



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Charlie Parker

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Second Session

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2010

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2010

Sixty-first General Assembly

Second Session

2:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Charlie Parker

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Mr. Gordon Gosse, Mr. Leo Glavine, Mr. Alfie MacLeod

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll get today's proceedings underway.

The honourable member for Glace Bay.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order. Yesterday in Question Period I asked the Minister of Community Services for information on co-operative housing units across this province. First, I'd like to say that I misspoke when I referenced the housing co-operative in my riding. I meant to refer to the seven co-operative housing developments in Cape Breton. I apologize to the House for that and I acknowledge the mistake.

I asked about the state of co-operatives and if the minister's department had a plan for maintenance and repairs of the 79 subsidized co-operative housing units across the province. The minister said, "I think that there might be a misunderstanding of co-operative housing - which are typically privately run, versus public housing - and whether it's public housing that we're responsible for, affordable housing through our department, which is a different category of housing."

Under the Priorities and Accomplishments section of the department's 2009-10 *Annual Accountability Report*, there's a statement that says the government has made repairs to co-operatives. Clearly this department and the minister have a responsibility for the state of disrepair of co-operative housing units across this entire province. The department's *Annual Accountability Report* even acknowledges that 30 per cent of subsidized co-operatives were deemed unhealthy. This highlights the problem. It is part of the affordable housing strategy. We rank co-ops and we invest money, so I think and I would argue that we do share responsibility.

I would like to give the minister the opportunity to clarify her position on co-operative housing and specify her department's role in addressing co-operative repairs in Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, several things that I would like to mention. Number one is that I have asked our staff person, Dan Troke, to contact the honourable member, which he will, and to get more information about exactly what he is looking for.

[2:15 p.m.]

With regard to the co-operative housing, there are levels that I know the honourable member has mentioned, like Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. Those levels were brought in more as a safety net when the department would be looking at co-operative housing, and those would cover a variety of areas. That would be finances, how well the board was able to govern the co-operative housing, and also the physical aspects. So they were three different elements within those levels, not just specifically one area, and that's where I was confused with the questioning of what they were looking for in levels, because being a Level 1, 2 or 3 does not necessarily mean just the physical condition of that co-operative housing and also most of those are privately owned and we work with them if they have any issues. But staff will be talking to the honourable member to be able to explain fully and get more information. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I certainly see it as perhaps a disagreement here over some facts and it sounds like the two members are agreeable to talk to each other, and I suggest you do just that and work it out. I don't see it as a point of order.

The late debate topic today is submitted by the honourable member for Lunenburg West, and it reads as follows:

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate our Minister of Health and Health Promotion and Protection, Maureen MacDonald, and the Department of Health for their leadership in making life better for Nova Scotian families by negotiating a generic drug price for Lipitor, saving 20,000 Nova Scotian seniors up to \$145 for the annual cost of the drug.

That will be debated at the moment of interruption at six o'clock.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, before I table a petition, I would like to recognize a friend of mine in the audience, Mr. Bernard Melanson, in the west gallery. Bernie has actually played a leadership role in our community, collecting signatures of individuals without doctors in Yarmouth, and Bernie himself has had 15 doctors over the course of the last 20-something years. Bernie, I'd like to ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: We will begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition on behalf of the residents of Yarmouth County. These residents are concerned as they do not have access to a family physician and are requesting the assistance of the Minister of Health in recruiting physicians to their communities.

Mr. Speaker it is signed by 2,247 residents of Yarmouth County and I have affixed my signature in support of their efforts.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I'd like to do an introduction, is that appropriate?

MR. SPEAKER: Certainly.

MR. LANDRY: Up in our east gallery we have Colin Brownell and his wife, Ruth, and Justin. Mr. Brownell received the Medal for Bravery this morning and I just want the House to recognize him and thank him for his courage. (Applause)

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Committee on Law Amendments, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 76 - Credit Union Act.

and the committee recommends this bill to the favourable consideration of the House, with certain amendments.

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Committee on Law Amendments, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 7 - Pharmacy Act.

and the committee recommends this bill to the favourable consideration of the House, without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

MS. BECKY KENT: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise in my place to table the Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, for the First and Second Sessions of the 61st General Assembly.

Before I present this, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the time to thank the committee members for finding the time in their busy schedules - some of them have to come quite a distance - and certainly all of the presenters who have taken the time to come to our meetings to inform us and educate us, and certainly last but not least, the staff, and particularly Jana Hodgson in the Legislative Committees Office for the tremendous work that she does in supporting our work. So I thank you very much and I'll table this.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

MR. SPEAKER: I have a report I wish to table at this time. It's the *Report of the Auditor General* to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, November 2010.

The report is tabled.

The honourable Attorney General.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as Attorney General, pursuant to Section 51 of the Judicature Act, I hereby beg leave to table revisions to the Civil Procedure Rules that were made in accordance to the Judicature Act by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia on October 29, 2010.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable Attorney General.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Section 47 of the Public Trustee Act, I'm required to lay the annual report of the Public Trustee of Nova Scotia before the House of Assembly, so I hereby beg leave to table the annual report of the Public Trustee of Nova Scotia for 2009-10.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. DARRELL DEXTER (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, if I may, on an introduction, here in the east gallery with us today is Ava Czapalay. She is the founding president and CEO of EduNova, Nova Scotia's education export alliance. EduNova is a non-profit, co-operative association with 37 members and associates from Nova Scotia's universities, community college, English school boards and several private partners, including private schools, private language schools, and consulting firms.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to work with Ava when we travelled to Abu Dhabi last month to explore further educational opportunities between schools and universities in Nova Scotia and the United Arab Emirates. Ava is here today to help us kick off International Education Week, which, as you know, runs from November 15th to

November 19th. Ava is passionate about Nova Scotia and works hard every day to sell the province's educational expertise to countries and organizations all over the world. Ava sits on several local and national boards and committees, looking at collaborative approaches to marketing Canadian education abroad and in her spare time, I'm told, Ava is an avid long-distance runner, volunteers for many sports organizations, and lives in Halifax with her three children. So I would ask the House if they would please join me in welcoming Ava Czapalay. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 2195

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

Whereas the week of November 15th to November 19th marks International Education Week; and

Whereas EduNova has been working tirelessly with members to promote Nova Scotia as a premiere education destination through a number of initiatives, including direct overseas student recruitment and hosting familiarization tours in Nova Scotia for guidance counsellors and education agents from around the world; and

Whereas this past year, post-secondary universities in Nova Scotia saw an increase of 17.7 per cent in international student enrolment, this is in addition to encouraging news from the Nova Scotia International Student Program whose enrolment numbers continue to rise each year;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate EduNova and its members for their outstanding work in bringing students from around the globe to Nova Scotia.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

RESOLUTION NO. 2196

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

Whereas the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims is observed around the world on November 17th and today Canada will observe its third National Day of Remembrance; and

Whereas every year we lose too many Nova Scotians in road crashes; and

Whereas improving road safety is a priority of the government and its many partners;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize the importance of road safety on this National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims and support efforts to keep all road users safe in our province.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Economic and Rural Development.

RESOLUTION NO. 2197

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

Whereas chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, will be the third leading cause of death in Canada by 2020, causing higher hospitalization rates and higher hospital re-admission rates than heart failure and angina; and

Whereas 90 per cent of COPD cases are caused by smoking cigarettes; and

Whereas nearly two million Canadians are afflicted by this - mostly preventable - chronic condition;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in marking today as World COPD Day and showing leadership in modelling healthy lifestyle practices and support organizations that help Nova Scotians with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 99 - Entitled an Act to Avoid Conflict of Interest by Members of the House of Assembly, Members of the Executive Council and Public Employees. (Hon. Frank Corbett)

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be read a second time on a future day.

The honourable Minister of Economic and Rural Development.

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health, I'd like to make an introduction. We are pleased to have in the gallery today, Jacqueline Whitaker. Ms. Whitaker is the president of the COPD Canada Patient Network. The head office is in Williamswood, Nova Scotia. The COPD Canada Patient Network represents COPD patients, caregivers, support people, and professionals, and works relentlessly to promote awareness of this terrible disease, which unfortunately has no cure. I ask the House to give a warm welcome to Ms. Jacqueline Whitaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: We welcome all our visitors here this afternoon and hope they enjoy the proceedings here in the Legislature.

NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

RESOLUTION NO. 2198

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

Whereas Hants Equipment is a locally owned business in the Municipality of West Hants and has been operating successfully for almost 30 years, first opening in 1981; and

Whereas Hants Equipment, specializing in machinery and equipment for the forest industry, is owned and operated by Lawrence Hart and, until the last few weeks, operated outside Windsor town limits on Tonge Hill near Garland's Crossing, Hants County; and

Whereas Hants Equipment Ltd. is now serving the Nova Scotia forest industry in brand new headquarters and office space at Exit 5 just off Highway No. 101, near Three Mile Plains, Hants County;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Lawrence Hart and his staff of quality professionals for their continued hard work in Nova Scotia's small business sector.

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

[2:30 p.m.]

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Deputy Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 2199

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

Whereas Steven Wilton of Lingan was travelling home in January of this year when the bus he was on crashed through a guardrail on a bridge off Highway No. 104, falling almost eight metres into the icy Tracadie River; and

Whereas Mr. Wilton swam in the frigid water to the front of the bus, escaped, and climbed an embankment, where he flagged down a passing motorist who called 911; and

Whereas Mr. Wilton's quick and selfless actions saved the lives of five people, resulting in him being awarded the Nova Scotia Medal of Bravery at a ceremony earlier today, November 17th;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank Steven Wilton of Lingan for his bravery and congratulate him on being awarded the Nova Scotia Medal of Bravery.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

RESOLUTION NO. 2200

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

Whereas the inshore fishing fleet in Nova Scotia is going through tough financial times because of low prices for shellfish and lack of groundfish because of too many seals in our inshore waters; and

Whereas the premiums they are paying to have mandatory workers' compensation is nearly 10 per cent of their income, compared to zero for their neighbouring New Brunswick inshore fishermen; and

Whereas inshore fishermen have access to private insurance with better coverage at only 10 per cent of the cost of the Workers' Compensation insurance, which in turn could help our inshore fleet through these financial hard times and maybe then be competitive with the New Brunswick inshore fishing fleet;

Therefore be it resolved that this government give our inshore fisheries the privilege to opt out of the mandatory Workers' Compensation program if they show proof of private insurance that covers their workers.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

RESOLUTION NO. 2201

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

Whereas Kathy Meekins and her sister April Findlay of Springhill travelled to Dublin, Ireland, to take part in the Give'r for Liver Marathon, which is coordinated by the Canadian Liver Foundation; and

Whereas the sisters participated in the 42-kilometre marathon in memory of Kathy Meekins' son, Matthew, who passed away from liver disease four years ago in his early 20s; and

Whereas the sisters started training for the marathon in June and have been fundraising along the way, raising over \$10,000 for the Liver Foundation of Canada as well as raising awareness about donating blood, organs, and tissue;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Kathy Meekins and April Findlay on their incredible journey and for raising awareness and funds for such an important cause.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 2202

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

Whereas Barrington youth Daniel Blinkhorn was presented with the Nova Scotia Medal of Bravery on November 17, 2010, by Premier Darrell Dexter for an act of heroism and courage that saved the life of his mother Sherry Blinkhorn; and

Whereas Daniel Blinkhorn, through his quick actions, was able to guide his mother with his voice to safety from their burning home in Loch Broom, Pictou County, on June 23, 2009; and

Whereas Daniel Blinkhorn, who was 15 years old at the time, re-entered the burning home to rescue his mother after escaping himself;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly commend Nova Scotia Medal of Bravery recipient Daniel Blinkhorn for his act of heroism and courage on June 23, 2009, that saved the life of his mother Sherry Blinkhorn.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Preston.

RESOLUTION NO. 2203

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

Whereas the East Preston United Baptist Church Prison Ministry will be celebrating their 30th Anniversary on November 20 and 21, 2010, with a church service and banquet; and

Whereas the ministry was founded in January 1980 by leader Dr. Joyce Ross with 31 volunteers and today they have 15, three of whom are the original members, namely Dr. Joyce Ross, Janette Brooks and Pamela Thomas; and

Whereas the ministry visits the Youth Training Centre in Waterville in the Spring and Fall, the Nova Scotia Institute in Truro once every month and the Central Nova Institute in Burnside once every month, plus two volunteers work one-on-one with those in the Springhill prison once a month;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House recognize the volunteers of the East Preston United Baptist Church Prison Ministry for their hard work and dedication over the past 30 years and wish them many more years of success in helping to turn around the lives of those in prison.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Inverness.

RESOLUTION NO. 2204

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

Whereas Charlene Cormier was presented with the 2010 Entrepreneur of the Year Award by InRich Business Development Centre; and

Whereas Ms. Cormier faced the challenges of starting up a business and met them with determination, hard work and passion; and

Whereas Charlene has achieved a lifelong dream of operating her own restaurant, Wabo's Pizza;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly commend Charlene on her entrepreneurial spirit and her contribution to the small business community of Nova Scotia.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

RESOLUTION NO. 2205

MR. BRIAN SKABAR: Mr. Speaker, we've already been introduced to Colin Brownell and his son Justin. Colin, would you please stand.

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

Whereas in the early evening of May 8, 2009, Colin Brownell was driving along Highway 6 through Linden, Nova Scotia, and saw a vehicle on its side. He looked into his rear view mirror and saw a person's hand pressing on the windshield of the burning vehicle and immediately returned to the accident site to assist; and

Whereas Colin Brownell proceeded to pull the vehicle into an upright position, break the window and pull the man who was trapped inside the vehicle to safety, through the broken driver's side window. By the time he was removed to a safe location the vehicle was full of smoke and in flames; and

Whereas Colin Brownell was recently presented with the Governor General of Canada Certificate of Commendation for this act of heroism and just this morning he was also appropriately awarded the Medal of Bravery by the Province of Nova Scotia as formal recognition of his courage and valour on that night on May 2009;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly honours and thanks Colin Brownell for his selflessness in risking his own life to save the life of another and congratulate him on receiving the Nova Scotia Medal of Bravery.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried. (Applause)

The honourable Minister of Health on an introduction.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to draw the attention of members of the House to our east gallery where we're joined today by Tim Holland. Tim is a medical student, fourth year, at Dalhousie and he is spending two weeks with myself and others in the Department of Health as part of his learning experience. So I would ask Tim to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: We're ready to go to Oral Question Period and just a couple of friendly reminders to direct all questions and answers through the Chair and, secondly, not to have any electronic equipment on for questions or answers. The time now is 2:41 p.m. and we'll go to 4:11 p.m.

The honourable member for Kings West.

ERD - LARSEN PACKERS: CLOSURE - ACTION PLAN

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, just about an hour ago we learned the upsetting news that an icon of Nova Scotia's agriculture industry will be shut down. The Larsen plant in Berwick will be closing and more than 300 people will be out of work. With Larsen's out of the picture, Berwick will lose 18 per cent of its tax rate. My question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development is, what plan of action are you prepared to take to help Berwick and the surrounding areas after this crushing blow to Berwick?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, it's a sad day when anyone in Nova Scotia loses their job. I certainly can sympathize deeply with this huge blow to the Town of Berwick. Certainly Labour and Workforce Development - I'm sure the minister is well aware of this - Labour and Workforce Development will be working with the employees through NSBI and the RDA in the area. We'll be doing anything and everything we can to ensure or to assist in whatever way we can. It's always unfortunate when people lose their jobs and I just - you know, there's not a good time to lose employment. We'll be working with the community, and with the employees, and with the employer.

MR. GLAVINE: For years, Mr. Speaker, I have questioned and petitioned both the Progressive Conservative and NDP Governments to examine the dire situation of our hog industry, knowing the connection to the Larsen plant and its viability, and nothing was done. Now the largest hog manufacturing product facility in the province is closing its doors. These are good jobs, good jobs that may now disappear entirely, leaving Kings County with a severe reduction in economic development. My question to the minister is, what will your department do to replace the more than 300 jobs with the closure of Larsen's?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, as I've already mentioned, unfortunately what I don't have is - I don't have a magic wand in my back pocket and, you know, for the people in Berwick and for anyone in Nova Scotia who loses a job, I wish I did. We will be working with the employer. We will be working with the employees. I think the most important thing here now is to work with them and I know, with my colleague to my left, that Labour and Workforce Development will be there as well.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, an anchor of our agriculture industry and a cornerstone of economic development in this region is gone. More than 300 families will be without employment and a steady income. Government must act now to establish a crisis management plan for the workers of Larsen's. So my final question to the Minister of Labour and Workforce Development is, will your department be on the ground immediately following the plant's closure to help workers transition and retrain as quickly as possible?

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, of course, we will react very quickly. We have teams coordinating services that will be able to step in as soon as possible. Obviously, or usually, the first reaction of employees when they hear this news is looking at whether or not they're eligible for EI and what they can do to retain their income. We're going to also be providing them with information and access to services through the regional development agency, the Career Resource Centre, and Nova Scotia Business Inc., to make sure that the necessary supports are in place for training and transitioning to, hopefully, other employment opportunities within that region.

[2:45 p.m.]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

PREM. - LARSEN PACKERS: JOB LOSS - PREVENTION

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Premier. According to media reports within the last hour, the Town of Berwick is receiving devastating news that Larsen Packers plans to lay off almost 300 employees. Simply put - this will cripple their economy. It is unfathomable to me that while this situation was deteriorating the Minister of Economic and Rural Development sat by and watched it happen. He did nothing while Scott McCain and Maple Leaf Foods announced a restructuring plan at the beginning of October - in fact, our caucus sent a letter to the minister on October 8th asking what his plans were to save the facility in the event of a major layoff.

We finally received a response two days ago, which I will table, Mr. Speaker, which confirmed what we knew all along - that the minister has been as ineffective on this file as he has been with rural economic development throughout Nova Scotia. My question to the Premier is, if your minister is out of the loop, Mr. Premier, please explain to this House what actions you took, if any, to save these jobs?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. McCain. I have, over that time, in fact offered him any assistance and support we could to make that plant more viable and to be able to assist in trying to keep those jobs in Berwick. Mr. McCain assured me that this was, as he put it, part of the economic gravity that was changing the industry in North America.

