

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

**COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Legislative Chamber/Video Conference

Protecting Employment in the Transition from Coal

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**NATURAL RESOURCES AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Tom Taggart (Chair)
Dave Ritcey (Vice-Chair)
Kent Smith
Trevor Boudreau
Chris Palmer
Ronnie LeBlanc
Carman Kerr
Claudia Chender
Lisa Lachance

[Ronnie LeBlanc was replaced by Hon. Derek Mombourquette.]

[Claudia Chender was replaced briefly by Susan Leblanc.]

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Acting Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Ava Czapalay
Deputy Minister

Nancy Hoddinott,
Senior Executive Director - Skills & Learning Branch

Nova Scotia Power

Peter Gregg,
President and CEO

Mark Sidebottom,
Chief Operating Officer

IBEW Local 1928

Jim Sponagle,
Business Manager

Clean Foundation

Scott Skinner,
CEO



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2022

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

1:00 P.M.

CHAIR
Tom Taggart

VICE-CHAIR
Dave Ritcey

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone - I think everybody is in attendance. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development to order. My name is Tom Taggart, I'm the MLA for Colchester North and Chair of this committee. Today we have officials joining us virtually from the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, Nova Scotia Power, IBEW Local 1928, and the Clean Foundation.

I ask everybody to please turn off their phones or put them on silent. Please keep your masks on during the meeting unless you are speaking, and please try not to leave your seat during the meeting unless it's absolutely necessary.

I will now ask that the committee members introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and constituency, and if you don't mind, I'm going to start with Mr. Mombourquette.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'd like to also recognize the presence of Chief Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb and Legislative Committee Clerk Judy Kavanagh, who is sitting in for acting committee clerk Sherri Mitchell.

Today's topic will be protecting employment in the transition from coal. I'd like to welcome all the witnesses and ask that they introduce themselves, calling on them by order of the agenda.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Are the witnesses prepared to make some opening statements? I'll start with Ms. Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration's work to support the transition of jobs in Nova Scotia communities.

Nova Scotia is on a path to phase out its fleet of coal-fired generation stations and transition to clean, renewable energy. The Province is working collaboratively with federal and provincial partners to support this transition. While this department is not driving the clean power project, we understand that we have an important role to play. The Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration will work with the communities and other departments - Natural Resources and Renewables, Environment and Climate Change, and Economic Development - throughout this transition.

We also look forward to working with Nova Scotia Power. We know they have been working to prepare for new opportunities and are working with their employees and union to plan for retraining, upskilling, and transitioning workers.

Whenever an industry transitions, we understand that this can impact individuals, families, and communities. It can also create new opportunities. In this case, that includes economic growth and job opportunities driven by clean and renewable energy and increased demand from a growing population.

LSI offers several programs and supports that help people retrain and retool for the next phase of their careers. For example, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency provides incentives to employers to register and employ apprentices through the Apprenticeship START Program. SkillsonlineNS provides free online training with hundreds of courses available to all individuals and businesses in Nova Scotia. Our 16 Nova Scotia Works providers serve more than 50 communities throughout the province, online and in person, and connect people to jobs and jobs to people.

These are just a few examples of our programs and services which are informed by labour market information and forecasts. It is estimated that the province will require more than 11,000 new certified tradespeople in 31 trades over the next 10 years due to recovery, new growth, and retirements. This means there are opportunities for skilled Nova Scotians who work in the coal sector. They have helped fuel our province for generations. As we prepare for a clean-energy future, their skills will continue to be needed. LSI looks forward

to supporting them and the province in an efficient transition through ongoing collaboration and innovative solutions as clean energy plans are finalized.

Thank you for your time. We're happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, deputy minister. Ms. Hoddinott, do you have any comments?

NANCY HODDINOTT: No, I do not. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gregg, President and CEO of Nova Scotia Power.

PETER GREGG: I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak with you today on this important subject. I'm pleased to be joined by Deputy Minister Czapalay and her team; also by Scott Skinner from the Clean Foundation; and, as I mentioned earlier, by our own Chief Operating Officer Mark Sidebottom, whose role is dedicated to leading our transition away from coal.

In particular, I'd also like to thank Jim Sponagle, the head of our union, the Local 1928 of the IBEW, for joining us in this important discussion today. It's under Jim's leadership - our union has been integral to the work that has been done to date, to ensure we have the right plans, the right supports in place for our employees as we transition away from coal to a cleaner energy future. It's a vital partnership, and we are grateful for Jim's ongoing support.

These kinds of opportunities for the type of dialogue and discussion we're having today is essential as we work together toward a clean-energy future for our province and, indeed, for all Nova Scotians. Climate change is a real concern for all of us, and I can assure you that Nova Scotia Power is committed to keeping and meeting government's environmental goals because it's the right thing to do. We live and we work in communities across this great province, so we share in the vision of a clean-energy future for our families, for our friends, and for our neighbours.

For decades, our coal-fired power plants have provided firm, reliable, dispatchable generation, and we've delivered that reliable electricity to customers. While we recognize that coal has been an important part of the Nova Scotia history, we know it can not be part of our future. This is why we have steadily added more renewable energy to the system, and our team of approximately 2,000 employees has led one of the fastest transitions to renewables in Canadian history.

Over the past 15 years, we've been on a path of greening the grid as we transition away from coal. Since 2005, we've reduced carbon emissions by 34 per cent, and our use of coal by 43 per cent over that same time period. We've also tripled renewable energy

output from nine per cent in 2005 to 30 per cent over the last decade, and we're on track to achieve 60 per cent clean energy this year in 2022.

We've made good progress that our team is certainly proud of. That progress has also been made possible by our parent company, Emera. In early 2021, Emera announced its climate commitment for all of its affiliates: a set of clear goals on the path to net zero, including achieving 55 per cent CO₂ reduction by 2025, and at least 80 per cent by 2040, compared to 2005 levels.

As we look to next steps, our employees continue to be first and foremost in our minds and in our planning. We've approximately 400 potentially impacted employees at four generating sites in the province, and they are our top priority in this transition. The most important element in our planning is the focus on care for our employees, their families, and the communities in which they live.

In 2020, we established an internal working group whose primary focus is on supporting employees during this transition. Members of this group include several human resource leads and specialists, seasoned operational leads from the plants, government relations and communications leads as well. Through this group and in close collaboration with our union, we've committed to being the first and best source of information about the transition for all of our employees.

We've been meeting early and often about plans and sharing what we know as we know it. Feedback from our team has shown us how much they appreciate this high level of transparency.

We are also committed to developing individual plans in collaboration with each of our employees who will be impacted to help chart their path forward. We will be leveraging best practices and lessons learned from similar changes and transitions in the company over the years - within Nova Scotia Power, but also across our other Emera affiliates that have gone through similar transitions.

Also, in collaboration with our union, last year we established local transition teams at each of our coal plants where we know there will be impacts to jobs in the coming years. We've also established a central transition team to bring together representatives from each of the local plants to collaborate and regularly share information, learning, and ideas. We will also continue to engage with our employees to help define their individual paths forward, which could include training for new roles both inside and outside the business as we transition to that cleaner energy future.

At the same time, we recognize that we don't have all the answers right now, and if we are going to do this right, we know we can't do this alone. We are proactively reaching out and working with government to ensure a shared understanding of options for our employees. This is in part what led to our joint submission, together with our union, to

Natural Resources Canada in September 2021 to develop a just transition task force for this transition. We've been committed to a just transition for over 15 years on our journey to more renewable sources of energy.

