



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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Third Session

FRIDAY, MAY 13, 2011

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, MAY 13, 2011

Sixty-first General Assembly

Third Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordon Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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. 59 - Elections 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.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table the Annual Report of the Review Board under the Involuntary Psychiatric Treatment Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Environment.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, further to the request by the member for Dartmouth East about the coal site in Point Aconi, I am pleased to table a copy of the industrial approval.

MR. SPEAKER: The information is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 1624

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

Whereas many community groups and organizations in our province would not be able to continue their work without the commitment and dedication of volunteers; and

Whereas on May 5, 2011, the Halifax Mainland North Volunteer Recognition Committee held their annual Community Champion Awards Dinner to recognize outstanding volunteers who consistently dedicate their time and talents to improving the lives of others; and

Whereas 15-year-old Samantha “Sam” Nielson has been involved with her community since she was 11 years old, through charity and volunteerism, starting out by adopting a family at Christmastime and now graduating to coaching soccer for the sixth season;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate Sam Nielson for the tremendous contributions she has made to improving the lives of others in her community, and wish her continued success in the future.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 1625

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

Whereas the Boston Red Sox Bluenose Brotherhood is a dedicated and active organization that promotes and celebrates the Red Sox Nation; and

Whereas the Bluenose Brotherhood is an integral part of hosting the Red Sox and the World Series Trophy in Nova Scotia, that included an event at Province House that forged an even stronger bond; and

Whereas the Boston Red Sox have partnered with the Bluenose Brotherhood to declare July 5, 2011, as Nova Scotia Day at Fenway Park;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly encourage the Bluenose Brotherhood with this endeavour as they promote the Red Sox and our province in this special partnership.

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.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 1626

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

Whereas many community groups and organizations in our province would not be able to continue their work without the commitment and dedication of volunteers; and

Whereas on May 5, 2011, the Halifax Mainland North Volunteer Recognition Committee held their annual Community Champion Awards Dinner to recognize outstanding volunteers who consistently dedicate their time and talents to improving the lives of others; and

Whereas Suzanne Morrison has dedicated so much of her time to volunteering within her community by acting as PSA President at École Rockingham School, as choir director of the Rockingham Parents Choir, working with the Kids Help Phone and many, many other volunteer endeavours;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate Suzanne Morrison for the tremendous contributions she has made to her community in music and volunteerism, and wish her continued success in the future.

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 Yarmouth.

RESOLUTION NO. 1627

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

Whereas Fred Graham has dedicated his time and service to his community as a member of the Yarmouth Lions Club for the past five years and is the current King Lion for the past two; and

Whereas Mr. Graham recently received a commendation from International Lions Club President Sid Scruggs III; and

Whereas the commendation recognizes that Mr. Graham has been a beacon of hope to those in need around the world;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Fred Graham on this significant honour, recognize his outstanding service to his community and wish him every success in the future.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Third Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 17.

Bill No. 17 - Fair Drug Pricing Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move third reading of Bill No. 17, the Fair Drug Pricing Act. This is a bill in the public interest. North Americans pay more for drugs than any other part of the world. Canadians are among the highest payers for generic drugs in the world. Inside this country, Nova Scotians pay more for many generic drugs than residents of other provinces.

Last week, CIHI, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, issued a report on pharmaceutical use in Canada. That report indicated that Nova Scotia has the second highest expenditure per person of any province in the country, second only to Quebec. The price of generic drugs, the cost of drugs, places a very heavy burden on Nova Scotians. It places a very heavy burden on our public programs paid for by the taxpayer of the province; it places a very heavy burden on private plans paid for by employers and employees; and it places a very heavy burden on consumers who have no plan, people who work for minimum wage, for example, who get sick and require medication, or who have a chronic condition that requires the use of pharmaceutical drugs.

This legislation is a very important and a very significant piece of legislation. It creates a stand-alone Act which will allow the Province of Nova Scotia's public Pharmacare Programs and the provincial government the authority to regulate drug prices. Through this authority, we will establish regulations to get better, fairer drug prices for Nova Scotians, and ensure that Pharmacare remains sustainable for the more than 200,000 Nova Scotians who count on it today as well as those who will need it in the future.

