



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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Third Session

TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2011

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2011

Sixty-first General Assembly

Third Session

2:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordon Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Ms. Becky Kent, Mr. Leo Glavine, Mr. Alfie MacLeod

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. As is our tradition on Budget Day, with the consent of the House we will commence with the motion for Resolution No. 4, respecting the estimates under Orders of the Day.

With that consent I will now recognize the honourable Minister of Finance.

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to a notice of motion given by me on April 1, 2011 and the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly, I have the honour, by command, to present a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia, relating to the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012 which is:

“The Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia transmits Estimates of the Sums required for the Public Service of the province, for the year ending March 31, 2012, and in accordance with the Constitution Act, 1867, recommend them together with the Budget Address of my Minister of Finance and any resolutions or bills necessary or advisable to approve the estimates and implement the budget measures to the House of Assembly.

Signed,

Mayann Francis

Lieutenant Governor

April 5, 2011”

Mr. Speaker, at this time I wish to:

(1) table the message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor transmitting the Estimates of Sums required for the consideration of this House;

(2) table the Estimate Books;

(3) table the government business plan;

(4) table the Crown Corporation business plans;

(5) table the Estimate and Crown Corporation business plans resolutions;

(6) deliver my Budget Speech; and

(7) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012, being Supply to be granted to Her Majesty and the Crown Corporation Business Plans be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin I would like to say a word of thanks to all of the people who put so much effort into putting together the budget for the fiscal year 2011-12. I think all of those people - and I hesitate to begin mentioning people for fear of leaving someone out - but in the Department of Finance, Treasury Board, Communications Nova Scotia, Premier's Office, throughout the civil service, I think the people who have put so much effort into producing this budget today can be very proud of their work serving the people of the province and the people of the province can be very proud of them. (Applause)

Building on the Province's Plan for Change that Makes Life Better for Families**Making Life Better for Families**

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present Nova Scotia's budget for the fiscal year 2011-12. This budget builds on the province's plan for change, that makes life better for families. It shows real progress on the road back to balance, which is the result of a good plan and sustained discipline.

Nova Scotians will notice a real improvement in how the province's finances are managed, how important public services are delivered, and how we support and grow our economy.

When this government came to office in 2009, the province was on an unsustainable financial path, facing a deficit of \$1.4 billion and a debt of \$16 billion in three years - if nothing changed. That's why last year I embarked upon the most extensive financial consultation in the province's history. And the consensus that came out of that consultation formed the backbone of the four-year "Back to Balance" plan that we laid out in last year's budget.

In last year's budget speech, I said the following:

"Our plan stretches well beyond this budget. Our approach will be smart, strategic and steady. As promised, it will ensure that government lives within its means and focuses on the programs and services important to Nova Scotians."

I continued by saying:

"Our plan has four key components. First, our government will bring better health care to you and your family. Second, we will create secure jobs and grow the economy. Third, we will make life more affordable. Fourth, we will get Nova Scotia back to balance and ensure that government lives within its means."

Those words are as true today as they were when I first said them, one year ago tomorrow, as we laid out our "Back to Balance" plan.

Recently, I completed another pre-budget consultation tour. It touched down in every region of the province. Although not quite as extensive as last year's Back to Balance consultation tour, it was still far more extensive than any pre-budget consultation tour undertaken by any Minister of Finance from the other Parties.

From one end of the province to the other, the message was the same, overwhelmingly: “Stick to the plan.” And so that is exactly what we are doing in this budget.

One key component of the “Back to Balance” consensus is to balance the books in 2013. Any faster, and important public services like health and education would be threatened. Any slower, and the province’s finances would continue to deteriorate, which is itself a threat to those same public services.

I am pleased to say that this budget confirms that we are on track to balance the budget in 2013. (Applause)

Another key component of the “Back to Balance” consensus is that there needs to be both increases in revenue and spending restraint, but with a significantly larger emphasis on restraint. So for every \$1 in new revenue, we are committed to finding between \$3 and \$4 in restraint.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that this budget confirms that we are on track to reach that target, too. There are some who suggest quick, deep cuts in public services. Others say there’s no real problem, and that spending should continue. Others agree there’s a problem, but can’t or won’t provide meaningful alternatives. Nova Scotians overwhelmingly reject each of these unsustainable paths, and we agree with them.

In this budget, we are taking the best path. The measures incorporated in this budget are thoughtful, reasonable, prudent, and measured.

There was another message that I heard clearly during my most recent consultation tour. And that is that every program, every community, has unique opportunities and challenges.

In communities across the province, from Sydney to Yarmouth, from Amherst to Guysborough, from Port Hawkesbury to Bridgewater and from Antigonish to Kentville, from the capital city to the smallest town, Nova Scotians have asked that the uniqueness of their communities be recognized. That is what we have done in this budget by rejecting quick slashing, one-size-fits-all solutions, and across-the-board cuts.

Dans les communautés de la province, de la Baie Sainte-Marie à l’Isle Madame, de Chéticamp à Argyle et de Pomquet à Sydney, de la ville capitale au plus petit village, les Néo-Écossais ont demandé que le caractère unique de leur communautés soit reconnu en rejetant les solutions rapides et uniformisées et les coupures généralisées. Et c’est ce que nous avons fait dans ce budget. Nous reconnaissons le caractère unique de nos communautés acadiennes et francophones.

To give just one example, this budget protects funding for community museums and public libraries that are so important to communities in every corner of the province.

Mr. Speaker, the budget slashers say we're not moving fast enough. And we say "So be it." Because when we're dealing with educating our children, or prescription drugs for seniors, or support for the poor and disabled, or where and when primary health care is being delivered, we have an obligation to take the time to get it right. And that is what we're doing.

The steady discipline we've brought to the job is working.

When I delivered last year's budget, I forecast a deficit for 2010-11 of \$222.1 million. I am pleased to inform the House that we are now forecasting a surplus of \$447.2 million for 2010-11. Nova Scotia's books for the just-finished fiscal year will be written not in red ink, but in black. (Applause)

Last year's surplus is partly due to higher than expected adjustments to our revenues. But it is also partly due to good management and sustained discipline. In fact, for the second year in a row, total spending is coming in under budget. This is a significant achievement. It's the first time in 23 years that Nova Scotia has witnessed back-to-back underspending of the budget.

This discipline on our part is in contrast to the previous government. For too long, an unexpected surplus would spur a spending spree. Three years ago, the previous government spent \$408 million in additional appropriations, or put another way, \$408 million in unbudgeted spending. For the past ten years, the average end-of-year spending was \$277 million. It was March madness at its worst.

We choose a different path, a more sustainable path. The surplus for 2010-11 is large enough to allow our government to reduce the provincial net debt by \$37.8 million. This will mark only the seventh time in the past 50 years that Nova Scotia's net direct debt will have gone down. Our debt-to-GDP ratio, which is a widely-used measure of financial health, will drop from the 39.6 per cent estimated last year to 36.6 per cent. At the end of 2014-15, if we stick to our plan, the debt-to-GDP ratio will actually be lower than it was when we came into office, despite the financial mess the previous government left behind.

Because of the steady hand this government has brought to the province's finances, our net direct debt is almost \$1 billion less than forecast last year. Gratifying as these results are, it is important to understand that this year's surplus doesn't change the underlying fundamentals of the financial challenges we face. That's why this budget continues to demonstrate sustained discipline on the spending side.

Total program expenditure in 2011-12 will be \$8.345 billion, as compared to an estimate of \$8.022 billion for 2010-11. The difference, \$323 million, is entirely accounted for by the re-insertion of \$327 million for university funding.

On this subject, I wish to remind the House that the previous government made two university payments in a single year, which distorted the true state of the province's finances. That left our government with one payment to make in two years, and 2010-11 was the year in which no payment was made. With the budget tabled today, we have brought an end to the previous government's poor practice, and re-instituted annual, accountable university funding, exactly as we said we would.

Allowing for the resumption of clear, accountable university funding, the budget for program spending for this year is unchanged from last year. This contrasts with spending growth averaging five per cent per year over the previous government's ten years in office. Our government will maintain expenses at 2011-12 levels over the medium term, while still making significant investments in new priorities.

Mr. Speaker, more than half of the Nova Scotia government's expenditures are payments to third parties like universities, school boards and district health authorities. We want to congratulate our partners for their willingness to work with us, to ensure that the government truly lives within its means. Everybody is being asked to contribute to getting back to balance, but each in a way and at a pace that makes sense for them and the people they serve.

At the same time that we are demonstrating sustained discipline on the spending side, we continue to have challenges on the revenue side. For example, revenue from federal sources is forecast to be down \$175 million this year compared to last, and revenue from petroleum royalties is estimated to be down \$63 million this year compared to last. Total revenue is \$8.524 billion, compared to \$8.391 last year. With the re-insertion of university funding, the growth in revenue does not match the growth in expenditure.

In last year's "Back to Balance" plan, we forecast the deficit for 2011-12 would be \$370.0 million. In this budget, the deficit is forecast to be \$389.6 million, which is almost exactly where we expected to be when we laid out our four-year "Back to Balance" plan last year.

Living within our means, and the restraint that it implies, is of course only one side of the story. Sound finances matter because they allow us to deliver important public services to Nova Scotians, services like health and wellness, education, income assistance, and transportation.

Providing Better Health Care for you and your Family

This government promised better health care to Nova Scotians, their families and their communities, and that is exactly what this budget supports. In fact, it is a key focus of this government and this budget.

The Better Care Sooner plan is this government's plan to improve emergency health care in Nova Scotia. A central theme of this budget is to support the many Better Care Sooner initiatives that have already started, or will be starting in this new fiscal year.

Nous avons un plan qui vise à améliorer les soins de santé d'urgence en Nouvelle-Écosse. Un thème principal du présent budget est l'appui aux nombreuses initiatives de ce plan, qui ont déjà été entamées ou qui le seront au cours de ce nouvel exercice financier.

Better Care Sooner keeps emergency rooms open and delivers faster, better care to Nova Scotians. Chronic emergency room closures became a regular feature of life under previous governments. This government, and this budget, changes that. (Applause)

Our emergency protection fund will be used to keep emergency rooms open, and to support Collaborative Emergency Centres. We will soon open at least four Collaborative Emergency Centres in smaller communities around the province. These centres stream patients to special purpose areas to get appropriate care faster, matching services with the community's needs, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Lives are being saved because highly-trained and skilled paramedics can administer life saving drugs and procedures to their patients before they arrive at hospital.

This budget allocates \$2.6 million to begin the replacement of the emergency room at the Aberdeen Hospital in New Glasgow, fulfilling a longstanding request to improve patient flow and care. This will be very welcome news for the people of Pictou County. This budget supports measures to improve wait times. This budget provides \$616,000 to support pre-hab teams in four locations, resulting in faster recovery times and improved outcomes for patients receiving knee and hip surgeries. The Capital District's pre-hab clinic has significantly cut the wait time for patients to get their first appointment with an orthopedic surgeon, in many cases going from one year to the national average of 90 days.

The province's 811 nurse line provides reliable health care advice at home. This initiative is already an outstanding success. In this budget, we are allocating another \$466,000 to handle the increased demand.

Nova Scotia will be the first province in Canada to develop and implement emergency-room standards, and as promised, accountability for emergency departments rests with the Minister of Health and Wellness.

Ensuring our skilled health professionals work to their full scope of practice makes sense for the system, and more importantly, for the patient. That's one of the reasons this budget provides \$1.5 million to place additional nurse practitioners across the system.

As promised, \$2.2 million will add additional assessment beds and keep the Cobequid Community Health Centre emergency room open longer.

This budget allocates another \$482,000 to a rapid assessment unit at the Halifax Infirmary, which has already resulted in shorter wait times and better patient flow. In fact, in just six months, almost 1,200 patients have benefited from this \$2 million initiative.

A new drug management policy unit will soon be operational. As well, our government's plan for fair drug prices is expected to save up to \$8 million this year.

This budget allocates \$4.4 million so that more than 800 Nova Scotians benefit from Lucentis.

We're spending \$500,000 to address acute and chronic diseases, keeping Nova Scotians healthier over the long term. In this budget, we also support the introduction of a plan to reduce childhood obesity, and a renewed effort to reduce tobacco use.

It was this Premier, and this Party, that successfully fought to end the injustice of having seniors in long-term care facilities pay for their own health care. Today, we are putting in place additional measures that make life better for seniors. Now, nursing home residents are being treated on site by both nurse practitioners and paramedics, saving the stress of a hospital visit. We are hiring four nurse practitioners to augment care in nursing homes at a cost of \$568,000. An additional \$21 million will open new nursing home beds this year.

We are fulfilling our commitment and allocating \$1.8 million to expand the Caregiver Benefit Program, helping seniors to remain at home in the communities they helped to build.

These changes use health care teams more effectively, which means tax dollars are being spent more efficiently at the same time as health outcomes are being improved. (Applause)

Creating good jobs and growing the economy

Changing the way we deliver services is critical. We have also taken on the challenge of creating good jobs and growing the economy.