Change is constant in our business, and it's engrained in our culture to put the care and safety of our employees first. We've also met with local municipal officials in areas where there will be job impacts to discuss our planning. Our commitment is to continue this dialogue.

As we continue our path to transitioning off coal and achieving 80 per cent renewable energy by 2030, we know we have the opportunity to assist in creating and supporting a green powered economy, which will create more jobs and more opportunities for Nova Scotia Power employees, as well as businesses and organizations both large and small across Nova Scotia.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to your questions and the discussion.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Sidebottom, do you have anything to add?

MARK SIDEBOTTOM: No, I don't. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Sponagle, do you have any opening comments before we start?

JIM SPONAGLE: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers is the largest union of electrical workers in the world - nearly 700,000 members. In Nova Scotia, the IBEW 1928 represents approximately one-half of the Nova Scotia Power workforce.

I started as an employee of Nova Scotia Power back in 1995. I became a local union president in 2012, and for the past six-plus years I've been the business manager for the local union and represent members right across the company.

Work in the electrical utilities sector is extremely complex. Our members working at Nova Scotia Power are highly skilled and have significant impact ensuring the safe, effective operations of the utility. Most of our members are individuals with highly skilled trades or specialized occupations. In addition, many jobs can be physically demanding and dangerous. Our long history of working with Nova Scotia Power has led to a strong, positive working relationship where we share a common commitment to safety and operational excellence.

I'll be the first to say, as the business manager of the local union, that we have not always agreed on everything. Over the years, I've worked through collective bargaining, arbitrations, and grievances. We also worked together through a major transition as the

company has evolved and workforce requirements change, but together we've never wavered in our shared commitment to health, safety, and care of employees.

When it comes to the current work to achieve the government's environmental goals, Nova Scotia Power and the IBEW are working together to align in our plans to support employees and IBEW members in a meaningful transition, as we move to future cleaner sources of electricity for Nova Scotians.

As Peter mentioned, we worked together last Fall on the joint transition submission to the federal government. IBEW plays a vital role in supporting employees in the electricity sector and ensuring their effective representation. It is our intention to continue to advocate for employees through and following the transition and to continue to grow our membership. To that end, we are actively seeking opportunities for members in clean-energy jobs, whether internal or external, for Nova Scotia Power.

[1:15 p.m.]

From my perspective, on behalf of IBEW, we're seeing many here today. We see this meeting here today as an opportunity to step in the right direction to having the right support in place, and to doing the right thing for our membership by our membership. We share a commitment to the just transition and thoughtful engaging process of those impacted.

Thank you again for the opportunity today. I look forward to your questions to continuing the ongoing discussion/collaboration to come.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Skinner, would you have any opening comments?

SCOTT SKINNER: Yes, I do. Thank you for inviting me to contribute to today's standing committee discussion. At the Clean Foundation, we are an environmental non-profit that strives to help communities transition to a clean, low-carbon economy. Part of that work includes helping communities through workforce development programs focused on facilitating career opportunities in the clean economy sector.

Through our experience in supporting the growth of the sector, we know that there are and will be significant opportunities for impacted workers with the proper planning and supports. The workforce development programs we currently deliver are growing rapidly. We have seen a large increase in employer interest as some labour markets face challenges filling existing roles.

With the right skill set, it has quickly become a job seekers' market, and we have yet to really begin to bend the emissions curve down towards the 2030 goals included in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act passed in the Fall of 2021.

Our broader experience also tells us that one-size-fits-all transition plans are unlikely to work.

Through delivering many programs across Nova Scotia, we know that communities and potential program participants need to be engaged from the beginning to understand their needs and concerns. In our opinion, any workforce transition plans need to be designed for the workers and the specific communities and people impacted, not necessarily focused on the employer or to fit within existing government support programs.

Further, it is our opinion that the complexities of a just transition need to be addressed through planning well before job losses are experienced. Depending on the situation and scale of the job transition, it is necessary to have options including tools like wage subsidies and wraparound services for job seekers and employers. These need to be ready to go before workers experience change.

We are here to talk about coal today, but there are most certainly other industries that will experience profound change in this decade and will require similar attention. There will be many jobs that need to be filled to successfully reduce emissions while we continue to grow the Nova Scotia economy. It's a challenging opportunity, but one which we must get right as a province if we are to live up to our commitments laid out in the unanimously-supported Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act.

THE CHAIR: That concludes the opening remarks. I'm going to begin with the question-and-answer period. I ask everybody to please wait until I say their name before they speak, and to speak, I ask folks to indicate by raising their hands. Hopefully I'm going to try to wrap up questioning by 2:40 p.m. and we'll move on to other committee business.

We're working here under the rotational, where everybody gets to speak once before anybody gets their second question, and I will do my absolute best to keep things in order and run through it that way. The other thing I'd like to ask is for you to indicate who you're addressing your question to.

MLA Boudreau.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Certainly this is an important topic. I think we all recognize the importance of moving towards green energy in this province, but I will say as a member who has a generating plant in my constituency, we do definitely have concerns with how things will unfold for employees. We're looking forward to hearing some of those strategies and how things will move forward.

Ontario closed their coal plants in the early 2010s. Alberta's last plant should close in the next year. I'm going to ask these questions to Nova Scotia Power and to Mr. Skinner. What did these provinces do to prepare their coal plant workers and their communities

where these were located? Have we learned anything from these jurisdictions and some lessons that can be applied to this transition that we're going to be going through?

THE CHAIR: Maybe Mr. Gregg will answer first, and then I'll go to Mr. Skinner.

PETER GREGG: Thank you, Mr. Boudreau, for the question. I actually had the opportunity to work in the Ontario electricity market during that period, so I have some first-hand knowledge of that. I wasn't engaged in the direct conversations with the coal plants at that time - I was in another part of the industry - but I was very involved from a planning perspective. I think there are some really important lessons to learn there.

I think one - and Scott Skinner touched on this - is that over time, there are new opportunities that are presented by the transition away from the more traditional to the new, cleaner generating technologies. In Ontario, we have seen business opportunities, job opportunities, training opportunities develop. That has been a real positive story that we can learn from.

The other part of it though, from a high level, is the issue of making sure we do the transition in a way that is an affordable one for all Nova Scotians. That is one of the most important lessons that I think can be learned from the Ontario context. There were some decisions made there that contributed significant cost onto energy ratepayers, customers, that I think we can avoid here as we manage our transition.

That's front and centre in our mind as we do this. It's not only making sure we're working closely with each and every one of our employees affected, but that when we make decisions around the replacement energy for coal, we're doing so that it's reliable and safe but also affordable for our customers. That's one of the most important lessons we can learn from Ontario.

SCOTT SKINNER: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on this question. I'm not as familiar with what happened on the ground as Peter may have been, given his time in Ontario, and as well with Alberta. I would suggest that we have an opportunity here in Nova Scotia. We have a pretty good line of sight on when the coal plants are going to offline. We have a very good line of sight on the policy measures that are going to be into place around reducing emissions and adding renewable energy to the grid, that we can plan around it in a way that works for the communities in your constituency, Mr. Boudreau.

I think in general, over to this date across Canada, we probably haven't done as good a job as we probably could have around this notion of a just transition. It's been talked about for quite a while. There's a task force that I think started in 2017 and really started to come out with information just recently - last year.

What I would reiterate again is that we have the opportunity here in Nova Scotia to set out a plan with a pretty good idea of when things need to happen. I'm really hopeful that we can do that and make sure that we have the opportunities there for people who are going to be impacted.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer next, please.