As regrettable as that is, he pointed out that with the withdrawal of support for the hog industry that took place over the last decade, and without the product here in the province, it didn't make sense for them to be bringing hogs from Manitoba to Nova Scotia for processing. It's a very unfortunate situation, of course we feel very deeply for the people of Berwick who lost their jobs and we are going to continue to do everything we can to try and assist and ameliorate the situation.

MR. PORTER: In a letter dated November 10th, which I just tabled, from the Minister of Economic and Rural Development, he says that Maple Leaf Foods remain open to further discussions with the province.

That was seven days ago. This letter would seem to indicate that as of one week ago the minister, the Premier, and his Cabinet were under the impression that Maple Leaf was also at least willing to discuss the options. It could also mean two other things, Mr. Speaker - the minister is so out of the loop that he believes anything anyone will tell him, or he knew the plant in Berwick was closing but chose to ignore it.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, it seems everybody knew except the employees at the plant - how long have you and your minister known that Maple Leaf was planning to lay off 300 employees at Larsen Packers?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the question, the viability of that plant, goes back many years. In large part the (Interruptions) Do you want an answer or do you not?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Now for a considerable period of time this plant has been under a great deal of stress. As I said earlier, we did make offers to the owners of the plant, to say how can we help in order to correct what is a structural change that is taking place in the economy. We sought to try and find ways to help.

They simply said that the changes - and there's no one cause for this, you know the high Canadian dollar, the manner in which the industry itself is repositioning to become specialized lines of production, all of those contributed to the situation. However, we have said to McCains that if we can be of assistance in helping to repurpose that plant, to find some alternatives for it, we would certainly be willing to do that.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, after 17 months into this term, we don't have any economic strategy, private sector employment in Nova Scotia is in a free-fall and the one economic policy the government has adopted is to raise taxes. My final question to the Premier is, when will his government put forward a coherent economic strategy for Nova Scotia that creates jobs and prosperity rather than crisis after crisis?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we're working with employers in the province. Thankfully the number of jobs in the province continues to rise. We'll be releasing very shortly an economic strategy. We have had one of the best councils on the economy that I struck. Business people from every sector across the province who have been providing advice to the government, they have confidence. The business people of this province have confidence in this government and I'm proud of that.

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

PREM.: TAX STRUCTURE - CHANGE

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the loss of the Larsen plant in Berwick is devastating for the local economy. About 18 per cent of the tax base for the Town of Berwick comes directly from this plant. Many of the workers live in the town and support local business. The workers have lost, the town has lost and our entire province has lost. My question to the Premier is, how many more businesses must leave Nova Scotia before you change the tax structure in this province to allow us to be competitive with our neighbours?

THE PREMIER: The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, we're a very competitive jurisdiction. The reality is that had nothing to do with the closure, it had nothing to do with taxes. It had to do with the fact that plants in the United States are now some 20 per cent more productive than the ones that are here. The costs associated from specialized plants that do only one line - whether it's bacon or sliced meats - meant that it was too difficult for this particular plant to be able to compete. As I said before, I think it's a terrible shame for that plant but the seeds that led to its closure go back many years.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, Maple Leaf in Berwick is gone, Maple Leaf is doing well in Moncton. Every day businesses in this province have to look at the bottom line and make decisions. Our tax structure is unfair. We have a 15 per cent HST compared to 13 per cent in New Brunswick. We have the highest gas taxes in the Maritimes, compounded by an HST increase. Our small business tax is too high and we start collecting it earlier than our neighbours. We are the only province in Atlantic Canada that still collects a capital tax on large corporations. We make it easier for companies to do business elsewhere instead of in Nova Scotia. My question to the Premier is, when will your government realize it cannot tax our province to prosperity?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I agree with that and that's why we have lowered - for the first time in decades the small business tax has been lowered. That's why we're phasing out the capital tax, that's why we took the tax off children's clothing, that's why we took the tax off home energy. We're going to continue with that program.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the small business tax does not take effect until January. This government will start collecting it sooner than our neighbouring provinces. Every other province is already lowering and have lowered the taxes that the Premier is referring to. Quite frankly, what we're trying to prevent is what happened in Berwick, jobs leaving this province and ending up in our neighbouring provinces because it is more friendly to business and the Premier is ignoring the facts. We are uncompetitive with our neighbours. It is not just my opinion, it is the opinion of Donald Savoie in his July report to this government, "I have long believed that a competitive tax regime is a powerful economic development instrument. Nova Scotia's tax structure is not competitive, at least when compared to other provinces."

My question to the Premier is, how many more businesses must close in this province or move elsewhere before you get the message?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as they say, you're entitled to your opinion but you're not entitled to the facts. The facts are that we are a very competitive jurisdiction. The fact is that we out-performed our neighbours on all economic indicators last year.

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

**PREM. - SOUTHWEST N.S.: JOB INCREASES
- DETAILS**

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, that leads right into it after listening to the Premier. The words uttered in this House make a difference. Nova Scotians depend on us to speak the truth. At our best, Question Period helps to illuminate the reality of our province and its issues. But more and more frequently, the so-called answers we receive from the Premier are hollow, just like the last one.

Yesterday, in a response to the member for Yarmouth, he made the following claim, "The number of jobs in southwestern Nova Scotia that were related to the tourism industry actually rose this year." My question to the Premier is, what evidence are you basing that statement on?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, of course I'm basing it on the departmental examination that was done in the routine course of business before I attended there yesterday.

MR. MCNEIL: I'm sure the Premier would be willing to table the document that says jobs related to the tourism industry in southwestern Nova Scotia are going up. Credibility in the Premier is important. Nova Scotians deserve to know that when he speaks, his words reflect reality. Rodd Hotels & Resorts, owners of the two largest hotels in Yarmouth, lost \$745,000 in revenue as a direct result of this government's decision to cut the ferry. They have laid off employees and cut back on the hours of others.

In the real world of business, when revenue is down, jobs are lost. Just ask the ferry workers - more people who have lost their jobs because of this government. My question to the Premier is, are you standing by your comment that tourism jobs are up in southwestern Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker, and I'm proud of it.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, let's review the facts. American visitation and tourism in Yarmouth are down 40 per cent to 100 per cent. A report presented to the Region of Queen's Council shows a 61 per cent drop in the number of New England visitors to the

tourism bureaus in Liverpool, Caledonia, and Fort Point Lighthouse in Liverpool this summer. In fact, we have no information to support the Premier's claim that tourism jobs are up in southwestern Nova Scotia. I suspect in the heat of the moment yesterday he just made up his answer. My question to the Premier is, who's misleading Nova Scotians - the tourism operators of southwestern Nova Scotia or you?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition brings forward things that are patently untrue. They don't reflect (Interruptions) Because he talks about New England visitors . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, he talks about New England visitors. He fails to talk about the fact that the market for southwestern Nova Scotia is actually the Maritimes or the fact that we invested a lot more money in advertising and marketing that district throughout the market which is most important to them, which is what created more tourism-related jobs.

[3:00 p.m.]

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

PREM. - POLICIES: EFFECTS - ADMIT

MR. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. He spoke a moment ago about how the economic gravity is changing in this province. The only thing holding this province down is the tax and economic policies of that government. Today is just the most recent example. Common sense tells us that when you raise taxes and add to our debt, it is real jobs that suffer in the end. That is the sad story that we hear today as a result of what's happened at Larsen Packers. The reason is that Maple Leaf Foods, the owner of that plant, had a choice.

As I get to my question, I just remind the Premier that when they consolidated their operations they had a choice of many provinces to choose from and at the end of the day, Nova Scotia was not one of them. My question to the Premier is, what further proof does he need that his policies are taking our province in the wrong direction and real people are paying the price?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, one thing is for certain - part of the gravity of the situation in this province is created by 10 years of poor administration by a former government that created a \$13 billion millstone. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order.

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party on your first supplementary.

MR. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, that answer is cold comfort to the 300 people who we are thinking about over here today, as they go through a very tough day. A good government does not dwell on the past; they work with companies like Maple Leaf Foods to see that they can survive and thrive in our province. My question to the Premier is, what discussions took place between his office and other officials of government to try and save that plant and why did they fail?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, first of all, unfortunately, the past created by the former government weighs heavily upon the shoulders of all Nova Scotians, because they're still paying for those mistakes. The reality is, I spoke with Mr. McCain, and I offered him our assistance. What he told us was that this is the first step in their consolidation, that unfortunately, eventually there will be many fewer plants in this country. Obviously we wish that wasn't the case but that is the reality of the economics of that business.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the best thing that we can do today for the people of that plant, and in fact for the entire agricultural industry, is be constructive and learn the lessons of what happened here today and not dwell on things that may or may not have happened dozens of years ago. My question for the Premier is, other than promises of more studies and some future strategy, what is your government actually going to do to support the agriculture industry in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the member opposite doesn't want to reflect back on the withdrawal of support for the agricultural industries that took place under the former government, particularly the pork industry. But what we are going to do, of course, is to work with the current owner of that plant to see if it is possible to re-purpose it to find another industry that may be able to take advantage of what is already there. Hopefully we will be able to bring jobs back to that area. We're going to do our best to see if that can happen.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

JUSTICE: BURNSIDE JAIL - ASSAULTS

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, on Monday night, correctional officers at the Burnside jail suffered yet another assault. Three guards were assaulted, two of whom were taken to a hospital suffering from injuries, such as a bite wound and a dislocated shoulder. The Justice Department refused to release this information to Nova Scotians when they became aware of it.

Two patterns are clear. Since August of this year, there have been six correctional officers injured while on duty that we know about. The other pattern is just as concerning and that is the Justice Minister's unwillingness to face the public and provide them with the facts as soon as they arise. My question to Minister of Justice is, with six assaults that we know about in just over three months, will the Justice Minister explain to Nova Scotians how he justifies these assaults as just part of the day-to-day function at the Burnside jail?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I too share deep concern any time an employee of Nova Scotia's justice system is in a confrontation and gets injured. My sympathies go out to any one in those circumstances who may have been injured. What's critical here, is that in the past year and a half, since taking over this portfolio, we have done a number of things to reduce the impact on our employees within the corrections facility, such as putting forth the best training for them. We have a zero tolerance policy that each and every time that someone is mishandled or abused in any manner, it's under a criminal investigation. We have improved the quality of the video cameras and so on so that we get more accurate and up-to-date information.

We have also put forth a new system where the monitoring is going to be installed hopefully within the next while, so we can track the movements of the correctional officer within the facility to provide additional safety to them plus give additional data back overall within the system. So I want to assure the people of Nova Scotia that the institution is safe, that there are professionals working in there and they have my full support, and I'm committed 100 per cent to them.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, six assaults since August would lend one to believe that the minister's efforts don't seem to be having their necessary intent. The Premier claimed in this House that he was running a transparent government, yet his Minister of Justice has been caught twice trying to hide information from Nova Scotians. Last week it was the mistaken release of an offender which the minister sat on the information for over 24 hours before releasing it to the public after his department was contacted by the media. Yesterday we learned that the Minister of Justice knew Monday night that three guards were assaulted at the Burnside jail yet, once again, it took the media to get the minister to disclose the details.

So my question to the minister is, when will he finally put the interests of Nova Scotians ahead of the political interest of his NDP Government?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for that question. I want to make it very clear that I spent a lifetime on the front lines of the justice system - over 35 years - and I take the concerns that affect each employee who works within that system very seriously. On the issue of communicating with the public on the evening in question that that information came in, the information was released within 24 hours and in all likelihood in the future I would prefer that it's out sooner, we will work very hard. I had discussions already with my staff in regard to that and they're committed to working in a collaborative

manner to ensure that good communications continue with Nova Scotians and reassure them that they are first and foremost in our minds.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, with every hour that goes by, the minister's policy on disclosure of information seems to be changing because in The ChronicleHerald today he is basically saying, why should I bother telling Nova Scotians every time a guard is assaulted at the Burnside jail, why would they want to know this information?

Mr. Speaker, what message is this government sending to jail guards, teachers or civil servants when the minister says that being assaulted at their workplace is simply part of the day-to-day function of their work? Twice now this minister has been caught withholding information from Nova Scotians. So my question to the Premier is, when will he finally demand that his Minister of Justice show the transparency that he claims his government is giving Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, to be honest, what I find remarkable is they're now complaining about delays of 24 hours. This is a remarkable response rate and only underlines and proves the very point that the member is trying to make, that this is an open and transparent government.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Cape Breton North.

JUSTICE - MIN.: RESPONSIBILITIES - EVASION

HON. CECIL CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Justice. Here we have another week and another bungled cover-up by the Minister of Justice. Yesterday we learned through the media, who learned it through the union, that the minister attempted to hide a lockdown at Nova Scotia's largest jail, a disturbance that resulted in workers being injured. Time and time again we see this minister attempt to cover up matters in the criminal justice system and when he's caught out, he places blame everywhere except where it belongs and that's squarely on his shoulders.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister do the right thing for a change and apologize to Nova Scotians for evading the responsibilities that come with his job and eroding the confidence that Nova Scotians have in him and in the province's justice system?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I reassure the people of Nova Scotia that I'm 100 per cent committed, I'm very focused on this job, and I look forward to addressing the concerns. Our information gets out in a timely manner and according to the policy that the previous Minister of Justice put in; I had an opportunity to read it electronically earlier today, to get the clarity of that policy. The policy in there states that the information is to be

gathered and put out within 24 hours once the information has been verified. We were well within the time of getting the information out.

MR. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that's hogwash and Nova Scotians know the same. In September, with great fanfare, the Minister of Justice boasted about the changes, the additional personnel and more resources at the Burnside jail. In a press release the minister said, that the escalating inmate violence at Burnside facility is not acceptable and will not be tolerated, yet yesterday he just dismissed it as business as usual. What he didn't say in that press release was that if violence does occur at the jail, in spite of the minister's tough talk, he will not tell Nova Scotians, even though because of the policy that's in place he should do it and why this minister has to wait for the media to hold him to account to do the right thing.

Yesterday the minister said Nova Scotians do not want to know about violence and injury at the Burnside jail. Who is he to decide what Nova Scotians want to know and why won't he follow the policies that are in place for him to do the right thing in his portfolio?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous Minister of Justice, this Justice Minister has a zero tolerance to violence. (Interruptions) Not only that, on each . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. The honourable Minister of Justice has the floor.

MR. LANDRY: On each and every time, unlike the previous administration, that a correctional officer is abused in any manner by an inmate, that is subject to a criminal investigation. That's what this government is doing, we have zero tolerance and we take action which is different than in the past.

MR. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians are becoming increasingly concerned about what is actually going on in the Justice Department. Cover-ups, denials, the blame game have shaken the integrity of this minister and confirmed for many that he's just not up to the job. Will the minister finally step up, show leadership and take immediate action to fix the mess that he has made and get his officials to do their jobs as he said they would?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I'm very glad and very happy to stand up and state the following: since coming into this position we have added vests, added security to the individual corrections officer; we have added staff to the institution; we have added further administration support; we have checks and balances in the system that did not exist before; and we're adding an electronic ground system to add security.

I want to reiterate to Nova Scotians that this government, this minister has taken action because the previous administration sat by and did nothing.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HEALTH - YARMOUTH: PHYSICIANS - RECRUITMENT

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that between 3,500 and 8,000 residents in Yarmouth do not have access to a family physician. This is not a new problem in Yarmouth and it's certainly not unique in the province. As the Minister of Health is more than aware, this places a tremendous burden on the ER in Yarmouth and it is becoming increasingly frustrating for the residents and hospital staff - and this problem is only going to get worse. My question to the Minister of Health is, what role will the province play to ensure that we are able to recruit physicians and retain them in Yarmouth?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for bringing an important issue to the floor of the House. It is very frustrating not to have a family doctor when you need health care. The area that he speaks of in Yarmouth is a priority for the Department of Health. We had three new CAPP doctors take up practice in Yarmouth. We had another two start in Yarmouth this week and there is a third physician who will begin very soon. This is because that area is a priority. I understand that the medical school, in fact, has designated two clinical residency opportunities for medical students in that area because medical students who practice for a period of time are exposed and therefore more likely to stay in an area after they've had that exposure.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues with physicians who come to Yarmouth, through the CAPP, is that they tend to only fulfill their four-year contract and we've had a very hard time retaining those physicians.

[3:15 p.m.]

The municipal units have stepped up to the plate offering financial incentives to recruit and retain doctors. The DHA is doing what it can with what it has, but with the exception of a few provincial incentive programs that have existed for years, Mr. Speaker, the province isn't doing what it needs to do right now to help our area out. My question to the minister is, when was the last time the province reviewed its incentive programs to see if they're competitive and if what is being offered attracts family physicians and keeps them there in rural communities?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health reviews, on a regular basis, the issues with respect to recruitment and retainment of physicians around the province. The member is correct, we do have a number of programs to recruit and attract doctors to the DHAs, including a debt assistance program, return of service agreements, program support, rural contact support with physicians who are deemed eligible for the CAPP program, for example, and other financial incentives.

We will continue to use and incentivize, to work with our DHAs, to work with the municipal governments and other community partners to make rural areas and under-serviced areas attractive places for physicians and their families to locate.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it seems that these incentive programs aren't allowing the province to be competitive because we are having these problems in Yarmouth and across the province. In Yarmouth there are over 3,500 - perhaps 8,000 residents - who don't have a family physician. Bernie Melanson who lives in Yarmouth cannot access a family physician in his own community. He is now forced to travel two hours to Wolfville to see a family doctor. Some of my constituents are forced to travel to Halifax.

To make matters worse, Bernie and others have been caught in a revolving door - physicians coming in and out of the area - which doesn't help to ensure good continuity of care. My question to the minister is, what is the long-term plan to ensure that local med students become doctors in Nova Scotia and stay here?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member, there are a number of programs and approaches that we take in the Department of Health. With respect to the long-term plan for physician services in the entire province, the Department of Health is developing a doctor-human resource plan for the entire province and it will look at those areas where there have been recurring difficulties over a period of time and listen to the communities and work with the DHAs to identify the things that we need to put in place.

The medical school, in fact, is a very important partner in looking at how we recruit and retain doctors in rural Nova Scotia. The example I gave around the clinical program opportunity for med students to go into those areas is a very important change that they have initiated, which allows students to be exposed to those communities and thereby giving a greater possibility that they would want to practice in that kind of area.

