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PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER

Impact of a Low Wage Economy on Government Revenue and Expenses

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Public Accounts Committee

Hon. Kelly Regan (Chair)
Nolan Young (Vice-Chair)
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Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Claudia Chender
Susan Leblanc

[Hon. Kelly Regan was replaced by Hon. Derek Mombourquette.]

In Attendance:

Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Kim Adair
Auditor General

WITNESSES

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia Office

Christine Saulnier, Director

Department of Community Services

Tracey Taweel, Deputy Minister
Joy Knight, Executive Director - Employment Support and Income Assistance

Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Ava Czapalay, Deputy Minister
Cynthia Yazbek, Executive Director - Labour Services

Minimum Wage Review Committee

Danny Cavanagh, Employee Representative



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8, 2022

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Hon. Kelly Regan

VICE CHAIR

Nolan Young

THE CHAIR: Order. I call the meeting to order. This is Standing Committee on Public Accounts. My name is Nolan Young. I'll be chairing the committee.

Just a reminder to place your phones on vibrate or on silent. Masks are no longer mandatory but are recommended.

I would ask the committee members to introduce themselves, starting to my left with Ms. Chender.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I'd like to note that we have officials from the Auditor General's Office, Legislative Counsel Office, and Legislative Committees Office in attendance as well.

On today's agenda, we'll have officials with us from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Department of Community Services, the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, and the Minimum Wage Review Committee regarding the impact of low-wage economy on government revenue and expenses.

I will ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, beginning with Dr. Saulnier.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I would invite the witnesses to make their opening remarks. We'll begin with Dr. Saulnier, then Deputy Minister Taweel, then Deputy Minister Czapalay, then Mr. Cavanagh. Dr. Saulnier.

DR. CHRISTINE SAULNIER: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My first point is this: the scope of the low-waged economy is larger than what we might think. While our low-waged economy is certainly partly fuelled by a low minimum wage, low wage work should be considered against the average or median, or what it takes for a living wage, which in Nova Scotia would include those earning \$22 an hour or less, which actually represents about 50 per cent of workers in Nova Scotia.

A low-wage economy is also marked by low quality of jobs. The lower the wages, the more likely a job is to be insecure and not come with benefits. We know that in Nova Scotia, only 31 per cent of workers who earn less than \$25,000 a year have access to paid sick leave, for example.

My second point is this: a low-waged economy's negative impact runs deep. When we have so many people who face barriers to reaching their full potential and are not paid their worth, their lower productivity has an impact on government revenue in lower income and consumption taxes. In addition, we know that earning a low wage has a negative impact on workers' health and leaves them scrambling to cover their basic needs. We all pay for the additional public health expenses and social benefits required to fill gaps.

My third point is that a low-waged economy reflects the value placed on certain types of work and skills and certain workers, and we need to understand why. It also exacerbates inequities by race, by gender, by disability, as examples. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that a lot of the people we pay the least are the ones we need the most.

In sum, addressing low wages, including by substantially increasing the minimum wage, reduces the need to use the tax system for redistribution, and helps stimulate overall purchasing power and aggregate demand. This also increases tax revenue, decreases expenses because of the impact of low waged work, and increases government's ability to spend on the universal public services and infrastructure that we all need to build a healthy, productive, green, inclusive economy.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you for inviting the Department of Community Services here today to talk about the impact of a low-wage economy on government

revenue and expenses. As previously introduced, my name is Tracey Taweel. I'm the Deputy Minister of Community Services. Joining me is Joy Knight, Executive Director of Employment Supports and Income Assistance.

All Nova Scotians want to provide for themselves and their families, contribute to their communities, and lead fulfilling lives. Our work at DCS is to help Nova Scotians find success.

When considering poverty rates, the Department of Community Service uses the Market Basket Measure to define the scope of poverty in Nova Scotia, in accordance with the Government of Canada and other provinces and territories. Established by the federal government as Canada's official poverty measure, the Market Basket Measure or MBM develops thresholds of poverty based on the cost of a basket of goods: food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for individuals and families, representing a modest, basic standard of living.

In March 2022, Statistics Canada released 2020 poverty data. Because this data includes the impact of COVID-19 income supports, the decrease it reveals is likely an anomaly. Therefore, the department continues to consider 2019 MBM data as a more accurate representation of poverty in the province.

The 2019 data would indicate that Nova Scotia's poverty rate is 12.1 per cent. Child poverty in Nova Scotia has decreased over recent years. In 2015, according to MBM, the poverty rate was 20.7 per cent, and by 2019 data reports, sits at 10.9 per cent. While we have seen welcomed improvement, we know the numbers are still too high. We know there is much more work that needs to be done.

One of our main goals as a department is to help our clients develop increased resiliency and self-sufficiency. Our Employment Supports program offers several supports to help our clients build the skills and experience needed for work.

For example, Career Seek is a program that allows eligible income assistance recipients to continue to receive assistance as they attend university or post-secondary education programs. We also have the Earned Income Exemption, which allows income assistance recipients to keep more of their income from employment while still receiving income support.

Investments in our young people are fundamental to breaking the cycle of poverty and building a stronger Nova Scotia. That's why we provide a continuum of supports to help youth build connections to community, transition into post-secondary education, and attach to the workforce.

Since the introduction of these programs, there has been a drop in the number of new intakes to Employment Support and Income Assistance for people aged 19 to 24 years.

This trajectory was interrupted by COVID-19, but the department is once again seeing a decline in this age group as programming comes back online and options for employment increase.

The Africentric Youth Development Initiative was introduced as a pilot program in 2020 to help African Nova Scotians build connections to their communities and develop career paths. Designed by communities and the Association of Black Social Workers, the initiative has supported more than 500 youth to date. Recognizing this success, the Province recently invested an additional \$415,000 to make it a permanent program.

The EDGE program uses peer groups and mentorship to help youth with job searches and job readiness. Now in its fourth year, the program has expanded to Bridgewater, New Glasgow, Sydney, and north end Halifax, and has evolved to include integrated mental health supports. Today, the program has capacity to reach 300 young adults each year.

The Educate to Work for Dependents program helps dependents of income assistance clients to enrol at the Nova Scotia Community College by covering half of their tuition and all of the costs for their books, fees, health, and dental. This year, 26 young people received funding, some of whom are the first in their families to attend post-secondary.

We know that preventative programming is critical to moving individuals and families out of poverty permanently. This approach requires long-term commitment and the collective efforts of government, stakeholder partners, and communities.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Good morning, committee members and Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be with you today. Joining me from the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration is Cynthia Yazbek, Executive Director of Labour Services.

There is no question of the impact of COVID and other world events like the war in Ukraine are having on the cost of living and employment in some sectors. We understand the pressure this is putting on families who work hard and are trying to make ends meet. We also understand the challenges of some sectors trying to attract and retain workers.

At Labour, Skills and Immigration, we are constantly monitoring our programs and services to ensure we are responding to the needs of workers, businesses, newcomers, and sectors. Throughout the pandemic, we have been updating immigration streams to meet the needs of employers and to attract newcomers. We have adapted labour market programs to meet the needs of sectors, communities, and impacted groups. In some cases, we work with committees to help inform our work.

One such example is the Minimum Wage Review Committee. The committee is made up of employee and employer representatives. They meet annually to make recommendations to the minister in relation to the minimum wage rate adjustments. This is no easy task, and we appreciate the thoughtful and careful consideration of the committee members.

Earlier this year, the Province accepted the recommendations from the Nova Scotia Minimum Wage Review Committee, which included a path to a \$15 minimum wage by 2024. The recommendations provided a balanced approach that considered the perspectives of both businesses and workers. The recommendations included five planned increases over the next two years, with the final increase on April 1, 2024, at \$15 an hour.

The Minimum Wage Review Committee will meet again this Fall to review the wage rate and determine if any rate changes are needed and provide their recommendations to the minister.

The department is continually monitoring the labour market landscape. Working with other government departments like Community Services, we partner with sector councils and academia to ensure we are providing the best direction to government and flexibility within our programs and services to meet the needs of Nova Scotians.

It is important to note that for the first time ever, Nova Scotia has more than one million residents calling this province home. This is an important milestone toward our goal of two million people by 2060. Our work in growing the population is critical to helping us respond to labour shortages in key sectors.

Later today, government will be releasing more details around the More Opportunities for Skilled Trades program, which goes by the acronym MOST. For those under the age of 30, this program will return their provincial income tax paid on the first \$50,000 of income earned in a designated trade or occupation. The skilled trades are vital to our overall economic growth and offer a rewarding and viable career path. This will help attract and retain more skilled workers and entice more young Nova Scotians to choose a career path in the skilled trades, most of which provide a very good income.

Since December, when we achieved a population of one million, we have added almost 12,000 people. This number of people is about the same size as Truro. Skilled workers and entrepreneurs are choosing Nova Scotia, and with them come opportunities to address labour shortages and to grow our economy. We have navigators who are working hard to help newcomers connect to work opportunities, communities throughout Nova Scotia, and other supports. We have Nova Scotia Works, with 50 offices in communities throughout the province which helps Nova Scotians find employment, development opportunities, and training. Labour, Skills and Immigration has programs that help businesses recruit and develop the talent they need to be successful.