CHRIS PALMER: As my friend Mr. Boudreau has said, it's a very important topic that we're discussing today. With all the new opportunities and the transition that we're going to be going through, I'm sure there's a lot of anxiety amongst a lot of people out there. It's so comforting to know that there are a lot of plans and lot of thought being put into how we're going to work with workers going forward.

I'd like to address my question to Mr. Skinner. You had mentioned in your opening statement that not only is this transition away from coal affecting not just the workers, but their families and communities. Could you talk to us a bit more and maybe expand on what you mentioned and discuss some of the work that goes into supporting the communities that we're going to be seeing now and going forward? Could you clarify and expand on that?

SCOTT SKINNER: What I was referring to in my opening comments was that there are a number of sectors and areas of work right now that will be impacted. Allow yourself to imagine the impacts to businesses in your community around the switch from internal combustion engine vehicles to electric vehicles. This will impact a lot of different parts of mechanic shops, car dealerships - electricians will be needed to install charging infrastructure. There's a lot of work to be done there.

I think at this point, we should be thinking pretty soon about doing a vulnerable sector review and seeing what that looks like down at the community level, and then getting out into those communities around the province and talking to the businesses about it. There's enough directional certainty on a clean economy transition that people should not be surprised, but right now, we too often talk about the stuff anecdotally without having really a good understanding of what that transition is going to look like.

THE CHAIR: MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: My question is for Deputy Minister Czapalay. There's a role for the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration in rolling out programs or skills development for these workers. You had mentioned Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and SkillsOnlineNS, but could you give us some more detail of those programs and how they'll help these particular workers in this skill development or transition?

AVA CZAPALAY: I'm really pleased to hear in the opening remarks from Nova Scotia Power that the workers are highly skilled workers, and many of these workers do practice a trade, and that's our understanding as well.

Many members of this committee will be aware of the fact that we need about 11,000 apprentices in 31 trades over the next few years. There are a lot of jobs for people to practice skilled trades here in Nova Scotia. We're really hopeful that some of the workers will consider applying their trade or gaining a new trade as they transition their career. On that piece, we feel like there's a lot of opportunity to work.

Mr. Boudreau mentioned Cape Breton, and definitely we know that there are a lot of trades-related projects ready to go in Cape Breton that require skilled trades workers, so we're hopeful that there are some opportunities there.

What the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration does is help communities and employers in transition. We work with employers to help with the transition piece where they need help. We also work with employees who are seeking assistance as they transition to a new career. We do that through a number of ways - both online and through our Nova Scotia Works offices that are throughout Nova Scotia - helping the workers both assess their skill set and determine what skills they need to transition to another opportunity.

My colleague Nancy Hoddinott heads up our Skills and Learning Branch. If there's time, I'd like her to just be specific on a few of the things that we're able to offer.

NANCY HODDINOTT: As the deputy minister mentioned - and actually coming off a number of the comments this morning - there's incredible work happening within Nova Scotia Power in terms of supporting its employees to transition over the next number of years. We're certainly working with Nova Scotia Power, keeping abreast with your HR people around what those plans are and what the timelines of potential impacts are in the next year, next two years, next five years plus.

The other piece is again, with a highly skilled workforce, it's slightly different than if you're working with a group of individuals who need significant training to reattach to the labour market. We're keeping abreast of what the opportunities will be internally for staff to find other employment opportunities within Nova Scotia Power - what the training pieces are that Nova Scotia Power will be building into its plan. I know the proposal - and Nova Scotia Power has been very open with sharing the planning and submissions to Natural Resources Canada - has some pieces in there around labour market training and transitions. We are aware of those pieces as well.

In the interim for individuals who are thinking about staying within the company or looking to branch out to other opportunities in the province, there's certainly an ability to access Nova Scotia Works at any point in time. We have an online channel now that

individuals can go in and look at what their current skill set is, where there may be opportunities in their communities or across the province. That can be accessed, again, through Nova Scotia Works online, or by visiting a Nova Scotia Works office. There are always supports to help people look at their resumes and just think about their career and their career planning through Nova Scotia Works. Those opportunities are there.

[1:30 p.m.]

I want to come back to another issue that Scott Skinner mentioned around wage subsidies. We have an ongoing array of programming and supports for individuals who are actually displaced from their workplace, when they become unemployed. We have that funding envelope here all the time so we can help because we have time in this particular transition to think about how that funding envelope.

That program is a start program which has a wage subsidy attached to it. If there are individuals who are displaced and a wage subsidy can help in some of those local communities, that program is ongoing and can be massaged to meet certain, very particular, specific needs related to this workforce.

To basically sum it up, we have a number of programs and ongoing support streams. It's really just being in regular communication with Nova Scotia Power as the plans unfold to understand what the things are that we need to maybe enhance or put into play as the transition happens.

THE CHAIR: MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for Mr. Sponagle. Thank you for joining us today. I wanted to recognize that it was great to hear about how the union has been engaged, even if at points the discussion has been difficult. We know that it's really important to have labour in particular connected with communities as a leading voice in this transition.

I'm wondering if you could take some more time to tell us a bit about how your members are feeling about the closure of the plants. Are they getting enough information? We've heard about some of the programs and resources that are available. Are folks able to access those? What kinds of community-level engagement has been happening? We heard from Mr. Skinner about how one size doesn't fit all, so just wanting to hear about specific community experiences thus far, and access to information.

JIM SPONAGLE: I'll try to answer to the best of my ability. Nova Scotia Power came around maybe mid-year last year, went to the multiple thermal plants. We talked about the transition from fossil fuel to coal to renewable green energy and the impacts it's going to have on the business. The vision is by 2030 to be off of coal, no longer burning coal as a source of power generation.

At the end of the day, there are six units in Cape Breton. Cape Bretoners are resilient people. They took the information, internalized it. There were a lot of questions. Initially there was a lot of buzz. We've got a couple plants - units - in the mainland in New Glasgow. Again, a lot of questions came out of the initial meetings. It's a big transition. It's over time.

We're in the infancy stages of the transition, so like I say, the employer and the union set up local transition committees at each of the thermal plants. If there are any questions, they're vetted through the transition committees, and we've got a central committee that I participate in when I'm available.

At the end of the day, it is what it is. It's a changing world. The world's been changing ever since I've been born - 1967. Like I say, my grandfather was in a horse and buggy, and when he died, there were people going to the moon. The world will continue to change. It changes daily, and we've got to change with it.

I don't look at it from a pessimistic standpoint. Coal will be eventually phased out, and I look at trying to leverage the opportunities that electrification is going to present to our members. Certainly, I'm not an advocate of Nova Scotia Power employees going elsewhere.

I don't engage in any political discussion with Nova Scotia Power and the government. Like with Nancy - I don't believe I've met Nancy before. I've had no discussions there, so I look at it as one step at a time. We'll get through it together. By having collaborative relationships with the employer, we'll work together and try to minimize the impact of the transition. That's all I can do. One day at a time.

THE CHAIR: MLA Mombourquette.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Good comment, Jim - we are a resilient bunch in Cape Breton. Good to see you. I appreciate all the presenters being with us today. I appreciate the conversations that I've had with many of you over the years as my time as the Minister of Energy and Mines, and how important this transition is going to be for the province. As has already been stated, there's a large number of workers who will be part of the transition, and we want to make sure we do whatever we can to support them.

My first question would be for either representative of Nova Scotia Power. In talking about the transition, in talking about the eventual shutdown of plants, a lot of this is really dependent on the Atlantic Loop and what that conversation is like, where it's going with the feds and the Province. As we talk about worker transition, could you provide just some of the opportunities that will be presented to Nova Scotia in the eventuality that the federal government approves the loop project, and the opportunities for your employees?