We are taking a balanced approach to help ensure that Nova Scotians have access to pharmacies in their communities and to the drugs that they need at a reasonable cost. The Province of Nova Scotia spends about \$300 million, annually, for pharmaceuticals and that

money is spent through the Department of Health and Wellness - about \$273 million - and the Department of Community Services, in their income support program. It includes the Exception Drug Status programs, for example, MS drugs would be exception drugs; drugs for people who have had heart transplants or lung transplants, the anti-rejection drugs; and it includes the drugs that are purchased in the DHAs. Of that \$300 million, approximately \$75 million represents the generic drug portfolio in the department.

If we do not make changes to the costs of generic prescription drugs, then those who rely on Pharmacare will continue to see costs increase at a rapid rate and, as I've said, as a province we are paying too much for prescription drugs and that is not fair to Nova Scotians. Pharmacare costs to government have increased on average of 9 per cent a year, over the past decade, and they've more than doubled in the past eight years alone. Mr. Speaker, this is a situation that cannot continue; it will have drastic implications for the sustainability of our Pharmacare Program. As you know, we've been able to hold the line on the premiums and the co-pays in our Seniors' Pharmacare Program, for example. We've been able to do that, but one has to wonder how much longer you can continue to do this if you don't deal with the rising costs of drugs and the fact that we do pay among the highest prices for generic drugs in the world.

Generic drugs, as everyone knows, are drugs that, after the patent protection for the brand name, are available and the theory is that they will be available to people at a reduced cost. I'm told that on average, in fact, we're paying perhaps 60 per cent, 65 per cent of the brand for those drugs. Members will remember that Lipitor, the brand-name drug, has come off patent and what we did was we went to a request for proposal mechanism and we asked the generic makers of the generic Lipitor to bid at 35 per cent of the cost of the brand drug and we had eight companies that responded to that. That resulted in a significant savings for the taxpayers of Nova Scotia and those savings were also realized for people in private plans and, indeed, for consumers who don't have a drug plan.

It is possible to bring the price of generic drugs down, but that needs to be done in a structured way and this is what this bill does. This bill provides us with a framework to, in fact, change and reduce and regulate the price of generic drugs and to do it in a way that is fair and will have a tremendous impact on our drug plans into the future.

Mr. Speaker, drug pricing needs to change for a number of very important reasons. As I've said, prescription drugs need to be more affordable for Nova Scotians who need them. We want Nova Scotians to be able to pay similar prices to people in other provinces in Canada, so that there is some equity across this country and that Pharmacare remains sustainable to those who need help with drug costs including seniors, families and Nova Scotians with low incomes, so they're all able to get help because of a reduction in the cost of drugs.

While the Fair Drug Pricing Bill has been before the Law Amendments Committee during the past week, we have heard presentations from pharmacists and pharmacy owners who are worried about the possible impact of the government's plan on their business. As a government we listened to the valuable information they provided. Mr. Speaker, we value pharmacists, we recognize how highly skilled they are and the expertise they offer - not only in drug therapy but in health care as a whole. Many Nova Scotians count on them for advice and they are valued and trusted members of our provincial health care team.

Mr. Speaker, that's why last Fall I brought forward changes that would expand the scope of practice of pharmacists so that the expertise that they bring to our health care system can be more fully engaged in that health care system. We have a working group with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia and with the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists. That working group is looking at this expanded scope of practice and compensation for the various expanded pieces of work that accompany those changes that were made some time ago.

Drug pricing is changing in Canada. This change started in 2006 and many provinces including Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec and Saskatchewan have, or are making, similar changes as to how drugs are priced. I did have an opportunity to speak with Minister Matthews, the Minister of Health in Ontario who in some ways led the way with respect to legislation around fair drug pricing, to learn from her what she would do differently and what she would recommend in terms of legislation here. That was a very helpful discussion.

The approach that Nova Scotia is taking with this bill is a made-in-Nova Scotia approach. For example in Ontario, the Ontario Government made a decision to eliminate the professional fees or the rebates, it's referred to in a number of different ways, that pharmacies get. In Nova Scotia, when we consulted with pharmacies through the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, they actually recommended that we not interfere with a business practice such as the professional fees. We accepted that recommendation, Mr. Speaker, and it is not our plan to interfere in those professional fees.

In Ontario, the Ontario Government capped the cost of generic drugs at 25 per cent of the brand. Our legislation caps the cost of generic drugs at 35 per cent and we phase that in over a year starting at 45 per cent in July, dropping to 40 per cent six months later and then in July 2012, going to 35 per cent. That's because in the consultations that we had with the Pharmacy Association, they told us that 25 per cent was too much and they recommended that a better option would be 35 per cent. We consulted, we listened and we responded to what the industry association had to say and that is reflected in this bill.