[9:15 a.m.]

We are starting to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, and we're growing a stronger economy. We will continue to monitor our programs with the latest information and make any needed adjustments to support vulnerable Nova Scotians.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Cavanagh.

DANNY CAVANAGH: I'm happy to be here this morning to talk a little bit about jobs and the economy and how it affects government and, frankly, how it affects all of us in our daily lives. I'm not going to speak, really, on behalf of the Minimum Wage Review Committee, but I'm going to talk in "isms" - like the realism of what many workers that I hear from are facing every day. As part of the committee, I certainly believe them and would liked to have seen a skip to a \$15 an hour at least minimum wage a lot faster than we are, but we are on the path to get there.

Frankly, I don't think \$15 an hour is enough now for a lot of people to live on, and I say that from the aspect of right now at \$13.35 an hour, somebody's gross pay for 40 hours a week - if you're fortunate to have a 40-hour-a-week job - is \$534. When that goes to \$15 an hour, the gross pay for those jobs goes to \$600 a week.

Just to put that in a bit of perspective, to fill an oil tank today with furnace oil costs about \$2,200. At the minimum wage rate today, that's 4.1 weeks of work to fill your oil tank. That's why we think it's important that people have good jobs, good union jobs in fact, that provide benefits to help build the economy.

If I may just tell you a story to make the point: The dockyard workers in Halifax were getting a bit of a rough ride, and they decided what they were going to do was cash their paycheques and get \$2 bills. They went to the bank, cashed their paycheques, got all their paycheques in \$2 bills, and when they went shopping to get their groceries, to the merchants, and to buy the things they needed, they paid for that in \$2 bills.

The merchants quickly in Halifax realized the benefits of those unionized workers and their spending and their stories when they counted the amount of \$2 bills that they had that evening when they reconciled their cash. I think that's why it's important to have good unionized jobs that pay benefits. They're good for society.

I think right now, part of what we're seeing is that workers are fed up. They don't want to work in part-time, casual jobs with the scheduling and a lot of other things. They're just not prepared to work in that kind of work atmosphere anymore, I don't think. I just want to give you some sense of what I'm talking about and how we could make things better, possibly.

If you're a school bus driver, you could possibly work two or three hours a day. That means you drive the kids to school in the morning, you park your bus, and you're out of work until the afternoon, when you drive your kids back home. One time those jobs used to be more full-time jobs, where the bus driver arrived at the school, dropped the kids off, and then went ahead and did some other work.

Those are the kinds of things that I think that we can convert - some of those part-time, casual jobs. In the health care system, we see the same kind of thing. There's a lot of part-time, casual work. Those jobs should be full-time jobs if we want to fix the health care system. Those jobs all come with the benefits, like a pension plan, which are good to help people after they retire. Medical benefits really affect all the social detriments of health that individuals may face.

As a society, when we don't provide people with good benefits and decent jobs, then we see where we end up. I would say that's part of years of cutbacks and rollbacks that we're seeing today, the kind of end result of that.

We heard from some others about how poverty is very high in Nova Scotia - family poverty and child poverty. We need to eliminate poverty, I think, in this province. Workers would like to see more paid sick days, better public programs like a national pharmacare program, public child care. The path to the \$10-a-day child care is going to help a lot of people. Unionization is really one of the paths to having a strong economy.

Just to close, I strayed from my speaking notes that you all have, but I want to put an emphasis on the fact that the Federation of Labour is here and we want to work with government, we want to work with people to try to fix things. We all want a province at the end of the day that's a good place to live and work and raise our families, and we need to do that by working together and by listening to one another and coming up with some decent solutions.

THE CHAIR: MLA Mombourquette, you've joined us. Would you like to introduce yourself, please?

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Derek Mombourquette, MLA for Sydney-Membertou.

THE CHAIR: How the committee flows is we'll have 20 minutes, 20 minutes, 20 minutes. We'll start with the Liberals, the NDP, and the PC Party. Most likely I would like to ask a couple of questions - if I do, I'll ask Mr. Boudreau to chair during that portion.

With that said, it is now 9:20 a.m. and we can start our questioning, beginning with the Liberals. MLA Maguire.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank everyone for being here today. I'll start with the Department of Community Services. Last week we heard from stakeholders that during the cost-of-living crisis, which we are in now - we are full-on in a cost-of-living crisis - we heard from seven or eight different stakeholders from different organizations that feel that Nova Scotians are not better off now than they were three or six months ago.

I'm going to give you a moment to agree or disagree. Do you agree with that statement or do you disagree with the statement by those eight stakeholders?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you very much for the question. Yes, certainly I do recall that conversation and the exchange that occurred last week at this committee. I would say that when we look over the course of the last three months, there are a number of factors that come to bear, certainly including affordability challenges that all Nova Scotians are facing.

In addition to that, there have been a number of investments made by government to provide supports to individuals to help them through the affordability crisis. I can speak for the Department of Community Services and indicate that the supports that are provided to individuals who come into contact with our department - either as participants or recipients of some of our programs, and also those who may just reach out to the department for assistance - we work very hard to help them navigate all of the programs that are available, to provide them with supports that maybe they didn't need before but certainly can avail themselves of now.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: This year, what are you expecting the percentage increase for assistance recipients - their overall funding that they receive monthly - what percentage is it going up this year?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: There is no income assistance increase included in this year's budget. There is an increase to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, which will certainly benefit families that are on the income assistance caseload, as well as others. Any Nova Scotian earning under \$34,000 will benefit from the increases to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit. The department also saw a significant increase - approximately a 400-per-cent increase - over the last two years in our homelessness and supportive housing programming.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What are the percentage of individuals on income assistance or receiving support from your department who are single or seniors?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: About 74 per cent of our caseload is comprised of single individuals. I believe, as committee members would be aware, individuals leave the income assistance program once they reach the age of 65 and are eligible for Old Age Security and other federal benefits.

My colleague may be able to tell me the exact number of individuals, but singles, about 74 per cent.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: So essentially what we're saying here today is that 74 per cent of the individuals receiving income assistance will not receive an increase this year.

When we hear that there are increases coming to families - which is great, but it's still not keeping up with the cost of living - 74 per cent of the individuals who are supported by the Department of Community Services will receive a 0-per-cent increase, which is essentially a reduction in their spending power. What we know is that it's not 0 per cent. It's probably more like -20 per cent, considering the cost of everything going up.

I'm going to throw this one over to Christine Saulnier. We heard today that it's a 0-per-cent increase for 74 per cent. In your opinion - you probably don't have a round-about number, but is that a 0-per-cent increase or is it a reduction? Can you kind of quantify what that reduction is?

THE CHAIR: Dr. Saulnier.

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: Absolutely. It's a cut. It's a cut in real spending. If you have inflation running near 7 per cent, depending on what you're looking at in terms of stats, that means that people have less - their money is worth less. When you go to the grocery store and there are price increases, the \$20 you had last month won't go as far as the \$20 you have this month. If there is no increase, it's essentially a cut to their spending power, absolutely.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm going to ask you a very strange question - we'll see what the answer will be. With that response, do you think that the system is fair?

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: The system is absolutely unfair. We're talking about a group of people who have been kept below whatever poverty line you want to use, and by below, I mean thousands and thousands of dollars per year below a poverty line. Whether you use the Market Basket Measure or not, it tells us that as a government, we don't recognize that people actually need that minimum amount of money in order to just be able to afford the basics. In a case where we're seeing inflation going up like this, it just means they're going further and further into not eating.

We've seen the surveys that came out this week that people are not eating what they should be eating, and it isn't because they don't know what they should be eating. It's because they cannot afford it, and the only discretionary budgetary amounts are their food budget. They have to pay for their shelter. They have to pay those costs, or they will be evicted. It's absolutely an unfair system.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What impacts does that have on the level of opportunity? The level of opportunity for people who are trying to break the cycle of poverty, but also for children growing up in poverty. I'll just leave it at that.

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: There are mounds of evidence about the impact that poverty has on people, on their health. They're under a tremendous amount of stress. They often cannot afford safe, quality housing. They cannot afford nutritional food. All of this has an impact on their health. It has an impact on their ability to just lift their heads up and figure out what comes next.

When you are so stressed about just your basic needs, it is very hard to think about what tomorrow might bring that could be positive. We are keeping people under distress, and in terms of children who are living in households that are low income, the evidence is that about 30 per cent of those children will actually remain in poverty.

What we are doing is really creating an underclass. We are ensuring that there is a significant portion of our population who are not being assisted to reach their full potential. That obviously is tremendously tragic for them, but it's tremendously short-sighted on our part as well. As a society, we benefit when people can be engaged in the labour market, engaged in our community, and able to reach their full potential. Without it, there's a loss.