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

PREM. -JOB LOSSES: PROBLEM - ADMIT

MR. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the issue of job creation and job loss is a very serious matter. Last week in this House, in Question Period, I asked the Premier about the most recent Statistics Canada Report that showed that in one month we had lost, as a province, over 8,600 jobs. Now it turns out that was one of the largest single monthly drops in our province's history. This was all before the sad news about Larsen Packers today. My question to the Premier, through you, sir, is, will he now admit that there truly is a problem, before any more damage is done?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out that day, the net number of jobs in this province this year is actually up. That's good news for the province. We're working every day to encourage more investment. We've just set up the new Venture Capital Fund, which is an opportunity for us to bring together investment dollars, to be able to put money on the front end for start-up costs for new businesses. It's one of the examples of the constructive approach that this government is taking.

MR. BAILLIE: Obviously the Premier thinks all is rosy in Nova Scotia today. He may be the only one - certainly the only one in the Valley - that thinks that, but it's good to know that he thinks that. Statistics Canada reports that only two other provinces have unemployment rates higher than ours today, which is a new low for Nova Scotia. My question to the Premier is, how does he expect any Nova Scotian to have hope that things will get better when they stick so stubbornly to policies that are obviously taking us in the wrong direction?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the policy of the government, of course, is to build confidence in our business community, it's to rely on them for advice and take the direction they give, it's to make constructive changes such as lowering the small business tax.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat that common sense tells us that higher taxes and more debt do not create jobs in our province, they do the opposite and we see every day more and more examples of how it is proving to be really true. Through you, sir, my final question to the Premier is, what will it take beyond the announcement like today's with Larsen's for the government to see the light, admit its mistakes and reverse course before we have more announcements like the sad one today?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it is indeed a sad day when people lose employment, particularly in an industry that has been around for a number of years and it is unfortunate that the economics of that was influenced, at least in part, by the policy of withdrawing support from that industry over many years.

We are moving forward, we are bringing new industries into this province. For example, look at the positive effect of the partnership of this province with DSME, the re-purposing of the Trenton plant, the creation of a new industry out of an industry that failed under the watch of the former government.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay.

**COM. SERV. - N.S. FAMILIES: ASSISTANCE
- DETAILS**

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today it was reported that the use of food banks has risen by 33 per cent over the last two years. People resort to food banks when their cost of living is higher than their income. The NDP has increased Nova Scotians' cost of

living with a 2 per cent HST hike, the NDP electricity tax, and slashed the amount that families get for heating assistance. My question to the Minister of Community Services is, other than tax hikes and reduced assistance for heat, is your government doing anything to help Nova Scotia's families?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the honourable member for his question. I know that there are many difficult times and that food banks are doing a fabulous job to help us in the Province of Nova Scotia because when it comes to poverty and needs, it is something that we have to come together as a community and as corporations.

This government has made more progress in the area of helping impoverished people than any other government in many years in terms of investing \$72 million in the affordable tax credits, making changes with respect to the ESIA redesign. There is a whole list that I can go through of changes that we have brought in today and there are more to come.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, a Feed Nova Scotia survey showed that over 22,000 Nova Scotians used the food bank in March 2010. My question to the Minister of Community Services is, when will our government introduce a specific plan to reduce dependence on food banks in this province?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: What we have done is actually put more money in the pockets of Nova Scotians, that's very important. Instead of an increase of \$4 to \$6 a month that has happened for income assistance recipients, we have put \$26 a month more. It doesn't sound like a lot, but it is like five times more.

We are working with stakeholders with respect to the poverty issues. Those discussions before very rarely took place and that's what I'm very proud of. We are not just doing it alone, we've invited the community and the advocacy groups together and they are working with us to make a difference for Nova Scotians.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians are hungry, they're facing heating crises and they can't afford their basic needs. They want a very specific plan on how those things can be addressed as soon as possible. Today's report also told us that 33 per cent of those relying on food banks are children. My question to the Minister of Community Services is, how can the government talk about supporting today's families and tomorrow's leaders when we don't even have a plan to feed them?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, what we have done as a government is put more money into people's pockets. We also have been working, as I mentioned, with stakeholders to go forward with the poverty reductions. We have an ESIA redesign on the go. There are many aspects that we are focusing on and I'm very proud that our government has realized and understands that there needs to be a plan. I would say this is the first

government that actually has come forth with a very strong plan to make a better life for Nova Scotians.

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

**PREM. PROPERTY-TAX PAYERS: INCREASES
- PROTECTION**

MR. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. After promising not to raise taxes, among other promises, the government did increase the HST by 2 per cent last July 1st. Hopefully the Premier can understand why the public would now be skeptical about anything this government has to say about taxes. Now we hear the government is reviewing the municipal assessment cap system, which has protected property-tax payers against sneaky tax increases in the past. My question to the Premier is, can you assure property-tax payers that they will be protected from more sneaky tax increases?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, what I can assure them is that there is a review that's underway. That was something that was committed to; of course we're going to follow through on it. I can tell you that I believe that the assessment cap has worked, it has worked to protect people from the kinds of increases that you have talked about. The question is how we balance the concerns of the municipalities about the manner in which it operates with respect to their citizens. They have a concern that is associated with respect to how that shifts the actual burden of the tax rate and that's what we're trying to do with it.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for his answer. Unfortunately, the last time we heard him and his government talk about balance, we ended up with a 2 per cent HST increase as the answer. That is why Nova Scotians are concerned as the government engages in this cap review. My question to the Premier is, if he believes as he says that the cap is working as intended, why then is his government launching a review if it truly is going to protect taxpayers in the end?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my previous answer, the municipalities have raised questions about the effective nature of the tax and whether or not it actually shifts the tax burden. If the assessments stay low and do not reflect increases in the market, then lower-income Nova Scotians may end up bearing more of that cost than higher-income ones. We're looking at that, we understand the argument that the municipality has made. We're doing a review and we'll look a whether or not that's a reasonable argument and whether or not there's anything that can be done about it because, as the member points out, what happened in the past is although the tax rate wouldn't go up they would depend on the assessment rate to go up and, therefore, people would end up paying more.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier spoke of shifting the tax burden. Sadly, the only shift that has been going on in Nova Scotia is a shift from the pockets of taxpayers and

into the coffers of that government, and that is what we are trying to prevent from happening another time. So my question to the Premier is this, will he assure all taxpayers that they will be protected from any further sneaky increases by this government?

[3:30 p.m.]

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the question of the assessment cap applies to municipalities and it would allow not the provincial government but, of course, municipal governments to raise their tax rates as opposed to affecting the province - or more particularly allowing them to benefit from increases in assessments that would effectively increase their taxes, but my recollection is that the financial issues that plague our province at this time are a direct result of very poor decisions that were made by the previous administration.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

COM. SERV.: YOUTH IN CARE - OUT OF PROV.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Community Services.

Recent media stories, once again this Fall, have highlighted the struggles of some grandparents of a troubled youth in Cole Harbour, a troubled youth who has been in the care of the province for the last two years and who had been shipped out of province; fortunately, now he's back at home. The unfortunate part of that side of the story is there's no program or plan in place for that youth. My question to the minister today is, how many more youth, in the care of the province and the minister, currently reside outside of the province and outside of the country?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the honourable member for bringing that question forward. As the honourable member knows, I'm not able to talk about a personal situation, however, he probably understands, because I know he has worked on many of these cases, the fact is that the child welfare system is very complex, it's very overwhelming. It's overwhelming for the child, as it is for the family, and there are a lot of emotions involved surrounding that and, of course, my primary goal and this government's primary goal, and the primary goal of Community Services, is the benefits and the care that is needed to be provided to that youth because we want that youth to succeed. So we do what we can in order to provide those supports for him or her to succeed.

MR. ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's comments, but I don't believe I heard an answer on that number, so I'll ask again in the future for that.

Mr. Speaker, these children who currently reside out of the province or out of the country currently cost this government upwards of \$100,000 to \$500,000 a year. My next

question to the minister is, why hasn't your government taken that opportunity to influx that money into the systems and programs that can keep these children at home and connected to their families?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, thank you, again, for the question. One of the things that we have to realize is the fact that some of these children and these youth have such complex needs that it doesn't matter what type of services we try to provide, we just don't have that ability to do that in the Province of Nova Scotia. So what we do is we take each case individually. If the child can stay within the Province of Nova Scotia and have that connection with their family, most certainly that is our number one priority. If not, then we try to work very closely with the family to ensure that they are aware and understand what needs to take place in order to provide the best supports for their loved one.

MR. ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, I guess my final question will be centred around the Wood Street Centre, the secure treatment facility in Truro. Two years ago I was informed by the deputy minister that we were within a two-year process of having an expansion to deal with some of these more complex troubled youth who are currently residing outside of the province and outside of the country. As of today, I'm being told that it's two years away, so that's four years total. Again, I'll ask the minister, when can we see a concrete continuum of care for children who are in care of this minister being kept in this province?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, the construction of the Wood Street Centre - we have invested \$6 million for that facility and that facility is moving along with its construction. In the meantime, we are looking at the fact that we work, once again, very closely with the family. We provide parenting supports. We provide tutoring. We look at it at an individual level and work very hard to make sure with these very complex needs that the child is the number one priority for us. I know that can be very emotional and very difficult. I have a child of my own, and I know that there are times that if I have to discipline him, it hurts me, or I may think one kind of discipline is different from what another person thinks. It is a very emotional situation, but I can guarantee you that the Department of Community Services and all the staff work very diligently to make sure that the children and youth are taken care of and their needs are being met.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

PREM.: JUSTICE MIN. - PROBLEMS

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, needless to say it was slightly amusing to hear the current Minister of Justice mocking his predecessor in light of the information that we have just learned. It would appear that not only does the current Minister of Justice have a hard time with keeping inmates who should be in jail rather than roaming free, but he also seems to be having a hard time keeping track of when they've actually finished serving their sentence.

For a government that continues to say they're looking to identify savings, it must come as quite a shock to Nova Scotians to learn that the Burnside jail actually kept an inmate locked up for 85 days longer than his actual sentence. My question to the Premier is, how much more embarrassment do you have to put up with for your Minister of Justice before you realize he just isn't up to the job?

THE PREMIER: Apparently, Mr. Speaker, they think it's humorous. The reality is that this was a matter that occurred at the court level. As I understand it, the facility was under the impression that the sentence was of a particular length. I understand that the inmate complained about his continued detention. He contacted his lawyer, who actually went to the court and had to listen to the tape and then brought that to the attention of the appropriate staff.

No matter how you frame it, it's not acceptable. I agree with that. I think what we need to do is to continue to work with the staff at every level, whether it's at the courthouse, whether it's - for example, and I'm sure the member who asked the question would appreciate this, one of the questions that was in my mind when I heard this story immediately was, were there not sufficient resources in Legal Aid to be able to assist this person sooner so that could have been corrected sooner? I don't know where the problem was in the system, but it's unacceptable, of course, to infringe on someone's rights by keeping them in detention longer than they should be.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I know this is going to be shocking news for the Premier, but I regret to inform him that the minister responsible for Burnside also happens to be the minister responsible for our court system. If it broke down in our court system or broke down in Burnside, it all falls to the feet of the Minister of Justice - someone who stood in this House earlier, mocked his predecessor in saying how he was going to do things differently, yet he is around getting the police to call inmates to tell them please report back to jail, and not letting Nova Scotians know. Then today you're having to face the embarrassment of an inmate being kept not one week, not two weeks, but three months' extra time when you're telling Nova Scotians it's time to tighten their belts. How can you continually explain such a waste of money and an infringement of someone's rights by your Minister of Justice and continue to have confidence in his abilities?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, he takes what I said, rephrases it and asks it to me as a question. I've already said that these things are unacceptable; the minister has said that he is looking at where the breakdowns took place. I explained to him my understanding of how it took place - maybe he has some other information, but it took place under a set of circumstances that certainly wouldn't be foreseeable by the administration. So the job, of course, is to make sure that these kinds of incidents don't continue to happen.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians have police officers who are working to keep our streets safe, they have Crown Prosecutors who are working to put criminals in jail, and you have judges imposing sentences, yet at the end of the day they all rely on the

Department of Justice to get it right. And yet time and time again we hear of these instances where Nova Scotians' confidence is being eroded, and a minister who said he was going to do things differently yet you continue to see these embarrassing statements.

Earlier today the Premier said that the Minister of Justice was responsible in announcing that the three guards who were assaulted, within 24 hours the public was informed. The Premier should know that no press release came from the Department of Justice. The only way the public got informed is because of a press scrum outside of this Chamber where only three members of the press were present - no release ever came from your department or from the Department of Justice.

Will the Premier now confirm whether or not his Minister of Justice respected the 24-hour policy and issued a press release informing Nova Scotians of three guards being assaulted on Monday night?

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, that question went in about 15 different directions before it finally got to where it landed. I believe that the minister, of course, complied with the rules as they exist in the policy. I think that forthrightly coming into a scrum and explaining the circumstances is one way to communicate through the media; we do it here all the time. I think ultimately people are seeing a level of transparency and dedication to this job that they have not seen in many years.

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

HPP: LYME DISEASE - INFO. CAMPAIGN

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, residents of Bedford-Birch Cove have reason to be concerned about blacklegged ticks and the disease that humans can catch from them, Lyme disease. There are a number of confirmed cases in my riding.

This past summer, Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed of Capital Health made it clear that ticks can drop off birds - in fact, they can drop off deer or rodents, so infected ticks can be found anywhere in the province, even outside the four areas identified as having established blacklegged tick populations and the bacteria that causes Lyme. In other words, you can catch Lyme disease even if you're not in one of the four identified areas.

Now I know the province has posted information on the department Web site and produced a brochure. My question is, could the Minister of Health Promotion and Protection please indicate why there has not been a more active, province-wide public information campaign?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, Lyme disease, indeed, is a serious disease and I know that people are concerned about it. We've identified several areas in the

province where blacklegged ticks that are carriers of this disease have been identified, in Pictou County, and on the South Shore in the Lunenburg area.

Mr. Speaker, we work with Natural Resources to monitor the province, to identify where else these ticks may be. We work with Doctors Nova Scotia and the medical community in terms of how to identify and how to treat this disease. We provide a lot of public information, distributing pamphlets and leaflets as well as electronic information on Web sites through each district health authority's public health office.

[3:45 p.m.]

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, the province identifies that only 50 cases of Lyme disease have been identified in this province since 2002. In fact, the information sent this summer to physicians may be deflating these numbers - I'll table that information. Let me give you an example. Doctors are told that they must notify Public Health of a confirmed case of Lyme disease when (a) there is a lab confirmation or (b) when the following three criteria are met: (1) cases with a compatible clinical picture, which means the patient is presenting the symptoms of Lyme disease; (2) exposure to one of those four identified areas; and (3) treatment has been prescribed.

That means if you contracted Lyme disease in a place other than the four identified areas, the physician doesn't have to report the case to Public Health. My question to the minister is, does this not artificially deflate the number of reported Lyme disease cases here in Nova Scotia?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member, we know people are concerned about Lyme disease, it's been in the media a lot. We do have a program and a requirement that verified cases of Lyme disease be reported to our Public Health officials. We do track these numbers, we work very closely with Health Canada as well, and we will continue to do so.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, because Lyme disease is of great concern in my riding, I have organized a public meeting for next Wednesday night. I attempted to get someone, anyone, from Capital Health to come out and address my community's concerns. But I was told that public meetings were not part of Capital Health's communications strategy for Lyme disease. My question to the minister is, did you direct Capital Health not to hold public meetings on the issue of Lyme disease?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I know that officials from the Department of Health Promotion and Protection have attended many meetings on Lyme disease in the honourable member's constituency in just the short time that I've been minister. I certainly don't direct staff not to attend meetings on matters of public health.

The Public Health/Medical Health officers in the DHAs are very professional people with very professional ethics and values. They make their own professional judgments on their schedules and when they attend meetings. I certainly don't direct them on how to conduct their business in that regard.

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

JUSTICE - MIN.: BUNGLING - EXPLAIN

HON. CECIL CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, yet again, the media are reporting on the incompetence of this Minister of Justice. This time it turns out, it has been reported that the minister held an inmate at Burnside 85 days after his sentence was over. How does the minister explain his latest bungling that further demonstrates he's not up to the job of being the Minister of Justice?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. First off, there is an incident that happened there and I've already been interviewed once in regard to this matter, so it is out there before the press, and my latest statistics show me the facts that I have to this point is it's actually 43 days. Right on that point, to start with, I want to clearly say to the individual it occurred to, I apologize deeply to the individual who's affected by that. I also want to report to this House that immediately upon being made aware of this instance, and in comparison to the issue of last week, I've asked for an internal investigation to be done in a very timely manner to get the facts of what's going on in that department, so we can get recommendations and put forth solutions to the problems that we find we are being faced with at this time. So from this government's perspective, we take action, we don't sit around.

MR. CLARKE: Yes, the minister doesn't sit around, Mr. Speaker, but an inmate had to sit around 85 more days because of his incompetence. The now Premier, when in Opposition one time with justice issues, was quoted as saying: It further shakes the confidence the people have in the justice system - that was quoted by Darrell Dexter, then Leader of the Opposition. Then another member of the NDP, the member for Timberlea-Prospect, said in his quotes around justice issues, that's not the way you do business.

Well, apparently things have changed a lot in a short period of time since that lot formed government and are now wreaking havoc on the justice system. Is it a case that the minister was too busy releasing prisoners while ignoring justice policy and jail lockdowns, that he held a person who served his term by over a quarter of a year? This minister's incompetence is without excuse. Will he finally do the right thing and admit he and his portfolio are out of control?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, thank you to that member for the question. As I stated, I think my fact is right now it's 43 days. Whether that's accurate or not, we will certainly get clarity. As being out of control, we're absolutely in control. We understand that there are

gaps in the system, that we took over significant problems in the previous administration. We're working through them. We will continue to be very diligent to address the issues and we do know that there are some concerns there to be addressed.

MR. CLARKE: Mr. Speaker, there's something ironic about how all of a sudden he'll investigate keeping someone in too long, but he won't initiate an investigation when he lets people out too early. It just goes to show you the inconsistency and the incompetence of this minister and this NDP Government. It's bad enough the minister has no idea what's going on within his portfolio, meanwhile the media know more about what's going on in the Justice Department than this minister, his officials, or even the Premier for that matter. Why is it that the media continually have to do your job, minister, rather than you doing your job as you were supposed to?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I think at this stage, on this issue, we're a little bit premature to make accusations. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Justice has the floor.