Previous governments have invested millions and millions of dollars in projects, ventures, businesses old and new, trying to spur economic growth and create jobs. Yet, averaged over the past 20 years, Nova Scotia's economic growth has been lower than any province in Canada.

To continue along the same path expecting a different outcome would be foolhardy. So we won't. We have a better plan, and it's called jobsHere. This is our economic development plan. Another key focus of this budget is to support the jobsHere plan.

The jobsHere plan is strategic and focused, and has three key priorities: learning, innovation, and competitiveness.

With a re-allocation of existing funds, and a new allocation in this budget, we will invest more than \$200 million to make jobsHere happen. One of the flagship programs is the Productivity Investment Program, with an annual estimated value of \$25 million. It will provide incentives for businesses to become more productive by supporting investments in capital, innovation and employee skills.

Nous investirons plus que 200 millions de dollars pour assurer la mise en œuvre du plan "des emplois ICI". L'un des principaux programmes est le Programme d'investissement dans la productivité, d'une valeur annuelle estimée de 25 millions de dollars. Il offrira des incitations aux entreprises pour qu'elles deviennent plus productives en appuyant les investissements en capital, dans l'innovation et dans les compétences.

A new workforce strategy will help workers to build new skills, learn new technologies and maximize their career potential. The strategy will focus on building a workforce with the right skills for good jobs, now and in the future. It will support learning and continual skill renewal. It will also support those with barriers to employment overcome those barriers.

The province's workforce needs this kind of support to be ready for two major, exciting opportunities. The historic Lower Churchill agreement will not only mean clean, renewable energy to power our homes and businesses, but will offer our companies the opportunity to benefit directly from a transformational economic opportunity for this region.

This project is a game changer for Atlantic Canada. It lifts the notion of regional co-operation off the pages of vision documents and puts it into action. This project will have significant environmental benefits, including a projected reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by up to one megaton. In fact, because of the certainty this project provides around firm back-up supplies of energy, we are now able to turn our goal of 40 per cent renewable electricity by 2020 into a legislated target. That will be one of the key outcomes of this sitting of the House. (Applause)

In addition, Mr. Speaker, having skilled, trained workers will help to position Irving Shipbuilding to be successful in its pursuit of the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy, which will provide high-value jobs for up to 4,000 people for 30

years with benefits extending from Sydney to Yarmouth. We will enthusiastically promote and champion this bid.

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia's non-profit sector employs over 24,000 Nova Scotians, which helps to grow the economy and benefits all of our communities in countless ways. This budget provides \$250,000 for training so their human resource needs can be better met.

The \$1.8 million strategic co-operative education incentive will double the opportunities available to students to receive valuable, hands-on work experience. Over the next three years, \$7.5 million will be invested to ensure more African Nova Scotians have the skills they need to enter the labour market.

Mr. Speaker, innovation builds prosperity, and jobsHere supports innovation. Companies like RIM, Composites Atlantic, and C-Vision demonstrate every day what innovation is all about. They prove we can compete and succeed in global markets.

Innovation must become an increasing feature of Nova Scotia's export-oriented forest industry. This budget will invest \$5 million to promote innovation and diversification, in support of the new policy direction announced last December by this government.

Our government is also committing \$15 million for a new regional venture capital fund, which will be established within 18 months, fulfilling an important recommendation of the Savoie report. The fund will attract new capital for companies that want to innovate and expand.

A \$2 million innovation and competitiveness fund will increase productivity and help companies bring new ideas to market in everything from digital media to our primary industries.

A new international commerce strategy, with a value of \$750,000, will help companies in every corner of the province build international capacity, strengthening access to markets and building networks.

jobsHere improves resources for employers and entrepreneurs, reduces red tape and offers one-stop service development programs.

More than \$30 million in loans have been approved under the Credit Union Loan Program to support ownership and succession planning for small business. More than \$1 million in new incentives will be offered through the Equity Tax Credit.

Mr. Speaker, our government was the first since 1992 to reduce the small business corporate tax rate. Last year's reduction from 5 per cent to 4.5 per cent put \$6 million back into the hands of the entrepreneurs that help drive the economy. Beginning in January

2012, the small business tax rate will fall again, this time to 4 per cent. These reductions mean up to \$4,000 in annual savings for small business owners. (Applause)

In addition, the large corporations capital tax will continue to decline, and will be eliminated next year as scheduled.

Businesses will also benefit from two investments in digital strategies. A \$2.4 million investment will make it easier for business to access government's programs and services. As well, \$900,000 will build e-Nova Scotia which will harness the power of the Internet as a tool for innovation.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to support our creative economy, with our film industry and digital media tax credits, which are, and will remain, among the most competitive in Canada. (Applause)

Helping Nova Scotians Make Ends Meet

This budget also supports measures to help make life more affordable for Nova Scotians.

On this subject, let me begin by addressing the issue of affordability of a post-secondary education.

From 2004 to 2010, provincial funding for universities increased by 64 per cent, going from \$212 million to \$348 million. Clearly this rate of increase is not sustainable. A new funding arrangement is therefore necessary to ensure the government lives within its means, universities remain sustainable, and higher education remains accessible.

We have already announced this year's funding to universities, and that students are being protected by capping tuition increases at 3 per cent. This will maintain tuition levels for Nova Scotia students below the national average.

In his report on the university system, Dr. Tim O'Neill said that Nova Scotia has had the weakest student assistance system in the country. We promised to fix that, and in this budget we will invest \$42.5 million to do just that. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, we do that because making post-secondary education more affordable is one of the most effective ways to support the jobsHere strategy, by helping young people gain the knowledge and skills they need to help grow the economy.

I am pleased to announce today a series of measures designed to achieve those objectives.

We will keep tuition below the national average by providing \$30 million in student bursaries to replace the expired Nova Scotia University Student Bursary Trust. This provincially-funded commitment will continue to provide a tuition reduction of \$1,283 for Nova Scotia students studying in the province.

Most substantially, we will create the first “debt cap” in the province’s history. As a result of this initiative, students will see up to a 35 per cent reduction in total debt under the new \$28,560 maximum debt cap. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, that matters to students and parents because it means a drop of up to \$16,320 in the maximum amount of debt a student may carry.

The cap is comparable to those in other jurisdictions and will be a powerful incentive to graduates to stay and build a life in Nova Scotia, in addition to the \$15,000 graduate retention rebate for university graduates and the \$7,500 rebate for community college graduates. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, we also recognize that non-repayable assistance is a key factor in accessibility, which is why students accessing provincial loans will now receive up to \$612 a year in additional grants, through an increase in the loan-to-grant ratio from 20 per cent to 30 per cent.

Recognizing that many students need to work part-time during their studies, we will double the in-study earnings exemption on student loans, from \$50 to \$100 a week. And we will increase the amount allowed for the purchase of books by 50 per cent, from \$1,000 to \$1,500. (Applause)

Taken together, there will be more provincial funding within the post-secondary sector this year than there was last year. We believe this package of measures will keep our universities and our Nova Scotia Community College strong and vibrant contributors to our communities and our future. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, making life more affordable is important for all Nova Scotians, especially those who are having difficulty making ends meet. Our plan will help. In fact, it already has.

As a result of decisions this government has made, Nova Scotians don’t pay provincial tax on home energy, children’s clothing and footwear, on diapers and on feminine hygiene products. (Applause)

We put in place the Affordable Living Tax Credit and the Poverty Reduction Tax Credit, and under the leadership of this Premier, we ensured that seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement will receive a full refund of any provincial income tax they pay. (Applause) We also increased the seniors property tax credit.

In this budget, we go even further. We're taking more steps to make life affordable for Nova Scotians. This year, the basic personal exemption will increase by \$250. Non-refundable tax credits for eligible taxpayers will rise by a proportional amount. Taken together, these measures represent a tax reduction of \$11 million. (Applause)

Families in every region of the province are benefiting from the \$128 million spent on affordable housing. We will also take steps to address homelessness. And we are introducing even more measures that will help families make ends meet. Both the Affordable Living Tax Credit and the Poverty Reduction Tax Credit will be indexed to keep pace with inflation.

On July 1st, we will be providing further help for more than 31,000 Nova Scotians in greatest need. The budget provides \$4.2 million to increase the personal allowance for people receiving income support. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, this year, we will implement new income eligibility guidelines for the Direct Family Support for children so more families can qualify. We will also make strategic investments to support families with autistic children.

Also beginning July 1st, income assistance recipients will be able to keep more of their income. This \$3.7 million annual investment will help about 3,000 Nova Scotians, providing a greater incentive to join and remain in the workforce. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, additional changes are coming that will help Nova Scotians make ends meet. Later this week, our Premier will provide the details of a new \$11 million investment that will make life better for families, for persons with disabilities and for children. (Applause)

This budget also provides \$585,000 to support the creation of 2-1-1 Nova Scotia, in partnership with the United Way. This system will make information more accessible, providing a single access point to a full range of community and government services. We will be among the first in Canada to offer this service province-wide. (Applause)

Building for the Future

Last Fall, we released our plan for capital spending for 2011-12. It was the first time in Nova Scotia that the capital plan was released in advance of the spring budget. The early release increases transparency and helps the private sector better prepare for upcoming projects and upcoming bids. This year, \$560 million will go to build roads and bridges, schools, health care facilities, housing and more. (Applause)

I am pleased to confirm today that the capital expenditure incorporated into this budget is essentially identical to the plan released last November. The envelope for capital spending in 2011-12 remains at \$560 million.

Our plan includes \$83.6 million for schools construction and renovations, including, among many others, Mr. Speaker, the construction of new schools in Bedford, Lunenburg and Yarmouth.

Our plan also includes \$3.2 million for ambulances and \$5.8 million for school buses.

There is also a budgetary allocation of \$15 million for the dredging of Sydney Harbour, and \$7.1 million to continue with restorations to the Bluenose II. (Applause)

Conclusion: Making Life Better While Living Within Our Means

Mr. Speaker, previous governments put Nova Scotia on an unsustainable path to a \$1.4 billion deficit and \$16 billion in debt. In contrast, our four-year Back to Balance plan ensures we can deliver programs that make life better for families while living within our means. And like our Back to Balance plan, this budget reflects the values and priorities of Nova Scotians. That is why we will succeed. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, there are no magic wands, no silver bullets, no quick fixes, on the path back to balance. There is only a good plan, hard work and sustained discipline. Nothing good can happen if the province's finances don't make sense; and the finances we inherited from the previous government did not make sense. If we stick to the plan, and the province's finances continue to improve, then more good things can happen.

This government is always looking ahead, to where Nova Scotians want to be when the recession is finally behind us and the province is once again on a sound financial footing.

That's why this budget is committed to the Better Care Sooner plan, and a health care system that promotes wellness, offers the care that people need, all within a financial envelope that we can afford.

That's why this budget is committed to the jobsHere plan, which will marshal the resources of government to support learning, innovation and competitiveness, and by doing so create good, sustainable jobs.

That's why this budget is committed to helping people make ends meet, in order to make life better for families, wherever they may live in this great province.

That is what this budget delivers. (Prolonged Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and offer a few words in reply, with a much more detailed reply coming on Thursday.

I want to say right off, I'm very pleased that the Minister of Finance had kind of a rebuttal to what the Premier had to say last night. As the Premier did his overview of the budget and the province, he only got as far as Digby. In many ways, the Premier and this government had written off southwest Nova Scotia. So it was at least good today to see Yarmouth mentioned in the budget.

In many ways, this budget is really a déjà vu experience. Last year I alluded to the minister being mentored by David Copperfield and Raveen in terms of illusionists' tactics. This budget, much like last year, is a fantasy. When we see a \$667 million difference in the budget projections of last year and the reality of this year, we now have to wait a whole year to get the real numbers from this budget. They are, in fact, unrealistic projections.

But worst of all is the reality that they are lowballing revenue and inflating expenses. We'll see those numbers, line by line as we compare last year's budget, that's exactly what we discovered and I have no reason to believe that it will be any different next year.

Worst of all, this government is giving up on economic growth. From 2.1 per cent growth this year, they are looking at 1.9 per cent in 2012 and in 2013. Revenues in 2011-12 are to go down by 3.03 per cent and with really little planning and low expectations for the Nova Scotia economy. In fact this government has low expectations. They have not learned to step aside and allow business to do what business does best. Too many taxes, too many regulations, lack of consulting with the business community.

This budget reflects a philosophy and approach to the economy that they are a caretaker government and economic growth is not a priority. In the last quarter of 2010, outmigration continued to be a reality; jobsHere is quickly becoming jobsThere, there in other provinces. (Applause) This fiscal year starts off with 300 jobs ending at Larsen's, over 300 jobs ending at Convergys, 50 jobs at the Halifax Shipyard and Scanwood hanging by a hair.