We did the costing on the impact of poverty, and that impact has to do with what I just outlined. It has to do with that lower productivity, which has an impact on government revenue. It has an impact on the expenses that we all need to cover when people's health is being affected. We have a public health care system, and that means additional health care costs, it means additional social benefits that we're hearing about that would be unnecessary if we actually rooted out the causes and eliminated poverty.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: You literally just answered three more questions that I had, so I want to thank you for that. One of the things I've always said is all governments seem to think in four-year cycles and they're looking for political wins. What ends up happening is the short-term savings actually end up having a massive impact on our health care system, on our justice system. They have an impact on our school system, everything. Someone once told me that there should be a Department of Long-Term Planning, which probably wouldn't be a bad idea.

I'm going to jump over to Mr. Cavanagh quickly. To say that you have the pulse on unionized workers in Nova Scotia is, I guess, a bit of an understatement. You've been around unions for a long, long time. I think, in fact, at one point you were the president of the union that I was in.

I just want to know your opinion on what percentage raises - let's say for the next two to three years - would keep unions from taking a reduction in their ability to spend but also would keep them ahead of inflation and the cost of living curve? Would a 1 per cent

or 2 per cent - I've talked to other union leaders so I kind of know a number. What is an effective number to keep them ahead of the curve?

[9:30 a.m.]

DANNY CAVANAGH: Well, I think with inflation running as it is now, we're looking at 7 per cent at least just to keep up. That's not even considering how people have gone behind, in the last five years as well. People have gone behind considerably when you look at inflation. We'd be looking at 10, kind of 12, maybe 15 per cent kind of stuff, maybe more, just to keep up with inflation.

The reason I told the story about the \$2 bills was, in fact, where those dockyard workers at the time - governments are talking about cutbacks and those kinds of things. I just wanted to show the detrimental effect of what happens when you start cutting jobs. People aren't spending, especially the people who are working in jobs that have the money to spend on things. When you look at the costs for somebody on minimum wage, just to fill their oil tank is unrealistic.

Where do they get everything else, with inflation? You've got to buy housing and food and all that stuff and then try to get to work and pay to go to work. It's a vicious circle that we've got to try to get ourselves out of.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Just a quickie. My hearing is actually not the best. That's true, actually. Did you say 10 per cent a year?

DANNY CAVANAGH: Ten, 12, 15 per cent, somewhere in that average. I don't bargain. The unions each bargain on their own. I don't want to put words in anybody's mouth about what they would expect. We recently saw some health care workers got a substantial raise just to keep up. If we want to make sure that things keep operating, then people need to be going ahead in a job when it comes to wage rates, not falling behind. I would suggest that in the last 10 years people have been falling behind, not getting ahead. Now with the inflationary pressures that are on people, that's only going to increase.

It's hard to answer the question for just one union organization, because they are all at different rates and aspects.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I am going to go back to Dr. Saulnier. We've heard Premier Houston say that there's no relief coming. The government seems to be single-minded. Someone said to me the other day that they felt the current government couldn't walk and chew gum - they needed to do one single thing and they have been unable to concentrate on anything else. We know there's a housing crisis, we know there's a cost of living crisis, we know there's a food crisis, we know there are all these things that are happening.

When you hear the leader of this province and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board saying there's no relief coming, Nova Scotians are essentially going to have to deal with and bear with it - we're seeing other governments across Canada, some with smaller economic packages or economic opportunity, providing money to other provinces. When you hear the Premier saying there's nothing coming - at first they kind of dangled it and said that something was coming and then they pulled it off the table, so you hear there's nothing coming.

Five months ago, we heard comments - the Speaker of the House actually kicked me out of the Legislature for being upset when the Premier had said that low-income jobs are not real jobs and people don't want to work those. We've heard the Finance and Treasury Board Minister say, well, the opportunities are there. If people can't make ends meet, there are lots of jobs - find a new job.

When you hear comments like that, when you hear there is no money coming, there is no support coming, low-income jobs aren't real jobs, if you don't like your job then find a new job - what impact does that have for those who are struggling day to day? It's not just a financial impact, obviously. Would you not agree there's a stigma that's being repeated over and over, and when it's being repeated at the highest level of government, it does have an impact. Would you agree?

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: Yes, I would agree. I think it's demoralizing to hear some of the comments that we have heard, especially around minimum wage jobs. One of the things that I tried to underline in the submission I made was about this myth that everybody is paid what they're worth. That is certainly not the case. As I say, we undervalue the work that actually means the most in terms of essential provision of services.

When Nova Scotians are struggling every day - and it isn't all Nova Scotians, let's be clear. There are some Nova Scotians who are just fine and, in fact, better today than they were last week because interest rates went up. We have to be clear about who benefits and who pays the costs of what's currently happening in our society and in our province.

When we have such an affordability crisis, as you say, around housing, around food, around essentials, it is demoralizing for people to hear from leadership that they aren't going to address it. As you say, many governments across Canada have made decisions to support people today because the crisis is today. It's in the grocery store today. It's in their housing today. The Quebec government gave everybody \$500. I don't know that everybody needs \$500 - maybe we could more effectively provide some kind of support to people who really cannot absorb this. They cannot.

We are risking more people being homeless. We're just risking what we shouldn't be risking at this point and sending a message that says that we aren't going to take leadership. I think that's a message that Nova Scotians don't want to hear right now.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire, you have just under three minutes.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm going to ask you two questions, and I'm going to be quick with the questions. If this was year three in the government's mandate, do you feel that there would be more financial aid coming to the people of Nova Scotia? If you were in charge, and the Centre for Policy Alternatives was in charge, what would you implement now to help with the crisis that we're in?

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: To the second question, I would implement something that provides some income support. Pick whatever metrics you want, but provide some income supports right now to people. We have the ability to do that through our various, whether it's the Poverty Reduction Credit - actually the Affordable Living Tax Credit is probably your best mechanism to do that. It recognizes that this is about people being able to consume.

The other thing we need to remember is that those who spend every single penny in our economy when they get it are those at the bottom. That kind of support is actually part of stimulating our economy. It's the right thing to do for the people who are struggling, but it's actually the right thing to do economically.

Not sure I want to speak on politics of decisions, whether it's your third year or not. At the end of the day, we should expect leadership from our government when there are crises before us that impact us daily, impact our neighbours, impact our communities. Whatever year it is in your mandate, we should be hearing from government on that.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The current response to the cost of living crisis, do you feel that the proper leadership has been shown?

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: As I say, we need to be supporting people right now, and I haven't heard that support. We just haven't heard it. Without hearing what the leadership is on that question, it is lacking.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I have about 30 seconds left. I just want to thank everyone. I'm going to pass the next round of questions over to Mr. Mombourquette, but I do think we're at a \$15 minimum wage. Does that need to be higher, yes or no? We're going to a \$15 minimum wage. Does that need to be higher than \$15?

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: Yes, it does. It should already be \$15.

THE CHAIR: That concludes the Liberals' round of questioning. We'll move on to the NDP, starting with MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to go back to the comments that Deputy Minister Taweel gave about the Market Basket Measure. Again, I understand there are different

ways of measuring poverty. I remember hearing much from the previous Minister of Community Services about how important using the Market Basket Measure was.

I want to talk about that for a second because if that's the measure that our province is using, fine. However, the fact that we're looking at 2019 numbers is frankly shocking to me. I understand the reasons. I understand that you gave an explanation of that, but it is now 2022 and we know - everyone who buys groceries or gas knows what the situation is with inflation. We don't need to overstate it, or I can't overstate it, I guess.

I am flummoxed by the fact that there is no thought to adjusting our understanding of poverty or the poverty line or the kind of supports people are getting in Nova Scotia based on a new version of the basket. So if the basket is groceries and rent and gas and furnace oil, then we know it's a much emptier basket right now.

I don't know if this is for Deputy Minister Taweel or Deputy Minister Czapalay, but is anybody doing those calculations about how big the basket is at this point? We have a point in time, we can do those kinds of calculations, we have economists who work for the government. I think it's a fairly easy kind of calculation to do. Is someone doing it? Do we have a sense of what is in the basket at this moment?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I will start. I'm sure there are probably others who want to provide comments.

I would say a couple of things. We are using 2019 and MBM data because we feel that's the most accurate data using MBM. Stats Canada is our source for that data. The most recent data they released, as I said in my opening remarks, include the federal CERB benefit, which we don't feel is an accurate measure. That's why we continue to use the Stats Canada data from 2019.

Now I want to stress that while we use the MBM and other organizations may use LIM, may use LICO, there are any number of measures. The measure, from my perspective, is kind of irrelevant. The real measure needs to be the efforts that we take to support individuals who are living with a low income. To that end, the department is working on a child poverty strategy. We will be releasing targets and very targeted measures in the coming months that will focus on that child poverty rate.

In addition, there are a number of other programs that are in place, as I referenced in an earlier response, to support individuals living with lower incomes.

With regard to your question about our economists running other numbers, that's a question for Finance and Treasury Board. The economic work happens in Finance and Treasury Board and there is no one present today from Finance and Treasury Board.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I understand why the 2019 numbers are being used. I'm saying that in 2022, things are a lot worse than in 2019 in terms of cost of living. So point taken, Finance and Treasury Board. I think as senior government officials, there have to be conversations going on and I wanted to know if there was anything going on there.