PETER GREGG: I'll start and then I'm going to invite Mark into the discussion as well. A lot of discussion around the Atlantic Loop - an important feature that we're working jointly on with the provincial government, but also neighbouring utilities and provincial governments in neighbouring jurisdictions to bring that together. It's all based on our shared, collaborative approach to achieving the off-coal environment by 2030 that is set in legislation. It's about doing it in such a way where it removes coal from our system and replaces it with renewables, but does so in an affordable way.

That's really what led us in our detailed planning to look at adding to the existing renewable resource base in Nova Scotia. It's leveraging the clean power that comes over the Maritime Link from Newfoundland and Labrador, but also this Atlantic Loop concept - really the completion of that loop - by building a transmission line from Nova Scotia into Quebec to tap into their vast renewable resources that they've got there.

That is the plan. It's not only that transmission line that will allow us to shut down about half of these plants that we've got in Nova Scotia, but it's the portfolio of solutions, including the transmission line to Newfoundland and Labrador that's already there. It's leveraging renewable resources here in Nova Scotia and technologies like grid skill storage to help optimize those renewables in the province.

To answer your question more specifically, we're having ongoing discussions. Mark is leading a team here at Nova Scotia Power in those discussions. As I mentioned, we continue to work collaboratively with the provincial government. We're having regular meetings with federal government representatives led out of the Privy Council Office in Ottawa - actually, we had our most recent meeting last Friday. I'd say they're going well. Discussions are there.

What it comes down to, to keep this an affordable transition for Nova Scotians - we need help. We need funding support from the federal government, and that's what our ask is. We're having those fruitful discussions I'd say. I do worry that 2030 is not far away. We need to get to some decisions sooner rather than later. The discussions have been great, but getting to some decisions - I think there's an understanding of that sense of urgency among all parties involved in those discussions.

Mark, I don't know if I've left you any room there, but anything you'd add?

MARK SIDEBOTTOM: I think you covered it well, Peter.

THE CHAIR: MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Hello, everyone. Susan Leblanc, MLA for Dartmouth North, filling in for MLA Claudia Chender. I have a question for Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner, in your opening remarks, you talked a little bit about the just transition. I just would love to know - from your point of view and imagining - what it will be like. What will the just transition look like for communities like Mr. Boudreau's community and all the different communities that are affected by us getting off coal - and workers are at the centre. What are the risks and missed opportunities if there is not a significant increase in spending on a just transition to the green economy starting with this year's budget?

SCOTT SKINNER: Thank you for the question. Honestly, if I look at what we have to do over the next years until the end of the decade, we're going to need everybody. There's frankly a huge amount of work that needs to be done on things like energy efficiency, small-scale renewables, large-scale renewables. I worry less about there being jobs than we bring people along to the jobs that they want.

I think we need to ramp up investment in all of these things really quickly. It takes a while to build capacity and to get these actions moving in communities, whether it's building electric vehicle charging stations or deep energy retrofits. It takes a while to get that bus moving. Ultimately, I'd like to see people working on these projects in their own community and having opportunities to do that.

I think we can also look at specific communities that are experiencing change and direct programming support and investment directly to them. To date, a lot of programming and investment that looks at this stuff will look at a geographic area, like a province, and set pretty rigid eligibility rules. Then everybody has equal access, and you go from there. I think we have to move beyond that. If you look at a community that's having this change effected on them by policy, let's just go in there and let's put them to work.

Before we decide to do that, let's make sure that they have the training. That the companies that are doing the hiring - whatever type they are - are able to pay them well for the work that they're doing. We're seeing inflationary costs in the community. We're seeing housing and rent costs go through the roof. We're going to have to make sure that people are paid well as they move from one job to the next.

In general, I think that we will have more trouble finding people to do the work in some of the areas of our province than we think we will right now. I would suspect that we're going to need more than 11,000 people in the trades over the next decade.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ritcey.

DAVE RITCEY: My question's going to be directed toward the members from Nova Scotia Power. What steps have been taken to prepare the Nova Scotian energy grid for the unique demands or necessities of different, cleaner methods of energy production?

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gregg, are you going to take that?

[1:45 p.m.]

PETER GREGG: I think I'm going to ask Mr. Sidebottom to take that, if that's okay.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Sidebottom.

MARK SIDEBOTTOM: Thank you for the question. There's been a significant investment over the years, getting ready for the renewable generation. There has been new transmission infrastructure built around the province to connect renewable energy. As we look forward to the next eight years - as we really do the off-coal transition - there's a need to enhance the transmission lines.

As Mr. Gregg said, the Atlantic Loop is a key part. A piece of that is actually infrastructure in Nova Scotia that needs to be enhanced so it allows for the two-way flow of energy and helps increase the grid's ability to take more wind energy.

Some of the early steps that are happening now - there's going to be new wind added to the grid. There is currently an RFP out, and that is going to enhance and lower the carbon footprint in this province. We're going to get the grid ready for that. That's one of many ways in which we can be ready for the future as we get towards a near zero carbon footprint in Nova Scotia for the electrical grid.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith.

KENT SMITH: Thank you to the witnesses for being here. My question is going to be directed toward Mr. Skinner. I was happy to hear your response to Ms. Leblanc's question because mine is similar, but going to go a little bit deeper. Obviously, we're talking about protecting employment, but there's also an element here of creating employment as well. I'm wondering if you can speak to us a little bit about the Clean Leadership Summer Internship Program and how that can be helpful in the transition from coal.

SCOTT SKINNER: Our Clean Leadership Summer Internship Program has been supported by the provincial government for a very long time, including the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration and the Department of Environment and Climate Change. It's a fantastic program that's been growing every year because employers in the clean economy are becoming more and more interested in offering up more positions for students. Alongside of that, students have shown overwhelming interest in it. We have a huge amount of students applying every year.

These roles end up in all kinds of different types of organizations, whether they be clean tech, energy efficiency, solar, environmental conservation types of roles. It really is setting up young people for a career in the low-carbon economy, transitioned economy

workplace. I would say that some of the things that we're doing in that program - although it's focused on returning students - the same tenets would hold to support people who are going through a mid-career transition who are more likely to be affected by this particular coal transition.

Without question, young people working in the clean economy is good for communities. The Clean Leadership Summer Internship Program has just as many placements in rural organizations across Nova Scotia as there are in the HRM, so it's covering a pretty wide swath of the province. As these companies are finding more positions for youth in these internship roles, they for sure will be finding more roles for people of older, mid-career looking for change.

THE CHAIR: MLA Boudreau is next, and then we're going into our second round.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Hearing some good remarks from the witnesses and some good questions from the colleagues here. Again, I'm going to back to being a rural community that has a generating plant there. Maybe this question will be for Mr. Skinner. From your experience in working with communities, what should these communities be doing to prepare for these plant closures?

SCOTT SKINNER: I think some of the work is happening right now with NSP and IBEW and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, getting ahead of when and how these job changes are going to occur. I think it is incumbent on government in general and organizations like mine to make clear what other opportunities there are in the community around clean economy transition.

There will be other jobs that won't be at NSP around this that may be attractive to people who are being experienced by it. I encourage you to think about more than just the physical labour and technical roles. If a company is installing solar panels, they also need people who do sales, administration, and accounting. Any organization that is involved in the clean economy transition is a company that has a diversity of roles.

I think we need to get out there and talk more with communities that are going to be impacted and see how the investments in policy that will run out of the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act will provide opportunities for them.