MR. LANDRY: What's critical that we do, is that we get the exact facts of what has actually occurred here, and that once we have the facts, that we address the gap in the system that occurred there and that we take positive action to reduce such incidents or to eliminate them totally. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

TIR - BURNSIDE EXPRESSWAY: TENDER - TIME FRAME

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal would well know the importance of the Burnside Expressway. As a critical piece for Nova Scotia and future competitiveness in both the province and HRM, it's a critical linkage between all regions: the airport, the port and the Atlantic Gateway - Halifax Logistics Park. As the Burnside News has reported, that critical piece of infrastructure is needed before Burnside strangles itself. Now the former Tory Government said it was a priority, but they did nothing; the NDP said in Opposition that it was a priority, yet they've done nothing. There have been public consultations and no one has questioned the need for this. Will the minister please tell this House today when that project will be tendered?

HON. WILLIAM ESTABROOKS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for a question that is of some consequence, particularly to the continuing growth in the Burnside area.

As the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, I am fully aware of the complicated transportation problems that we have in an area of growth of that significance, and I know the member opposite has the concern of that particular area because

it's in his constituency. It has been discussed with staff. We are continuing to look at it as a priority item, but at this time I'm not prepared to divulge to the House whether there is a tender going to be called immediately and whether the Burnside project will be fast-tracked, if that's appropriate.

MR. SPEAKER: Before we go on to the next question, I just want to remind members that there's a bit too much chatter back and forth in the Chamber and it's to be addressed through the Chair.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East has the floor.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I'm beginning to wonder whether it's delayed because the Minister of Justice is worried there might be a new escape route for prisoners from Burnside. The fact is, the minister's own department made a public commitment in January of last year that the project would be completed by the end of 2011. At a public meeting held last Spring, his department reaffirmed that the project would be completed by the end of 2011. We have seen no construction, no news that the department has even purchased the land to build the project, and yet it's a project that will take 12 months to construct.

In Opposition, the former member for Dartmouth North, Jerry Pye, and the current member for the riding spoke (Interruptions) Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't clap too soon, because those two members said that the NDP believed the project was a priority, but now the question for the minister is, will he tell the House whether his government threw out the department's commitment to complete the project by 2011 when they threw out the member for Dartmouth North?

MR. ESTABROOKS: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to thank the member for that question or how it was worded. We're talking on a subject of importance and the member for Dartmouth North has brought the concern to my attention. He's done it in the fashion of his predecessor when we talked about the importance of a transportation link such as the Burnside Expressway. It's just inappropriate to talk about using it as an escape route for inmates.

I'm aware of the fact that my staff has in the past publicly made a commitment to the extent that this should be done and should be done as soon as possible. I can tell the member opposite that it is under consideration. There are, however, some financial considerations that I am balancing in the department. When I am looking at the demands that come from this side of the House - requests that come from this side of the House - when I look at some of the requests that come from that particular side of the House, I'm balancing some of those particular requests in other constituencies throughout the province compared to the benefits of this particular project. When that decision is made, the member opposite and the members of this House will be informed.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, the minister seems to forget that his department has on two occasions publicly made a commitment to have this project completed by the end of 2011. Twice his department has made that commitment, yet it appears that - just like the jail, just like the ferry, just like any other project that isn't in an NDP riding - it's been thrown out. This is old-time Buchanan-style politics at its very best. In 2009, the NDP said, "This is a project that requires leadership . . . Rodney MacDonald has not displayed the leadership it takes to move this project from paper to reality."

Now it seems this Premier and this government aren't showing that leadership either. When will this minister and the NDP finally show some leadership and get a plan in place that will have this project completed by the end of 2011 as has been twice committed by his department?

MR. ESTABROOKS: Mr. Speaker, framing a question in this House is of some significance. Framing a question specifically when you're looking at the fact and you're referencing past Premiers and calling them by name, which is inappropriate - in addition to the fact that you're referring to Senator Buchanan, who in his day historically made some decisions in this House that perhaps we can differ with, but I can assure you that a department commitment is a commitment that is brought to the minister's decision table and that decision will be made by that minister, not by the department.

[4:00 p.m.]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

PREM. - UNSM FUNDING: DRINKING WATER - IMPACT

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Premier.

You've informed the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities to prepare for structural changes in the funding they receive from the province - will the Premier advise Nova Scotians today whether the proposed changes will ever impact the safety of drinking water in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, of course, the safety of drinking water in the province is of utmost concern to the province and we intend to see to it that the standards that are set out are adhered to.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, the mayor and town council in Hantsport have undertaken a \$9,000 pilot project looking at ways to reduce THMs in their drinking water - THMs have been linked to cancer in drinking water. They're doing this in order to meet the Department of Environment's regulations concerning the level of THMs in public water supplies. The cost for a full-blown THM reduction program over time in Hantsport ranges

anywhere from \$300,000 to \$1 million. My question to the Premier is, what is this government saying to municipal units facing such challenges?

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, as we went through and reviewed many of these projects, we tried to find ways to work with municipalities in order to ensure that they happened. We're talking about something pretty fundamental which, of course, is the access to clean drinking water. We think that the municipalities, you know, need to accept the responsibility to see that this is done, and we intend to help wherever we can.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the Premier. This government is expected to table a provincial water resource strategy before the end of this year - will this issue of THMs be addressed in the strategy and will the Premier assure residents of Hantsport, and all Nova Scotia communities, that the health and safety of Nova Scotians, when it comes to drinking water, will not be sacrificed?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, of course the health of Nova Scotians will not be sacrificed. The purpose of the water strategy and the purpose of the work, the minister is to work with those municipalities to see to it that the systems that are required and the changes that need to be made are, in fact, changed to benefit the health of all of our citizens.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

COM. SERV.: TARGET 100 PROG. - ESIA INCLUSION

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, again my question will be for the Minister of Community Services. Back on February 24th the Premier and the minister made a wonderful announcement, along with the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council, that a program was launched called Target 100. I'm just wondering if today the minister can tell us how many of those 100 jobs have been filled by people relying on the ESIA program?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. The Target 100 program is a wonderful program that has been able to help people who are looking for meaningful employment that is normally above the minimum wage. So it really entices and helps people move along and with their struggle, of course, of getting off ESIA. The actual number is something that I can certainly present to the honourable member by discussing it with my staff members, and they will contact him.

MR. ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, I would agree it's a wonderful program, one that hopefully in the future we can expand on. My next question for the minister is, has your department specifically earmarked positions throughout the co-operative council for persons with disabilities?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, anybody who has a disability is very important to our department, to make sure that they are aware of those positions. Those positions are open for anybody who meets the criteria and we work with them. Once again, it's on an individual basis. Whether they have a disability or not, we work with them and work with the co-operative council to make sure that the placement meets their needs and it's a placement that gives them the encouragement that they have a new job, they appreciate the job, and that it makes them feel that there are opportunities. It does open the door, because one of our first participants actually ended up receiving a management position out of being involved - and that's a wonderful story to be able to relate to Nova Scotians.

MR. ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, it's nice to hear that so far there's one individual who received a good position. I'm looking forward to having those numbers forwarded. In the past I've raised this issue around this program and was critical about targeting it at only 100 individuals. My final question to the minister is, if those numbers are indeed reached, the Target 100, will your government be looking at expanding that program?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I know the honourable member is right, it is a wonderful program. What we'll be doing is analyzing and evaluating how well the program was received, how well it was implemented, because that is very important to us, to make sure that people are receiving the benefit this program intended. I know the co-operative council was very excited when we announced it. They were looking forward to opening and expanding that program and we're looking forward to working with them on the evaluation and seeing that there may be potential opportunities for more people to be involved in the Target 100, and hopefully we can push it up to Target 200.

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

EDUC. - TUITION CAPS: COMMITTEE - ESTABLISHMENT

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, the two groups who represent post-secondary students in this province, the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations and the Canadian Federation of Students, are concerned about the O'Neill report and its suggestion that the tuition cap should be removed. Students need to know the government's plans. My question for the Minister of Education is, has a committee been established to develop a new MOU with the universities and has this group met?

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say - and I don't think it will be any surprise in this Chamber - that this government shares the objective of the student associations in that we all want affordable, accessible, quality, post-secondary opportunities, and that's the reason why various levels of government, but particularly the Department of Education and myself, as minister, have initiated a number of different levels of consultation with the universities, with student organizations, with faculty groups and other interested groups. Currently we're actually in the midst of a consultation on student

assistance, so we're out there making sure that we have the information we need before we move into a decision-making phase - and we are listening.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I believe that negotiations for the last MOU agreement had started by this point in the process. So, if I take the minister's answer to say they have not begun, I'm wondering, when can we expect negotiations to begin?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that there are a couple of preliminary stages before the final decision is made about the MOU negotiations. One of them is to have senior staff from the department meeting with universities to get what is called the chart of accounts - that is just getting the financial details and understanding what the cost pressures are. That has been finished and we'll be looking to moving into the other stages in the near future.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, students have been at the table for the last two MOU negotiations and cutting them out now would be unacceptable; the minister should have no hesitation about student participation in this negotiation process. My question to the Minister of Education is, will students have seats at the negotiating table?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, just as the process, the timeline and the participants are being discussed and those final decisions made, you can be sure that the students will be the first to know about their level of involvement. Certainly, governments in the past have appreciated the interest and the expertise and enthusiasm that they've brought to the table. That is under consideration. They have met with me and very adequately, carefully outlined the reasons they feel they should be at the table and we're certainly taking that very seriously and we'll be in touch with them as soon as those decisions are made. I thank the honourable member for her interest in this issue. Thank you.

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

Before we go to Opposition Members' Business, I want to recognize the honourable member for Antigonish on an introduction.

MR. MAURICE SMITH: Mr. Speaker, in the east gallery this afternoon, you have two guests. My lovely wife, Jane and with Jane, a very good friend of ours, Phyllis Larsen. Phyllis is visiting with us this week from Ottawa. Phyllis has been a dear friend and a supporter of mine throughout my political efforts and has been deeply involved with the Party for a long, long time. Indeed, our honourable Minister of Health, Phyllis was a former constituency assistant of hers. She has been a former constituency assistant of the Honourable Alexa McDonough. She has been a former constituent assistant to the Honourable Ed Broadbent. She just finished a tour of duty as the MA for the Member of Parliament for Ottawa Central, Paul Dewar and she's about to go back to his constituency office as his EA at the beginning of the new year. I would ask the House to give their usual warm welcome to these two fine ladies. (Applause)

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. MANNING MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private Members' Public Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. MANNING MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No.92.

Bill No. 92 - Agriculture and Marketing Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that we are hoping that government would take a look at. Perhaps it may come back to the House in some other form, however it's such an important issue and topic for Nova Scotians that we are bringing it forth now on our Opposition day. It's also timely in light of the fact that we have seen further collapse of the manufacturing sector relating to agriculture. The time has come to rebuild a food industry, a local food economy in Nova Scotia. We've put forth in this bill a vision, a plan, called a 2020 vision where the goal would be to have 20 cents of every \$1 come back to Nova Scotia farmers.

This really got its impetus this summer when GPI Atlantic released their latest study showing that we had declined in Nova Scotia to just 13 cents from 17 cents of every dollar going to Nova Scotia farmers and this decline really was a springboard for us to take a look at how we could start to rebuild a local food economy in Nova Scotia.

It comes at a time as well where the local food movement has been getting some traction, however we know that we've had slippage overall. Therefore setting a goal, setting a target is an important part of that. In fact, we're seeing that at some of our universities, they have taken the initiative to start to increase the amount of procurement, the amount of local food that they can bring to the cafeterias.

This is coming as a result of students making a stronger choice, a wise choice about consuming more local food - local food that obviously has very clear traceability, very clearly nutritious food that we know where it is grown and how it is grown. It has the benefits of bringing more dollars to the local economy and to the farmer who has been suffering through a couple of decades of lower gate revenues now. That has been confirmed, of course, by Statistics Canada.

[4:15 p.m.]

In some ways consumers are ahead of the politicians on this issue. They've been working on a number of niche opportunities in developing a local food economy. We need to look to them for the lessons they've learned so that we can expand that from a government perspective.

One of the ways in which the consumer has clearly shown us the way is in a development called the 100-Mile Diet. Now we have had opportunities in the province where community organizations have put on dinners and fundraisers that have the 100-Mile Diet as a main selling feature, that everything that will be consumed at the event will have been grown locally and moved to inside of that 100 miles.

The other area that we're seeing local farmers - and again in conjunction with the consumer demand, we're seeing that the major chains are having to listen and adhere to the demands of getting local food in the major superstores - Sobeys or the Atlantic Superstore. In fact, I was talking with one farmer, an elderly farm couple in the Valley, just this week. They are both over 75 years of age but they are still maintaining a strong farm presence on the North Mountain, in the community of Burlington. This year they took their beans to Sobeys on the South Shore and sold \$40,000 of beans that they had grown on a small farm operation.

These are good signs, these are good signals, and these are the kinds of endeavours that we have to build on. We do look to the Department of Agriculture, to Select Nova Scotia, to be leaders and to continue to work at educating Nova Scotians on this very, very important development.

The Liberal caucus believes government-funded agencies and institutions lead by example. The goal of 20 cents of the dollar by 2020 should apply to schools, hospitals, and jails. Now we know that there are small advances in our institutions as well, but when we compete with large companies involved in the procurement, sometimes the local food producer is left out of that equation. It's an area that through government policy - if not through legislation, at least through policy - we can start to make again a greater movement to have our provincial institutions get our local product.

Knowing that these are facilities that are 100 per cent funded by taxpayers' dollars, it only makes sense that government again develop a strong policy, a strong initiative, to make sure that whether it's our Maritime beef - we know that there's little pork left to bring to any of our institutions, but beef and market garden crops, this is where we need to get a percentage that goes to the institutions that are locally produced. We believe the goal is realistic and fair. Currently, with only 13 cents of every grocery dollar spent in Nova Scotia being spent on local products, going to the local farmer, we have a long way to go. We know that there are some jurisdictions, especially some of the northeastern states, who have made great strides. They have very strong programs led by agriculture departments in those states

and are well along to achieving targets of 25 per cent, 25 cents of every dollar going toward locally-produced food.

The time has come to work to reverse a very disturbing trend that now shows only 13 cents of every dollar. Setting a goal is why we brought forth this particular bill, because if we don't establish a goal, then we won't be setting a target. We won't be measuring each year and we'll get to 2020 and perhaps we will have made no gain on 13 cents of the dollar and, in fact, potentially have further decline. So that's why we establish this. We are just simply sending too many of our food dollars outside of Nova Scotia.

One of the things that we did learn - and I know the minister is very much aware - that during the period of the collapse of the hog industry, we got very detailed information on the dollar that went back to the farmer, how it was distributed throughout the local community. Employees on the farm, mechanics who repaired the equipment, veterinarians who came to the farm - it had a tremendous trickle-down effect. In fact, we talked about a ratio - for every dollar it multiplied six or seven times, so it has a wonderful multiplier effect and this is where we need to move.

My colleague today, the Education Critic, will expand on the healthy snack program in our schools. This has had great success in British Columbia, moving seven or eight years ago from about 20 schools to 1,029 this year. In fact, they now have contracts with about 1,000 farmers to produce as much in season and also throughout the winter months. If we take a look, can this be done? Well, I know that some of the farm markets continue into the Fall and winter months to put our local products on the market. Jim Lamb, the Lamb family at Meadowbrook Farm Meat Market - you go there in January, they have Sawler's carrots, Sawler's turnips, which is just really a neighbour farm, a huge farm, a commercial operation that put their own product throughout Maritime Canada. We can do this in our schools through a healthy snack program, so I'm going to have my colleague deal with this.

We have, in many ways, succumbed to a low-cost food policy, which has happened right across the country, where we know we can import cheap food. This is what has been at the root cause of our farmers and farms in decline. I think, as all elected officials in Nova Scotia, no matter what Party, we need to strengthen our ties to the farm community, to the local farmer, to understand not the importance but the necessity of not allowing our local food production to decline further.

All of us need to be part of the solution here and I think advancing it through strong government policy with a vision of 20 cents of every dollar going to the local farmer by 2020 will, I think, set a wonderful initiative in place that, in fact, will strengthen the farm community in Nova Scotia. I thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. JOHN MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand to speak to this bill, Bill No. 92. I want to say to the member, not the worst idea I have ever heard. There are some good points about this but I think probably the idea of moving say from the 13 cents of every dollar to 20 cents of every dollar, and I'm not sure how they determined the amount, you know, if they had a cost of production formula, or whatever. It's a bit difficult in the sense that the institutions for government, and I would say institutions generally, are kind of the low-price leader for what they buy. As far as getting those high price points, that's not necessarily the place to go.

Also I think, unless you have a situation where a farmer can go to the backdoor and deliver something, which is unlikely, it's very difficult if they go through a packing plant or whatever to, number one, determine actually whose product - because the volumes would be low. I think in Nova Scotia, in terms of apples, I think institutions purchase in the range of 250 tons and that's like somewhere in the range of one-half of 1 per cent, I think, of the consumption in the province, and it may be the production, I just forget how that number goes, but it is extremely small.

So to try to determine who should actually get the 13 cents or 20 cents I think would be a very difficult process and also you're going to maybe have the more efficient producer taking the same price as the least efficient producer. Also, he would have to exclude the supply-managed commodities as well because they have a cost of production formula that allows them to get their price out of the value chain. So I do see some issues with that. Anyway, we have already started much of the work mentioned in this bill. In fact, we've gone beyond what the member opposite is proposing today.

This government has a full complement of programs and initiatives that are supporting our producers and processors as we encourage all Nova Scotians to buy local - things that this government has been working on for the past year, Mr. Speaker. We already know food that's locally farmed is not only nutritious and delicious but supports many agricultural operators and helps grow the economy in towns and counties across the province. In fact, agriculture continues to be the heart of many rural communities. It contributes to who we are, how we work, and how we live. We want communities that are strong, safe and vibrant and agriculture contributes to that goal. Providing more opportunities for the purchase and consumption of local foods benefits the industry.

Mr. Speaker, this government has several very successful initiatives that are ongoing in our public schools and in our public institutions, and I'm pleased to share this information with members of this House. I'll start with what is perhaps the most well-known program. For almost 40 years the Nova Scotia School Milk Program has made milk available in our public schools. The program allows milk which is consumed by students on school premises to be provided at a reduced cost. This doesn't send a particular number of cents per dollar back to the producer, because milk comes from a supply-managed system where a cost of

production formula is used to ensure that producers actually get the price out of the value chain.