That being said, and I get it - your job is to look at different strategies to support the lowest income people in the province. But as my colleague pointed out, we're hearing that there are no supports coming. Where is the missing piece? Why are we allowing people in this province to become poorer and poorer and possibly go further into debt - although some people are not going into debt because there's no debt to go into, if you know what I mean?

Why is that happening when we know the costs to the Province overall? I understand that these are not questions that you possibly can answer but I know that you are having these conversations. You must be. If you're not, then there's a real problem. I put that out there.

I would love to continue the conversation at the Public Accounts Committee about this. We are in charge of examining the spending of this Province, and we want to make sure that the spending is the best type of spending. To me, at this point, the best type of spending is investment in people so that we can stimulate the economy, as we've heard from our expert witness from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. I will leave that there.

The second question is for Deputy Minister Czapalay, just based on your opening remarks. You mentioned that the announcement is coming today about the skilled trades tax credit, or tax break, which is a great program. I'm really happy to see that. However, my sense of that program is that there's a very narrow definition of what a "skilled trade" is in Nova Scotia. I understand that the building trades and those types of skilled trades are essential to building the province.

However, I would like to suggest that there is a great group of skilled tradespeople called ECEs in Nova Scotia, who are largely women and are extremely skilled in taking care of our most vulnerable people, which are our kids, who aren't benefiting from this. They would fall into that age category. They fall into that money category - not as much, but that's another problem.

I'm wondering if you've considered expanding that program to ECEs and other types of skilled trade where women are the majority of workers.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for the question. The program is called More Opportunities for Skilled Trades - I'll just use the acronym MOST. The program that's

being announced today - it's my understanding that the program will return the provincial income tax paid on the first \$50,000 of income earned by workers who are in the skilled trades and occupations. This includes all designated trades within the apprenticeship and journey person bucket. It's for people who are under age 30 - that's the key criteria - and they have to be registered as apprentices or certified as journey persons.

[9:45 a.m.]

You raise a really great point about women benefiting from incentives like this. We're working really hard to really ensure that all Nova Scotians, all people living here, understand the opportunity that skilled trades present. We're working hard to attract more women into the skilled trades and hope to see that that makes a difference.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Well, that's great - a shoutout to my niece Larissa, who just finished her training in welding in Ontario and is now working as an apprentice there. Absolutely, we need more women in those skilled trades, but what I'm saying is that we need to expand the definition of what a skilled trade is. I understand what you're saying, but I am asking for a blowing up of that definition so that we can include other types of skilled work.

I think no one would argue with me that an early childhood educator is an extremely skilled person. They've gone through training. They need special skills to do their job. They don't have an apprenticeship program, although I would suggest that it kind of works that way, although it's not codified or official. Anyhow. I'm also going to leave that there.

For many years, as you may know, our caucus has been pushing, along with labour groups and activists, for a \$15 minimum wage. In the last several years, we've recognized that \$15 is not even that much, as Mr. Cavanagh has pointed out today. It's becoming inadequate, amazingly. So we're pushing for a \$15 minimum wage now on the road to a living wage which, as Dr. Saulnier pointed out, is about \$22 an hour.

The Premier has previously voiced concern about the impact of higher wages on the economy, suggesting it would result in fewer jobs. We've heard from Dr. Saulnier that that is not the case today, but we also know that there's tons of other evidence that this understanding is incorrect. Economist David Card, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics, won his prize for his work in showing that an increase in the minimum wage does not reduce employment.

I'd like to ask Deputy Minister Czapalay if the department has done any analysis on the potential economic impact of higher wages in Nova Scotia or an analysis on the opposite. What is the potential impact of stagnant wages in Nova Scotia?

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you very much for the question. We do need to get Larissa back to Nova Scotia. We need welders, and she sounds like a great candidate.

I can speak to the work of the Minimum Wage Review Committee in establishing the \$15 an hour. First, I want to say that we recognize that the minimum wage rate does impact the lives of many workers and also many businesses. That's why it's important that we take a balanced approach. The Minimum Wage Review Committee consists of four individuals, two individuals representing employees and the other two representing employer groups. They provide thoughtful consideration.

We do obtain information from economists from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board to help support their work, and any other labour market information that they need. Our department supports their deliberations in that way so that they have current information, they have jurisdictional scans, they know what the rest of the country is doing, and so forth when they set their rate.

The committee meets once a year, and we expect that they'll be meeting this Fall to consider their report and the recommendations that they made in that report, which provide government with a path to \$15 an hour by 2024.

I'm just going to check with my colleague Cynthia Yazbek to see if she wants to add anything to that.

CYNTHIA YAZBEK: In terms of the increases, I think that the committee was really clear in its report around the kind of data and the research that it considered, and it did note that there is no significant effect on employment with minimum wage rate increases when the increases are relatively modest. The research that they were relying on did support that if the increases reach a level that is more than five times the rate of CPI, then you do start to see some negative impacts on employment in terms of businesses' ability to continue to employ workers in their small businesses, in their workplaces, and you will start to see a negative impact.

What they were trying to do was balance, really, what would be reasonable rates over the course of the next number of years that would help minimum wage earners and setting increases which, based on the data they had at the time, were more than the CPI that was anticipated, but they didn't want to set those rates too high, because they didn't want to see those negative impacts on employment.

SUSAN LEBLANC: What is the CPI today, do you know?

CYNTHIA YAZBEK: I believe it's around seven per cent today.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Seven times five is 35. I'm not going to be very good at this, but anyhow. I can't imagine that getting to \$15 today would be more than five per cent of the CPI. I can't imagine if we went to \$22. I can't figure this out on the fly, but I feel like that - okay, fine.

Also, I want to ask if you would please table a list of the research that was done by the committee. That would be really helpful. Not table, but get it to us after the meeting. It seems to me that at this point, with the CPI at such a larger increase, then I think we can probably figure out a \$15 increase a lot quicker. Anyhow, I'm going to leave that.

I have a real skill of just saying I'm going to leave things so people don't get to reply to me. That's my strategy here. Just kidding. (Laughter)

I want to move on, though. The Public Accounts for 2021 showed that household income in Nova Scotia was actually lifted by COVID-19 payments, as we heard from Deputy Minister Taweel, and supports. The Community Emergency Response Benefit from the federal government was set at \$2,000 a month, which actually works out to about \$15 an hour if you're working a 40-hour work week.

What does it say about the Nova Scotia economy that this benefit resulted in an improvement in household income in the province? Does that seem like we're in a healthy situation or a healthy place if \$2,000 a month is an improvement and is actually helping folks out? Is it concerning to you? I'm going to ask that question first to Dr. Saulnier, and then Deputy Minister Czapalay.

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: I'd actually like to answer all of your questions, if I could, very shortly. I think what you're getting at is, what can we expect from government? In terms of how responsive government can be to what's happening today, how quickly can we respond? What can we expect from government in terms of the analysis that's needed? That intersectional lens was needed when we consider things like a tax cut or a spending decision. A tax cut is a spending decision. We really need to be underlining that the CERB taught us a few things.

It taught us what you just underlined: our incomes are so low that \$2,000 meant a lot to so many people in Nova Scotia. It also taught us that a government can respond very quickly to what's happening. The federal government had no choice - well, it had a choice. Our governments always have choices. We see them make choices every day to act or not. Our federal government chose to act, and it acted quickly, and from what our poverty measures show us, that had a tremendous impact. It also underlines the impact that a government can have, and it can do it very quickly.

I think we need to take away some things from COVID-19 - many, many things. Our government can act without the quantitative data from two years ago. There was a pandemic, there is a housing crisis - there is still a pandemic, let me underline. Governments can act quickly.

The other thing I want to underline is what we can expect from government in terms of its role. I'm hearing a lot about a balanced approach. To me, government's about the public interest, and it's actually about counterbalancing those who already have power in

our society - whether that's landlords to tenants, whether that's employers to employees, or any other power relationship. Our minimum wage and our labour standards are about minimums. They are about protecting our workers, bottom line, and that's the approach that we need to take.

The other one is, in terms of the minimum wage question, the evidence we're using now is very different from what we used before, which was theoretical. The evidence we're using now is actually based on real time, real impact. CCPA Ontario just did an analysis which I'm sure our finance department could do that showed what happened when we went from \$11 to \$14 in Ontario, and it is striking. Not only did we not see job losses, we saw increases, and, of course, the increase in the amount of money that those workers made, but we also saw a decrease in the racial wage gap. Surely these are the values and principles that should underline government decisions.

AVA CZAPALAY: I think the question probably is better for the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, but I will tell you what concerns my department each and every day, and that is connecting people to work and work to people, and we're working very, very hard to do that. We're recognizing that a lot of people need wraparound supports. They need not only a job, but they need to get to the job. They need the daycare that you mentioned earlier. They need a lot of other supports in order to get to that job, so that's what concerns us each and every day.