THE CHAIR: MLA Mombourquette.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm going to continue on the topic of the loop. I think it's important - well, it is very important based on the comments we've already heard from the CEO of NSP - how important that infrastructure is going to be for government to really hit the targets that they want based on their legislation.

Over the years we've continued to increase our efficiency programs, increase many of the programs that Nova Scotians utilize every day. But these larger infrastructure projects that may exist will really help with that transition, I believe, of not only Nova Scotia Power employees but it will provide hundreds of opportunities for skilled trades across the province.

In the event that the Atlantic Loop does not happen, what happens to the targets set out to close the plants; and also, what happens to power rates? That's my question, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: I'm going to ask Mr. Gregg to respond to that, please.

PETER GREGG: I'd start by saying that in the utility business, we build long-term assets to serve customers. That's sort of how we're wired. We do a lot of planning. We do a lot of engineering. We do a lot of scenario development. You can go and look at our Integrated Resource Plan that was completed a couple of years ago with a lot of consultation from people across this great province. It came up with options for what the clean future is going to look like.

Partly based on that work, and partly based on our own internal planning, we determined that the most viable, affordable, reliable way to get to a cleaner grid was to focus on what I mentioned before. It includes the Atlantic Loop, but it also relies on a portfolio of cleaner solutions inside the province.

That is really Plan A for us. Put it all together, we believe it's the most affordable solution for Nova Scotians. But what I said about planning - we wouldn't be good at our jobs or doing what we need to do if we didn't have other scenarios developed. There are other ways of getting to 2030, but we think we've got the best Plan A, and that's where our energies are focused at the moment.

I think it's also important to say that as the utility, we have to respond to the legislation. It really is an obligation on us as the utility to meet those 2030 targets. We feel that obligation. It's safe to say we feel the pressure - it being 2022 - that we need to have the right plans in place to do it. We will do everything in our power to meet those targets that are set for us, but we need to make sure we do that in a way that is responsible, so it's an affordable transition for everyone.

It has to be an equitable transition, a reliable transition, and sets us up for the potential of - we're talking about 80 per cent renewables by 2030. There's a lot of talk about net zero, and we as a corporation have goals for net zero. It also sets us up for that next step beyond 80. That really is the Plan A that we talked about, that includes the Atlantic Loop.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I, as well, want to commend all my colleagues and all of you who've appeared as witnesses today for the great questions and the responses that we're hearing. It's definitely a lot that's been happening, and a lot to learn from today.

It was mentioned about 11,000 trades positions that will be needed over the next decade. That was a staggering number. As Mr. Skinner said, that will be a combination of young people going into school, but as well, what we're discussing here is the transition from coal and the retraining opportunities. Each person's circumstances are unique, and their ability to access retraining services could be different in different circumstances.

I would like to address this question to Ms. Czapalay or Ms. Hoddinott. Could you talk to us about the impact that age and other demographic factors might have on a worker's ability to access any retraining services that would be available?

AVA CZAPALAY: We do need many, many more skilled trades workers in Nova Scotia. We have a plan as to how we'll go about increasing the number of skilled trades workers and do so very purposefully over the next few years, but our plan includes recruiting Nova Scotians and promoting the fantastic jobs that are available for life-long careers in skilled trades to Nova Scotians.

Also, it's about really working to ensure that under-represented groups in Nova Scotia appreciate the opportunities that a career in skilled trades would bring to them. We have very targeted campaigns to promote skilled trades among women, for example, among Mi'kmaw and Indigenous populations, as well as African Nova Scotian populations.

We also have a population growth campaign underway right now, which is specifically targeting skilled trades and health care workers across Canada to bring their skills to Nova Scotia - come job ready and there's opportunities here for them. Then, of course, working with people who are looking at a career change to help them understand the many options that are available to them in skilled trades.

Finally, we're looking to retain people who start the apprenticeship journey and perhaps don't complete it, so helping those folks finish their apprenticeship journey and become a journey person in a skilled trade. There are many approaches that we're taking to ensure that people access careers in skilled trades.

In terms of accessing our services, age doesn't matter. We do offer individualized services. When someone comes to our Nova Scotia Works office, they're offered customized service, just taking where they are in their journey and working with them to help them along and realize what their career goals are. We have a number of programs in place, but it all starts with understanding the individual situation: what they want for their career, what skills they have, and where they might want to go with those skills. Also, then,

appreciating what the opportunities are, both in their community and throughout Nova Scotia.

I'll just check with Ms. Hoddinott to see if I left anything out there.

NANCY HODDINOTT: I think that's good. Just to reiterate, with a workforce like this, Nova Scotia Power has really good details on the individuals, their career, their training, who's likely to be impacted, and where they are in their career: early career, mid career, or late in their career. All of those things will factor into the work that Nova Scotia Power is doing with their employees.

At the end of the day, as the deputy has said, there's no age or demographic or location across the province that impacts any of the supports that we would provide. They're there for anyone who's interested. They're there to help people make some career decisions. They're there to help individuals understand, with the current skill set that they have, where are the opportunities. Those things are available across the province, 12 months out of the year, to anyone who wants to access those services.

THE CHAIR: Now we'll go to MLA Lachance.

LISA LACHANCE: My question is also for Deputy Minister Czapalay, and perhaps Ms. Hoddinott, and actually follows on quite nicely from the previous question. I just wanted to explore a bit around community planning. We're talking about transitioning individuals, but individuals are part of communities. We're talking about coal mining communities because there's such a long history and tradition and culture. On one hand, I think it's great to hear about what's available for individuals, but I'm also still very interested to understand what's happening at the community level.

I'm wondering, perhaps if you could comment on what you understand about the particular challenges in each community, that each community is facing. I think the question around age is really important, because that may have a different answer depending on where your community is. Not that there's a barrier to showing up for services, but realistically there are contextual issues that need to be taken into account.

I'm specifically wondering about that bridge from individual, to understanding the individual in their context, and what you understand as the challenge for each community.

AVA CZAPALAY: I'll start, and then I may need to draw on my colleagues' expertise. Thanks for the question. It gets completely to the heart of the matter, which is: How do you assist individuals in transitioning their careers? Then what about the community? How does the community also transition from supporting a sector to perhaps supporting employees in another sector or a variety of sectors?

[2:00 p.m.]

Just to reiterate the first part, individuals are treated individually. They all have different hopes and dreams and objectives. They're all in different places in their careers. Some may have a skill set, which will be required by Nova Scotia Power and may be remaining in their jobs. Others may be transitioning to something completely. Then you also have a spectrum in between.

There might even be some people who aren't quite sure of what they want to do. They just need to sit down and talk to somebody, get a bit of information and a helping hand to assist them with whatever that transition looks like as their understanding of what they want in their career evolves.

On that piece, we're good at that. We have community supports for that. We have over 50 locations for Nova Scotia Works offices. All of the communities that would be affected by this transition would have a Nova Scotia Works office nearby with skilled professionals ready to help at any time.

In terms of the community, I believe there was a question similar to that earlier. I did make note that the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables is currently undertaking a bit of an analysis of a broader impact in terms of what this transition might mean to the larger community. We'll be working with NRR and our partners just to have a bigger appreciation of what the impact might mean in each community, and also be ready to support that transition.

That role would be assisting with labour market information, helping with apprenticeship programming and promotion, promoting the Nova Scotia Works offices and the variety of services that we mentioned today, and lending a hand if necessary to the employer as well to see if there's anything further we can do to help employers transition.

Nancy, can I ask if you have anything further to add?