It was good to see a small amount of the recent \$196 million windfall placed on the debt. Remember it is only \$37 million that is going on the debt, not the \$447 million windfall that the Premier paraded to Nova Scotians last night as going on the debt. Again, that is typical of how the Premier portrays what this government does. Inflate and place, in fact, an illusion of what is really happening in Nova Scotia. So, the question, how can we

believe you now? This budget is showing all indications of that based on the reality of what we discovered happened last year.

Minister Steele did not leave our children and grandchildren out of the budget. How kind of the minister to account to our children and our grandchildren an additional burden of debt of \$678.9 million. That's another part of the legacy of this government. This budget, before being presented, did have some commentary around high expectations. Much like when this government started in 2009 - great expectations. But this budget is really coming down to be much to-do about nothing.

It certainly has little to offer in terms of hope, possibility and reversing the cycle of being the province averaging 20 years of the lowest economic growth.

So in many regards now, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue of trust. They told us we had to pay more HST to balance the books, it obviously was not true. They increased more than 1,000 user fees just days before declaring a surplus. They have now downloaded \$50 million to municipalities. We're paying for a shell game and Nova Scotians will keep on pay for the next two years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: I am going to ask the honourable member for Kings West to adjourn debate, please.

MR. GLAVINE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on the reply to the budget.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. There has been a motion to adjourn debate on the Budget Address. Would all those in favour of the motion Please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We will now return to the daily routine. Before I go to the daily routine, the topic for the late debate tonight has been chosen as earlier submitted:

Therefore be it resolved that with today's announcement of last year's surplus, the NDP Government explain to the people of Yarmouth and southwest Nova Scotia why they can't prove they needed \$3 million to sustain the Yarmouth-New England ferry for one more year to keep this economic driver alive and keep people and business coming into the province.

That was submitted by the honourable member for Kings West.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition from the residents and frequent travellers of Big Baddeck road, the operative clause being:

“Our road, just 18 months after being paved has developed an uncountable number of new cracks and the sections that were patched have large spaces around them.... This section of the road has to be repaved properly so that there is a sound road surface for years to come.”

Mr. Speaker, this petition contains the names of 156 people and I have affixed my signature as well.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS****STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

RESOLUTION NO. 167

HON. JOHN MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Premier, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the Program Management and Corporate Service Division of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations was recently awarded a Level I certification by the National Quality Institute; and

Whereas this certification is in recognition of a commitment to organizational quality, building leadership and a focus on proactive and preventive planning and methods; and

Whereas Program Management and Corporate Service Division is only the third Nova Scotia recipient of this certification of quality;

Therefore be it resolved that that this House of Assembly congratulate the team at Program Management and Corporate Service Division, and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations and wish them well as they work toward an even higher quality certification through the Progressive Excellence Program.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

RESOLUTION NO. 168

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Nova Scotians are celebrating International Adult Learners' Week from April 2nd to April 9th, in particular, the achievements of adult learners and the organizations that support them; and

Whereas every experience is a learning experience, everyone is a learner and Adult Learners' Week raises awareness as to the tremendous value of participation in lifelong learning and the opportunities and services available to Nova Scotians who wish to enhance their knowledge and skills; and

Whereas adult learners who take the initiative to meet the demands of changing labour markets will be poised to meet those challenges leading to a knowledgeable and skilled workforce;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize and celebrate Adult Learners' Week and the important role made by adult learners in contributing to the growth of our economy, the strength of our workforce and the prosperity of our province.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotia Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 169

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Dr. Sharon Oliver was a woman of many firsts – first African-Canadian nurse educator, public health nurse and health executive in Nova Scotia, as well as the first chair of the Order of Nova Scotia Advisory Council; and

Whereas Dr. Oliver was instrumental in the growth of the Black Loyalist Heritage Society and served on many other boards including Metro United Way, Dalhousie University, Neptune Theatre, Nova Scotia Community College and the Council on African-Canadian Education Advisory Committee; and

Whereas Dr. Oliver passed away on January 19th;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House take a moment to reflect on the contributions that Dr. Sharon Oliver made to this province.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

A moment of silence has been requested.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

RESOLUTION NO. 170

HON. JOHN MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas music jamborees bring music lovers together from miles around to listen to upcoming and established musical performers; and

Whereas the Nine Mile River Country Jamboree is the longest running jamboree in Canada; and

Whereas on May 8, 2011, the Nine Mile River Country Jamboree celebrates its 45th Anniversary;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate the management and staff of the Nine Mile River Country Jamboree on their 45th Anniversary and wish them many more.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Queens.

RESOLUTION NO. 171

MS. VICKI CONRAD: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Danny Westhaver of Greenfield, Queens County designed and tied the winning entry in the Medway Fly Contest; and

Whereas the Medway Fly Contest asked for entries to represent green initiatives being undertaken or being considered by the Medway River Salmon Association; and

Whereas Danny Westhaver for his winning entry has received a lifetime membership in the Medway River Salmon Association;

Therefore be it resolved that the Nova Scotia House of Assembly congratulates Danny Westhaver of Greenfield, Queens County for his winning design and tie in the Medway Fly Contest.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings North.

RESOLUTION NO. 172

MR. JIM MORTON: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Love Our Local is a non-profit organization that promotes local food and local producers on the NSCC Kingstec campus to ensure a stronger future for our farmers; and

Whereas Love Our Local was started by Alex Harnish and Amanda Prall, two NSCC Kingstec students taking Business Administration and has grown to include James Bishop and Jessie MacDonald in its leadership; and

Whereas local businesses and organizations including Kent Co-op, Meadowbrook Meat Market, Canning Village Meat Market and W.G. Oulton and Sons Ltd. have shown strong interest and made changes in their company policies to advance support for local farmers;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly congratulates Alex Harnish, Amanda Prall, James Bishop and Jesse MacDonald and the entire Love Our Local initiative for the hard work, creativity and dedication that supports local farmers and their products.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings North.

RESOLUTION NO. 173

MR. JIM MORTON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Taekwondo is the national sport of South Korea and combines combat techniques, self-defense, sport, exercise, meditation and philosophy; and

Whereas this year the International Taekwon-Do Federation held the World Taekwon-Do Championships in Wellington, New Zealand from March 9 to 13; and

Whereas Millwood High School student Colin Truen represented Canada after winning the National Junior Men's Black Belt Taekwondo title last November in Vancouver;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly congratulate Colin Truen from Millwood High School on representing Canada in the World Taekwon-Do Championships in Wellington, New Zealand and wish him best of luck in all his future competitions.

Mr. Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

MR. SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: Before we start, I remind all honourable members that the use of Blackberries, laptops and any other electronic devices is not permitted during Question Period. They are to remain off during that time.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

GOV'T. (N.S.): DEBT REDUCTION (2011) - DETAILS

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Last night, the Premier announced a \$447 million surplus, yet he is only putting \$36 million on the debt, a debt that I might add that the NDP Government has increased by \$1.7 million in less than two years. My question for the Premier is, why are you carrying forward \$400 million that you should be putting on the debt?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Official Opposition has displayed a good reason why he's there and not here. The reality is that the budget surplus first goes to pay down the capital spending of the previous year; the balance goes on the debt.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier obviously knew before yesterday that they had a surplus, they had a surplus and a large one. I would say that he knew more than a week ago that he had large a surplus. But yet he chose to increase 1,400 user fees to people of this province. It's more expensive to register your car, it is even more expensive

to register the death of a loved one. My question to the Premier is, how can you justify nickel and diming Nova Scotian families when you knew you were sitting on a \$447 million surplus?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition demonstrates that he doesn't really understand the way in which the finances of the province work. First of all, the figures that he was given were the closing figures for the former year, those increases which reflect the cost of providing the services were increased for next year. If they weren't then the deficit next year would be larger, which I'm sure he wouldn't want.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the mystery has been solved. We asked this government to put a sunset clause when it used its majority to eliminate balanced budget legislation; they refused, but now their motives have become clear. You know that under the former legislation, you would have to put the entire surplus on the debt of the Province of Nova Scotia - I might add, a debt that they increased by \$1.7 billion in less than two years. The largest increase in the debt of the Province of Nova Scotia has come under the NDP Government. So my question for the Premier is, why won't he clean up his own mess instead of asking our children to do it?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where to start with that because almost none of it is true. First of all, the reality is if you increase the borrowing to pay for your capital and then pay off the capital expenses with this year's revenue, that means you don't increase the debt of the province. That's the first thing.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, in this very difficult economic climate we brought the budget of this province in under the estimates two years in a row. That's the first time in 23 years that this has been done. We paid down on the debt, only the seventh time in 50 years it has been done, and I would put the record of this government up against anyone in North America.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

GOV'T. (N.S.): FIN. PLAN - EFFICACY

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Here it is time for a fact check. My question is to the Premier, because both last night and again today he was bragging that his government is on track and that their plan is working. But they ignore the work of our very own Auditor General, who actually measures the financial condition of our province and has identified a number of measures that he believes are important for us to keep track of if we're going to go on the right track, not the wrong track, as a province.

Those measures, from his own report, which the budget today is silent on, include whether we are in a deficit or not, whether our debt-to-GDP ratio is going up or down, whether our debt service costs as a percentage of our economy are going up or down, and whether we are being more reliant on our own taxation than other forms of revenue to

cover our costs. Mr. Speaker, if you measure from the time the NDP took office until today, we are going in the wrong direction on four out of the five key indicators. It is a matter of fact . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Question, please.

MR. BAILLIE: My question to the Premier today is, will he admit that his plan, in fact, adds \$700 million to our debt since they took office, increases the amount of interest that we're paying on that debt, and makes us more reliant on others and less independent as a province, or will he admit that his plan is not working at all?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the debt that he refers to, of course, was all debt that was committed to by the previous government, before we came into government. That's the first. Secondly, all of the performance indicators that he talks about are in the economic assumptions, in the budget. Of course, things like the debt-to-GDP ratio are going in the right direction, as was the surplus last year in the right direction.

We have a plan to get this province back from the imbalance that that government put us into and we are on track and we are on target. (Applause)

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker the debt to GDP in 2009 was 36.2 per cent, today it's 36.6 per cent. That is a matter of fact, it is going up. There is more debt not less. It is a matter of fact. We spent 10.3 per cent of our budget on interest. That is up from the 10.0 percent when that bunch took over. That is a matter of fact. It is audited by the Auditor General of Nova Scotia. You do not need to take my word for it; you can check it with the Auditor General. My question to the Premier, does he agree with the Auditor General that these are true important measures and if so, why does he refuse to deal with them?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it is, to me, bizarre that a group of people who ran on a platform committed to matching stimulus spending and increasing the debt, and who asked all of the members of the House to support that position, now says that there's something wrong with it. You can't have it both ways. The reality is that all the economic indicators for our province are going in the right direction.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, after two years in office and three budgets, it is the Premier who is trying to have it both ways because he has forgotten that he does not sit on this side of the House. He is the one responsible now. It is his debt, it is his taxes, and it is his HST. For a government that has plans and strategies for everything, 28 alone in the Throne Speech just a few days ago, my question is, when will we have a real plan for real debt reduction and real tax relief for Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, in the first year we managed to cut the projected deficit to half. In the second year, we not only completely cut the deficit, we managed to finish the year with a surplus. We put forward a four year plan, we're on track, we're on target and the people of Nova Scotia know it. (Applause)

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

PREM.: ECONOMIC GROWTH - PROJECTION

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, there are two things for sure we know about this government, it has increased taxes and it has increased program spending. One thing we don't hear from this government is talk about economic growth. My question for the Premier is what is your projection for economic growth this year?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, of course almost one-third of the budget speech was directed directly at economic growth. We put in place the Productivity Investment Program; we put in a digital media tax credit. We have done more on economic development initiatives than the last government did in the last 10 years and a heck of a lot more than former Liberal Governments did.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I understand it's a topic that the Premier is uncomfortable with. Our economy has stalled under his government. Last year the growth was just 2.1. But what's even worse, this government is projecting less growth in 2011 and 2012. My question for the Premier is, why are you content with a stalled economy and a lack of hope among Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the opposite is true. We have a great jobsHere program that we're rolling out, one that was endorsed almost universally across the province by business interests, by labour, by all the stakeholders who recognized the need for us to concentrate on learning, on innovation, on competitiveness if we're going to grow our economy. That's our plan. I still haven't heard anything about it from the Opposition caucus.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, this government projects a 1.9 per cent growth this year and next year, that is going in the wrong direction. We are uncompetitive with our closest neighbours and we will continue to fall behind. Economic growth is not on the Premier's list. My question to the Premier is when will you realize you can't tax and spend your way to prosperity?

THE PREMIER: One day, Mr. Speaker, we're cutting too much, the next day we're spending too much. I think that's a good signal that we've got it just right.

Mr. Speaker, personal income is up, corporate income is up, retail sales are up. That's the economy that's moving.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

FIN.: INCOME TAX/INFLATION - INDEXATION

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotian families keep paying and paying for this government's decisions. You constantly give on one hand and take away on the other. I'm talking here about personal income tax and we know why that's up. My question for the Minister of Finance is, why on earth would you find more than 1,400 user fees and not index personal income tax to inflation?