[4:30 p.m.]

That's made possible by the Department of Agriculture, and I refer to the reduced cost, which pays the school-servicing dairy the difference between the wholesale selling price and the school selling price. Every day, more than 130,000 students from Primary to Grade 12 get to enjoy all the nutritional and health benefits of milk through the program.

A somewhat newer initiative, Strive for Five, was started earlier this year, but it's already having a great impact on students and staff in our public schools. This initiative takes healthy eating in our schools a step further. It focuses on promoting and preparing local in-season fruits and vegetables. We already know our locally farmed and produced food is healthy and delicious. Teaching our students about what's available in their own backyards delivers not only a lesson in agriculture but a lesson in supporting a local economy.

Our government believes in giving students a good start each day. It's widely known that when students are well nourished they're better prepared to learn. Breakfast programs have been found to increase student performance. They also result in fewer days missed and fewer in-class disruptions. Through the Health Promoting Schools initiative, the Department of Education and the Department of Health Promotion and Protection are providing funding to school boards to support breakfast programs in our public schools. More than 200 schools with 16,500 students are getting healthy breakfasts and snacks through this program. The Health Promoting Schools Program doesn't stop there. It also funds initiatives like Big Crunch and Fall Fruit Frenzy that highlight local fruits and vegetables in each school board.

On a local level, perhaps a project that's familiar to the member opposite is a pilot project at the Annapolis Valley School Board called Farm to School fruit and vegetable promotion. Through this program, one fruit or vegetable is delivered to schools once a month and the fruit and vegetables are, of course, all produced locally in the Annapolis Valley. There is a lot of support for this program, both locally and at a provincial level. The Department of Agriculture has provided funding for the distribution and administration of this program. I'm pleased to say that farmers who are members of the Kings County Federation of Agriculture are donating the produce and Armstrong Food Service is providing a delivery service. This partnership goes to show just how agriculture continues to be at the heart of many rural communities.

In addition to the programs I just mentioned that already benefit public school students, I'm pleased to speak about some of the other measures the government has taken to support our local producers and retailers. As I've said many times in this House, we recognize the benefits of buying local. We know that transporting food over shorter distances uses less fossil fuel. That act alone helps maintain a clean environment and we see the

resulting economic development in communities when goods are brought from local suppliers.

Helping form these types of policies, a study of local food consumption is underway. It is looking at publicly-funded institutions like hospitals, universities, our community college system, public schools, and correctional facilities, and how they buy local food. I'm pleased to advise that a committee of senior government officials is being established to help shape future policy direction and oversee implementation of recommendations from this forthcoming report. I'm not sure if that actually passes muster for the member who introduced the bill, but certainly I think he indicates the need for an advisory committee and I'd like to think that they could have that role. In fact, the Food and Nutrition Policy for Nova Scotia Public Schools contains a policy guideline for buying local. It's a policy guideline that was developed after much consultation with stakeholders and has existed for some time.

Our government's procurement policy allows a preference to be given to goods manufactured in Nova Scotia. The policy also asks government departments to consider the sustainability factor when they are buying something, including food.

Mr. Speaker, this government clearly recognizes the importance of having buy local policy guidelines in place. There is significant opportunity for local industry to capture more of the value chain. Nova Scotia agriculture is well positioned to take advantage of these value-adding opportunities. Our government continues to assist local agriculture, to learn how to get more from the value chain and recognize that the industry is well positioned to make the most of these opportunities. Many local producers and processors are already successfully adding value to their primary production.

The member for Kings West indicated Sawler carrots - and they've been doing great things to add value to their product. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I think carrot production in this province is somewhere in the range of 300 per cent of what we consume, so we're exporting carrots - we don't eat all of what we produce. I know members would be aware, something like blueberries, I think we have to consume - well I was going to say 10 pounds apiece, but it might be more like 40 pounds apiece, if we were going to consume all the blueberries (Interruptions)

Many local producers and processors are already successfully adding value; others are taking advantage of growing or emerging market trends that present opportunities to those who are willing to compete on value versus price. Nova Scotia is well positioned to capture domestic and export opportunities. We possess a number of strategic advantages: our size; proximity to markets; highly-skilled labour; resources; a solid reputation; a great climate for specialty crops like grapes; and excellent growth potential.

My department already has in place a suite of specialized services, resources and initiatives that can assist business interested in pursuing value-adding opportunities through financial and human resource capacities. The Product and Quality Development Division assists entrepreneurs in the agriculture and agri-food sectors realize a great economic success, while endorsing greater innovation and productivity in our shared pursuit to stimulate a stronger economy. Staff provide support, at all levels of the agri-food value chain, to access the tools, confidence and support to pursue new value-adding opportunities resulting in higher profits for their businesses.

They foster a culture of innovation and optimism in the agriculture and agri-food production sectors. As a matter of fact, we are partnering with Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship, Kings Regional Development Authority, and the Eastern Kings Chamber of Commerce, to deliver a workshop tomorrow entitled Exploring New Opportunities in Value Added Agriculture - 118 participants will learn about the opportunities and increasing returns on their product through value-adding activities. Long-term prosperity for Nova Scotia agriculture is about getting local products on store shelves; equally as important is getting more money in the pockets of farmers. As I've outlined here today, we are working on a number of initiatives that can help make that happen. It's important that our programs continue to support industry growth and development, Mr. Speaker.

We continue to support industry efforts to add value to primary products. These are significant pieces of work that are helping to address current challenges and prepare for future opportunities. They will help us move forward in our efforts to build a stronger agricultural economy. For too long, long-term problems have been addressed with short-term solutions, like ad hoc emergency funding, that have few lasting benefits, Mr. Speaker.

We can no longer afford to look for quick fixes to help the industry get through another tough year - the government can't afford to operate like that and neither can the industry. We strongly believe that farmers also want long-term solutions and well-thought-out programs that will help them grow their businesses, their profits, and the industry. We've certainly been discussing it within the department, as well as with producers and processors, and we've heard a lot about where they want the industry to be in the future.

We are listening, and what we have heard has contributed to the development of our 10-year plan to help move the industry forward. And I intend to release this plan at the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, their annual meeting next week. Our 10-year plan will guide the department's business, ensuring that the programs and initiatives we develop and support are based on solid research, best practices, and innovation. They will be designed to make the industry stronger in the long term.

We know there are some very real challenges to address. The industry continues to demonstrate that it is capable of adapting to change in a modern competitive economy. It requires risk, resourcefulness and a willingness to learn, but it's possible and, in the business

environment of today and tomorrow, it's necessary. I have great optimism that together we can build a strong environment and agricultural economy in the province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to chat for a few minutes on this very important piece of legislation that could potentially get passed through this House. This is a bill that has some merit and it doesn't matter in this case which side of the House it came from - it's certainly worthy of some debate. It doesn't have to be a government bill to be a good bill - I know members on the other side would probably concur. There are not many bills that get passed through here, however, that aren't on the government side but, every once in awhile, it happens. This may be one that's worthy, but it may need an amendment here or there.

I've heard a fair bit of discussion on this. The minister rang off a number of statistics and read about their commitment and such, but I've got to say that I talk to farmers weekly, daily, I go to the farmers' markets and it's the same thing - it's almost depressing, actually, when you talk to the farmers. That's a harsh word, but it's reality because of the position that they're in. Now the minister spoke about a couple of things: carrots - that's great, we're doing wonderfully with carrots, we're shipping them out; blueberries - we're doing great there, we're shipping them out.

That's positive and that says to me there's some potential here in Nova Scotia. Now we've had more than potential in the past, as members in this House would know - certainly the member for Kings West, who comes from the Valley, would understand and know, and the Minister of Agriculture would certainly know with his background that we've had success in this province over the years, but the problem remains that there is no real commitment here.

We haven't got a commitment. We talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk. Let's be honest with ourselves - we don't walk the walk in this Legislature, when it comes to putting forward a bill and supporting a bill that will mean something to the farm community in this province. We haven't yet made an investment. We keep hearing about the 10-year strategy, which is now maybe an 8-year strategy. I know I brought this up to the minister before and I've said these words before - where's that strategy? We're looking for it; we're looking hard for it, and so is the farm community.

Next week I'm pretty sure all three of us, the critics and the minister, will be down in Truro at the Federation of Agriculture meeting and I know what they'll be looking for because I'm talking to them constantly. I know what you're looking for. We were at a breakfast - I believe all three of us were there and others, last week - and we heard about these numbers - it probably generated part of this bill coming forward from the honourable member. It talks about these numbers being low - not only low, disastrous, going the wrong way. There's the talk about 2020, we keep hearing 2020 - that's too far away, we need

something now. The farm community is going to tell you we need something before 2020. We need to put together a plan that works now.

We keep asking, where's the plan? Well, still no plan. Someday there might be a plan. Some are asking, is there even a plan - good word - where is the plan? Where's the material? Where's the written word that says this is where we're going, this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to assist farmers in this province? This fair province called Nova Scotia has hectares and hectares - I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of it - prime agricultural land.

We just saw this great big thick report that said we've got all kinds of land to grow things. We've got good soil and it's good for this and it's good for that, and there are times a year - you know ultimately we can't grow everything; we're aware of that. We can't grow enough of everything, but if we had a commitment, and again I'm going to go back to that word "commitment", not just to produce stuff for schools, not just to produce stuff for the jails and the hospitals - mind you, those are huge commitments, we've got a lot of facilities - government facilities, government buildings.

You could go in all kinds of directions with this; this could be expanded for anything and everything to do with government alone. It would just take in a phenomenal amount of food, whatever type, whether it is beef, eggs, pork - which we're not that good at these days anymore and it just keeps getting worse, doesn't it? It shouldn't be. We've got a wonderful province with wonderful opportunities and wonderful ground to grow on, but we're not doing it.

[4:45 p.m.]

Now the minister also mentioned, and maybe the other member did as well, about the apple program. We've got great apples in this province. Perhaps every apple in this province - every school in this province should have apples from Nova Scotia go to them and that's it, nothing more. Year-round. I know we can provide that because Mason's apples is in my backyard and they have the ability to - I'm going to call it freeze it for lack of a better term, but to keep it. They have this wonderful facility there and they can maintain an apple and pull it out in January and it will be as good as it is in October or November. It's a wonderful thing.

The technology exists in a food product, to grow it and to keep it. So, can we do that with blueberries? Can we do that with strawberries, tomatoes? Probably. There's a lot of science in all of this as we well know, but what are we doing? Are we really committed to doing it? I'm going to keep coming back to the word commitment because I don't believe we're committed to the farm industry. If we are, we haven't shown it. Maybe we are. Maybe next week, the minister is going to have a big announcement at the Federation of Agriculture meeting and he's going to say, here's the 10-year/8-year plan. This is what we have left, this is where we're going. Maybe it will be a full 10-year plan, minister, I don't know. Maybe

it won't be announced at all. All we keep hearing is, soon. I remember soon, very soon, being criticized - I'm starting to wonder if he took that to heart. I don't know where it's going, but we have to have a commitment.

The breakfast programs he talked about as well. I don't have a whole lot of time so I'm going to bounce around on a few things. The breakfast program is a wonderful thing. I don't know that every school in the province has a breakfast program, but I know that our school has one and a very, very good one, the Annapolis Valley board, at least I do know my own area has good programs and I'm sure other areas do. I know that the kids go early in the morning at 7:30 a.m. to start preparing for this program.

Our kids have an understanding of what it means to have local food. They go to the store and they say, where's that from? I take my kids to the store and we're going to buy tomatoes or cucumbers or corn - that's the best example. In the summertime, everybody wants a fresh ear of corn. Where'd that come from? The sign says Valley corn - where in the Valley? I think that kids are smart enough to know if you start teaching them now what it means. Maybe it is 2020, maybe that's the number of years out that this takes to accomplish. Maybe it's our kids, who are now 12 years old, 15 years old, who are going to be the ones who are actually catching on to this.

Maybe we won't. We live faster lifestyles from what they keep telling me - everybody working, two-car families, they're going to Sobeys to buy tonight's dinner, they're taking it home. Forget about buying local. You see them every night at Sobeys and Superstore. Whether it's fish, chicken, whatever it is, they're going to get their meal and they're busy. Everybody has busy lives. How many people are taking this to heart? How many people are serious?

Well, there's always a thing called cost. Buying local always seems to cost more. Why does it cost more? There's a question. How come it costs more? We have the ability. Well, there's feed and there's fuel and there's all these other fine things that sort of get set aside. First and foremost, the farmer. The farmer has to be treated right. You have to have a reasonable cost to stay alive.

We talked to farmers last week from the Valley and I can tell you, they've survived. There was a young man who is now taking over and working with his father but mostly running the place. He's not doing too bad. He's got a good operation going. He's shipping hogs out to Ontario, small hogs, I don't know how many weeks old they are, how many weeks old are they?

AN HON. MEMBER: Twenty days.

MR. PORTER: Twenty days old and they're going to Ontario and there's half a dozen of these farmers around the province in the Valley and throughout who are shipping them to Ontario. What a sin that is. The hog industry is gone to - well I can't say those words

in this place, but you all know what I'm getting at, you know what I mean. There's where that's gone, what is next?

We're shipping birds, where are they going? Quebec, isn't it? (Interruption) New Brunswick, and they're coming back and we're buying them and paying more for them. Why are we doing that here? Today we lose 300-plus jobs in the Valley by April. April is five months away. (Interruption) The good member says fish, where's the fish going? China. They're coming from China. How come it's so hard? This shouldn't be hard. We have a well-educated population, we have a well-educated Legislature - you look around this room, there are teachers, maybe doctors, paramedics here, there are people who are knowledgeable, there are people who are educated, it seems really simple, doesn't it?

Farmer grows corn, member goes to buy corn from local farmer. How hard can that be? It's a very simple process that has become very complicated. How come? There's no commitment. Where's the commitment? Everybody's looking for a commitment though, aren't they? Farmers are looking for a commitment from government, in some ways. But the farmer doesn't say you have to support me forever.

These programs legislated would mean a lot. I've said before, I've said in the meetings that I've attended with my local association, the farm community and said, something went wrong somewhere. We know that. Farming used to work in this province. Our grandfathers, some of our fathers were farmers. It wasn't a bad business, they survived, but a lot of them still have part-time or a full-time job and worked both in latter years because they couldn't survive because they weren't being supported. The co-ops went to the same place the rest of them went, didn't they? In a handbag out the window because they weren't being supported.

The big chains come in, like Sobeys and Superstore, and nothing against the big chains, there's a place for them. People enjoy them, they go, they support them, they survive. That's obvious that we're supporting them - they are able to survive. Maybe the commitment has to be from them to buy locally as well, as much as they can possibly buy. Would that ever happen? Who knows? But we have to reach out to more than just one entity and say, this will work or you have to do this or you have to do that.

We have to look at the entire aspect of the buy local campaign. We started this back quite a while ago and here we are. I don't know how much progress we've made. According to the numbers that were presented at that breakfast meeting last week, we haven't made any progress. As a matter of fact, it has gone the other way, from what I can tell. The numbers are going down, so we do have to do something. Minister, maybe you have better numbers than that, but when you talk to them, it's not really working. Some aspects of it might be.

We mentioned the apple industry - a very good industry. We have Mason's, who are exporting them all over the place. That is a wonderful industry - a powerful industry, actually. They're making good business, they're employing lots of people, trucks on the road

going this way and that way. (Interruption) Going everywhere, to Alberta, and they're seeing our trucks out there. I talk to people from Alberta, saw a Mason truck going down a highway today. Isn't that great? That's the first thing that comes to mind. That is good. It's the same as the carrots. Great, they're doing that. Unfortunately, our hogs are going to Ontario and we're paying how much for pork? Quite a bit. It's incredible, actually. We've destroyed it, in a way. That's what we've done to it.

The bill is an interesting bill and certainly one that, like I said, might need a little work, but it's worth a serious look. It's worth some support, and we have to think about a lot of different aspects of it. It's not just about schools and it's not just about hospitals. It's about everybody. You have to instill this in everybody. You can't just say we're going to do this and we're going to do that. There are rules around everything and we know that. I'm not sure whether this will ever happen or not, whether the legislation will pass, and even if it does, how much difference that will make.

We have to do more. We have to be committed to the farm community. We have to give them a reason to stay in business, which we're not really doing. We see young people going to the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. I think they have big dreams of staying alive in Nova Scotia. They want to stay home. They don't want to move to Alberta and they don't want to go wherever. They do want to stay home and they want to farm the land that their grandfathers farmed, that their fathers have farmed. Like I said, we have a report that says we've got the best, we've got all kinds of things, but how are we going to make this a reality?

Murray Scott - who we all know in this House - a few years ago, I don't know how many years ago now, said the beef must be ordered and eaten in Nova Scotia correctional facilities. Well, I'll never understand why measures such as this can't be implemented. How hard can that be? Why can't the government of the day put in legislation? This is a simple piece. It's commitment. We have to say we want to really be serious about this. If you told the farmers in this province we have a commitment to do exactly what's being proposed, they would grow it. They really would. The fishermen would fish it, the farmers would grow it. They could supply it and it's always about the supply and demand. Well, they can't supply enough. Sobeys says they can't supply enough. Superstore said, well, you can't supply it, we can't buy it from you, you have to have bigger demands. Well then, tell us what you need.

Instead of telling us what we need, we're buying it and bringing it in from Alberta or the United States or China, as the example the good member for Digby-Annapolis says. We're bringing it in from everywhere but home. We could bring it. We could clean every farm, every piece of farmland going; we could clean right up with our fruits and vegetables, et cetera. You go to Sobeys, you can't even buy Mason's apples - you've got to buy them out of a bag that's unmarked. The only reason you know they're Mason's is because there's a little three or four digit number or whatever it is on it, and if you didn't know that, you wouldn't know you were buying a local apple. Well, how do I know that? I was there with

Steve Wells and he says, what you don't know is here is our number and here is my picture now on a sign at Sobeys. He has a commitment which he works with, which is great. That's a good idea of the local support that we need. Why can't you do that with every other item that's available out there in Nova Scotia that can be grown?

Corn. You see a sign that says "Valley Corn", but you don't know where it's coming from. It doesn't say "Grown at Noggins Corner". It doesn't say "Grown in Falmouth". It doesn't say where it comes from. It says "Valley Corn" or it says "Corn from the U.S.A." What is that? How can we possibly be bringing in corn from the United States - or anywhere for that matter - when we've got the very best in prime season right here?