NANCY HODDINOTT: Not much to add, except just to say that when these kinds of things happen in local communities, the magic around the planning actually happens at a very community level. We are available as a government department to sit in and help with those things in the areas that the deputy minister mentioned. If Nova Scotia Power already has these transition communities locally established, there may be some opportunities to broaden those out. Then it becomes up to those community partners to come to those tables and sit and be part of that planning. That's probably the vision you see for those things. When that happens, we're there.

In other instances, when things like this have happened, it had impacts at local levels. It's the chambers of commerce that come to the table, as well as the Regional

Enterprise Networks. It's our Nova Scotia Works centres. It's the local employer. That's where those conversations happen.

Coming back to something Scott said very early on, it's important to have really good information when you're doing that planning. I think of the work that's happening with government, led by the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables right now, around what's that broader economic impact that could be felt in communities with some of these transitions. Having that in hand, and having the information that we can pull together around really good detailed labour market information across the province, is helpful in that space.

At the end of the day, we're ready and able to join those tables and help facilitate some of those local conversations and planning that will happen from now over the course of a number of years as the transition unfolds.

THE CHAIR: Next, we have MLA Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I hope to get back to that topic in a few minutes and to ask about why maybe the government should take more of a leadership role, I think, in the just transition that we're facing.

My question now is for Mr. Gregg. In your opening remarks, you talked about a focus on care for employees, families, and communities, and throughout the committee, you've talked a lot about affordability. But we know that there is an application before the NSUARB which would include a 10 per cent rate increase over three years for ratepayers but at the same time would increase the rate of return for shareholders. In many ways this would increase the profitability of your company in the meantime, based on the ways that things are restructured.

Mr. Gregg, my real question is, affordable for whom? But my question to you is: What are your plans to ensure that we meet our climate targets and make sure that bills remain affordable for Nova Scotians?

PETER GREGG: A big part of our general application to the NSUARB has been to make investments to support the transition that we've been talking about here today, to get to 80 per cent renewables by 2030. We need to be making those investments now to make sure we hit those goals, and also to make sure we do it in a way that is - as I've said on a few occasions and as you mentioned - as affordable for Nova Scotians as possible. That was a huge consideration for us in making that application to the NSUARB.

I can tell you that as we progress towards our 2030 shared ambitions for 80 per cent renewables, we will always apply a really strict lens of affordability as we make those decisions. We haven't been to the regulator for a general rate application in over a decade, and we never take it lightly when we do have to go forward. I think we do have a very

strong independent regulator in this province who will hear what we have to say, but will also hear the perspectives of others who are intervenors in such a process, and we respect that process.

THE CHAIR: MLA Kerr.

CARMAN KERR: This one is for Mr. Gregg as well. I was pleased to hear that there are local transition teams and central transition teams working with employees throughout the province and throughout the plants, so I've switched up my question.

You had mentioned that there are other ways to achieve our province's climate goals if the Atlantic Loop doesn't work out, and I'm curious what those other ways are.

PETER GREGG: In answering the previous question, what I was trying to illustrate was that as planners for a complex grid serving all Nova Scotians, we need to be planning for multiple scenarios all the time. That's part of our DNA as a company, it's part of the DNA of utilities more broadly.

Are there other ways of getting there? There are. We are very focused on our planning, which includes the Atlantic Loop. That's where our attention is. We've done the analysis that says this is the best option for Nova Scotians that provides the most affordable option to get there. We need help from the federal government: 55 per cent of the cost of getting off coal for Canada is going to be borne in Nova Scotia, and we're three per cent of Canada's population. That just illustrates why we need that help.

We're confident that our shared approach to the Plan A, which includes the Atlantic Loop, is the right way to go. That is the subject of ongoing in-depth conversations with multiple parties at the table. We have confidence in that. I didn't want to say that we're looking at other options because that plan isn't going to work. We have confidence in that plan, and that's where our focus is, but we wouldn't be good utility planners if we hadn't thought through other ways of getting there if we need to. I would illustrate and highlight that we think we've got the best plan, and we'll continue to be focused on that.

THE CHAIR: I have MLA Ritcey next, then Smith, and then we're going over to the third trip around. I have MLAs Boudreau, Mombourquette, Chender, and Ritcey.

DAVE RITCEY: As a result of Bill No. 57 being introduced this past Fall sitting, Nova Scotia has become a leader in the country when it comes to setting ambitious targets for its transition to energy efficiency. This question is directed to Mr. Gregg. Could you tell us if there is, to your knowledge, an ongoing effort to communicate between provinces as we learn how to better undergo this transition from coal?

PETER GREGG: I'll do my best to answer that and start by saying the transition we're contemplating here in Nova Scotia is a transition that other jurisdictions are

obviously dealing with as well. We've obviously got more of a concentration of coal in our province than you see in other parts of the country currently, so the challenges are going to be unique in each jurisdiction.

We have been engaged, as I mentioned before, with our neighbouring colleagues in very in-depth discussions. Mr. Sidebottom and I meet regularly with our colleagues at NB Power to talk about ways to move off coal jointly, and to serve the needs of our neighbouring jurisdictions. Those conversations are also happening with our colleagues in Quebec at Hydro-Québec on a regular basis, and they also involve provincial governments from both New Brunswick and Quebec, as well as the federal government. Those discussions are ongoing.

We also have discussions regionally. As you know, we get power through the Maritime Link now, so ongoing discussions with Newfoundland that have been underway for a long time, and those continue to happen with our colleagues in P.E.I. Yes, there are shared discussions around the shared journey, and we're really trying to take more of a regional approach. We think it is the best approach to manage the transition.

I also have an opportunity to interact with my colleagues across the country through the Canadian Electricity Association. I sit on the board of that association, and we talk about net-zero ambitions, legislation at the federal level, and how we're all going about it. It's a real benefit to get the perspectives from all of those leaders in the sector, and share our perspectives, as well, to make sure that we're all focusing on the right solutions.

THE CHAIR: MLA Smith, please.

KENT SMITH: Earlier in the conversation, I heard one of the witnesses talk about rural and how some things are happening in rural. It's not all happening in HRM. Well, I happen to represent part of HRM, but I can tell you that the communities of Ecum Secum, and Sheet Harbour, and Seaforth, although in HRM would not be considered urban; they would be rural.

With that being said, something like the CustomerFirst Renewables initiative for the RFP for wind and solar - how can something like that be beneficial to those rural communities that I spoke of? Mr. Skinner is who I would like to have address this.

SCOTT SKINNER: That, in my understanding, is an open call. It would be dependent on the companies that respond to the RFP, and if those companies have a site located in that area of the province. At this stage, I'm not aware of what's going to be submitted in there. I know there's been a lot of groundwork done by many of the renewable, especially wind, companies that have been around the province for a while.

It would be hopeful that the benefits of this procurement and future procurements find their way into local benefits for many of the rural communities in the province.

[2:15 p.m.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, sir. Now, the third round - MLA Boudreau, please.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Again, interesting topic. We've heard a couple of different witnesses talk about the jobs - 11,000 jobs will be needed, or maybe even more - and some of the construction that's going on in Cape Breton right now in those near locations to these generating plants.

That brings me to a different type of conversation or a different kind of question. Is there an operational risk to these coal plants if employees start leaving for some of these jobs now that they're anticipating a plant closure? Is there any way of Nova Scotia Power addressing that? Maybe to Mr. Gregg.

PETER GREGG: I think I'm going to invite Mr. Sidebottom in. He's our Chief Operating Officer, so it's probably appropriate that he answers that question, if that's okay.

MARK SIDEBOTTOM: You're absolutely right. Making sure that our employees feel valued through the transition and committed to safe operation is really one of our core principles. It's very much a part of why we have set up local transition teams and had an ability to have a conversation with employees as they see the transition occur.