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, of course, the reason why revenue is up from personal income tax is because personal income is up. (Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, I hear Mr. Angry over there on the other side and let me talk about this because it has been mentioned on both sides of the House. Let me talk about this idea he's shouting across the aisle about me low-balling revenue. Look, the revenue estimates are done by the same people in the Department of Finance following the same methods and the same professional standards that were followed when that group was in government and that crowd was in government. (Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, they are reviewed and approved by the Auditor General and if they're going to make accusations about the revenue numbers, well, then call the Auditor General and tell him how he got it wrong. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: I would like to remind all honourable members who are recognized by the Chair that they must direct all their comments and questions through the Chair.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Inflation has a convenient excuse for the Minister of Finance when it suits him. He says user fees are being increased because of inflation. He ignores the fact that inflation affects every man, woman and child in the province, not just the Minister of Finance. My question to the minister is, why have you broken your promise to Nova Scotia families and not eliminated bracket creep?

MR. STEELE: Mr. Speaker, the options that were available to us are indexing all of the credits and then indexing all the brackets. The total cost which we have in estimate of the cost for doing entire indexation is \$21 million and the measures that we've taken today have a value of \$11 million. Now, in an ideal world, indexing brackets to inflation is a highly desirable thing. It's something that personally I would like to accomplish before my time here is done. (Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, everybody understands you don't get every single thing on your Christmas list - everybody except the Opposition.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Minister of Finance knew I was going to give one of his famous quotes here because just a few short years ago when the Minister of Finance was in Opposition, he called bracket creep a stealth tax. In fact, he said it was like the Minister of Finance reaching into the pockets of Nova Scotians. How times have changed. My question for the minister is, when will you stop reaching into the wallets of Nova Scotian families?

MR. STEELE: Mr. Speaker, it is a legitimate issue and the fact is that when we don't index brackets, it represents a subtle way of increasing taxes every year and it amounts to a total of \$21 million. Now, when I said that, the economy was going better and there were more options. (Interruptions) This is something that I would like to accomplish. I mean, the Progressive Conservatives called for it. They had 10 years in government and they didn't do it, Mr. Speaker, and now they're telling us to do it. It is something that is desirable to do, and in the current economic environment it is not affordable yet. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

PREM.: BALANCED BUDGET - TABLE

HON. JAMIE. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the NDP said one thing before the last election but they quickly cried poor after the election, concocting a work of fiction known as the Deloitte report. The Auditor General himself says they inherited a balanced budget. They decided to concoct a story, an inconvenient truth was exposed that there was no problem, but they concocted a story that they could then later beat.

Yesterday we learned that they concocted a second work of fiction, which was the last budget, which was off by \$700 million - a very expensive work of fiction indeed. Now we have a budget where what is up is down, what is down is up, what is right is left and vice versa. Let's end the parade of fiction.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, will you get into the real world and table a balanced budget today as Nova Scotians want, and then get on with the job of providing meaningful tax relief that Nova Scotians so richly deserve?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I am shocked that the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party has such a poor opinion of chartered accountants, but I'm beginning to understand why. I have to say we have, in fact, tabled a budget that is on target, on the right path, that is going to bring us back to balance, but it's also going to provide the services that the people of this province need and that is the real priority of any government. (Applause)

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier can try and deflect to chartered accountants all he wants. Obviously many of us, including me, have a high regard for chartered accountants. It is that Premier and that minister and that government that I hold suspect today, because of the claims that they are making that are so provably wrong.

Mr. Speaker, here is a simple question, a very simple question. Yesterday we reported a surprise surplus, or the government did in this House. When, on what date, did the Premier know that we were going to have that size a surplus this past year? What day?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as the former Chief of Staff for the Progressive Conservative caucus he would know, these figures come in over time, they are supplied by the department, you receive them in order to prepare documentation like we do, like the quarterly update - in fact they are constantly updated almost on a daily basis, as new information comes in.

MR. BAILLIE: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that's why it is called Question Period because we'll be trying to figure out what that answer was for a good long time.

Obviously it wasn't just yesterday that the government knew that they had that size of a surplus and yet they brag about it. But what is good news for the government's finances - that personal taxes are up, that corporate taxes are up, that sales taxes are up - is not good news for Nova Scotians who are actually paying those taxes, and so my question for the Premier is will he admit that his surplus comes on the backs of hard-working Nova Scotians and get on with the job of providing them with meaningful relief now?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I can't believe he just said that. He seems to be saying that having an increase in personal income is a bad thing, that having corporate income go up is a bad thing. I don't know what in the name of Pete's sake we could do to satisfy the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. The reality is that all of the economic indicators of this province are going in the right direction - he should be happy.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

PREM.: FEE HIKES - EXPLAIN

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the NDP Government's decision to increase 1,400 user fees will affect Nova Scotians directly - people will pay more for mortgages, GEDs, apprenticeships, drivers' licenses, birth certificates, and the list goes on. My question to the Premier is, given that you knew about this mystery surplus weeks and possibly months ago, why did you still hike fees?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Again I must say that question or comments come through the licences, birth certificates and the list goes on. My question to the Premier is, given that you knew about this mystery surplus weeks and possibly months ago, why did you still hike fees?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Again, I must say that questions or comments come through the Chair and you keep saying the word “you”. It comes through the Chair, please so I remind all members to please direct your questions through the Chair, thank you.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for that direction because I know that you very wisely understand the difference between last year and next year and the increases in the cost of the fees reflect the inflationary pressures on the delivery of those services. Those apply to next year, the surplus was last year.

MR. GLAVINE: While Leader of the Official Opposition, the member for Cole Harbour condemned the practice of announcing these user fee tax increases outside the legislative session and called on the Tory Government of the day to make user fee hikes part of the budget. Now as Premier, that very same member of this House has pulled the very same tax grab as the Progressive Conservative Government he criticized. My question to the Premier is, who was wrong, that NDP member or the Premier?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as you would know, I believe that both the member he refers to and the Premier are right in this regard. It has to do, of course, with the timing of the House sitting and the fact that they are coming into affect on April 1st.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the story about user fee increases in the March 2007 edition of the Cape Breton Post features the following sentence: NDP Leader said there was little difference between increasing fees and raising taxes. Today, most Nova Scotians would agree with that statement and I’m among them.

My question to the Premier is, after saying one thing while in Opposition, doing the opposite once in power after misleading Nova Scotians in the election campaign, after so badly mismanaging this past budget, it’s clear we can’t trust you. Why should Nova Scotians . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The word ‘untrust’ is unparliamentary. I would ask that you retract that, please.

MR. GLAVINE: I’ll remove it from the question, Mr. Speaker. Why should Nova Scotians believe user fee increases are any more than a tax grab?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, user fees are, in fact, a revenue source that support the services that are being delivered. They are both revenue lines in the budget. The distinction, of course, is that one is directly related to the service that is being provided.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

SNSMR: MUN. SERVICE - PAYMENT AGREEMENT

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, effective budget year 2012-13, the NDP Government will recoil from its commitment to municipalities and will require them to continue to pay for services such as corrections, education and public housing. Additionally, the NDP Government would also roll back funding to 2010-11 levels. My question to the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations is, why are you backing away from municipalities?

HON. JOHN MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, we're not backing away from a commitment to the municipalities. As a matter of fact, this was a commitment between both parties and one of the things that they committed to in the memorandum of understanding - generally referred to as the MOU - was a statement that said, the UNSM and municipalities acknowledge that unforeseen costs or revenue losses may impair the province's ability to achieve its commitments as expressed in this memorandum and that in any event, all are subject to the appropriation of the necessary funds by the Legislature. (Interruptions) This is the agreement.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

MR. MACDONELL: This is the agreement that we had with the municipalities. They recognized that this may not be sustainable by the province and that's the reason that we've changed the agreement.

MR. COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, how quickly the minister forgets they have a surplus. It is an irresponsible decision that will raise property taxes across Nova Scotia. Property taxes are already far too high for most people. The NDP Government is downloading responsibility onto municipalities, which are already stretched to the limit. All the while, the minister is sitting on a surplus that appeared out of thin air. My next question is to the Minister of Finance. Why are you downloading the responsibilities to make your own books look better on the backs of property tax owners of Nova Scotia?

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, just about every single thing that member just said is wrong, wrong, wrong. I can't help it if they misunderstand everything, but that memorandum of understanding was a promise made by the previous government for the province to accept more and more and more cost from the municipalities. It's just one more expensive promise that that government made. What this government has done is, we have said to the municipalities, we do not have the financial capacity at the moment to continue to accept an uploading of costs. If there's any increase in municipal taxes, it is

100 per cent due to decisions that will be made by municipalities. It will not be due to anything that this government has done. (Applause)

MR. COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, municipalities, especially smaller towns and villages, cannot bear the additional cost at a time that this government claims to have a surplus. Fair and equitable funding is exactly what the NDP railed for while they were in Opposition. They changed their ways since they made it into government. What they said in Opposition is not what they are doing in government. My last question is to the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. How can Nova Scotians trust you when you go back on your word so often?

MR. MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, for the record, I have never changed my word. What we've identified with the municipalities is that the charges that were being uploaded to the province were not sustainable so we adjusted the MOU. Something the member should be aware of, being a former municipal politician, is that the municipalities have budgeted those costs over the past few years into their budgets so there would be no changes there whatsoever. This should not impact their bottom line or their taxes.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

FIN. - USER FEES: INCREASE - COST BASIS TABLE

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. This NDP Government just raised user fees on 1,400 government services by 2 per cent, the same amount by which they raised the HST. Will the minister table a report in this Legislature that shows the cost basis for each of these fees and why they had to be increased?

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, the rationale, of course, is the same rationale that the previous government had when they raised user fees by substantially more than we just raised user fees.

I just want to repeat something that the Premier has just said. When you're providing government services, and the cost of government services are going up, you essentially have a choice between which bases is it that's going to pay for that? Now, if they're not paid for by increased fees, it has to come out of the general tax base. Sometimes it is simply more reasonable and more fair that the services will be paid for by the people who are using them rather than having everybody paying for services, whether they use them or not.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the people deserve better. In the Spring of 2009, our Premier today was concerned enough about this very issue to ask for the same information that I am asking for today. He even suggested that to refuse disclosure of this information was contrary to the Fees Act. To the Minister of Finance, why does your NDP Government reject this transparency today?

MR. STEELE: Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to call them a crowd anymore because they are not really a crowd anymore, it keeps getting smaller. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Finance.

MR. STEELE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At best, they are a hockey team, but only if everybody shows up.

Look, the situation is this: The costs of government is going up so when the cost of government goes up you have the choice between finding the revenue from the general tax base and then you choose which tax base it comes from, or from users. Mr. Speaker, in an ideal world it's not something you would have to do but we are just coming out of recession. The previous government left a considerable mess behind them and regrettably, this is a measure that was necessary in order to bring us back to balance and clean up the finances of the provinces.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government seem to enjoy evading questions because they don't like showing any transparency. Now this question is important. The services that people are paying for in government, people should have a right to know why they are paying what they are paying and unless Nova Scotians understand what the amount is, they are stuck paying whatever fees the NDP Government decides to charge.

We, as Progressive Conservative members of this House, believe that people should pay services at a rate as low as possible. I think that's a reasonable expectation that people can have from their government. I think that this member can complain about the size of numbers on this side of the House but, at the end of the day, there's a lot of Nova Scotians who would agree with us, it's very reasonable.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister consult with his Premier and reconsider this request for information so that it may be tabled in this Legislature for the benefit of Nova Scotians?

MR. STEELE: Mr. Speaker, of course all the legal requirements have been followed and will be followed. The question that the Opposition continually tries to evade is to say well, let's just cut all taxes, all fees. One of the important realities is that taxes pay for services; services are paid for by taxes. In an ideal world I'd love to eliminate all user-fees, but then the cost would simply have to come out of the general tax base. You can't escape the fact that if you want the services, the revenue has to come from somewhere.

Maybe, just maybe, Mr. Speaker, that crowd over there would start talking about taxes and services together, rather than acting as if you can talk about one without the other.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

EDUC. - BEDFORD SCH.: UNDERBUILDING EXPLAIN

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, a new high school is a once-in-40 year proposition for most communities. The Charles P. Allen High School community is very excited about the prospect of a new school being built with enhancements recently approved by HRM.

Mr. Speaker, parents in our community have been concerned for some time that the new school is being built too small for our rapidly growing community. Halifax Regional School Board only requested a school built for 1,200 students, while the school population will be at 1,326 when the school opens in September, 2013. This is according to new Baragar numbers provided by HRSB, which I will table now. The registration will quickly balloon to 1,554 by 2018. My question is, can the Minister of Education please explain why she is under-building the school like this?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, to answer the question, this minister is not under-building a school. That school is built for the population that the numbers were given to us by the school board and having a relook at the building, that school can house 1,500 students comfortably, so the school is going to be built there, is going to be adequate and it is going to be beautiful. I feel that the community should be very excited about this new school. As you know, the work has begun, in terms of clearing this site, so it is an exciting time.