How do we help Nova Scotians, even those who were underemployed or vulnerable before the pandemic, and those who have become more vulnerable during the pandemic? How do we attach them to jobs, and how do we help workplaces? How do we help them become more welcoming and more supportive of newcomers, and how do we help them retain the workers that we have here in Nova Scotia so that when people come from outside of Nova Scotia from the rest of Canada or around the world to come here and work, how do we keep these people here working in Nova Scotia?

That's what keeps me up at night, and what makes me motivated to help our population grow and to help our Nova Scotians connect to good jobs.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Real quickly, Mr. Cavanagh, what needs to change in the Labour Standards Code to facilitate unionization more easily at workplaces?

DANNY CAVANAGH: I think if we get to a card check process where 50 per cent plus one is just an automatic certification for people if they choose to unionize.

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes the questioning for the NDP. I'd ask my colleague, MLA Boudreau, if he would take the Chair for this round.

[Trevor Boudreau took the Chair.]

[10:00 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Normally I'm the Chair for the Health Committee, so this is a different one for me.

We are now on the PC topic or questioning. They will have 20 minutes and after those 20 minutes I'll call order and we'll return to our normal seats. MLA Dave Ritcey, I see your hand up. You can begin.

DAVE RITCEY: I just want a point of clarity around what is happening right now, and what our government is doing. We've provided \$13 million in targeted relief for vulnerable Nova Scotians in March.

Beyond that we are focused on finding sustainable solutions, including - and I have a little bit of a list here: reducing child care fees and creating more access to child care spaces so more Nova Scotians can return to the workforce; increasing the supply of affordable housing and capping rent increases at 2 per cent while what we build on is ongoing; allowing flexible loan payments for farmers and providing support for some fuel costs to stabilize the rising price of food; creating the MOST program, in which skilled trade workers under 30 will not have to pay taxes on the first \$50,000 of their income; increasing support to food banks and for Nova Scotians experiencing homelessness; increasing the Nova Scotia Child Benefit; creating the \$500 Seniors Care Grant program to support seniors living at home; and developing a child poverty strategy. We're doing lots to counteract.

This leads me into my line of questioning. My questions will go first to Mr. Cavanagh. I want to thank you for your submission of your annual report and recommendations, which our government has accepted. My first question is: Who is on the Minimum Wage Review Committee and what is the committee's role?

DANNY CAVANAGH: There are four of us on the committee: two business reps, two reps from labour, I guess. There's one vacancy now, I guess. One of the business people left the committee, so that vacancy apparently is being filled.

The committee's role is - really, I see if you are asking what my role is there, I try to advocate as best I can to get us to make sure that people have a decent wage when they're going to work on minimum wage. When I look at things like all those things that people need - the cost of rent goes up, all those inflationary kind of items and stuff like that - then we try to put forward the reasons why, based on Stats Canada information, it's beneficial to have a higher minimum wage in the province.

Sometimes it's as simple as people may leave this province to go to New Brunswick or another province that is close by, especially, as an example, if their spouse works in health care. Say if somebody works in health care and their spouse is an X-ray tech at a

hospital but the other person is working at a minimum wage job, to go to another province where the minimum wage is \$1.00 more an hour, as an example - New Brunswick just offered an increase of \$2.00 an hour - that wage rate is substantial for people. People can and will leave the province, I think. That's why it's important that we have a decent minimum wage in this province, but it needs to be a living wage so people can live and buy the necessities they need.

There's a lot of people who are those low-wage earners who can't make ends meet every day to look after their families. It's not going to be the end-all to eliminate poverty but we've got to try to lift people up a little bit if we can so they're not facing such hardships when they try to raise their family.

DAVE RITCEY: My question is more around the committee's role. I guess you're part of the Minimum Wage Review Committee. Can you unpack for us how you came to the recommendations in your latest report?

DANNY CAVANAGH: It was through much debate. (Laughter) We try to be respectful in our debate and come to somewhere where there's some reasoning that happens, where we don't feel that we're not going to get any farther, we're just spinning our wheels, so we have to come up with something.

Those increases that we see - although I would say they're not enough, they're better than what we've typically seen over the past 20 years. They're better than eight or 10 cents, but definitely I would agree they need to be more.

DAVE RITCEY: I'll revert over to Deputy Minister Czapalay. Can you discuss how having gradual and clear and predictable changes in the minimum wage, as the committee recommended, and the Province accepted, is important for the business community?

AVA CZAPALAY: I do want to say again that the minimum wage rate impacts the lives of many workers but also businesses, and it's about striking a balance, and it's about the hard work of the committee and the representatives on the committee really do look at that balanced approach. If the minimum wage rate is too high, then businesses may look at part-time work or may make some adjustments that impact the workers even more, and then it provides challenges that way.

It's always going forward with this balanced approach and looking at what other jurisdictions are doing, and what is a pathway to a minimum wage that employers can see coming and that employees can also see. That predictability, that transparency is important. We do know from our consultations that both parties have asked for that predictability.

DAVE RITCEY: Again to Deputy Minister Czapalay: Population growth and economic growth are both very important priorities for our government as we see through

our goal to grow our population to 2 million by 2060. What are the links between population growth and economic growth? That is my first question, and my second question is: How can provincial government revenues grow when we grow our population?

AVA CZAPALAY: For sure, population growth is linked to economic growth. I mentioned in my opening remarks the growth of our population since December, when we crossed the one million person mark, so 12,000 people added to our population, a town about the size of Truro, and these are people typically between the ages of 24 and 55 who come here either through an immigration program - our immigration programs are economic programs, so they come with a job offer - or they come from the rest of Canada.

You'll know that we recently concluded a campaign that targeted skilled workers and health care workers from the rest of Canada. We're seeing the benefits of that marketing campaign in that we're growing our population with skilled workers. We're probably lowering the age of the average Nova Scotian in terms of our population growth, and we're also attracting people who have job offers. You can see the connection between economic growth and population growth.

The second part of your question was around ...

DAVE RITCEY: My second part of the question was: How can provincial government revenues grow when we grow our population?

AVA CZAPALAY: We're just looking at having more people working here in Nova Scotia, bringing in people who are work-ready, so therefore they're attaching to available work and paying the taxes and participating in our economy.

DAVE RITCEY: Again, this is for Deputy Minister Czapalay. In December of 2021, the Province announced that the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program would become permanent. Can you discuss the successes of this program, particularly how it's allowing us to cultivate a skilled workforce that provides good wages itself and grows the economy to increase wages in these sectors?

AVA CZAPALAY: We're really excited by the Atlantic Immigration Program. We're very, very happy that it's been made a permanent program. It's a program that designates employers in Nova Scotia to participate in hiring skilled immigrants to do the work that needs being done in their areas.

Because we moved from a paper-based program to a technology-based program, we got off to a great start in January. We've already designated over 250 employers with another 500 or 600 in process right now. We're well ahead of other Atlantic provinces in terms of having employers prepared to participate in the program. Once they're designated, we then ask them to take a cultural training course, which really helps them create welcoming workplaces.

Not only do we want to attract workers to Nova Scotia, we also want to keep them here. We do know that keeping workers here requires that they're welcome both into the community and into the workplace.

Once the employers finish their training, then they're ready to hire employees. They've found the program to be great when it was a pilot, and they're excited to be participating in the program again. So the program got off to a great start since January when it became permanent.

DAVE RITCEY: Thank you, deputy minister, for your answers. I'll now pass my remaining time over to MLA Young.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Next to MLA Young - who, just for the purposes of Legislative Television, is in my seat.

NOLAN YOUNG: As you may or may not know, I'm a tradesperson. My wife is a tradesperson. The trades are something that's really important to me and to all Nova Scotians. I was walking down the street the other day and I ran into a young gentleman. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Well, I'm working in the trades." "Not out West, here?" He said, "No, the wages came up here. Things are good here, there's ample work," which was quite impressive. I see good paying jobs from Yarmouth to Halifax to Cape Breton within the trades, some starting at \$18 an hour.

According to the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, we currently have billions of dollars of housing and infrastructure in development. We're going to need 11,000 certified tradespeople over the next eight years to meet construction demand, and we all know that there's a housing crunch in this province, but if we can increase our numbers of skilled tradespeople, we can increase the housing supply to lower prices, create good paying union jobs, and increase government revenue. Therefore, it is critical that we increase our number of skilled tradespeople in the province.

I want to ask the deputy minister: In addition to promoting the trades through the school system, what else are we doing to grow our number of tradespeople so that we can make sure that our province's construction boom can keep going and more people can be employed in stable, good paying union jobs which will increase government revenues?

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for the question. You've shared your insights with us before, and thank you for that as well.

Really, growing the skilled trades is a very clear path to prosperity for Nova Scotia. We really want to make sure that Nova Scotians see that skilled trades are a wonderful option.

[10:15 a.m.]

The MOST program that's being announced today, I'm excited by that because it is a competitive market. While we're out there recruiting skilled trades workers from the rest of Canada and promoting Nova Scotia as a wonderful place to live, work and raise a family, so are others. I just came back from P.E.I. where I was there with my Atlantic counterparts, and they're all doing the same thing. So we need to differentiate ourselves and offer competitive programs, like the MOST program, so very excited by that announcement.