This year, to give you a sense, we're going to have one-on-one conversations with all of those employees so that we'll get a deeper understanding of what they aspire to do, what worries them, and how to chart a path forward - engaging on an individual basis, so that we can give the best possible transition. Some employees may want to retire. Others may want to work within the organization in the new structure that exists in the clean generation framework. Others might, in fact, be really interested in being in the community in one of the other job skills.

Working very closely with the employees over that period is key, and making sure that while we do this, we understand how the transition will look and feel for them and how they can understand how they can productively finish one part of a career and then transition into another part of a career. It speaks to very close coordination as we build out training with the communities and the opportunities along with those inside the company.

THE CHAIR: I have MLA Mombourquette next.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the opportunity to ask another question. I'll go back to some of the comments that were said by Mr. Gregg around the rationale for the rate increase to help support the transition from coal to renewables. There's the rate increase, but there's also the ask for the federal government, which I suspect is a very significant number and I don't have in front of me.

You're looking for a rate increase, but you're also looking for a significant ask from the federal government to help support the transition. My question to either representative from Nova Scotia Power is: Can you provide the committee with a breakdown of what that money will look like and where that money will be going if the federal government is to commit to that envelope of money, along with your ask for a rate increase to the NSUARB?

PETER GREGG: Thank you, Mr. Mombourquette, for the excellent question. I'll start by saying that we need to make the early investments in our plan to get to 2030. As I mentioned before, it's 2022 so it's not that far away. Really, those investments are investments in enabling the grid to be ready for the coal shutdown and the replacement of either renewable generation - well, it'll be both - renewable generation in the Province of Nova Scotia, but also bringing renewable generation across transmission lines into the Province of Nova Scotia.

It's investments like we need to make in grid-scale batteries placed in different spots across the province to enable that optimization of the renewable energy employment in the province. That's part of the Province's RFP for new wind - they want to add several hundred megawatts of new wind in the province. We think that's the right thing to do. More renewables are part of the plan, so we need to make sure the grid can handle that and manage that intermittent energy reliably. That's why we need to make investments like grid-scale batteries onto our grid.

Your question around - there are costs in doing that now. We made an application to the regulator, and you're right - we're having parallel conversations seeking a significant contribution from the federal government to make the transition an affordable one. One of the elements that's in our application is the concept of introducing what's called a decarbonization deferral account. I won't go into all of the machinations of that.

It's something that would need to be approved by the regulator, but it is essentially an account that, if approved, we could utilize to minimize the cost pressure on Nova Scotians for achieving the transition to 2030. It's a mechanism by which, if we were successful in getting some federal funding to make it an affordable transition, it's something we can use to spread those costs out and make it an affordable transition.

THE CHAIR: MLA Chender, please.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'll ask Mr. Gregg, since he brought up the decarbonization fund, that while I think, as a financing mechanism - I'm sure smarter minds than I would understand that and the utility of spreading those costs over time. However, the impact on ratepayers is going to be essentially to bring back an efficiency tax. I will remind folks, and I know Mr. Gregg you weren't in your role at the time: that is the core thing the Liberal government campaigned against when they were successful about eight and a half years ago.

While I absolutely understand the need to shore up the grid and the grid-sized batteries, and make sure that our grid can handle the shift, I think that there is a huge demand-side management piece involved, as well. What we've been told is that between the idea of breaking out essentially an efficiency tax onto people's bills, which is what this will look like, and the proposed net-metering change to solar - that happily has been withdrawn, but it really seemed to have the possibility of crippling the solar industry in Nova Scotia.

My question is: How do these fit with this climate target? How is Nova Scotia Power proactively, in fact, moving forward with partners in industry and community to ensure that we can meet those climate targets in a way that's distributed? We are hearing a lot of fear from the community, that this latest application to the NSUARB - which I understand is an independent body and will evaluate it - is raising a lot of red flags for people.

PETER GREGG: I'll give you a couple of different elements to the response to that question. One is certainly demand-side management is an important part of the transition. That absolutely needs to be, and we support that. We've got to have efficiency programs, and we definitely support that and ongoing discussions with EfficiencyOne. I think we've had a very productive working relationship with EfficiencyOne, as well, and expect that to continue. That is part of the future.

We've also got to make sure that other elements of the transition are an affordable one, as well. I mentioned in my opening remarks that we've come a long way in Nova Scotia, where last year we achieved 30 per cent of our power supply to Nova Scotians from renewable resources - that was up from 9 per cent a decade earlier. With consistent flows over the Maritime Link, which is now happening - we're getting those flows over the Maritime Link - that will enable us to get to 60 per cent renewables.

Over the last decade or more, we have really been making prudent investments to ensure that we can not only hit more aggressive climate targets, but also to make sure that we do that in an affordable way, and to make sure we maintain reliability for our customers as well. We're fully committed to that. The next phase of that plan is a broad approach to making sure we hit 80 per cent renewables, again doing that reliably, safely, and affordably.

It's not only us. We need many partners to be involved in this. There will be others who will contribute by building wind in the province. There will be others participating on the demand side of management side of it. There are others. It's a big transition. It's going to require a lot of collaboration from many parties, and we're committed to collaborating.

THE CHAIR: MLA Palmer.

CHRIS PALMER: I'd like to address this question to Ms. Czapalay or Ms. Hoddinott. We discussed earlier how the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and the Nova

Scotia Community College system can do a lot of things in this transition period. I'd like to ask you to reiterate and expand on what we should be asking of them to engage with us to develop and implement upscaling options now as we're going forward.

AVA CZAPALAY: There's no doubt that there will be a need for skilled trades workers. There are skilled tradespeople working with Nova Scotia Power, and we have a great need for skilled trades workers throughout Nova Scotia. Anything that we can do to help those workers who want to work in other sectors transition, that would be our pleasure. We have many programs and individualized ways of assisting them to make that transition. I'll just start by saying that.

In this particular instance, most of the workers would have, I'm assuming, been employed with Nova Scotia Power for a number of years. They probably have some career experience that they would need assistance with translating into what that looks like. Whether they transition to a new career within Nova Scotia Power or whether they want to take that set of skills and utilize those in another type of work outside of Nova Scotia Power, the first job would be to determine what their skills are.

Some employers may need assistance in understanding that they actually have a skill set that's very applicable to another trade. That's work that we do all the time. We talk to individuals, talk about their skills, talk about their interests, where they are in their career, and what they would like to do moving forward, and help guide them along that path.

I still recall a story where someone had been working for many years in an industry and he approached me and said that he was about to be laid off and he had no skills. I asked, what have you done? He said, I've driven a forklift for 30 years. He had a lot of skills. Driving a forklift in an industrial setting requires a great number of skills. Through a conversation with the Apprenticeship Agency, ultimately he was able to challenge for an exam and became a journey person in a related field. Working with employees to help them understand their skill set and how that translates into other opportunities is what we do.

We also have a great partner in NSCC and work very closely with NSCC. We have a joint stewardship agreement with NSCC. They're on the board of the Apprenticeship Agency. We work very closely with them from a policy level, a program level, and also assisting individuals with their path. If we talk to the individual and we feel after the conversation there's a role for NSCC, we'll bring them in as helping that individual to understand what the options are with their career goal.

I'll just check with my colleague, Ms. Hoddinott, to see if she has anything to add to this piece.

NANCY HODDINOTT: I would only add that in a broader context, as we talk about the green economy, we have prioritized clean and green across a number of our

supports and our programs. Whether it's a co-op, work integrated learning placement, or helping individuals connect to their first job post-graduation through graduate to opportunity, green is a priority that we look for and want to support in those students and young people attaching to jobs.