MS. KELLY: That's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, but I don't understand, if the school is being built for 1,200 students, why does it say that it is being built for 1,200 students? Why not say it is being built for 1,500 students? The fact of the matter is, it's their own calculations that indicate it is 1,200 students that it is being built for. We didn't just pluck this out of somewhere.

HRSB may be trying to under-build this school so it can request that another high school be built nearby in a few years. Could the minister please indicate whether she has in fact received a request for another new high school to be built in the Ravines area of Bedford?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, there has been no request for any other school.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, parents are concerned about protecting the lab space at the new Bedford-Hammonds Plains High School. All too often labs are repurposed as classrooms which means they cannot be used as labs. Currently Grade 10 students at

Charles P. Allen - which was built for 800 students and now houses 1,200 students - those students cannot do their weather experiments that are part of their curriculum because they do not have enough access to labs. So my question for the minister is, will you guarantee that the labs at the high school being built to replace Charles P. Allen High School will not be repurposed as classroom spaces?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, this new school that's being built has met all of the criteria for all of the numbers of classes that will be accessing the labs. There are going to be adequate labs and more capacity than even necessary. So this is a school that's built and with everything taken into consideration so we can make sure that our students whom we're educating in terms of our science curriculum, they're going to have nothing but the best in terms of their lab and time in the lab.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

ERD & TOURISM: YARMOUTH-NEW ENGLAND FERRY - FUNDING REFUSAL

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, last night in grandiose fashion and not so humbly, the Premier announced to this House that due to the interesting budget practices of the NDP, which includes an HST hike, that the province will have a \$446 million surplus this year.

Back in 2009 the people of Yarmouth just needed \$3 million to keep the ferry going for one more year to allow the community to transition while maintaining that vital sea and economic link. My question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, with the surplus being what it is, will the minister admit to this House that not giving that \$3 million to the ferry has had marginal, if any, impact on the province's four-year plan to balance the books?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in my place. First of all, I would bring to the attention of the House that the \$3 million that I've heard the member opposite quote, the number wasn't \$3 million, it was much larger than that. As we all know now, we've been down this road, the ferry, The Cat ferry wasn't a viable, sustainable operation for Yarmouth. The ridership had been reduced by over 70 per cent. There was not a business case there for continuation of the ferry. We did something that was a hard decision, a tough decision, but we had to think of what was in the best interests of all Nova Scotians.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, let's review the math - \$9 million to subsidize that ferry for one more year. The province would not have to pay \$3 million to cancel the contract already, so we're down to \$6 million. The municipalities came up with another \$3

million that they asked the province to match. So \$3 million from this province would have been required to subsidize that service for one more year - \$3 million - that's it. I understand why the Cabinet Ministers aren't aware of it because the Premier wouldn't even bring that request to Cabinet when the municipalities came forward to propose it. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, there has been no evidence given to this House to suggest why this decision was made, nothing tabled. The only thing given to us and the public was that they didn't have the money to do it but, lo and behold, we have tons of money today. So my question to the minister is, in light of this budget, will the minister admit that the decision to cut the Yarmouth ferry was political and not based on the financial position of the province?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I've got to say that it disappoints me to hear the member opposite talk such rhetoric when he knows, for one, that certainly this government and myself as minister, have always tried to work co-operatively with that particular member. I would also say that this funding coming from municipalities - I don't know where that's at because I've never heard of it. (Interruptions) We were the only game in town. I wrote to the U.S. Government, to the federal government. To the best of my knowledge, there was only one game in town and that was the provincial government.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I know that the members opposite would like this ferry issue to go away but I'm sorry, too many people are suffering because of that decision. It's not going to go away until there is a ferry back in Yarmouth.

With the Leader of the Official Opposition committing a Liberal-led government to funding a viable service in Yarmouth, the restoration and long-term operations of such, and with the member for Queens issuing a statement insinuating that the Liberal position on the ferry was the same, in fact, as the NDP's position, and with the minister's recent comments here talking about co-operation, that sort of stuff, I would like to ask this minister if he can identify any funding that the government has in its plan that will be in place to restore the Yarmouth ferry and to ensure its long-term operations.

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, we stand - certainly I as minister - stand by the decision that was made by Cabinet and I reiterate it was a tough decision and tough decisions are hard to make. We had to make a decision and we made one. We have made a large investment in the southwest region of the Province of Nova Scotia. Just recently I was down there on Sunday and Monday with the launch of My Nova Scotia campaign. We've invested another \$400,000 in Explore Our Shores. We've invested \$150,000 in the 250th Anniversary. We continue to make investments. There is an ask that's being considered now for the southwest region around the taskforce. We were looking at that and we're seriously considering it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HEALTH & WELLNESS: RURAL PHARMACIES - CLOSURES

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, as much as I'd like to continue on that one, I'm not. The government's Throne Speech promised legislation that will be soon introduced to bring lower drug prices for Nova Scotians who rely on Pharmacare. Lower drug prices are a good thing but my question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is, will she commit today that no rural pharmacies will close as a result of drug pricing legislation and will she guarantee that seniors and other Nova Scotians will not need to travel great distances to get medicines that they need?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, this government wants to ensure that Nova Scotians pay fair prices for generic drugs. We know that Nova Scotians are paying much too much for drugs and the plan that we will be bringing forward in this session will address that and will ensure that seniors and others in Nova Scotia get fair prices. We consulted with pharmacies, including rural pharmacies, and we will have a plan that will serve this province very well.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, we know from the Ontario experience that reducing the price of some generic drugs has meant manufacturers simply stopped making them. What has the minister done to ensure that the drugs Nova Scotians need will still be available after her legislation is enacted?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the shortage of generic drugs is complex and can't be attributed merely to the initiatives that have been taken in Ontario. In fact, other provinces have taken initiatives as well and are in the process of doing so. As I said, our plan will be a made-in-Nova Scotia plan, a plan that was developed with a great deal of consultation with a broad spectrum of groups including pharmacies, pharmacists, seniors' organizations and others, and I'm very much looking forward to unveiling this plan in the not so distant future.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, the effect of lower drug prices will inevitably mean lower profits for pharmacists at a time when the government is expanding the scope of practice for pharmacists. How much of the drug price savings will the minister use to compensate pharmacists for the new services that they will soon perform for Nova Scotians. When will she roll up her sleeves and develop a tariff or a fee schedule for those folks who are going to be offering those great services that they've asked for and the department has asked for as well?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, we believe in treating all sectors of our health care sector fairly with respect to compensation. Pharmacists have been a group in our health care system that has a much greater capacity to provide services to Nova Scotia than they've had an opportunity to do. The work we will engage on, and we're embarking on with this really important group of health care providers, is going to see a

real benefit for pharmacists, but more importantly, for members of our community and people who rely on their services. That's our objective.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ENVIRON.: TRENTON POWER STA. - FLY ASH STUDY

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment. In June 2010 the Minister of the Environment promised concerned citizens in the Hillside-Trenton area that a health study would be conducted on fly ash emissions from the Trenton power station and the impact on the health of residents in that area. As we get close to June 2011, almost a year, will the minister please tell us, where is the study?

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite, I think there is a disconnect or a misunderstanding here. I met with the members of Trenton and there was discussion around a study that was being conducted by Health and Wellness. I think there's a misunderstanding there. Truly, we've met with those people, we discussed their issues and I look forward to meeting with them as we have in the past and we'll continue to do that. Thank you.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there was any misunderstanding by the residents there on what the minister said. He did, on March 24, 2011, many months later, write an e-mail to the residents saying he, in fact, had nothing to do with the study he announced would start at that June meeting and the one he was talking about was already underway as the Department of Health Promotion and Protection. My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is, where is that study and when will it be released to the public?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I haven't had an opportunity to meet with the residents from the Trenton area. If they request a meeting with me, I certainly would be prepared to meet with them. I understand that the medical officer of health for that district health authority has in fact been involved in this issue and has it well in hand with respect to whether or not there is a need for a study, whether or not this is a public health issue. Thank you.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I think there are a lot of residents in those areas that will be very surprised to hear the minister say that, I will table e-mails from the Minister of Environment claiming the Minister of Health and Wellness already has the study underway and a letter from the Minister of Health and Wellness claiming the Minister of Environment is responsible for this. And, they copied one another on that e-mail so I'm surprised the Minister of Health and Wellness seems to know nothing about this.

Furthermore, the fact is that in these e-mails it is with the tacit support of the members for Pictou Centre, Pictou West and Pictou East, all of whom were also copied on these e-mails regarding these studies.

I'll return to the Minister of the Environment, one of them must know what's going on here, would you please tell the members of this House and the people of Pictou County since this minister told those residents this study was already underway, will the minister take responsibility for the study and tell us when it will be completed and released to the public.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the member opposite again I point out that I believe there's a sincere misunderstanding here. We met with the people in that particular area and we referred to the study that was being conducted through the Health and Wellness Department.

I take full responsibility for that, I met with those people and I am sure it is a case of misunderstanding. So we're here, our staff has been working with that community and will continue to work with that community and will look forward to it in the future. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ENERGY: FRACTURING PERMITS - ISSUANCE

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: This is a new question. Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Minister of Energy. Yesterday, in a sort of odd and unusual joint statement, the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Environment announced that they will do an environmental review of hydraulic fracking.

Now obviously, Mr. Speaker, at the time and I say today we're very happy to see the government finally take on that review, I asked for the government to conduct such a review last August and again in the fall and as well put a moratorium on permits on during that review, both in last August and in the fall.

Now Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't note the fact that it did not include a moratorium on the issuance of any permits, unlike all other jurisdictions in North America, which are currently doing reviews. So my question to the Minister of Energy is, why did he not put a moratorium of the issuance of industrial permits for hydraulic fracturing during the review process?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the honourable member for the question.

The moratorium in the Province of Quebec, it's only on the new developments and there are actually 31 wells that are there that are still being hydraulically fractured. But here in Nova Scotia, we have none. We have no applications for this process and it doesn't, I wouldn't say there's any on the agenda during the period of time that we're going to be doing the study, so really there's no need for it.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy just gave the reason why there should be a moratorium on the issuance of permits, because Quebec ran into an issue where they couldn't put a moratorium on projects that were already underway. Just as the minister said there are no applications there yet, so you put the moratoriums in so industry knows what the rules are.

Mr. Speaker I'll follow up with the Minister of Environment, as Minister of Environment why did this minister not demand that there be a moratorium on the issuance of industrial permits for hydraulic fracturing while the review is taking place?

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and again to the member opposite. Well first of all I want to tell the member opposite that I have the greatest confidence in the joint council or committee that is working on this and these people are senior staff, they understand this issue, they are going to go out and gather information from all of the jurisdictions.

I'll repeat what the Minister of Energy just said. There is no urgency to this issue, we are taking the right approach, Mr. Speaker. Also I want to add a footnote to this. Since a media release on this subject as of last night, our neighbouring province, P.E.I. has shown interest in our leadership.

Mr. Speaker, that is a very good comment, when you have a neighbouring province recognizing leadership on an issue that is protecting our environment. Thank you very much.

MR. YOUNGER: I'm a little bit surprised, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Environment doesn't think there is any urgency to this issue. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of Nova Scotians who feel otherwise and I'm sure he has received the e-mails and phone calls. I think certainly the Minister of Energy understands first-hand from the demonstration at his constituency office.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to direct my final supplementary to the Minister of Energy, the other thing missing on this is there is no timeline on the completion of this review.

Now we know this government has a history of missing deadlines for everything from gambling studies to natural resource studies to wetland studies, all of which have been overdue, yet Mr. Speaker, why is it that this government would not put a deadline for the completion of this review?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, we actually in the press release said yesterday the study would be done by early 2012 and with that we'll be consulting with Nova Scotians. We'll be listening to experts in the field and we will use the best resources to get the best possible regulations to protect Nova Scotians and their drinking water.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton West.

NAT. RES.: CLEAR-CUTTING - DEFINITION

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Your government has been discussing a new Natural Resources strategy since June 2009. I asked the Premier and the former Minister of Natural Resources last Fall for a definition of clear-cutting and neither could come up with an answer. Will the new Minister of Natural Resources today please give his definition of clear-cutting?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, clear-cutting is an issue in Nova Scotia. We made a full commitment that we're going to reduce clear-cutting in this province by 50 per cent within a five-year period. We're absolutely sticking to that. I understand there are many different definitions of what clear-cutting is and we're listening to Nova Scotians to see what they determine that the clear-cutting should be defined as.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit even though the former minister didn't give an answer, it was better than that one.

Mr. Speaker, the Ecology Action Centre and the Federation of Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners, the Nova Scotia Woodlot Owners and Operators Association, do not think a general ban on clear-cutting is a viable option for forest management in Nova Scotia. Last October these leaders of Nova Scotia forest industries defined a clear-cut as: the final harvest of a stand of trees that removes most of or the entire overstorey when either of the two following conditions are met. One, the area of the stand is reduced to a stocking level below the sea line threshold of acceptable growing stock and, two, an opening in the canopy is created that is greater than twice the height of the surrounding trees, measuring as the diameter of a circle or the narrow side of a rectangular box.