Maybe some of the investments and the commitments should be back to the Mason's example. They freeze it or whatever they do, keep it in the condition that it should be kept in all winter long. Surely, blueberries, corn, name the fruit, name the vegetable - it can be done, it's a matter of commitment. The government needs to commit, the people, not just the government, the people of Nova Scotia need to commit to such a campaign. They need to buy into the legislation. We can pass any bill in this House we want, but people have to buy into it. They have to be willing to support it, they have to want it. That's important for the survival of the Nova Scotia farm community today in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time has expired. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. I will now recognize the honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would just like to remind the honourable Minister of Agriculture that it wasn't that long ago that when beef producers came to meet with his department, they were offered apples from Chile. So, I think we really want to focus on locally produced apples and locally produced food. Food is implicitly connected to nutrition and health. Healthy eating, particularly in the short term, is also believed to impact individual behaviour, like concentration, activity levels and these behaviours have the potential to affect school performance for children. They can affect interaction with peers and can compromise self-esteem if kids aren't getting enough good food.

So, promoting Nova Scotia's fruits and vegetables as a source of healthy eating to Nova Scotia students will play a role in encouraging healthy eating. It will also ensure we have a better chance to increase student outcomes. Studies show that even moderate under-nutrition can have lasting effects on children's cognitive development and school performance. Anybody who's ever seen a class the day after Halloween, when they're all hopped up on sugar, will know what I am talking about.

Chronically undernourished children obtain lower scores on standardized achievement tests, especially tests of linguistic ability. When children are hungry or undernourished they have difficulty resisting infection and therefore are more likely than other children to become sick to miss school. We've been talking, the minister responded recently to the report on absenteeism and so what we want to do is make sure our children are well nourished so at least that one area will reduce the number of days that children miss because they're undernourished.

We know that when kids miss school, they fall behind in class and, let's face it, we can all become fairly irritable and have difficulty concentrating if we're not well fed. In fact, it reminds that when I first started dating my husband, I was warned by his former law partner that he was kind of like an army, he marched on his stomach and if I wanted entertainment, I could just not feed him and then watch him wilt throughout the day. Unlike me, he doesn't have vast reserves of extra energy - no, not energy, vast reserves of extra *avoir-du-poids*, I guess.

We do know that with children, if they're not well fed, they'll have low energy and it can limit their physical activity. We did hear some statistics just within the last couple of days that 33 per cent of those relying on food banks are, in fact, children. So you have to ask yourself if those children are from families who have to rely on food banks to get through the month. You really have to ask, what is their level of nutrition like. Are they getting enough good food to help them have a good academic career.

We think that a healthy snack program in the classroom will help. Certainly, school breakfast programs do help although they're not available in all schools and I think that no matter what riding you come from, there is poverty in every riding in this province and there are children who are not adequately fed in every riding of this province. So we think a healthy snack program in the classroom would help.

[5:00 p.m.]

Our idea is based on the British Columbia School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program and we think a similar program here in Nova Scotia would provide an opportunity for school-aged children to learn more about healthy food choices while at the same time it would provide an opportunity for students to experience fresh fruits and vegetables supplied by Nova Scotia farmers, in their classrooms.

According to Stats Canada, less than one-third of Nova Scotians - that is 29 per cent - over the age of 12 years old eats the recommended five to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Now this compares to the national rate of 35 per cent. As the mother of a 14-year-old boy, I can tell you I am sure he would much rather come home from school and eat pizza or cookies or things like that but I do know that it's like if you build it, they will come. If I leave out Honeycrisp apples or some other local fruit, he'll eat them and he'll eat them without thinking about going for the cookie jar.

Research has shown the most effective programs for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption have four main qualities: they give clear messages about the need to increase fruit and vegetable intake; they provide long, more intensive interventions than just one or two contacts; they actively involve influential people, like family members and their incorporate behavioural theories and goals. All of these can be achieved through a healthy fruit and vegetable snack program delivered in the classroom setting.

So you might be wondering, how does the British Columbia fruit and snack program work? This program was established in partnership with three departments - the equivalents of our Department of Health Promotion and Protection, Agriculture and Education. The program in British Columbia ensures that students and staff receive a fruit or vegetable snack twice a week, every other week, for 14 selected weeks in the school year. Currently in British Columbia there are just over 1,000 schools - 1,122 - from Grade Primary to Grade 12, currently enrolled and participating in the program. School participation is voluntary and it's free of charge.

Now as you can imagine, the benefits of such a program include introducing students to the importance of healthy eating early, transferring healthy eating messages that students bring into their family homes and supporting the province's agriculture community. In fact anecdotal evidence from this program indicates that kids start talking to their parents about what food they're eating and they start encouraging their parents to make better choices. We all love having a smart hockey pre-teen tell us what to cook for dinner.

Seriously, it does start to filter to the family, from the child, because they're learning this in school and they are really taking those messages to heart. So British Columbia started the School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program as a pilot project in 2005. In the beginning they started modestly. They didn't go for a great, big program; they just started with 10 pilot elementary schools and those schools involved just over 3,300 children.

An evaluation of the B.C. program - conducted in November 2006 - discovered that children who were at risk, eating less than five fruits and vegetables per day, increased their consumption servings by two. Sixty-five per cent of children reported making positive changes, including eating more local fruits and vegetables and feeling healthier. Again, it's one of those things where if we really encourage out kids to do this and we give them good models, you see it in your own family life where if you start educating your kids about, well, this Honeycrisp apple came from the Valley and this is the farm - that kind of thing. They begin to take it in.

The most significant statistic to come out of that program, I think, is that 100 per cent of teachers and administrators provided positive feedback on the program and the impact it has had in the classroom. Again I go back to my comment about all you need to do is go into a classroom on the day after Halloween and see the kids hopped up on sugar to know that giving them an alternative for lunch or for a snack is bound to have some positive affects.

Interestingly, Manitoba has since implemented a similar school-based program. This type of program is also in line with a recommendation contained in the Healthy Eating Nova Scotia report, which recommends that government take a lead role in the development of public policy to increase the intake of fresh fruits and vegetables in public institutions like schools.

I have to say that if BC can implement such a program, so too can Nova Scotia. We certainly have the producers in this province and I defy anyone to - in fact, my parents were recently here, they came to the House, and my mother was saying that they had tried a Honeycrisp-something cross in Ontario and they said they were not bad and I said, well, you haven't had a Honeycrisp apple from Nova Scotia. So we went off to the Wolfville area and we got a big bag of apples and we brought them home and I said, okay you have to try this apple. Bearing in mind my mother grew up on a farm, my dad in a farming community, they tried their first Honeycrisp apples.

They loved them, they're amazing and they said, we can't get anything like this back in Ontario, which was music to my ears. [Interruption] The member for Digby-Annapolis says, that they're really good with sardines. I haven't tried that yet, but then again someday if I take up smoking and I'm trying to quit, maybe I'll try them. Anyway, so mom and dad, when they were going home, of course, they were going to get their Nova Scotia lobster to take home and they were trying to figure out how they could fit a big bag of Nova Scotia Honeycrisp apples into their luggage on the way home. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work so they just had to take a few with them.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel on this program. BC has done a good job, they don't have Honeycrisp apples, but they have done a good job with their program. Manitoba has now followed suit. We think, on this side of the House, that this is a program worth doing. We certainly need to increase the amount of Nova Scotia produce and farm product that we are using in government institutions. We think that making children conscious of what they are eating would be an appropriate thing to do. We just need to take the best practices of British Columbia and implement them here. There is no shame in doing something that has been done elsewhere. In fact, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and we think that would be a good - [Interruption] Thank you, minister.

With that, I think that although there are still two minutes left in my time, I would like to take my seat, thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you and I want to thank all members for their participation on Bill No. 92.

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. MANNING MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 293.

Res. No. 293, re Cole Hbr. MLA: Election Misleading - Remind - notice given Apr. 12/10 - (Hon. Manning MacDonald)

The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, this resolution is dealing with taxation uncompetitiveness that we are experiencing in our province. One of the first things I wanted to take a look at this afternoon is four or five messages that myself and my colleague will be talking about. We know that our system of taxation here in Nova Scotia is unfair to taxpayers and proven to be economically destructive. Nova Scotia is woefully behind the rest of the country when it comes to productivity, innovation and entrepreneurship. We need to give Nova Scotians the incentive they need to thrive instead of deep taxes at every turn. Government can offer solutions but right now its approach to economic development is very scattered and unfocused. We all want a robust economy, we want opportunities for ourselves, our neighbours and our children, but the fact is living in Nova Scotia immediately puts us at a disadvantage.

I hear this generally in the first two or three months of the school year. I'm referring to the months of September, October and November, when we get a new crop of military transfers into Greenwood. As soon as they come to Greenwood, to our province, they're talking about the extra taxes that they have to pay on a regular basis. Every time they go for any purchase, any service, new licence, all of these areas they talk about as costing them more compared to other provinces where they have spent time in the military.

The time when I really hear from them is when they do their first tax return in Nova Scotia. That's when they get a real enlightenment as to how quickly they start to pay taxes. We're at that just over \$8,000 where we start to pay taxes in our province. Compared to other provinces, we can range from \$8,000 up to \$16,000, which is the case in Alberta. This is an area that stands out if you've lived in other parts of the country.

For a few additional facts, we had this actually quoted during Question Period today from Donald Savoie, *The Way Ahead for Nova Scotia*, on Page 10 of his report, "I have long believed that a competitive tax regime is a powerful economic development instrument. Nova Scotia's tax structure is not competitive, at when least compared to other provinces."

He is somebody that this government has looked to for advice. We know that this is an area he has expertise in and as he looks at the entire tax structure of Nova Scotia, it is where he finds a number of weaknesses. We have the highest general corporate rate in the country. Nova Scotia's small business tax is too high and we start to collect it before our neighbours. We know on January 1st we're going to see a small change in the province. We're going to reduce it by 1 per cent eventually when it's fully implemented.

We have the highest fourth and fifth personal tax brackets in the country and it has the highest personal income taxes in general in Atlantic Canada. When we take a look now at the HST tax hike, Nova Scotia now has the highest HST in the country. P.E.I. has 10 per cent provincial plus 5 per cent federal, but it's a tax on tax value-added tax, so it's not technically the HST.

One of the areas that we hear a great deal about is the fuel tax in Nova Scotia. This has been a subject ever since I came to the Legislature in 2003. We have the third highest provincial gas tax rate in Canada, plus 15 per cent HST applied on top of this tax. We see one of the areas where we thought the new NDP Government would actually make a change. They were against and, in fact, the current Minister of Finance rallied many times in the House around the tax on a tax. To date we haven't seen any change, any movement to bring about a stop in that particular tax.

In every province except Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador, only the 5 per cent GST applies. So since 1998, Nova Scotia has increased its spending more than any other province in Canada except Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador - Canada's two oil-producing provinces. So we've been on a pathway of pretty aggressive spending and no doubt, as we realize, spending beyond our means.

[5:15 p.m.]

In a recent report by the Fraser Institute measuring the fiscal performance of Canada's Premiers, Nova Scotia was ranked dead last under the categories of corporate income tax, personal income tax, and taxes in general - last out of all the provinces in every other tax indicator. This is the reality that, you know, people in my constituency who come in a significant number each year to 14 Wing Greenwood, this is one of the conversations that they quickly get around to having with me - wanting some understanding, wanting an explanation of why we have the current tax rates that we have in our province. So unlike the rest of our neighbours in Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The chatter is getting a little high and it's hard to hear the member.

The honourable member for Kings West has the floor.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, in April 2009 there was a report by CFIB which scores provinces on an index with regard to their tax regime. Overall ranking, the CFIB found that Nova Scotia was the third-worst province in the country based on our provincial tax regime. Nova Scotia has the second-worst score on property and capital tax and is in the bottom three on corporate income tax.

This is why we have consistently over the past year and a half asked the government to do a comprehensive tax review. Don't just look at one or two tax areas like the HST increase. Perhaps now they're giving some consideration to other tax areas like a tax on junk food, for example. We know that government is taking a look at a few other specific areas and we would like to see this comprehensive tax review that would make our province, once again, more competitive.

On just about every tax indicator, Nova Scotia consistently comes in the bottom half. In other cases Nova Scotia comes in the bottom third in the country. In terms of corporate income tax, Nova Scotia businesses pay well above the Canadian average at every price point. At \$300,000, the gap is almost \$3,000 higher in Nova Scotia than the Canadian average. At \$600,000, the gap is almost \$7,500 higher in Nova Scotia than the Canadian average. At \$1.5 million, the gap is over \$30,000 higher in Nova Scotia than the Canadian average. Other provinces and Ottawa have plans to lower corporate income tax by 2014 - B.C., Manitoba, Ontario, and New Brunswick - and at this stage Nova Scotia does not have such a plan. So we are seeing why on many fronts Nova Scotia is not as attractive to do business in. Again, my colleague will take a look at a number of the other tax areas.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other areas that we do need to take a look at is industry-led research and development, "The level of R&D performed by industry in Nova Scotia is the second lowest in the country, just ahead of PEI. The Canadian industry-led R&D level average is 1.12 per cent of GDP, while Nova Scotia sits at 0.30 per cent." That's from the InNOVAcorp Business Plan 2010-11 on Page 8. So raising again the levels of research and development and innovation is fundamental to increasing Nova Scotia's competitiveness and closing the productivity gap with the rest of the country.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of that productivity gap, there's a general comment that I would like to put into the record: Canada tends to be 80 per cent as productive as the United States while Nova Scotia tends to be only 80 per cent as productive as the rest of Canada. So on so many fronts, in wrapping up, we in this province, small business, large business, the individual taxpayer, we are hearing that they would like a review of our taxation regime that will bring a greater degree of fairness and balance and that will make us more competitive.

We have a wonderful example daily, in Nova Scotia, where if you are uncompetitive, the business goes elsewhere. We know that a great deal of business in Cumberland County is moved daily across the border into New Brunswick. It certainly was very upsetting today to hear that a good part of the work from the Berwick Larsen plant will be transferred to the plant in Moncton. Again, we ask the question, why Moncton? Why New Brunswick? Why are they more competitive? We know that is indeed all about the current tax structure that we have in our province.

It was said today at the Global Entrepreneurship luncheon by John Risley - highly-respected, highly-regarded, one of the province's great entrepreneurs - when I asked him about where we are in Nova Scotia, he essentially said, we cannot be looked upon as being serious about attracting business to this province. With that, Mr. Speaker, I take my place.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise here today and to say a few words about Resolution No. 293, introduced by the member for Cape Breton South. The member for Kings West waxes lyrical about the state of the economy in neighbouring New Brunswick, and in other parts, and how the economy was when they were in power. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we do need a little bit of a history lesson here tonight to remind us of the way things were. I don't need to make things up (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island has the floor.

MR. PREYRA: Mr. Speaker, I listened respectfully when the member for Kings West was speaking, as much as he spun his fairytales.

Mr. Speaker, let me just read an excerpt here from the Daily News of November 26, 1993, talking about the Finance Minister's budget: The minister tabled a budget that included a dizzying \$78 million tax grab of unpopular taxes and controversial measures. Terry Donahoe, my predecessor in Halifax Citadel said, "His budget was loaded with disincentives, and was a complete reverse, philosophically and practically, of the position the **Liberals** had espoused in the election,"

Government popularity had plummeted. "A week after the budget was introduced, a crowd of civil service union members and university students . . ." and nurses " . . . rallied at Province House and called Savage a liar to his face." There was a 3 per cent tax on electricity. There was a recreation tax applied to ski hills and skating rinks, and within months of that budget being tabled, New York's bond rating agencies released a mixed review of the budget. "Moody's Investor Services dropped the rating from A2 to A3, while Standard and Poor's left it at an A-minus." (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask the honourable member to table that information.

MR. PREYRA: So we're not going to take any great lessons from the Liberals on tax incentives and tax credits. When we were first elected (Interruptions) \$400 million, if you need to know. \$400 million was the operational debt that year, and thank you for asking. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island has the floor.

MR. PREYRA: When we were in the 2006 election, Mr. Speaker, we listened to what Nova Scotians told us. We told them that we would give them a true assessment of the operational debt and the deficit. We commissioned a report. The Deloitte report told us exactly what the state of the finances were. They told us that the province was facing a projected annual deficit of \$1.3 billion by 2012-13. Nova Scotians told us that they wanted to get back to balance. The Minister of Finance went right across the province and listened. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island has the floor.

MR. PREYRA: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians told us that they wanted us to clean up the mess that was left by Liberal and Progressive Conservative Governments. They told us they wanted us to live within our means, so we immediately conducted an expenditure management review and we got savings of \$54 million this year; \$250 million next year, in year two; and \$500 million in year three.

We introduced regulations to control MLA expenses. There was a huge job that we inherited when we came into government and we took steps to clean it up. We are creating an open, accountable, and transparent system - something that Nova Scotians told us that they wanted. We're reducing the civil service by 10 per cent in 2013. We introduced a Change and Innovation Fund to encourage departments to reduce inefficiencies and find innovative ways of saving money.

In fact, we seemed in the last sitting to almost eliminate March madness, something that went through millions of dollars. Nova Scotians in the 2009 election told us that they wanted us to create good jobs. They wanted us to introduce a competitive tax regime. We created 2,200 jobs through a 10 per cent Manufacturing and Processing Investment Tax Credit. That was designed to boost innovation and productivity and that's exactly what it did. We boosted the Equity Tax Credit to promote investments in communities. We increased the rate to 35 per cent, and the maximum annual claim will increase to \$17,000 within the next year.

We reduced the small business tax for the first time since 1992 and that put \$6 million back into the pockets of small business people. We reduced the large corporate tax by 0.15 and that large corporate tax will be eliminated by the year 2012. We're not going to take any lessons from the Liberals on tax reductions, tax cuts, tax credits, and tax incentives.

We kick-started a new home construction program with a one-year program rebate on 50 per cent on the HST. Up to 1,500 people who built and purchased a new home qualified and that rebate is equivalent to 50 per cent of the provincial portion on HST to a

maximum of \$7,000. In fact, we heard through the NS Home Builders' Association that it was, in fact, what got them through the recession. We introduced tax incentives to university and community college students, to keep them here in Nova Scotia and we rolled back the 8 per cent tax increase on home electricity that the Progressive Conservatives introduced. We rolled them back .