We're working hard, as you mentioned, to ensure that more Nova Scotians see the skilled trades as an option earlier. Let's see more young people and their parents talking about a career in skilled trades earlier in the school system. That, for sure, is important.

We also have Nova Scotians who did not consider skilled trades and could perhaps look at skilled trades. We offer a number of programs to underrepresented groups that help them become attached to a skilled trade apprenticeship program. Those programs have been very successful. We're very keen to have a more diverse workforce in the skilled trades, including African Nova Scotians, Indigenous and Mi'kmaw workers, and also women in underrepresented trades. We are working very hard on all those respects as well.

NOLAN YOUNG: As a former NSCC instructor, I've worked with several different groups and initiatives over the years - Women Unlimited, some other groups. It was really good that they exist.

Last year the government partnered with the Nova Scotia Boatbuilders Association and the Nova Scotia Community College to create a new training program for boat builders in composites fabrication. As I mentioned, as a tradesperson and NSCC instructor and an MLA for southwest Nova Scotia, I know there is a labour shortage in the industry, and working to get more people into the trades like this is so important to the economy and for people to be able to live productive and prosperous lives.

I receive calls quite often - people reaching out and saying, I need tradespeople, do you know anybody? There's so much demand that often people are getting into the trades with no experiences that they're able to get to work.

Could you discuss specifically how the training course is serving to address the labour shortage and how it is allowing individuals the ability to earn a higher wage and find employment in rural southwest Nova Scotia?

AVA CZAPALAY: As you know, I came from rural southwest Nova Scotia. Any initiatives like that are community-based initiatives where people come forward and say, we see a need, there are jobs in this field, we see a need for young people to find skilled employment, let's offer this program. That's probably one of the best-case scenarios.

There's commitment within the community and there's commitment from young people to take those opportunities.

Initiatives like the boat builders training program are fantastic. Many people will be aware of the projects we had, for example, with Irving Shipbuilding, where we supported workers in acquiring the skills that they needed to work in that industry. It's the same kind of thing, looking at what people need to acquire the skills.

Quite often it's wraparound supports. Is it a matter of transportation that's standing between someone who isn't working and someone who could be working? Is it a matter of daycare? What is it that we need to do to support that person?

I actually said the other day, I feel like maybe it's just being able to talk to someone, an individual, if someone's having a rough day or has a bit of a barrier - maybe their car has a flat tire. It's calling someone and saying, I'm having a bad day, and having that person talk them through: don't quit, stay with your training, because the future will be brighter.

Really, it's working with communities, working with organizations like the boat builders, but many others, to support them in helping people acquire the skills that they need for a lifetime of work.

NOLAN YOUNG: I'm wondering if you'd be able to just expand on some of the opportunities that exist for the diverse range of individuals such as women and other diverse groups. If you could talk about some of the programs.

AVA CZAPALAY: Sure. We want to both attract more people to the skilled trades and work to retain people in the skilled trades. Using that dual approach, we hope to actually meet the 11,000 number that you mentioned. Working hard to help all Nova Scotians, including underrepresented groups, see that there's a lifetime of work if you have a skilled trade.

There are many avenues to pursue into the skilled trades. You can show up on a worksite and there you are, and initiate the process that way. You can go through NSCC. There are a number of different avenues. We also want to work with employers, because we need employers to help people acquire the skills that they need. It's very much a hands-on process. Are there journeypeople who can support people on their pathway to becoming an apprentice and writing their Red Seal? A number of our programs do incent employers to hire underrepresented groups and to mentor them and support them throughout their process.

We're finding that many employers are very excited to participate in the program anyway. Also having additional financial supports to help them makes that more likely to be possible, especially where in Nova Scotia we do have a lot of small employers who could use the financial assistance. We have a number of programs that assist with that.

NOLAN YOUNG: As I was walking down here, I was looking at the amount of cranes in the air and it reminded me that I think there are more cranes in Halifax than in Edmonton. It was just unbelievable. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Order. Thank you for having me as Chair. I'll pass the chair back to MLA Young.

[Nolan Young reassumed the Chair.]

THE CHAIR: We will begin our second round of questioning with approximately eight minutes each. We will begin with the Liberal Party. MLA Mombourquette.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I wasn't supposed to be here today but here I am. I am actually really glad that I was able to participate in this because I've had the opportunity to work with many of you in some capacity over the years, looking at supports for folks. I always try to put a Cape Breton kind spin on this because that's where I am from and that's where I represent.

It's interesting to hear the skilled trades piece. I was involved with a lot of the construction that you're seeing, with the commitments made from government at the time. I spent the last two days with union contractors and the unions. The relationship is strong. It's a problem that we need to address when it comes to the labour shortage that we have but it's a good problem to have.

The more we can do to encourage skilled trades in our schools - and hearing the story that there is now going to be a mobile classroom moving around the province. A big shoutout to the Mainland Nova Scotia Building Trades, the Cape Breton Island Building Trades Council, and the unions and contractors who probably have the best relationship that they would say they've probably had in two decades. A lot of that has to do with the investments that government made around construction. It's pretty amazing. That's the good problem.

The challenge for us - and I use Cape Breton particularly - is that we're seeing a large increase in first-time usage at food banks. It's a problem. Some of the things that we're talking about - we are probably almost a year to the day that we saw in the child care deal. It was a big step for us at the time. We wanted to make sure that deal was done to support families.

As Mr. Cavanagh talked about in his opening remarks, that's going to give people - particularly women - a chance to get back into the workforce. It's a significant savings for families in Cape Breton where at the time we were saying that maybe one in four, arguably one in five, were accessing child care - that's great.

I do want to talk about what my colleague said: there's no support coming. We've talked about that today. It's obvious that there's no more support coming. It has been said by the leadership of the government, but I do believe there are things that should happen. A universal lunch program should happen. It should have happened already for our kids in school - programs like that.

A huge shoutout to the Department of Community Services. Transit passes in the CBRM - that was a big step. I mean, we're trying to connect people to workplaces, support families getting around the community.

My question could go to anybody, the Department of Community Services, Dr. Saulnier. Aside from giving people financial relief right now, what programs could the government start to implement that would take some of the pressure off? I go back to the lunch program because it was part of my mandate when I was there, and we just didn't get it over the finish line.

I'd like to hear some of the comments because you mentioned the poverty strategy that you are working on. I'll leave it at that for now. We know there's no financial support coming, so what can we do right now to help support our most vulnerable families?

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Having been at this committee and other committees a number of times, I've referenced on numerous occasions the need for us to shift our systems to be much more preventive and to intervene much earlier - speaking for the Department of Community Services - than we typically have.

We do offer a whole range of preventive programming, specifically to support youth who are attached to the Department of Community Services in some way. We have a program called the Youth Development Initiative that funds career-focused, community-based programming and provides wage subsidies for youth starting at age 12 and goes right up to the age of 20. I think programming like that is a really good example of how government can invest in programming that is community-based and that supports young people as early as possible.

We also expanded the YDI in the most recent budget to support African Nova Scotian communities with a focus as well on skilled trades - to pick up on my colleague Deputy Minister Czapalay's point. That program within the African Nova Scotian community is community-led and was community-designed. It has already surpassed the targets that we had set for enrollment in that program.

There's a whole list of preventative programming that the Department of Community Services provides - some in partnership with community-based organizations, some in partnership with colleagues in the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

We also have a suite of early intervention programming such as the EDGE program, which many in this room would be familiar with. Offered now at six sites, we've expanded that program because of its success. It's a youth intervention for individuals attached to the income assistance caseload, and targets individuals between the ages of 18 to 26 to help better meet their needs. I would highlight that in response to participant feedback, we've also added mental health supports and wraparounds.

I believe our role really is about creating programs that meet people where they are and supporting them as early as possible. That's where community comes in as well. A lot of this programming, you need to be attached to the Department of Community Services to access it. I would argue that a lot of this programming has merit outside of the Department of Community Services, and funding organizations to provide that to others makes a lot of sense.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the answer from the deputy minister. Most programs have played a very important impact on families across the province. Maybe I should have been a little more direct about it, and I'll ask for comments from you all. Really what I'm looking at right now - and we've talked about this - is that we are at a point right now in this province and around the world where people are making decisions about whether to eat or not. As you said, people have to be attached to the Department of Community Services in a lot of cases to access some of the programs, but there's a group that falls just above some of those programs that are just not making ends meet.

Really, what I'm looking for from comments from all of you is: What can we do now, aside from giving people - we've seen other provinces essentially give money. What, in your opinion, could we be doing right now to help with the current circumstance? I sound like a broken record on it: the best thing we could do is feed our kids lunch. That cost for families is significant.

Food poverty is a massive problem right now, and it's something as a government we could be - we've been doing the work on it for well over a year. So when I hear during Estimates that it isn't a priority for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, that's a concern for me - especially now, because of the environment.

I'm going to ask everybody this. If you're in government right now, and you have to make a decision, seeing what's happening on the ground . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That ends the period for the Liberals. I'll pass it on to MLA Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'll jump right in. I think the conversation has been interesting so far. We have a lot of information, but we seem to be going back and forth on certain topics, so I'm going to try to narrow it down a little bit.