MR. SPEAKER: Question.

MR. MACLEOD: Well, it's hard to ask a question if you don't give me time to finish the necessary information but the question is, of course, Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree with these people who manage the forests of this province?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, I agree that that's one definition of what clear-cutting might entail but if you talk to Nova Scotians, you talk to foresters, you talk to environmentalists, there are different definitions of what a clear-cut means. We're going to

continue to work with Nova Scotians as we develop our Natural Resources strategy. We're going to come forward with the definition of that and we'll have a working group of all stakeholders to determine exactly what forest policies we should be following in this province, including a definition of clear-cutting. We will very shortly have a better handle on what exactly is included in our Natural Resources strategy. So stay tuned and you'll get your answer.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, if the minister doesn't agree with the definition of clear-cutting, will you not provide a definition and you can't provide a definition . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. The time allotted for the Oral Question Period has expired.

Before I finish up after Question Period, I must first of all apologize to the member for Kings West on the word "untrust", I said it was unparliamentary which I must admit I was wrong. The point I was trying to make in that Oral Question Period was that members are only supposed to refer to other members in the third person, usually by their position. "The member ordered the Minister of", you know, not his or her or you, and that was happening quite a bit today in Question Period. So I apologize to the member for Kings West and please refer to those ministers or the honourable member for.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that crowd over there is happy now.

Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 1.

Bill No. 1 – Motor Vehicle Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

HON. WILLIAM ESTABROOKS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations on your appointment and congratulations for surviving your first Question Period. You know many of us have, of course, sat here and have been critical of the Speakers in the past. In the

years I have been here, and I know the member for Cape Breton West might have been on occasion before, but a Speaker has come forward and the first time during Question Period admitted he made a mistake - he's off to a good start, as far as I'm concerned.

I have the honour, Mr. Speaker, and to members in the House, today to speak on Bill No. 1, and that is dealing, of course, with an amendment to the Motor Vehicle Act, but more particularly it deals with impaired driving with children in a vehicle. Now I've heard some comments about this further to - and I thank the members opposite who did attend the bill briefing - I've heard from some members of the public, of course, who are concerned, one reaction: My goodness, driving while impaired is silly enough - "silly" is not the correct word, we should use something stronger, but it is almost scandalous to make the decision if someone is under the influence to be driving with children in the vehicle.

However, I am pleased to bring this forward. Bill No. 1 is a piece of legislation that I am looking forward to hearing comments from members opposite, to hear it go through to the Law Amendments Committee when, of course, we will be hearing from various members of the public, including MADD, who were in attendance at the bill briefing and, of course, from members of police enforcement. I thank them for attending the bill briefing which took place on Friday.

Mr. Speaker, there is currently no increased penalty for those who choose to drive impaired with children in the vehicle, not in this province for sure, and this legislation will create tough penalties for drivers convicted of impaired driving where children under the age of 16 were present in the vehicle at the time of the incident.

Mr. Speaker, creating penalties for impaired driving with child passengers demonstrates the seriousness of impaired driving while transporting these young people. This legislation builds on earlier legislation enforcement and awareness initiatives. I think it would only be appropriate at this time that I congratulate some of the members opposite who served in government during the past number of years.

I know that the member for Cumberland South - I believe I am permitted to use his name now that he is no longer a member - the Honourable Murray Scott showed great initiative when he came forward with dealing with the issue of impaired driving; in fact it was Mr. Scott who initially introduced me to Margaret Miller. Margaret Miller was the national president of MADD at the time and it is only fair to point out that when we deal with an issue of this sort it goes well beyond political stripes, we are dealing with an issue, we are dealing with a crime, we are dealing with a punishment that must be fitting the crime and it is something that I am sure that Mr. Scott, in his retirement - although I hope he is doing something more productive today than watching the Legislative channel in Springhill - Mr. Scott probably would say this is a good piece of legislation, and I'm sure I'll be hearing from him in the weeks and days ahead about this.

I'd like to point out the amendments to the Motor Vehicle Act and what they will entail; it is important that we clarify this. It increases the time a driver's licence is revoked by adding another 12 months on top of the current penalty. The Minister of Justice, the Attorney General, attended this bill briefing and clarified, in fact, particularly for the media - and I appreciate him being there - the fact that the judge could make the decision of whatever length, but now it is going to be added to by 12 months if there are children present and you are caught drinking and driving. It will also require first-time offenders to participate in the Alcohol Ignition Interlock Program - first-time offenders, they are on the interlock program. It will also increase the minimum requirement of the alcohol interlock program by 12 months for all offenders.

It is important that as a government and as legislators across this province, in all three Parties, we send a strong message to Nova Scotians that driving while impaired is absolutely unacceptable - and driving while impaired with children present is absolutely scandalous. It is, after all, an absolute crime to consider the fact that you would jeopardize not only your own health and safety, but children are also involved in the vehicle while you are driving under the influence.

Manitoba is the only province to have penalties for impaired drivers with child passengers. Impaired driving is the leading cause of vehicle collisions, fatalities and injuries in this province. In fact, impaired driving took the lives of 21 Nova Scotians in 2010, 21 Nova Scotians who needlessly died on our highways because of impaired driving. This legislation is part of several initiatives and legislative enforcement and awareness that, of course, we've brought through to this House. They include the Alcohol Ignition Interlock Program, Operation Christmas and, most recently, increased penalties for those who drive with a blood alcohol level between .05 and .08.

In particular, I must highlight Campaign 911. I am absolutely pleased with the response from the public and Nova Scotians deserve a round of applause for how they've responded. The number of Nova Scotians who have spotted, in their opinion, that someone is under the influence and they have the opportunity to call 911 is absolutely fabulous. It is unfortunate that we have to continue to deal with Nova Scotians because of this unwise decision but Nova Scotians who have called 911, they certainly have done a great deal when it has come to recognizing how important it is to identify drivers who are drinking, under the influence, and I encourage them to continue to do this. More than a year after the launch of the program, Nova Scotians continue to help keep our roads safe by reporting suspected impaired drivers.

Every call makes a difference and on behalf of this government and on behalf of the MLAs present, I would like to thank Nova Scotians for taking up this challenge. It is a positive step and it makes certainly the message more and more clear; not just legislators, not just the police force, but Nova Scotians are not going to put up with drinking and driving.

I'm also encouraged that Nova Scotia has moved up seven places in the most recent provincial ratings released by the Mothers Against Drunk Drivers. This province moves from 11th place to 4th and improved its D+ rating in 2006 to a B- rating in the 2009 report card. The old teacher in me and the parent also says, report cards are important, they do offer a measuring when it comes to how well we've met the expectations of Nova Scotia.

I want to assure you that when Margaret Miller speaks, she is listened to. Margaret Miller, the past national president of MADD has said on a number of occasions - and I would like to table this, it is important that she is recognized again - this sends a strong message to the people in this province that if they - if I look at the print here - participate in this kind of behaviour, they will be punished. I thank Margaret Miller for her support on this particular issue. Ms. Miller, of course, has personal experience with the issue. Her commitment to MADD is absolutely exemplary.

This legislation will help prevent alcohol-related tragedies and the lasting impacts they have on those left behind. This legislation clearly demonstrates the government's commitment to the issue of impaired driving and we are going to continue to make sure that Nova Scotians get the message through education, they're going to continue to get the message because of enforcement and they're going to continue to get the information, hopefully, that this is a particular crime that's not going to be accepted under any circumstances in this province. I encourage members opposite to participate in this debate. I encourage Nova Scotians to come forward to the Law Amendments Committee, and I can assure you that this government is absolutely committed to the fact that we will do everything possible to make the roads as safe as possible in this province. With those few comments I'll take my spot. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

HON. WAYNE GAUDET: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and say a few words on Bill No. 1. (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

HON. WILLIAM ESTABROOKS: Mr. Speaker, my apologies to the member for Clare. It has been pointed out to me that I did not actually move second reading. I'll have to do it the correct way next time. I move second reading of this bill.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

MR. GAUDET: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and say a few words on Bill No. 1 that is amending the Motor Vehicle Act. First of all, I want to congratulate the minister for bringing this piece of legislation forward. We all know that drinking and driving is not

allowed on our highways, however, when you look at the statistics released by the department on accidents and fatalities happening on our roads where alcohol is involved, these numbers keep reminding us that drinking and driving continues to be a major problem on our highways and a leading cause for accidents on our roads.

Mr. Speaker, looking at some of these numbers - and again these numbers speak for themselves - last year, in 2010, 21 people lost their lives in accidents on our highways where drinking and driving was involved. In 2001 - I'll just give you a few statistics - 31 people lost their lives; in 2002, 34 people; in 2003, 39; in 2004, 22; in 2005, 26; in 2006, 29; in 2007, 32.

Now we all know that these are preventable accidents. Mr. Speaker, I was also able to find more information that I want to share with you on accidents involving alcohol on our highways. I'll just look at the numbers for 2006. I looked at previous years and basically the numbers are in the same ballpark. The total number of collisions involving alcohol in 2006 was 507 accidents; in 2006, 507 accidents happened on our highways that involved alcohol. The total number of injuries - we talked about the fatalities - the total number of injuries involving alcohol was 318 injuries. Again, these numbers speak for themselves, so they clearly show that drinking and driving continues to be a major problem on our highways.

Now these numbers make us all aware that more prevention work needs to be done. As legislators, we need to do more work to make our roads safer, as the minister pointed out. One fatality on our roads is still one too many to have.

Now even though we don't have numbers for these, I want to share this with you, Mr. Speaker, for the record. We all know that not every driver who drinks and drives gets involved in an accident. These individuals are lucky. We also know that not every driver who drinks and drives on our highways gets stopped by the police either, so again, these are very fortunate individuals. Yet we certainly do know from the statistics that have been released by the department, how many people are involved in accidents on our roads involving drinking and driving.

Mr. Speaker, the obvious question is, why are people drinking and driving on our highways? Why are people not getting the message? Yet our government, the department, the police, MADD Canada and many different groups throughout our communities are involved in awareness campaigns, trying and trying again to get that message out that drinking and driving is not allowed on our roads.

Mr. Speaker, in the past I have attended some of the kickoff campaigns by MADD Canada, especially at home with the Digby County chapter, in order to try to help get that message out in our own community that drinking and driving is not allowed on our roads. These awareness campaigns are great, trying to reach all drivers, trying to reach individuals, families, the general public, to get that message out. These awareness campaigns are vital, are critical, but there are never enough of them, especially when you

look at these numbers I just shared with you, in order to help make our roads safer. We still have people getting behind that wheel who have been drinking.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the many MADD Canada volunteers across Nova Scotia who are trying to get that message out, trying to make us understand that drinking and driving don't mix and is not allowed on our highways. Their efforts are certainly not going unnoticed, and at the end of the day if one accident can be prevented, one life can be saved, then we are all grateful for their dedication and hard work.

The amendment that's before the House this afternoon will make it tougher for convicted impaired drivers who choose to drive impaired with children under the age of 16 in their vehicle. If someone is found guilty of such an offence, an additional 12 months will be added on top of their current penalty handed down by the courts. As we're aware, Manitoba is currently the only province to have such penalties. Now that Nova Scotia is introducing this change, I suspect other Canadian jurisdictions will be adopting the same policy to protect our children in the near future. Mr. Speaker, again this amendment sends a strong message to parents and to other drivers who drink and drive with children in their vehicle.

I also understand that under this legislation first-time offenders who are found guilty of drinking and driving with children under the age of 16 in their vehicle will be required to participate in the Alcohol Ignition Interlock Program. This will force first-time offenders to enrol in this alcohol ignition program - previously you had to enrol if you were convicted of a second offence. The alcohol ignition program started back in 2008, and this program was put in place to keep our roads safer by reducing the number of people who drink and drive. This program is for people who have lost their driver's licence because they have been convicted of an alcohol-related offence.

Before wrapping up my comments on this bill, I want to take a few minutes here to acknowledge the many drivers on our highways who don't drink and drive, who respect the law. I'm sure Mr. Speaker, you have, and I'm sure all of my colleagues here in the House have as well, noticed individuals throughout their communities who are taking precautions before they go out and enjoy themselves. They make sure that they have a designated driver to drive while others may enjoy themselves - or they decide to leave their vehicle behind until the next day. I think it's absolutely critical that we do acknowledge that a lot of our drivers in Nova Scotia are aware of the situation and are taking precautions. I think we have to take a moment to congratulate them.

Hopefully more and more drivers in our province will take and make these arrangements before they go out and enjoy themselves. It's important to recognize that many drivers understand and make sure they don't drink and drive and, like I said, they

should be congratulated. I hope they'll keep on sharing that message with other drivers in our province.