[5:30 p.m.]

If I can go on, to talk about the Liberal legacy, here's another article from the Daily News of November 21, 1993. It says,

“Taxes have risen, despite an election promise that they wouldn't.

Halifax's major hospital, the Victoria General, this week laid off about 150 workers on the heels of reduced provincial funding.

Government offices were closed . . .” Twelve of them, “ . . . 60,000 employees took the first of five days . . .” off that were forced on them.

And this week, it was revealed that close to \$14,000 in untended work had been done on the Bluenose.”

That week, there were more doctors and health care workers on Hollis Street than there were in the health care system right across the province. That was the Liberal legacy. Agar Adamson writing that week said, “I'd give them a C-minus or D-plus for their first six months,” I know the member for Yarmouth would have never have been satisfied with that grade. He pointed, “ . . . specifically to the broken tax promise.” of the Liberal Party and said, “They've increased the cynicism and distrust of politicians.” I'll table that.

In contrast, I must commend the Minister of Health for the initiatives that she has taken. Nova Scotians told us that they wanted better health care. They wanted to reduce wait times. They wanted accessible health care and we in recent weeks, we worked to ensure fair drug prices for Nova Scotians who get help with their drug care cost to the Pharmacare program. We've introduced coverage for out of province patients, a rapid assessment unit, there's more hospital beds. We've got a provincial advisory on emergency room health care. We have already started acting on that and I want to say something more, about an issue that I was involved with.

In 1993, I got a call from then-Premier Savage saying, he would like to do something about patronage and could he get some help on that. I want to tell you, one Liberal at that convention said, if the Liberal government had to get one promise, if they had to keep one promise, if they had to get one thing right, why did it have to be the anti-patronage policy? That patronage issue was on the agenda at that convention, and the speaker at that

convention was Public Works Minister David Dingwall. The Liberals at that convention said they were entitled to their entitlements.

What did we do in contrast, we've introduced a paving plan, we ended corporate and union donations and we set about making life more affordable for Nova Scotians. I want to say that in the 2009 election, Nova Scotians told us they wanted us to live within our means, they wanted good jobs, they wanted clean, sustainable jobs, they wanted accessible and timely health care, they wanted to make life more affordable for Nova Scotian families . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please, the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

MR. PREYRA: Thank you Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left now - 14 seconds. To make life affordable for Nova Scotian families. We listened, we learned and we acted. These were promises that were made and these were promises that we have kept. Thank you.

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

MR. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I particularly enjoyed the speech of the member opposite. I enjoyed listening to it, in fact, I wish all Nova Scotians could have heard that speech because the whole point of this resolution is the delusions of the Party opposite and it's very clear that those delusions go on after the election as much as they were in evidence before the election.

One of those delusions is that they still seem to deny the fact that they're actually in government. Many Nova Scotians would like to deny that as well, but they seem to be determined first to debate, in Question Period today, the election of 1999 or 2003, I forget which one it was they wanted to debate. Now they seem like they want to debate the election of 1993, almost 20 years ago. The point is that this group opposite needs to take responsibility for their actions.

The resolution, which I support, is all about being responsible for the words that you choose to use when you're talking to Nova Scotians before the election and the actions that you take after the election. It will be a great day when it dawns on the Party opposite that they are responsible for what they say and they are responsible for what they do and they leave 1993 behind and they leave 1999 behind and they start dealing with the real issues and the real problems and the real challenges that we face in 2010.

If I can say, as someone who supports this bill, who also is the newest MLA in the Legislature, who is the one who has most recently put my name on a ballot to face real electors, that it is very obvious that the true cost of the broken promises of the government is not measured only in financial terms. As bad as those financial terms have been - and I

will get to those in a moment - the cost to our democracy, the cost to our system of government, the cost in confidence in this House of Assembly is incalculable, because too many Nova Scotians have concluded that they were sold a bill of goods in the last election, that they faced a Party that said one thing before the election and did the exact opposite after the election. I can tell you, that is very evident in the riding of Cumberland South where that bunch got exactly 5 per cent of the popular vote as a result of what they have done, not just in Cumberland South, but to all Nova Scotians, and they didn't even deserve 5 per cent for the way that they have acted.

We all know (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party has the floor.

MR. BAILLIE: We all know the biggies, we all know the big promises, no tax increases, a balanced budget in the first year, all services. (Interruption) I know the member does not want to hear the truth, but it's on the record. In Cumberland South we face it every day on the jails, on roads, long-term care beds, all promises made by that Party over there before the election, all broken after the election. That is why the people have said no more to them in Cumberland South, the first test or the most recent test. There will be more tests and I have no doubt that old-style, cynical way that they played so well will be turned aside by the people in other ridings in the not too distant future.

I must say, moving along, the Party to my right are no angels when it comes to this style of politics. The Party to my right, who have put this resolution forward, have their own issues to answer for. They are upset that this Party made a promise to balance the budget and they have failed to do so. The last Party that promised to balance the budget that failed to do so was the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia, as we all remember so well. That budget got defeated. There was a lot of funky accounting going on in that budget as well. We all know the Health Investment Fund, we all know the plan that they had to borrow \$600 million without telling the people about it and then try and pretend that it was a balanced budget. Their hands are not clean on this either. That is something they have yet to come clean on with the people of Nova Scotia.

Even in their own resolution, they make an accurate statement, that the NDP have created two deficit budgets since coming to office, and I think the word "created" is right on. I'll give them credit for that. We were talking about the Auditor General earlier today and he has made the point that eight consecutive times, prior to the election of that bunch, he signed his name, in his opinion, to eight consecutive balanced budgets. This Party is the only one that promised a balanced budget and then delivered it. Not once or twice, but eight times in a row. You don't have to take my word for it because the Auditor General himself signs his name every year to those budgets to say that it's so. I'll add this, all eight of those budgets were balanced at a 13 per cent HST, not a 15 per cent HST.

As much as people are skeptical that a budget can be balanced and that taxes can be made to be competitive again with New Brunswick and our peers, I will remind them that it has been done in the recent past. It has been done, in fact, eight times in the recent past. It was promised to be done again a ninth time by that bunch over there. That is what this resolution is all about. That promise was broken so quickly after the election - without even trying to make the budget balance - by taking the easy way out, by raising our taxes, by reaching deeper into our pockets, by borrowing more money.

The question is, why? Why would the government promise one thing and do the other? Why would they say that they'll balance the budget and then not do it? Why would they say that they'll keep our taxes competitive and then raise them? Why would they say they would keep services at the current level and keep all the infrastructure commitments of the previous government and then do none of those things?

Perhaps it's because they knew that if they told Nova Scotians the truth in that election campaign, they never would have voted for that bunch over there. They knew that if they told the truth, that their plan was to throw our government into a massive deficit for the first time in eight years, if they told the people their plan was to raise the HST from 13 per cent to 15 per cent - or more specifically, to take the provincial portion from 8 per cent to 10 per cent - if they told the people that they planned to cancel all those infrastructure projects, if they told the people they had no idea how they would keep our emergency rooms open - in fact, they'd probably start to close them - they never would have voted for that bunch, and rightly so. That is the real cost to our democracy, that they were sold a bill of goods before the election.

Mr. Speaker, let me just tell you, these are my early days as an elected person, but I do remember a government under Premier Hamm that went out of its way to list 243 promises. They criticized that government when they were in Opposition for having the nerve to list in detailed form 243 things that government would do if it was elected. But I know from firsthand experience, as you and others in this Chamber do, that Premier Hamm made it his mission to report in detail how he was doing on those 243 promises to the people of Nova Scotia every year. By the time he went back to the people, he was able to say that they were all done. They couldn't run a campaign saying that he'd broken his promises because he hadn't.

[5:45 p.m.]

Let me conclude where I started. The real cost - we could list it in hundreds of millions of dollars of new taxes, in the now thousands of lost jobs, in the billions of dollars we're now borrowing that we shouldn't be borrowing. But to me, to all members of this House, to you, sir, as Speaker, to all those who care about this place, to all those who know the only way we're going to move forward as a province is if we can get people who have turned their backs on that government and in our system to turn back and check in again, to have faith in their system, to believe what their political Leaders say.

To all of those who know that that is where we must start, then we have to pass this resolution and tell the people that there is a better way forward, that it is worth believing a little bit again, despite what that bunch has done to the reputation of this House, to the reputation of democracy, by so cynically saying one thing before the election and doing the opposite after the election. We need to start by making a statement just like this so we can get away from that foolishness and on with dealing with the real issues that the people of Nova Scotia deserve action on. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it is very nice to hear about governments of the past, from 17 years ago, from the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. It was especially nice because I was 9 years old at that time, and it's nice to hear a bit about what happened in the early 1990s. I also understand why members of this government want to distract this House and people of Nova Scotia from our current situation because this government has reneged on many of its promises to Nova Scotia and has made decisions that have negatively impacted my constituency and many other constituencies across the province.

I assure you, Mr. Speaker, our Leader and the Liberal Party aren't focused on the past, we're focused on the now and the future of Nova Scotia. Right now our tax system in Nova Scotia is both unfair and economically disruptive. There is a reason why the Premier promised he wouldn't increase taxes during the election, because people didn't want it and because it would make our province less competitive.

How do we know our tax system is not working? Our young people are going elsewhere to find work, and our businesses are choosing to set up shop in other jurisdictions. Poor government tax policy can make the risk of owning and operating a business greater than need be. The extreme and excessive punitive tax regime can influence whether a business thrives in Nova Scotia or fails. Nova Scotia is a province of extremes. We need to bring our taxes in line with our neighbours so that we can ensure fairness and a competitive edge for Nova Scotians.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal caucus spent some time in Amherst this summer and you should have heard what the people were saying there. They were struggling, retail operators struggling, service operators struggling, gas operators struggling, businesses struggling because they can't compete with the prices in New Brunswick, which is just close by. To mention a quote by Donald Savoie, who was mentioned earlier today, "I have long believed that a competitive tax regime is a powerful economic development instrument. Nova Scotia's tax structure is not competitive, at least when compared to other provinces." This came from a report that was commissioned by this government.

Here are some quick facts on the Nova Scotia tax system: we have the highest general corporate rate in the country; Nova Scotia's small business tax is too high and we start to collect it before our neighbours; Nova Scotia has the highest fourth and fifth personal tax brackets in the country and has higher personal income taxes in general than the rest of Atlantic Canada; and thanks to the New Democrats hike to our HST, we now have the highest HST in the country.

In a recent report by the Fraser Institute, measuring the fiscal performance of Canada's Premiers, Nova Scotia was ranked dead last under the categories of corporate income tax, personal income tax, and taxes in general - last out of all the provinces on every single tax indicator. Unlike the rest of our neighbours in Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia still has a capital tax. CFIB is saying the same thing, Mr. Speaker. In Search of Tax Excellence, a report done in April 2009, which scores provinces on an index with regard to their tax regime, in an overall ranking the CFIB found that Nova Scotia was the third worst province in the country, based on our provincial tax regime. "Nova Scotia has the second worst score on property and capital tax, and is at the bottom three on corporate income tax." That's on Page 7 of the report.

On just about every tax indicator, Nova Scotia consistently comes in the bottom half; often in cases Nova Scotia comes in the bottom third in the country. In terms of corporate income tax, Nova Scotia businesses pay well above the Canadian average at every price amount - at \$300,000 the gap is almost \$3,000 higher in Nova Scotia than the Canadian average; at \$600,000 the gap is almost \$7,500 higher in Nova Scotia than the Canadian average; at \$1.5 million the gap is over \$30,000 higher in Nova Scotia than the Canadian average. Other provinces and Ottawa have plans to lower corporate income tax by 2014 - B.C., Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick. Nova Scotia has no plan.

I understand that this government wants to balance the books, Mr. Speaker, but where we're missing is in boosting our economy to increase our tax base by creating jobs. I do think what this government has been doing is making decisions that aren't necessarily sound when it comes to our economy. Increasing the HST has hurt Amherst - as I mentioned, we have talked to a number of business owners there who have been hurt by that decision.

The decision to cut one of the major economic drivers in southwestern Nova Scotia, and in the province - that's the ferry between New England and Yarmouth, which brought in all kinds of foreign dollars - has ensured that this province lost out on over \$22 million this year in profits for Nova Scotians and it put people out of work. I keep hearing that tourism is up in this province. Tourism is up, from this government - I've tabled evidence that says tourism is down. In my constituency it's down 40 per cent to 100 per cent when it comes to American visitations, and American tourism in Nova Scotia is down. American tourism in Nova Scotia is down.

We haven't heard that from this government - and there's a difference between domestic and American tourism, Mr. Speaker, because American tourism brings new money into the economy of Nova Scotia. It's in influx of money and that's why it's important. Tourism is down in Queens - I haven't heard the member for Queens mention this, but it's down in Queens. We've tabled that information.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, I presented this evidence in this House. I presented the Spencer consultants' report, which was commissioned by the South Shore Chamber of Commerce, which identified that a \$6 million investment in the ferry service would yield over \$22 million in profits for Nova Scotians. The Premier, yesterday in Question Period, scoffed at this and said it was what I wish was true and not necessarily what was, but I have tabled that information - this government hasn't tabled a single shred of evidence to support the contrary.

Another decision was to strip the RDA that served Yarmouth and surrounding areas, but the problem is that this RDA was stripped without a plan to reinstate it, and without any effort from this government to work with our municipal units to bring it back, at a time when southwestern Nova Scotia is severely struggling economically. Where is the plan? I've talked to members of Team West, which is touted as this economic savior of our region and the only project that they're working on is this microenvironmental assessment to see if the area can grow cranberries. That's important, that's a good thing, but it doesn't address the issues that we're facing economically because of the drop in tourism, and it doesn't help other small businesses that have been impacted by that decision.

So in closing, Mr. Speaker, let's give Nova Scotians the incentives they need to thrive. Let's review our tax system and let's make sound economic decisions so that our books aren't balanced on the backs of Nova Scotians but on the economic success of our province. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you and I thank all members for their participation in today's debate. That ends Opposition Business for today and we will turn to the Deputy Government House Leader.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now rise, to meet again tomorrow at the hour of 2:00 p.m. The House will sit until 6:00 p.m. or until the conclusion of business. After the daily routine and Orders of the Day, we will call Public Bills for Second Reading - Bill Nos. 87, 88, 89, 90, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98 and 99.

Mr. Speaker, I move the House do now rise until 2:00 p.m. tomorrow.

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

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

The motion is carried.

We have now reached the moment of interruption. The late debate tonight was submitted by the honourable member for Lunenburg West:

“Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate our Minister of Health and Health Promotion and Protection, Maureen MacDonald, and the Department of Health for their leadership in making life better for Nova Scotian families by negotiating a generic drug price for Lipitor, saving 20,000 Nova Scotian seniors up to \$145 for the annual cost of the drug.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

HEALTH/HPP: LIPITOR PRICING - MIN. CONGRATS.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in my place and speak for a few minutes on the subject of drug pricing in Nova Scotia, past and present, and to say a few words on the leadership shown by the Minister of Health and the current administration in making life better for Nova Scotia's families by ensuring health care is better and more affordable, and that is for everyone in the province.

In April 2010 our government implemented an out-of-province travel and accommodation assistance policy for Nova Scotians who need to leave our province to receive medical treatment. These funds help with patient travel and accommodation, making it financially easier on families who need to seek health care outside of the province. On May 31, 2010, the colon cancer program was expanded to cover Colchester-East Hants health district. In June 2010 our government opened nine long-term care facilities across this province, making it possible for hundreds of Nova Scotians to stay in their own communities and receive long-term care.

In August 2010 our government approved a \$7.9 million investment for equipment and construction at the Nova Scotia Cancer Centre at the QE II Health Sciences Centre. That included new radiation therapy suites and new equipment, and as a result, cancer patients in Nova Scotia came one step closer to better care and shorter wait times.

In September 2010 our government added more beds to the region's largest hospital as part of a \$2 million investment into three initiatives designed to improve emergency

health care and eight new general medicine beds were also opened in September at the Halifax Infirmary. In October 2010, our government also announced coverage of Lucentis treatment of AMD for beneficiaries of publicly-funded drug programs such as Seniors' Pharmacare, Family Pharmacare, and Community Services Pharmacare programs, effective January 1, 2011.

I mention a number of these initiatives, and I know I'm speaking about drug prices, but fair drug pricing is just part of an overall plan to make health care more accessible and affordable to Nova Scotians.

I would submit that what I've just explained there represents a significant amount of work for any government to accomplish in the field of health care in just a little over one year. Now we have yet another stellar example of government making a major stride toward making health care more affordable for all Nova Scotians, and of course that involves negotiating a generic drug price for Lipitor, saving 20,000 Nova Scotian seniors up to \$145 on the annual cost of the drug.

Government spending on drugs has almost doubled in the past eight years. Without measures to contain escalating drug costs, they are expected to grow and were expected to grow by 7 per cent in 2010-11 - and of course, we're almost through 2010 now. When I say "grow," I mean grow to more than \$300 million annually. This is not sustainable, and for our government it is also not acceptable. Drug costs now account for the fourth-largest health care expenditure after hospitals, physicians, and continuing care. Now, of the drugs included in these escalating costs, Lipitor accounts for the largest portion of government spending on drugs through Pharmacare programs.

[6:00 p.m.]

In 2009-10 the government spent \$14.7 million on Lipitor through the various Pharmacare programs. Atorvastatin, the generic form, became available in August and costs significantly less to Nova Scotians in Pharmacare programs. However, because Nova Scotians pay more for generic drugs than people in many other provinces, and indeed many countries, our government believed it could get a fairer and better price. Up to now, Nova Scotians enrolled in the Family Pharmacare plan, taking a generic version of Lipitor - which I think everybody knows is commonly used to treat high cholesterol - paid \$84.88 for a one-year prescription. Using Ontario's pricing strategy, Nova Scotians and Family Pharmacare would pay \$46.88.

All eight companies which submitted offers to provide Atorvastatin were accepted and contracts have been signed for one year, from December 1, 2010 to November 30, 2011. As part of the agreement, the eight companies will provide Atorvastatin at 35 per cent of the cost of Lipitor through Pharmacare programs. For the record, these companies and the provinces in which they are based are as follows: Sandoz - Quebec; Ranbaxy - Ontario; Teva

- Ontario; GenMed - Quebec; Apotex - Ontario; Sanis - New Brunswick; Pharmascience - Ontario; and Cobalt - Ontario.