[10:30 a.m.]

I'm going to bring economist David Macdonald back into the conversation. He was mentioned earlier. He explained that at this point in the pandemic, job vacancy rates are twice as likely to be driven by low wages. Many have said - like the Executive Director of the Downtown Dartmouth Business Commission, Tim Rissesco, whom I've worked with a lot, and other folks - that raising wages is one way to bring back workers to industries experiencing a shortage.

We know this. It's supply and demand. We need workers now, which is a relatively novel position for Nova Scotia to be in. We need to offer them more attractive packages, including higher wages.

I just want to put a point on this. The argument against raising minimum wage quickly is that according to what Ms. Yazbek said earlier, if we raise it at more than five times CPI, there could be an impact on business. I think we also agreed in the last round of questioning that CPI is 7 per cent. Five times CPI is significant. Getting to \$15, I would assume, quickly would not take us over that metric.

Is there a consideration from government to either unilaterally raise that wage outside of the Minimum Wage Review Committee, or to bring that committee back prior to the Fall, recognizing the impact low wages are having on our economy, and ask them to reconsider the available information? I guess that question is either to the deputy minister or to Ms. Yazbek.

AVA CZAPALAY: Right now, the Minimum Wage Review Committee is minus one person. That spot is being filled, and as soon as that spot is filled, the committee could meet any time. So we need four people on the committee in order for them to meet.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Is there any consideration to having a conversation about raising that wage by government and not reconvening that committee right now, in a kind of emergency fashion?

AVA CZAPALAY: The Minimum Wage Review Committee is the mechanism that we have in place to recommend minimum wage to government. It's important to have both the employee perspective and the employer's perspective, and to have that advice coming forward in that balanced way. What we are doing is working hard to fill that vacancy, and I think we're in the home stretch now. As soon as that vacancy is filled, the committee is able to meet.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I don't want to belabour the point, but I am going to belabour the point just for a second. There are lots of decisions that government makes every day that could use more input than it gets, so it is possible for government to

unilaterally raise the wage. I just want to confirm that this is not something that's being considered. Is that accurate?

AVA CZAPALAY: The process that we're following is to use the Minimum Wage Review Committee, and we will have our team, as per usual, provide them with all of the current information on the labour market that's available.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I want to, then, turn the conversation, acknowledging that we need higher wages yesterday to what we mean when we talk about good jobs, because wages are a component of that, but benefits and work environments and full-time, et cetera, are also a part of that. I'm wondering, Dr. Saulnier, if you have a recommendation about what levers government has to ensure that jobs are good jobs. We talked about wages. What else should we be looking at?

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: Yes, we have a whole report on labour standards, and that's really where it is for government. It is for government to strengthen the protections that exist that are really about supporting workers to be able to have balance in their lives, to be able to know what to expect in terms of their work hours.

We have the longest irregular work week in Canada. Many of the conclusions we came to in just comparing to Canada - we haven't even compared to other jurisdiction - is that Nova Scotia's labour standards are some of the lowest in the country. We could do a lot to address that. Overtime doesn't kick in until 48 hours. That's something we could address.

We could be thinking about whether we could be taking a green jobs look, or look at what else we could be doing. We could be thinking about a four-day work week. Let's really think about what the impact is here. Currently, it's things like ensuring that workers know what to expect in terms of their shifts, that there are not incentives for part-time work, but actually disincentives - and, currently, I'd say we have incentives for part-time work in terms of benefits. We can't prorate our health, so we shouldn't be able to prorate our health benefits, as an example.

I think there's a lot we can do to get at the quality of jobs. Really it is about health and safety for workers, it's about paid sick leave - all the things that allow our workers to go to work and do the best they can.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I want to circle back to the conversation around - maybe it's the Market Basket Measure or maybe it's just what we can and we can't increasingly afford. We know that the highest-cost items in a family's budget are child care, housing, food, transportation.

We heard Deputy Minister Czapalay talk specifically about how increasingly we discover that what people need to succeed in the job market are those supports around the

jobs. Government can do a lot of that. We can expand access to public transportation, we can build more non-market housing, we can implement a universal school food program like we've talked about, we can continue down the road to affordable child care.

To start, I want to ask Deputy Minister Czapalay, what is the government doing in a structural way to increase those supports? You've identified that as an issue, so I'd like to hear what the solution is.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thanks for the question. You'll know that we have responsibility for Employment Nova Scotia, and through Employment Nova Scotia we administer a federal program that funds the Nova Scotia Works offices. They are in over 50 communities and centres throughout Nova Scotia, so it's community-based support, so having people . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. The time for questioning has elapsed. I'll pass it on to our colleagues in the PC Party. MLA John A. MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: We know that to pay for community services we need more people working. It's simple - it's taxes coming in. NSCC is not just trades, it's also other industries like IT, which is where I graduated.

The technology and IT sectors are growing rapidly world-wide. Just recently, a global technology services company, Cognizant, selected Nova Scotia for its expansion in creating up to 1,250 high-paying jobs. Can you speak to the success of our government's \$1.3 million investment in NPower Canada and the benefits we're seeing to young Nova Scotians in the IT sector as a result? That would be for Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: I'll just say that the NPower program is a great program that helps connect underrepresented youth to IT jobs. I'm going from memory here because I don't have it in my notes so I'm just going to say that we participated in a pilot. It's a national program, but it's offered here in Nova Scotia and we're funding it with the Department of Community Services. It enables the youth to tap into both the training and the mentorship they need to connect to jobs in the IT sector.

My colleague, Deputy Minister Taweel, can answer more about the program.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: I'll just add that the majority of individuals who are enrolled in the program are income assistance clients and feedback is very positive about the program here in this jurisdiction and certainly in other jurisdictions. The program has seen remarkable success so we're very hopeful for that same level of success here and to see the program be able to expand.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Just to follow up, and either one of you two ladies could take it. What's the current and future outlook for the wages in this industry? You've just told me - and I wasn't aware - that a lot of them come from income assistance.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: The outlook is very positive. In fact, we need more workers in the IT sector. The IT sector, as you'll appreciate, is a very broad sector so we'll be looking for all kinds of programs - like the NPower program, but also NSCC and the universities and private career colleges - to help us with the demand that our IT sector needs to grow and to contribute to our economy.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I'll defer to MLA Boudreau now.

THE CHAIR: MLA Boudreau.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Deputy Minister Czapalay, I'm going to ask you another question. Our government has created many opportunities to create and attract well-paying jobs in Nova Scotia. We have seen economic development initiatives, both in the innovation sector through \$12 million for the refreshed Innovation Rebate Program as well as in the resource sector - for example, in my constituency, a \$327,000 investment in the Université Sainte-Anne Marine Research Centre to help strengthen and grow our province's marine and aquaculture sector.

What are we doing to ensure that we have a skilled workforce to fill these types of positions now and into the future?

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Definitely, innovation is a driver for economic growth. Ensuring that we both attract talent and retain talent is key to that. Our post-secondary infrastructure, including our community college system, would be key to supporting young people in terms of identifying opportunities where they can contribute to growing and innovative sectors.

We have a number of programs that help attach young people to work while they're currently studying like Summer SKILL programs and Graduate to Opportunity, where young people are connected to employers and the employers are provided with an incentive for hiring young people. Connecting people to work in these fields is important, and providing them with opportunities to engage in research and to contribute to economic growth in those companies.

I will also say that entrepreneurship is another opportunity. We've also found that through our marketing program in the rest of Canada, we're attracting entrepreneurs both from the rest of Canada and from overseas and having entrepreneurs come here and see

that there are opportunities for them to have their research supported and to participate in a thriving innovation ecosystem is also important.

We have an immigration stream for entrepreneurs, and we also are welcoming entrepreneurs from the rest of Canada. They're happy to look for lifestyle balance as well as opportunities to grow and run their business.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: I'm going to pass it over to my colleague Ms. Sheehy-Richard. Hopefully there's some time.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I will be quick, I hope. I wanted to talk about how the province has been funding community-based organizations aimed at supporting youth, such as the Portal Youth Outreach Association. It operates not only in my constituency in Hants West but expands all the way down to the Annapolis Valley and on as far as Annapolis.

Can you discuss how organizations like Portal Youth effectively help the vulnerable youth transition to independence and stability through education and employment? That's to Deputy Minister Taweel, please.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Portal Youth is an amazing organization. We're really fortunate to partner with them on a number of programs. I referenced earlier the EDGE program. That is certainly one of the highlights of our partnership with them, targeting 18- to 26-year-olds with wraparound employment supports and seeing great success.

We also partner with Portal Youth to support their efforts around tackling youth homelessness, providing stability and a safe and nurturing environment to help youth get back on their feet and potentially reconnect with family, and also connect to employment opportunities and education opportunities.

I can't say enough about Portal. They're very in touch with the needs of the communities that they serve. We recently funded, as well, the expansion of Portal Youth through the purchase of some homes in the province to help those youth whom I referenced a moment ago have a place to lay their heads and also . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. That concludes questioning for today. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to say thank you for being here and answering the questions. I'll provide time right now if you have any closing remarks. Dr. Saulnier.