In order to make our roads safer, as legislators we need to address the seriousness of drinking and driving on our highways, and by supporting these amendments that are before the House today it will certainly help address the seriousness of drinking and driving on our roads. Bottom line - it will save lives and it will make our highways safer.

I want to certainly end with this - by whatever actions we do take as legislators, protecting children is and should be our highest priority.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the PC caucus to speak in support of this legislation. It seems to us in this corner of the House that Bill No. 1 is another step forward in a continued effort to stamp out drunk driving in Nova Scotia. Over the last decade or so there have been a number of substantive and forward steps in a never-ending effort to end the dangerous practice of impaired driving. I remember the alcohol ignition interlock program introduced and implemented in 2008, as well as the introduction of strengthened penalties for driving a motor vehicle with a blood level alcohol between .05 and .08.

Years earlier at the turn of the present century, Operation Christmas was established to reduce impaired driving by folks hitting the road after imbibing generously on various Christmas seasonal social activities. So this bill, Mr. Speaker, will likely reduce impaired driving by a number of people, parents who might choose to have a little too much at family and sports promotion activities or fundraisers which their kids might also attend. It will likely reduce consumption of after-work drinks by parents who have to drive their kids to sports events in the early evening. But perhaps the most significant effect of this bill will be the deterrence of teenagers drinking and driving with someone under 16, friends in their vehicle after parties and social activities.

Mr. Speaker, it will be a great incentive to working parents, young working people and teenagers who have just received their driver's license to be sensible and to not drink and drive. This bill should also encourage increased uses of designated drivers. We know that MADD is strongly supportive of this legislation and we understand and agree with MADD. Driving under the influence is a dangerous and harmful practice and it does indeed deserve serious consequences. In addition, Bill No. 1 follows in the steps of other laws protecting kids like the law prohibiting smoking in vehicles with kids that was passed in 2007.

So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, the Progressive Conservative caucus will be voting in favour of this legislation.

MR. SPEAKER: If I recognize the honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal it will be to close the debate.

HON. WILLIAM ESTABROOKS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again your apology is accepted. It's good to see the Speaker admit that he did make a mistake like I made earlier.

For members present and for those watching Legislative TV, this is a perfect example of co-operation on an important piece of legislation. I know that members of the Progressive Conservative caucus have highlighted the fact that I took the opportunity to recognize the previous minister in this position, Murray Scott, you know, in the time that I spent in this House, we look at legislation such as this legislation. As the member for Clare makes it very clear, it's based on responsibility of protecting children and I thank him for his comments.

The member for Victoria-The Lakes put things in perspective and the teenager influence in particular is one that I appreciate you highlighting. It is after all a good example of how we have to continually educate young people, and people of all ages, about how it is just socially unacceptable to drink and drive. I thank you for those examples. I thank the members opposite for their points of view. I'm looking forward to this proceeding on to the Law Amendments Committee and with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would move second reading of Bill No. 1.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is to move second reading on Bill No. 1. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: That concludes the Government's business for today. I would now hand it over to the Official Opposition's House Leader for business for Opposition Day.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. MANNING MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the House will meet tomorrow between the hours of 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Following the daily routine and Question Period, we will be calling Resolution No. 134 and Resolution No. 8. I move that we do now

adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion before the House is that we rise to meet tomorrow between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

We have now reached the moment of interruption. The subject for tonight's late debate was submitted by the member for Kings West.

"Therefore be it resolved that with today's announcement of last year's surplus the NDP Government explain to the people of Yarmouth and Southwestern Nova Scotia why they couldn't provide the needed \$3 Million dollars to sustain the Yarmouth/New England Ferry for one more year, keep this economic driver alive and keep people and business coming into the province."

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

GOV'T.: YARMOUTH-NEW ENGLAND FERRY - FUNDING REFUSAL

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to stand in my place and talk about this important issue, the Yarmouth ferry issue, it's an issue that I hear about everyday in my constituency. I will respond to the minister's comments earlier in Question Period about collaboration, working together and respect. I want to assure the minister that I am a member who, despite my critiques of some decisions that this government has made, will always be a member - as the member for Pictou East knows - who is willing to collaborate with all members of this House when it comes to doing good things for Nova Scotians. But I will tell you that if the minister keeps it up with the way he's acting in Question Period, he'll be pushing it. (Laughter)

No, this is a very important issue for my constituency in Yarmouth as you well know. I think it is important to review the facts of what has happened here. In 2009, Yarmouth was hit with a decision that this government would be stopping subsidy to our ferry link, effective immediately. That original investment would have cost this province \$9 million, but if you look at the numbers, it actually would have been \$3 million to keep that ferry service going for one more year. All that the community wanted was to have one more year with The Cat so that we could transition and get a new service in place while maintaining that essential economic sea link to the United States, our greatest trading partner and international friend. It would have cost \$ 9 million in the original subsidy, \$3

million of that - if you review the math -the government would have to pay any way to cancel the contract, so you're looking at \$6 million. The municipalities came up with half of that, they came up with \$3 million. They went back to the Premier and said, we'll provide this \$3 million if you match it. It would have cost this government \$3 million to ensure that service was in existence for one more year in Yarmouth.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We could have it a little quieter for late debate, this very important topic before the House. The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. CHURCHILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker - \$3 million to ensure that that economic engine in southwest Nova Scotia would be going for another year, \$3 million to ensure that. Those 100 years that, as a province, we educated people, our American friends on the U.S. side of the border - for 100 years we educated them to come through Yarmouth. It would have cost \$3 million to keep that going. Instead, we have thrown that away. In two years we have thrown those 100 years of education away. We've told people in the last two years, you know what? You don't come through Yarmouth any more. You drive all the way around if you come at all, all the way around.

Mr. Speaker, I've seen firsthand the consequences in my constituency because of that decision; 300 people, according to the Municipality of Yarmouth, the Town of Yarmouth, lost their jobs as a direct result of that ferry, 300 people. Businesses have been closing. It's no joke, it is actually happening. I hear on the government side that I don't know the full story that dictated their decision and that's true because they haven't brought that information to the House to debate. They haven't presented any information, any evidence to support that decision so I might not know the whole story but I do know the story and the many stories of my constituents who are struggling right now, who are worried right now, like the story of Bill Currie who had a tourism operation. For 100 years, a family company that existed for 100 years, this past year closed. It was shut down after 100 years, a 100-year family tradition shut down, because of that decision.

I know that the 20 people who are out of work now, at the mothballed Colonial Inn, Yarmouth's second largest hotel, I know their story, they are out of work, wondering what they are going to do in Yarmouth. Captain Kelley's, a longstanding restaurant in Yarmouth shut their doors, another 20 people out of work. The list goes on of the businesses that have been affected by this. It is not just tourism, the tourism operators have been hurt the most by this decision. Of course they are going to be hurt when you cut off 75,000 people coming through your community a year, that's going to hurt.

It is the economic spinoffs that have really impacted the area, such an impact, I think the worst impact it has had is on the psyche and the morale of that community. Many people in that community are concerned, they feel hopeless. They don't feel that they have

the partner they should have in government, a partner that during hard, difficult times stands with them and helps move them forward. They feel that they have had a government that has actually set them back and I think that's true.

I know that the members of the government will stand up and boast about tourism numbers being up for this past year, 3 per cent or something like that. I think those numbers are inflated, because of the cruise ships that come into Halifax Harbour. They don't stay overnight, they don't fill the rooms. I also think they are inflated because I believe that the Economic and Rural Development and Tourism Department is counting every single person who comes in and out of the province as a tourist, whether it is the Premier or myself, or any Nova Scotian. My family members who leave and come back, I think they are being included in that as well. If you look at the room accommodation numbers and tourism numbers for southwestern Nova Scotia, they are down, Yarmouth and Acadian Shores down, and I'll table that, Mr. Speaker. Occupancy rates down, in Yarmouth and Acadian shores and visitations from New England down.

These are the facts, these are from the department. These numbers are down. The situation is so dire that churches in Yarmouth have started to voice their concerns about what is going on. The Protestant Ministerial, representing protestant churches from across the County of Yarmouth, sent a letter to the Premier letting him know the urgency of the situation in Yarmouth, letting him know that people are struggling, that their numbers of clients that come in looking for help because they don't have money, they don't know what to do, have increased.

The Catholics followed suit, Mr. Speaker, sending a letter of their own because their services for the community are being used a lot more than before. Those church groups have associated that increase in need in our community to the loss of the ferry service. That has happened, everybody associates it with that. (Interruption) Yes, God is involved now. Yes, the NDP have brought God into the whole thing; who knows what is going to happen now.

Mr. Speaker, you hear that things are fine and everything is dandy but you don't hear from this government the stories of all the people who have been affected by this. To hear the Throne Speech this past week mention Yarmouth - I appreciated that and Yarmouth's 250th celebrations, you know, this government continually mentions the \$400,000 they put into their Explore our Shores campaign and talk about how much support they're providing for southwest Nova Scotia and Yarmouth. There has been some monies come in, \$150,000, I believe, for the 250th Anniversary; \$400,000 for Explore Our Shores campaign; but if you look at the results that those investments are bringing about, there aren't any.

Occupancy rates have still gone down, businesses have still closed and there has been no indication from anybody in the tourism industry that these investments are doing something to improve their situation. The reason it's not is because we've cut off a sea link

to one of the biggest markets in the world, in New England. One of the biggest markets in the world, the government looked at that and said, we don't need that, we don't need to connect ourselves to our greatest international partner and friend, the U.S. We don't need to have that direct sea link with the closest port in Nova Scotia, to the closest port in New England. We don't need to have that, there's no business case for it is what they said.

We learned afterwards, after the fact, from the chambers of commerce from southwestern Nova Scotia that there is a business case for this. According to them, this is the only cost-benefit analysis that has been done and has been presented to this House, a \$6 million annual investment in the Yarmouth ferry would have yielded over \$22 million in profits for Nova Scotians leading up to 2015, \$22 million in profits that have been lost because of that one decision.

We feel it most distinctly in Yarmouth. I am told this isn't necessarily the case and that I might not know all my facts and, as a government, they did their homework. I look across at the benches opposite and I see a lot of teachers. They know your homework is only good if you bring it to class and share it with everybody else. No one has been given any indication why this decision was made, which leads me to think it was a political decision - not one based on business, not one based on any cost-benefit analysis by looking at the spinoffs in the economy by having that sea link, and definitely not one that considered the interests of our tourism operators and small-business owners who needed the business from that vessel.

I talked with tourism operators across Yarmouth; we've consulted with them numerous times. I've talked to them in Queens County, in Shelburne, in Hubbards - they're all saying the same thing, we've been hurt by this decision.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member for Yarmouth would have had a little more time to finish off his speech, but we're going to get to speak about this many times over the next number of months, unfortunately.

I think that the government feels this story is getting old and they would like to move on from it. Maybe they're getting tired of hearing us, from Yarmouth County, talking about it on every occasion possible and I can say that as the MLA for Argyle, along with the MLA for Yarmouth, we'll talk about this at any opportunity that we have. We see the impact of this bad decision every time we travel through our constituencies.

The member for Yarmouth was talking about how the church associations have now gotten involved in writing letters to the Premier, in writing letters to the communities. I'm talking about what they're seeing as impacts to their constituents. What happens a lot is

after all government funding is expired, you lose your EI, you end up on the welfare rolls of this province. That doesn't give you enough to live and in some cases people don't even qualify for income support, so they turn to their churches, to the Sally Ann, the Salvation Army, in order to help them survive. And what those churches have seen, what those pastors have seen, what those congregations have seen, they've seen an increase in people looking for help because they're desperate, they don't know where to turn to now that we're almost two years from where we were when we did have that kind of tourist system in southwest Nova Scotia.

The other unfortunate part that's created by desperation, and I alluded a little bit to it in my Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne last night, is organizations and people who, you know, in my mind don't have all the details, don't have all the information required, can stand up and say everything will be okay, I just need an X amount of dollars and I can provide you with a ferry service that can start this summer - hallelujah. Well, do you know what? That's the thing we don't need to have happen in southwestern Nova Scotia, fly-by-nighters showing up and taking everybody's money, screwing it up and not having a service into the future.

We've got one shot at this, I believe, in getting the right service into Yarmouth because I am, of course, the eternal optimist, making sure that southwestern Nova Scotia will be having a ferry service in the future, and that ferry service will be a sustainable system that will be able to run on its own auspices. It will be the right boat in the right place going to the right place. It will be able to provide and make money on board; it will be able to take freight, you know, we can go on to the things that we believe that it needs to be a viable system, and I'm sure that at some point there will be somebody who will come knocking at the door of government saying, listen, you know, we've got some infrastructure needs, we have some marketing needs in order to get running - and I want to be able to hear from the government once again that they'll be there, that their door is open.