[2:30 p.m.]

The other piece is through our Sector Council Program where we work across 13 different industry sectors in this province. We know that a clean economy has impacts across most sectors, so as we work with those sectors in their strategy plans and in their programming to upfill and train and support employers in those sectors, that is another priority that we (Inaudible) sector initiative.

We have sort of infused, if you will, the green economy as a priority in all of the programs that we offer and in all of our work with sectors and employers across the province.

THE CHAIR: I've got 10 minutes and two questions. We have got MLA Boudreau and then MLA Mombourquette, then we're going to call regular business. MLA Boudreau, please.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I'm going to go back to asking a question to Mr. Gregg from Nova Scotia Power with regard to workers again. This might be an obvious answer to this question, but maybe not. Will the closures of the generation stations impact current or former workers' pensions?

PETER GREGG: There's no contemplated change to pensions that we're thinking about as this transition. I think that's probably the most direct answer. No, no changes.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Mombourquette, if you want to close it off, please.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the final question. This is to Jim. First I'll say, listen, if you can pass along from all of us our thanks to all the employees at Nova Scotia Power who keep the lights on for us in all five seasons we have here in Nova Scotia, please do so. It's incredible to see everyone go to work, especially when we need you the most in some of the weather that we've been receiving lately. Please pass along my best.

I just want to finish off by just giving you an opportunity to talk about how the employees are really feeling about the transition. We all knew it was coming. In Cape Breton, we've been in a lot of positions in the past where we've seen sudden closures of coal mines or steel plants and it's affected communities across the island. We have an opportunity now to really get it right. We have a number of years before some of these changes are going to be made. We have all been advocating for the last number of years to

really have this conversation. I appreciate hearing that those conversations are happening with Nova Scotia Power and within communities.

I'll let you finish it off by talking about how employees are feeling about the transition. As you said, we don't want anybody who wants to continue to work at Nova Scotia Power to have to leave. If you want to just elaborate on that, Jim, that would be great. Again, thank you to you and all the workers at NSP.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Sponagle, please.

JIM SPONAGLE: I guess at the end of the day, we spoke to this already. Just to my background, I worked in every thermal plant across the province. I'm from Glace Bay. I'm a Cape Bretoner. Certainly, again, Cape Bretoners are resilient, as are the rest of our workforce throughout the province. You can see that by the past month and a half. Since the new year, there's been a storm every weekend, pretty much, and the lights remain on.

Again, I look at it as the glass half full. I believe my members, at the end of it - it is what it is. There is a challenge, and we're going to try to meet the challenge head on. We're going to work with the employer to leverage or maximize every opportunity we can, whether it be wind energy or battery storage or whatever it's going to look like down the road. At the end of the day, whether or not we get there on the timelines that are etched in stone remains to be seen.

Again, I've worked for Nova Scotia Power since 1995, and to take off eight coal plants - eight different units - is an arduous task. If we don't have a good plan, it's going to be a difficult transition. Again, I think we'll transition together. I'll work with the employer. (Interruption) I've got to excuse, we're doing work here in the building. We lost some siding, so my ears keep banging. It's been going on for the last three hours.

We'll work together. My members are resilient. It's not the glass half empty, it's the glass half filled. It is what it is, and we'll move forward together. I appreciate the good question, but that's my answer. Again, my phone wasn't ringing off the wall about doom and gloom, we're going to lose everything. It is what it is, and we'll work with the employer to maximize, and we'll work with the government.

We've got the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour: President Danny Cavanagh works with the Premier and the MLAs on trying to ensure that we maximize benefit. There are folks, critics, government critics out there we talk to on occasion. We're all about trying to maximize what we can maximize throughout the transition.

THE CHAIR: That concludes the question-and-answer period. I wonder if the witnesses - and I'll start with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration - would like to make any closing remarks? Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: We know that Nova Scotians who work in this sector are highly skilled, and Nova Scotia needs their skills and their talents to help fill current and future labour market needs. The Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration is ready. Working with sectors and employers to address labour gaps, and helping people attach to labour market opportunities is what we do. We're here, and we're ready to play our role in supporting this transition. I just wanted to thank my colleagues today for their support.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Hoddinott, do you have any closing remarks?

NANCY HODDINOTT: No, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gregg.

PETER GREGG: I just want to thank the committee for a very good discussion today. Thank you for your kind attention to the issue; it's much appreciated.

I also want to say how proud I am of Nova Scotia Power employees for the work they do. You heard Mr. Mombourquette touch on that and the oftentimes very challenging conditions. I put our employees up against anybody's employees. They're incredibly well skilled and committed to the work they do. We've got to make sure we do what is right for them, what's right for their families, and what's right for the communities in which they live. We are committed to that as a company, and in partnership with Jim and his union, we'll continue to do that.

This is something we're all going to need to work on together. I think with the support of government for programs, it would help in that transition and others, as well. It's a concentrated, collaborative effort that's going to be there, but we are committed to making sure that we do what's right for our employees.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Sidebottom, do you have any comments?

MARK SIDEBOTTOM: No, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Sponagle.

JIM SPONAGLE: On behalf of my members that I represent, I thank you all for your time. Certainly, it's good to discuss issues that lie in front of us. My phone is always on if anyone needs to get a hold of me or reach out to me in regard to continued dialogue and discussion on the issue of transition. I'm only a phone call away.

I want to thank Nova Scotia Power. Although we're in the infancy stages, they've engaged with the union on the issue, and I continue to look forward to working with them as we go through the process. As it relates to Nova Scotia Power and government, the union certainly would like to be closer with some of the discussions. As the transition unfolds,

maybe that happens, but I'm sure we'll all get through it, and we'll endure, and it will all work out in the end.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Skinner.

SCOTT SKINNER: Thanks for inviting me to contribute today. As the others have mentioned, my organization is ready to help where we can as we try to collectively transition to a low-carbon economy. I'll note before we leave that none of these challenges exist in isolation. We'll find that as you're trying to address this in community, we're also going to be dealing with things around housing challenges and energy poverty, and the community capacity to respond.

It's going to take us all working together and a lot of conversations and discussions like this. Any opportunity to participate in the future, all you have to do is ask, and I will be there.

THE CHAIR: Thank you all for your time this afternoon. I believe it's been a great discussion. If you folks want to leave, that would be dandy, and we'll carry on with the committee business.

I guess the only piece of committee business I have is the venue for March 22nd. MLA Smith, please.

KENT SMITH: The venue for our next meeting - in light of the lifting of some of the public health restrictions, I'd like to move that we resume in-person meetings for this committee.

THE CHAIR: Moved by MLA Smith. Do we have a seconder? Mr. Ritcey. Any discussion, questions? MLA Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think that makes sense. I know that in some other committees, sometimes when there are a large number of witnesses, it makes sense to run the committee as we did today. I'd love to leave discretion for that with the clerk's office, just to make sure that we're meeting all the guidelines and people feel safe. Otherwise, we would support this.

THE CHAIR: Everybody's comfortable with that? Any other questions, discussions, concerns? If not, I'll call for the question.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Any other business? Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 22, 2022, at 1:00 p.m. The topic will be renewable energy, progress toward targets. The witnesses will be Karen Gatién, Deputy Minister of the Department Natural Resources and Renewables; Keith Collins, Executive Director of Clean Energy; and David Miller, Director of Clean Energy. I think they're all from the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. That's our next meeting.

I call this meeting adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 2:42 p.m.]