CHRISTINE SAULNIER: I just really want to underline that there is a high cost to us collectively of a low-wage economy, which is what we have in Nova Scotia. This is a value system that I think we really have to root out, because we have to tackle the crises

before us. That includes the climate crisis which I've heard nothing about, the health care crisis, the social care crisis, the housing crisis.

[10:45 a.m.]

The solution isn't that we simply shift to those higher-paid jobs in the narrowly defined skilled trades. We certainly don't want somebody who's thinking about early learning to simply go into construction - that is not the solution. So many people who are earning low wages are not being paid their worth because of our value systems placed on that work. Please consider what you need to do in order to address the low-wage economy.

Nova Scotia needs to really consider what it means to be a highly productive economy. We really need to be shifting to a higher-wage economy. We cannot be competing in the race to the bottom anymore. We need to be considering what we need to do in terms of investing in our post-secondary education and lowering the barriers to that - universities and colleges. There are wait-lists for our colleges. We have the highest tuition in the country. We could have the most highly educated population. That's what we should be competing on, not how low our minimum wage is.

I hope that those are some of the things that are taken away here. The interconnections between the low wage and the impact on our government revenues and expenses need to be underlined. We need to address what's happening in our province in terms of poverty and addressing both low wages and the high cost. Our government can do a lot in order to help people. The affordability crisis isn't going away and has been here for a very long time.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Taweel.

TRACEY TAWHEEL: Thank you very much for the questions and for the opportunity to be here and to have a few moments to speak about all of the great work that's happening in the Department of Community Services. I will just take this moment to emphasize the prevention and early intervention work that the department has invested heavily in and government continues to invest heavily in, as well as the increases coming next month to the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, which will certainly have a positive impact for families in this province.

This is a very important topic for us to discuss, and I'm very grateful for all of your questions and for the input of all of my colleagues sitting here in the witness seats.

THE CHAIR: Deputy Minister Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: The pandemic has had an outsized impact on vulnerable workers and on sectors like the service sector, accommodation, hospitality, retail. At LSI, we are focused on connecting people to work and work to people. We have many programs

and services that will help with this, and we will also work very closely with our community and sector partners and colleagues across government, including the Department of Community Services and others to be as responsive as we possibly can.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Cavanagh.

DANNY CAVANAGH: Just in closing, with inflation and, as I said earlier, the 30 years of cuts and rollbacks, a huge move from full-time jobs to part-time and precarious work all needs to change. We need to stop using the word “heroes,” because there are no heroes. People who can get a small increase in their wages and then are thrown on the trash heap while the corporations that they often work for are making huge profits - that is not labelling people as heroes. Neither are just the words. We need to see more action.

I think in terms of wage increases, a lot of workers would be quite happy if they could keep up to the wage increases that we hear the CEOs got every year in January when they release those reports. Investment in people, I can't emphasize enough. Labour standards in this province haven't been updated in 40 years. They need a complete modernization. There are lots of ways in there to help low-wage workers in there, whether it's cost for uniforms and boarding and lodging and many other things. A modernization of those.

There are many sectors of work life for people, for newcomers and migrant workers who are exempt, in fact, from not just labour standards, but also from workers' compensation. We need to move, as Christine said, out of a low-wage economy. If we don't, not much is going to change except we're going to have our streets full of homeless people - worse than it even is this year, I'm thinking. By working together, I'm sure that we can come up with some solutions that will work, but my main point is that government can do much more investment in people in the coming months to make some positive change.

The last thing is that I hope we don't see any more tax cuts for corporations because they just don't work. They're taking money out of the system that could be given to more workers.

THE CHAIR: Once again, thank you to our witnesses. We do have some committee business, so you're free to leave if you wish.

MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a motion.

THE CHAIR: You may after we finish our committee business that we have on the agenda. It's just two pieces of correspondence - it should be okay.

The first one is correspondence from the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. It's information that was requested on April 13th. I'm just asking if there's any discussion on that.

Hearing none, we'll move on. We have correspondence from the Office of the Auditor General in response to the committee correspondence dated on May 31st. I'm just asking if there's any discussion on that item.

Hearing none, we'll move on. MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you very much. I apologize to the clerk - I can send this to you in a second. I move that the Public Accounts Committee request the Department of Finance and Treasury Board appear before the committee to respond to questions related to the impact of a low-wage economy on government revenue and expenses.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I agree, and I'd just like to put a little add to that - I was wondering if my colleague would be up for that. We'd like to add that one of the largest promises that the Progressive Conservative Party made during the election was a better pay cheque guarantee. They made a better pay cheque guarantee promise, and they had promised that from Day 1. We're now 295 days with still no better pay cheque guarantee, and that would definitely help low-income and middle-income individuals. I'd like to add that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Chender.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think I'll speak for my colleague and myself. I think we'd like to leave our motion as it is. I think if MLA Maguire would like to bring a separate motion, that's fine, or to discuss that if we're successful here.

I want to be clear that when this topic was raised at agenda setting, it was prior to the rampant increase in inflation that we've seen and increase in the cost of living. It was also prior to the announcement from government that no further supports would be forthcoming.

I think what we heard a number of times today from the witnesses - particularly the deputy ministers - was, that's a matter for Finance and Treasury Board. Because of that, I think this is a question of very immediate importance to Nova Scotians. We'd like to be able to have a full conversation of it, which it became clear today that we can't do that without being able to question the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. So we'd like to move forward with our motion as is, and as I said, happy to entertain another one after.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: If I'm looking at the attached schedule of the agenda, we have meetings until the end of June. I believe our next meeting to figure out the next schedule is in September for the next agenda, and I'm fine with it being listed on that.

As has been previously decided for the last couple of weeks when other members have asked for it from different Parties, let's get it dealt with at the agenda setting. Since we're not going to get them in for this setting, I'm fine with it going to the agenda setting, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: Is there any further discussion on Ms. Leblanc's motion? MLA Leblanc.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Just to say to my honourable colleague, MLA MacDonald, that I think this is a special circumstance. I think that this is a very pressing issue. As Mr. Cavanagh said, we will be seeing many more people not be able to afford to make ends meet, we're going to see more homelessness. We're going to see more health care costs, and for a government who is fixated on solving the health care crisis, I think this dovetails completely with that. That's all I'll say.

THE CHAIR: MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I will just quickly say that these are literally the reasons I gave time and time again to try to get motions passed where both parties voted against it, so I don't know why they would say that the topic they have today - which is exactly the topic I put forward last week with the same evidence from the Premier and the crisis - was voted against. I will support this, but I'd also like to extend Public Accounts Committee an extra 15 minutes.

THE CHAIR: Is that a motion?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Well, we need . . .

THE CHAIR: I thought we have a motion on the floor.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Well, no, but we need to extend it if we're going to continue with business, so that would . . .

THE CHAIR: Could you repeat the motion again, please?

SUSAN LEBLANC: Certainly. The motion is: I move that the Public Accounts Committee request the Department of Finance and Treasury Board appear before the

committee to respond to questions related to the impact of a low-wage economy on government revenue and expenses.

THE CHAIR: The Clerk will conduct a recorded vote.

[The clerk calls the roll.]

[10:57 a.m.]

YEAS

Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Susan Leblanc
Claudia Chender

NAYS

Trevor Boudreau
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
John A. MacDonald
Dave Ritcey
Nolan Young

THE CLERK: For, 4. Against, 5.

THE CHAIR: The motion is defeated.

MLA Maguire.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Quickly, I'd ask that Nova Scotia Power appear the third week of October to discuss - first, I would like to extend the meeting. We do have more issues to deal with, so just a quick extension of 10 minutes, which everyone here can do.

THE CHAIR: Seeing noes, I don't think that would be possible.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would just advise people if they're going to be on the committee to leave some leeway between the committee and having to run out of here at 11 o'clock. So, Nova Scotia Power, third week of October. I ask that they appear on behalf of power rates, infrastructure costs, and bonuses.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I'd just like to remind the member that there are agenda-setting meetings for that exact purpose, so when we address the next agenda-setting meeting, I would think that that would be a fine time to bring that topic forward and have a discussion then.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Just one point. This has been brought up, I believe, four times. Every time it's found it's not substantially different. The actual motion, in my view, is out of order because it's already been dealt with. The point of change in a day is not as substantial. I get the point where it said the next available and then a date. I can live with that, but just by picking a different date is not really a substantial change.

To my view, that actual motion is out of order because we've already ruled against it. To my understanding of the rules, the only person who can re-bring it forward is somebody who actually voted in the majority of the original order. I'd like to know if we can get an answer from the clerk on that.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps we'll look for clarification from the clerk or Mr. Hebb.

KIM LANGILLE: I'm going to refer it to Mr. Hebb, with regard to the difference in the motion. There is a slight difference, but . . .

GORDON HEBB: I have no memory of what the exact wording of the previous motions is, but certainly, if the motion has previously been . . .

THE CHAIR: Order. It's 11 o'clock now. The time for the Public Accounts meeting has ended.

[The committee adjourned at 11:00 a.m.]