We go back to during Question Period and the member for Yarmouth talked about the \$3 million. I was a little put back by it, by looking at the members on the front benches that were saying, well, what do you mean? They actually were, I think, confused in what the member was bringing forward and that during all of this kerfuffle that has been created in southwestern Nova Scotia, the municipalities, in conjunction with the federal government, were able to come up with a \$3 million item and say, listen, we have \$3 million to partner with you to maintain that service into 2011 - or 2010, sorry - but it seemed it fell on deaf ears, and now I think we understand why it fell on deaf ears, because really nobody else knew about it except for the Premier. The letter was sent directly to the Premier that this amount of money was available, and here we are almost a year and a half later and people really didn't even know about it.

It's not the fact that someone finally said this is the wrong ferry, this is the wrong service, you know it has been coming for some time. What we do disagree with is the way that Yarmouth and Yarmouth County was treated in this. It was we're done, the door is

closed, forget it, when really what any compassionate government should have done and would have done is provided a transition to that area to find the service that it did need, that it still needs, and will continue to need.

I thank the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism for coming to Yarmouth, for his thoughts and concentration on what could happen and what might happen, on trying to market the area as a premium, but how can it be a premium destination when people still can't get there? The majority of people who came to that area came by boat. They came from the largest market in almost the whole world, which is the U.S. and the Eastern Seaboard.

To have them come and spend their dollars in southwestern Nova Scotia was I think phenomenal. Look at the \$23 million or \$22 million economic activity that was created by an investment of \$6 million. That is something that is laudable. It's something that is important to a community to have that kind of economic impact happening to it, but we're seeing people losing their jobs. We've talked to the 300 people who have lost their jobs; we're talking about businesses that are closing. I mean I look right now at my friend, Calvin d'Entremont, who runs A Day by the Sea Tours, and he is seriously considering selling his van and getting out of the business completely. He lost his biggest market, which was sitting at the terminal and picking up a number of people, bringing them on a day tour around the area, showing off the Acadian culture, showing off our beautiful vistas and then returning them to The Cat so that they could keep on their way. But he's - for all intents and purposes - selling his facility; he's selling his truck as he can no longer do it.

We're losing that infrastructure - I mean, the Colony is another symptom of that larger piece. They're closing their doors. They're closed; they're not open. We were lucky to see that they can turn it over quickly and open it up, but that's for one year. What happens after year two if we are not successful in getting that boat in place? We'll continue to lose some of that infrastructure that is so, so important to us.

Again, being the optimist and in the information that I continue to hear from the people who are involved - I'm not involved in this because the way we looked at it from the community, you had to have a person who was sort of the main contact point. The municipalities agreed through their industrial commission that the industrial commission would be the organization that would take in the request for proposals, that would go out and look for a boat, that would have the asset of the terminal that sits in Yarmouth, so they can go and say here is the package to come to Yarmouth, here are some of the supports that will go along with it.

From everything that we continue to hear, there is interest in it. There is interest for the 2012 season and all I can hope - this is what I ask - is with all these great talks of surpluses over the last couple days, can you find it somewhere in there to provide some real

dollars when organizations come knocking at the door looking for support? Again, as I said, it's support for marketing, it's for support set-up. It's maybe that first year or two years that they're going to need that kind of help because what has happened now is we have no service – and people know there's no service so they're not going to be looking for it for a long time unless we market it and get it set up.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity for speaking to this again, and I look forward to the comments from the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, the comment that I will make is I'll try to keep this as positive as possible and not resort to any schoolyard tactics. I'm pleased to rise today to discuss government's decision regarding the Yarmouth ferry service. This is not the first time I have been asked about this decision and I've heard that it's not going to be the last. Let me assure you, the thought process behind this decision has not changed. The bottom line is - one could argue - surplus or deficit, one more year or ten more years.

The ferry simply was not sustainable in the long run. There was no business case and we did what was in the best interests of all Nova Scotians. This was not a matter of spending \$3 million, as it has been suggested by some. The province spent tens of millions of dollars to support the Yarmouth ferry, yet money kept going, business didn't increase, there was a steady decline in the number of passengers, and costs were rising. Tens of millions of dollars - we couldn't stop those things from happening.

Unfortunately, and I say unfortunately, the ferry service was a victim of a number of things - the fluctuating dollar, rising gas prices, and a shift in the U.S. economy, not to mention a change in the pattern in those visitors coming from the United States. To be very specific, Mr. Speaker, a 40 per cent change in the value of the U.S. dollar since 2002 seriously impacted the ferry revenue that was, at that time, in U.S. funds.

Fuel prices had gone from 68 cents per litre in 2004 to a \$1.20 a litre and, Mr. Speaker, we know that they continue to rise. The price for a family of four with a vehicle to travel on The Cat to Maine and back cost more than \$1,070.00 U.S.

Tightening U.S. security has meant changes in family travel plans and patterns. In fact, Mr. Speaker, vehicle traffic from Yarmouth to the U.S. decreased by 71 per cent from 2000 to 2009, while the cost of operating increased significantly.

In 2009, just over 1 per cent of visitors to the province - I'll reiterate that - just over 1 per cent of visitors to the province use Yarmouth as their entry point. This equates to just over 26,000 people of an estimated total of over two million visitors to Nova Scotia.

In its last four years of operation, Bay Ferries had to rely heavily on government subsidies to keep its operation going. This included over \$21 million in subsidies from the Province of Nova Scotia. Those subsidies did not help to make Bay Ferries stronger in the face of growing challenges - didn't help a bit. In fact the company's need for government assistance was growing at a time when we are required to work hard and make the tough decisions that will get Nova Scotia back to balance.

Mr. Speaker, we are not the only ones who think that this was the case - a 2010 transportation study of the southwestern region, commissioned by ACOA, clearly agreed with us. Government's decision concerning The Cat ferry was a tough decision. It was thought out, it was deliberate, it had been under consideration for years.

The results of this study reaffirm that government made a tough choice - a business choice, not a political choice Mr. Speaker.

There is no new information that I'm aware of to support a business case for a Yarmouth-U.S. ferry service, and while the bottom line is that the ferry was unsustainable that certainly isn't the case for Yarmouth itself, Mr. Speaker. That's why I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to this government's commitment to make life better for families in Yarmouth, southwestern Nova Scotia, and every region of the province. This government continues to support projects that are creating good jobs and growing the economy in and around Yarmouth.

The province is actively supporting municipal efforts to create a new regional development authority. You see, Mr. Speaker, I see this, this government sees this, as an opportunity to focus on the future, not to dwell on the past.

I will take this opportunity to share with you what the province is doing to work with stakeholders and business, the tourism sector, and other levels of governments to create new opportunities, new opportunities for growth, new opportunities for success in this particular region of the province. Since June 2009 the province has worked diligently to create jobs in southwestern Nova Scotia - this involves dozens of projects well worth over \$13 million.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? I'm going to point out a few examples. We have invested \$8.8 million to restore infrastructure in the Shelburne Ship Repair - \$8.8 million. These improvements to the marine railway and wharf have allowed the company to resume building and repairing ships, and it will employ up to 45 employees during peak periods.

My department has given \$2.5 million, a loan guarantee, to D.B. Kenney Fisheries. It is an investment and an opportunity in an important seafood processor in southwestern Nova Scotia. This family-run business employs 70 people and processes and transports

local seafood to domestic and international markets around the world. It also generates businesses for many local fishermen and their crews - excuse me, Mr. Speaker, I should have said fisherpersons.

We are investing in technology and innovation by helping JHS FishProducts take recycling to the next level. The company is taking fish parts that would not normally be used in North America and turning them into a commodity using drying machinery - dried fish products are a dietary staple in southern Nigeria. Our \$1.8 million investment in the Tusket-based company has supported plans to create up to 50 jobs.

Think about tourism, Mr. Speaker, we have been just as aggressive pursuing economic opportunities for Yarmouth and the southwestern region. We work closely with Destination Southwest Nova Scotia. Previous investments have enabled stakeholders in southwestern Nova Scotia to enhance their tourism opportunities, and we will continue with that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired.

That concludes the business of the House for today. The hours have been set for tomorrow. We will resume at 2:00 p.m.

The House now stands adjourned.

[The House rose at 5:15 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 174**

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the Barrington Municipal High School Environment Club was selected by the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment as recipients of a Visionary Award for 2011; and

Whereas the Barrington Municipal High School Environment Club received the Visionary Award for its efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of watersheds and coastal environments in the Barrington and Cape Sable Island areas of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas club members, led by staff advisor Helen Goreham, have been good stewards of the coastal marine environment for the past six years, helping to protect and restore sensitive coastal habitats, and to promote environmental stewardship in the community;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate the Barrington Municipal High School Environment Club for being selected by the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment as recipients of a Visionary Award for 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 175

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Lockeport great-grandmother Carrie MacLeod has been chosen by her peers as the Representative Volunteer for the Town of Lockeport for 2011; and

Whereas Carrie MacLeod has been a dedicated volunteer for many years who has given freely of herself and her time for the good of her church, her family and her community; and

Whereas Carrie MacLeod, who was nominated by the Lockeport Area Food Bank continues to serve that organization as well as other community groups faithfully, helping

to enrich the lives of her fellow townspeople on a daily basis;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Lockeport great-grandmother Carrie MacLeod who has been chosen by her peers as the Representative Volunteer for the Town of Lockeport for 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 176

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Lower Ohio resident Margaret Bower has been chosen by her peers as the Representative Volunteer for the Municipality of Shelburne for 2011; and

Whereas Margaret Bower is a dedicated volunteer in her community and the surrounding area, serving in numerous capacities for various organizations and community groups over the past 57 years; and

Whereas Margaret Bower, who was nominated by the Lower Ohio Recreation Association, is described as a pillar of the community for her words of wisdom, leadership and knowledge;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Lower Ohio resident Margaret Bower for being chosen as the Representative Volunteer for the Municipality of Shelburne for 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 177

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Barrington resident Wayne Mullins has been chosen by his peers as the Representative Volunteer for the Municipality of Barrington for 2011; and

Whereas Wayne Mullins has been a valued volunteer in the community for many years, serving in various capacities for several organizations including Barrington Ground Search and Rescue which has earned him numerous accolades for his contributions; and

Whereas Wayne Mullins also volunteers his time instructing high school students in St. John's Ambulance First Aid Courses, enabling them to receive Standard and Emergency First Aid certificates free of charge;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Barrington resident Wayne Mullins for being chosen by his peers as the Representative Volunteer for the Municipality of Barrington for 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 178

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Shelburne resident and former MLA Clifford Huskilson has been chosen by his peers as the 2011 Representative Volunteer for the Town of Shelburne; and

Whereas Clifford Huskilson, who was nominated by Trinity United Church, is described as a reliable and dedicated volunteer for the church, holding two chair positions in addition to countless other tasks; and

Whereas Clifford Huskilson is also described as a leader in the community and a dedicated family man who is always happy and ready to lend a hand;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Shelburne resident and former MLA Clifford Huskilson for being chosen by his peers as the 2011 Representative Volunteer for the Town of Shelburne.

RESOLUTION NO. 179

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Shelburne County Special Olympian Andrew Hicks was a triple medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011; and

Whereas Andrew Hicks captured gold in the 200- and 400-metre snowshoeing events and was a silver medalist in the 100 meter event at the 2011 Winter Games; and

Whereas Andrew Hicks is a dedicated Special Olympian who always tries his best and has demonstrated good sportsmanship over the years;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Shelburne

County Special Olympian Andrew Hicks, who was a triple medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 180

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Shelburne County Special Olympian Evan Crowell was a silver medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011; and

Whereas Evan Crowell captured silver in the 200-metre snowshoeing event at the 2011 Winter Games; and

Whereas Evan Crowell is a dedicated Special Olympian who always tries his best and has demonstrated good sportsmanship over the years;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Shelburne County Special Olympian Evan Crowell, who was a silver medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 181

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Shelburne County Special Olympian Gillian Harris was a silver medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011; and

Whereas Gillian Harris captured gold in the 200-metre snowshoeing event at the 2011 Winter Games; and

Whereas Gillian Harris is a dedicated Special Olympian who always tries her best and has demonstrated good sportsmanship over the years;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Shelburne County Special Olympian Gillian Harris, who was a triple medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 182

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Shelburne County Special Olympian Kelly Garron was a silver medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011; and

Whereas Kelly Garron captured gold in the 200-metre snowshoeing event at the 2011 Winter Games; and

Whereas Kelly Garron is a dedicated Special Olympian who always tries his best and has demonstrated good sportsmanship over the years;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Shelburne County Special Olympian Kelly Garron, who was a silver medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 183

By: Hon. Sterling Belliveau (Fisheries and Aquaculture)

I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Shelburne County Special Olympian Martin Fudge was a triple medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011; and

Whereas Martin Fudge captured gold in the 100-metre and bronze in both the 200- and 400-metre snowshoeing events at the 2011 Winter Games; and

Whereas Martin Fudge is a dedicated Special Olympian who has excelled many times over the years in various sports, setting an outstanding example for others in the community;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Shelburne County Special Olympian Martin Fudge, who was a triple medal winner at the Nova Scotia Winter Games held in New Glasgow on February 4-6, 2011.