About 20,000 seniors will see savings of up to \$145 on the annual cost of brand name Lipitor and \$35 on the current price of the generic drug Atorvastatin. The new pricing takes effect on December 1, 2010. I am pleased to say that as a result of these contracts and the generic drug having become available at 50 per cent of the cost of the brand drug in August, government will have saved \$4 million under Pharmacare this fiscal year over last - \$4 million. This arrangement has shown real leadership on behalf of the minister and on behalf of the government and that's an example of our commitment to making health care affordable to all Nova Scotian families.

Before the generic drug was available, a Nova Scotian senior paid more than \$240 each year through Seniors' Pharmacare based on a prescription of 20 milligrams of Lipitor filled four times a year. Today that same senior pays close to \$130 each year for the same prescription of Atorvastatin and as of December 1st - and this is the best part - they will pay about \$95 per year. That's going from, if you were following my figures here, \$240 annually to \$95 annually. That's a saving of \$145. That's good for Nova Scotia seniors.

Nova Scotians, as previously stated, pay more for generic drugs than several other provinces and a number of other countries. Our government is committed to changing that going forward. When we were elected, we told Nova Scotians we were committed to making health care better for seniors and families in every region of this province. Providing the generic form of Lipitor at a lower price is just one step we have taken to accomplish this goal. We're working hard to ensure that Nova Scotians are able to afford the prescription drugs they need and that they get the health care that they need, as well, and in a timely manner.

As the Minister of Finance has often stated and Nova Scotians already know, the province is in difficult financial circumstances right now and there are demands to fund new - and I might add - expensive drugs. By actively working to lower the cost to Nova Scotia of generic drugs, our government is keeping the promise to make life more affordable for Nova Scotian families.

We are working towards establishing a drug management policy unit which will lead to a number of initiatives to make prescription drugs more affordable and more accessible to Nova Scotia families. Our pledge is to continue this work with vigour as we move toward making health care better for everyone who lives in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and with those few words I will take my seat.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening in late debate to talk about our medical plans and our Pharmacare and the cost of

Lipitor, the savings to seniors and to the government. It's clearly an avenue to talk about everything in health care when we have a resolution like this before us. The resolution is asking for us to congratulate the government on having savings in the drug Lipitor, but frankly, as much as we're happy to see that, it was coming anyway. The drug finished its patent life and once it was no longer protected as a patent it would immediately be available to generic drug companies to manufacture at a cheaper cost.

We've been talking for over a year now here in the Legislature about the savings that were coming to the province as a result of what is known as the "patent cliff." That is that there are a large number of very popular, frequently-prescribed drugs that are coming to the end of their patent life and that Lipitor, in fact, was the largest one of those drugs that the province prescribes, or doctors in our province prescribe. It is a very frequently-used prescription drug that lowers cholesterol, so it happens to be that many Nova Scotians are taking that drug; many seniors who are on Seniors' Pharmacare would be taking that drug.

The fact of the matter is, that drug was headed to becoming a generic this year. It did become a generic and the savings were recognized. So, in terms of what the minister has done, the minister had gone to tender, asking for lower drug prices if she could get them. That is something that is different for our province, something that other provinces have tried. I think our Minister of Health decided it was time to give it a try here and she has come back with eight companies that can supply the drug Lipitor to the province in its generic version.

We do worry about supply of drugs. There have been a lot of changes in the pharmacies and the pharmacies Acts and the work of pharmacists right across the country. There is, in fact, a lot of instability and a lot of uncertainty surrounding this. So while we can celebrate the decrease in one drug that is coming back to us and, in fact, look forward to others that - through no work on the part of the minister - will simply change from being a brand name to a generic name and available to us, there's more work to be done, Mr. Speaker.

One thing is that we need to ensure that doctors are actually going to be prescribing the generic version, or we need to ensure that pharmacists have the right to substitute on their own. Right now it's my understanding that if you come in and you say, I don't have a drug plan, and the doctor has given you the brand name, the Lipitor prescription, the pharmacist has to actually speak to the doctor in order to switch it to a generic, to say, do you mind, this person doesn't have a drug plan and they need the lower price. They can then go ahead and do that, but they need to have the doctor's permission.

What I'm suggesting is that somewhere in this government, while we're looking at the scope of practice for pharmacists, there should be a move made that pharmacists be given the right to recognize when there's essentially an identical drug but it's a non-brand name drug, it's a generic drug, and that they should have the right to substitute that drug and provide it without having to waste the time of the pharmacists - or waste the time of the

doctor, either, who gets a phone call saying, do you mind, and has to take that call and so on. There's an awful lot of time wasted between pharmacies and doctors' offices for any number of refills and prescription calls. That's part of the new Pharmacy bill that's coming down. In fact, I think it's in second reading now or perhaps it is going to the Law Amendments Committee. It is a bill to expand the scope of pharmacists, so that we can have them playing a bigger role in the delivery of health care and really using all their skills because they know an awful lot more about drugs than the doctors do because that's what they study for their entire time at university. They are experts in drugs. We need to use them more fully, Mr. Speaker.

One thing the Liberals have called for over a number of years - in fact, almost the entire time that I've been a member, which is seven years - was that we put in place a drug review for seniors that takes place every year. I had the opportunity to speak to somebody who works in geriatrics, who in fact is a world-renowned researcher and doctor in the area of geriatrics. He said, it is amazing, if you look at the drugs that people are on in nursing homes, to see that they are taking drugs like Lipitor - which was exactly one of the drugs he mentioned. Lipitor is intended to keep your cholesterol low when you are younger, in your 40s and 50s and moving into older age. It keeps it low so that you don't suffer heart disease and develop heart disease and have many, many more complications and costs and perhaps lose your life as a result of heart disease, so it's a very important drug, but it's not intended for people who are 80 years old, 85 years old or 90 years old to continue to stay on it. It's really intended for younger people to prevent heart disease in the long run.

If you haven't developed heart disease and you're already in that older age group, you don't need it anymore. Yet this researcher said that is an example of drugs that we're prescribing and administering to seniors that they don't need. It really needs to be reviewed. It's interesting to note that quite a number of years ago Australia introduced a seniors' drug review, that's an annual drug review, conducted by pharmacists because they understand the interaction of the drugs and they actually looked at seniors and found - I think recently here in Canada a study was done, that said the average senior takes between five and 10 drugs, I think, is the average - it might even be 10, the average number.

They're taking a lot of drugs and they often get on a drug like Lipitor that they're assigned maybe 20 years ago and they just continue to take it. There's no need, but I wouldn't stop taking it unless I had a professional, a pharmacist or my doctor agree that it was time not to be on it. But a lot of seniors are on a cocktail of drugs, different drugs, they don't always interact well, sometimes one negates another or they create adverse side effects. Then they give you another drug for the side effects and you end up on just a slew of drugs.

Our Department of Health and in fact our government could save so much money if they would institute a fee to pay pharmacists for this seniors' drug review. Just think of the enormous cost of the drugs that people are on. Sometimes a single drug is hundreds of dollars per prescription. If we could actually review the drugs they're on you'd have seniors that are actually feeling better and healthier because they've been taken off drugs that had

adverse reactions and interactions. So they're on fewer drugs and those drugs are really doing the things that are most necessary for them.

When Australia instituted this, especially in the first couple of years, they found that they saved millions upon millions of dollars. I know that the previous speaker, the member for Lunenburg West, spoke about \$4 million in savings. That's what's going to come as a result of Lipitor becoming a generic drug and being tendered. As I've said, those savings, we could have expected anyway because it is the largest single prescription drug that's in use in Nova Scotia.

What I would like to see is the government grab hold of this issue - seniors being on too many drugs - and work with either the pharmacists or Doctors Nova Scotia. But, I think, that the appropriate place would be through the pharmacies, to ask them to sit down with seniors once a year, look at the whole slew of drugs that they're on and help them make sense out of what really is worthwhile staying on.

All of us know from our own family members people that are assigned to take a drug and just continue to take it for years and years. I'm really suggesting today, and I think it's a worthwhile suggestion, I'm sure the members present will take it forward to government as well that this is something that the Liberals have been asking for for many years. It's happening in a haphazard way, if at all, now. Even to begin with every single senior in a nursing home, ensuring that every single senior who lives in one of the nursing homes that are licensed and managed by companies that are licensed. by the Province of Nova Scotia. We know where they are, we're subsidizing the cost of health and often the accommodation costs of people in those nursing homes. Let's look at their drug regimes and see whether we can't make tremendous savings right there.

That savings would go back into Seniors' Pharmacare and it would go back into the pockets of the individuals who are paying the co-pays and it would help the bottom line of the Province of Nova Scotia. I think that is in the interest of all of us because I don't think anybody should sit in this Legislature if they don't want to see Nova Scotia do better, have more money to meet the needs of the many important things that we have before us.

I think I only have about a minute left and I would certainly be remiss if I didn't mention that while we're putting a little bit more money into the pockets of seniors who may save as a result of Lipitor, we're also in a province where we just increased the HST by 2 per cent. That 2 per cent is affecting every single service and every single product that seniors buy. That is a tremendous cost that's on gasoline and it's compounded on gasoline because this is a province with a tax on tax.

We've had even a greater impact on seniors when it comes to the cost of gas, the cost of insurance, the cost of everything that has provincial tax associated. As I say, this is not altogether a good news story for seniors this year with this government.

Mr. Speaker, this is not altogether a good news story for seniors this year with this government. In fact, it's a bad news story. The government likes to boast about a decrease in tax on home heating fuel but in the time that they've been in government, there has been more than that amount added on for other charges - to pay for Efficiency Nova Scotia, to pay for fuel, to pay for people lowering their demand for energy through Nova Scotia Power. All those fees have been approved and pushed through on our power bills. In that length of time they have more than eaten up the savings that came with a decrease in the Provincial Sales Tax on home heating and that was completely counter-productive. That tax across the board really didn't help the people who need it the most.

[6:15 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, I see that my time has elapsed so I would simply like to say that it has been a pleasure to address the issue of Lipitor and we look forward to all the other patented drugs that are about to become generic.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight and I must give the government some credit, they've reduced the costs of generic drugs by using generic drugs and we have to give them credit for that. I would like to make a point that in the resolution there is a lot of credit being given to themselves for something that's good here but I think we need to look at the bigger picture issue - where are we going as a province? Yes, we're getting drugs cheaper and that's great. It is, as the honourable member mentioned, the fourth cost item in the budget line for the Department of Health so it is significant, but let's not start patting ourselves on the back too quickly here.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at Health which is the biggest department in government, last year it grew at a rate of almost 8 per cent. There was about a 7.9 per cent rate of growth. That may be okay if our revenues for the province are also growing at the same rate but they're not. If we look, we have a population that's in decline. A good portion of our productivity, our GDP - in fact, about 29 per cent of our GDP is government spending. So almost one-third of our economy is government spending whereas if we look at other provinces, we see numbers closer to 20 per cent. So those economies are stronger because there's a larger private sector.

The other thing that we have that's working against us is we have an aging population and in 2020 one-third of Nova Scotians will be seniors. So these are people who are going to need social services from government. They're not going to be able to contribute further to our economy because they're going to be retired. We have a small private sector here, as I just mentioned, Mr. Speaker, but it's the private sector that drives innovation and growth in economies and it creates jobs. Unfortunately, our private sector is small.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government will throw back at me, and they've done it in the past, if we look at the rate of growth in health care and they'll say, well, Allan, where would you cut, you know. I remember during estimates last year, the honourable Minister of Finance went so far as to suggest where he would cut in Inverness - almost in a threatening tone - and I thought that was unfortunate. I think there comes times in this House when we have to ask ourselves if we've come here for the betterment of the province or are we coming here for ourselves? I believe, and I have to believe this, otherwise I wouldn't be here, that I'm here for the betterment of the province. I do believe that it is time for government to get its costs under control.

I think of a university student I spoke with out on the step today when I was here earlier. I had a constituent, Jerome Tracey, who was given a medal for bravery today - it was very nice to see him here and his family - and when I left the House, I spoke with a university student who was asking me about what do you think about the cost of tuition? Like so many other things in government, everything is going up. The cost of everything is going up. I told him, I said, well, you know, if you want to get to the root of the problem, I think we have to look at finding some way to reward universities to reduce their costs. We have to make it more affordable that way. If we just give subsidies and if we give tax credits, we're only dulling the effect of the cost increase. We're almost hiding it and we're not giving an incentive for universities to reduce their costs. So we're not getting to the root of the problem. Much is the same in the case of health care and really government as a whole.

Today we saw a company in the province, Larsen's, close its doors, 300 people out of work. The government can say, well, you know, it's not the HST increase that was made earlier this year, it's not the increases to income taxes, it's not the deficits that have been running up. Maybe they're right, maybe those actions have not had an effect on Larsen's, but I think if we keep going in the direction that we're going with deficit budgets and high taxes, it's certainly not going to help. We have to ask ourselves if the only jobs in this province left that are safe are government jobs, is that a good thing?

Then we would have to ask ourselves the question, well, if government jobs are the focus of our economy in Nova Scotia, who is going to pay the taxes to pay for those jobs? Well, sure, people in government are paying taxes like everybody else, but if you were looking at an average tax rate of 30 per cent, you'd be looking at a need of about 3.33 jobs to pay for one government job. If you took out the one government job, you're down to 2.33 jobs needed from the private sector. In Nova Scotia we have a ratio of about four to one, so we're ahead of the game, but wouldn't it be better if we were ahead of the game with seven to eight jobs for every government job? Wouldn't our economy be that much stronger? We're not going to get there if we continue to let the costs of government rise and we are forced to increase taxes to cover off deficit budgets.

If there is one thing for sure in that small example, it's that we can't grow our economy with government jobs. If we look at the actions of this government, today they're patting themselves on the back about this action to bring in generic drugs to reduce the costs

- and that's good - but the main costs in government, all across government, are jobs and are salaries. This government, from what I've seen, is they are trying to reduce the size of government by 10 per cent but they're saying they're going to do that just through attrition, it's going to happen on its own. They've also given, from what I've seen, about a 90 per cent job security to government, to everybody who works in government.

Mr. Speaker, nobody likes to see jobs leave the economy and I'm sure the people in Inverness - there are a lot of people working in Inverness that work in government. I can say this, many of the jobs in government are located in Halifax and if we want to do something significant, something meaningful, if we're serious about turning this ship around, we have to look at the cost of salaries in government. It's either that or we have to get people more healthy in this province. I have a couple of statistics here: nine million Canadians have at least one chronic health condition and the demand for the service is very high for health care and that's no doubt driving the costs, but I don't think we can afford to supply that demand when we have a rate of growth of 8 per cent.

If you're at a rate of growth of 7 per cent you're going to double every 10 years, no matter what you're talking about, whether it's money or whether it's the size of something; if you're growing at a rate of over 7 per cent a year, you're going to double in size. If our revenues aren't growing, we're not going to be able to handle that and we're going to experience a lot of pain in other departments, in areas like education, in areas like infrastructure. People in rural Nova Scotia are very concerned about roads, that's always an important issue.

I want to say that this takes leadership and I have not seen it from this government. If we look in their history, we only need to look at their record of voting. When Premier Hamm was trying to turn the ship around like he did in 2002 and 2003 with the first balanced budget in 40 years, it was voted against by the NDP members in this House. They talk about the mess that they were left with, but, in fact, they were left with eight balanced budgets and the decisions that had to be made at that time were not always popular, but they put us in a better position today. I can only think of what position we'd be in today if we hadn't taken that action so those actions are really good and they require leadership. I believe that they are in the best interests of our province.

I would also say, the NDP Government here has many voters in Halifax and a lot of the seats in the 1980s when a lot of the spending was going on were held by the electorate in Halifax, so before criticizing past governments too much, they should recognize that the people who are electing them were also voting for those governments.

To summarize, should government be patting themselves on the back for this? I've seen advertising where they have been trying to do that, and I think really they're just distracting from the true issue at hand, which is the fact that they're not gaining a real control of the costs of government. It's important that we celebrate success, but we must be focused on the task at hand in making a difference for Nova Scotians.

I do have further remarks here, but perhaps on a future date I'll have an opportunity to deliver them. I will conclude my remarks with that. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I want to thank all of the members for their participation in the late debate tonight. That ends the day's business.

The House shall now rise to meet again tomorrow from the hours of 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 6:26 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 2206**

By: Ms. Kelly Regan (Bedford-Birch Cove)

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

Whereas the 2009-10 Grade 5 students of Ecole Grosvenor-Wentworth Park are celebrating a second victory for their silent animation film about a town of feuding light bulbs - "The Bright, the Bad and the Ugly" - made a year ago when teacher Andrew Stickings asked his students to make a film about energy conservation; and

Whereas Stickings submitted the film for consideration to the Ottawa International Animation Festival, the film beat out 70 international entries and won one of five spots in the high school aged category, a feat itself considering that those spots are normally reserved for high school student submissions; and

Whereas the class had already won an award for this film at last year's Atlantic Film Festival;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate Mr. Andrew Stickings and the 23 students of the 2009-10 Grade 5 class of Ecole Grosvenor-Wentworth Park on their awards and wish them well in their future endeavours.

RESOLUTION NO. 2207

By: Ms. Kelly Regan (Bedford-Birch Cove)

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

Whereas the Grade 5 classes of Mr. Andrew Stickings at Ecole Grosvenor-Wentworth Park School in Halifax have created many award-winning videos; and

Whereas the 2009-10 class earned a number of awards for their videos; and

Whereas student director Alison Horton and student producer Amanda Wentzell joined Mr. Stickings in Japan to receive the Panasonic Kid Witness News Program Hometown Documentary Award and the Global Web Award for their documentary, Pier 21;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate Andrew, Amanda, Alison, and all the students who worked on this video and wish them well in their future cinematographic endeavours.

RESOLUTION NO. 2208

By: Hon. Karen Casey (Colchester North)

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

Whereas Lieutenant Governor's Education Medals are presented to Grade 11 students each year; and

Whereas the award is presented to one girl and to one boy in Grade 11 in each high school who have commendable performance in the courses in which they are enrolled, and who have demonstrated the qualities of leadership and service in both school and community; and

Whereas James Hunt of North Colchester High School was presented the Lieutenant Governor's Education Medal;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate James Hunt for being the recipient of this prestigious medal.