Additionally, the Pharmacy Association also recommended that we not use a tendering process or a request for proposals process as we did with Lipitor when it came off brand. Although this legislation does have the power for tendering, it is not the government's plan to tender unless there are some compelling reasons to do so. We have made that abundantly clear to the Pharmacy Association.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is, I hope, a demonstration on the government's part of consulting, hearing what the Pharmacy Association has had to say and responding to their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, as drug pricing changes, the business models of pharmacies will change and adapt as well. This is taking place in Canada and I recognize that this brings stress and uncertainty to pharmacy owners. Any kind of change such as this is difficult. However, we have recognized the need to negotiate a new tariff agreement with the pharmacies.

There's a lot of misinformation that has been put forward, sometimes in debate and sometimes outside of this Chamber that I would like to have an opportunity to clarify. It has been said in this Chamber that the government did not consult with the Pharmacy Association. Nothing could be further from the truth; we have been meeting. I have met with the Pharmacy Association and officials in my department have met and are meeting with the Pharmacy Association and continue to meet with the Pharmacy Association regularly.

We did a consultation where we brought the Pharmacy Association and many, many pharmacy owners and pharmacists to the table to discuss what the options were to get fair drug prices for Nova Scotians. As I said, they asked us not to reduce to 25 per cent but recommended 35 per cent - we consulted and we listened to them. They asked us not to interfere with the professional fees or the rebates - we consulted and we listened to them. They asked us not to enter into a plan for tendering - we listened, after consulting with them. They asked that we not negotiate the tariff agreement until they had had an opportunity to see the bill and the regulations.

Mr. Speaker, we took steps not only to provide the bill but we provided a set of draft regulations with this bill. Members who are more experienced in this Chamber will know that that is a very unusual step for government to take, to have the regulations in draft form tabled with the bill, released with the bill - that rarely happens in my experience, which now is 13 years in this Chamber, you rarely see regulations. When we talk about the devil being in the details in a piece of legislation, what we mean is the legislation gives you the broad framework but it's the regulations that give you the details, quite often.

We have proceeded here, in a way, where we're consulting, we're working with our partners, we very much recognize that this piece of legislation will represent a change for pharmacies and we really need to work with them and involve them and support them throughout this process of change. That is exactly what we have been doing.

I want to return to the tariff, the negotiations for the tariff, because it's been said that we're not negotiating the tariff. Well, this is not the case. We are in negotiations for a new tariff with the pharmacies. I recognize that any negotiations are emotional. As one

member put it, there are high stakes, people on every side have a stake in the outcome, and it's a very interesting kind of process and dance that goes on around negotiations.

I want to reassure members that, number one, negotiations are well underway; and number two, we know that we have this date line of July 1st. I have said, and I will say again, I would very much like a resolution that is supported by both sides at the table, to be in place by July 1st, and I have directed the staff in my department to do their utmost to get a resolution to the tariff agreement in place by that time.

I expect that work to be done. I expect bargaining to occur in good faith. I know the people who are involved on both sides of this equation - and I know they're tough bargainers, and so they should be - I know they are fair-minded people and I do believe in the process of negotiation and I do believe we will reach a resolution.

I want to say that, in my limited experience as Minister of Health, I've now been through quite a number of negotiations with a lot of different health care providers. At the end of the day, when agreements are negotiated, if dates and deadlines don't align perfectly, we have never, as a government, said too bad, so sad. We have always shown retroactivity around the agreements that have been reached, if they don't align perfectly, and all of those kinds of things.

I do think we have been reasonable and we will continue to be reasonable. We value the pharmacy industry, the pharmacists in the province. We can only move health care forward with them, and the tariff agreement is a significant piece of being able to implement the changes that we so want in our health care system and as part of getting fair drug prices to Nova Scotians.

I just want to reiterate around the consultations that we engaged in in the Fall because I know that at least one member was of the view that we hadn't consulted with the Pharmacy Association and with very many pharmacists. We got input from more than 100 representatives of close to 20 different organizations, including the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia. Day-long meetings were held here in Halifax in one of the hotels. I popped into one of the consultations briefly in the morning and met a number of members of the Pharmacy Association. I was told at the time by my staff - who, by the way are pharmacists themselves negotiating on our side - that those discussions were very productive and very amicable.

We received, in addition, many written submissions and letters and e-mails from members of the public so the consultation back in the Fall was a very constructive, a very serious consultation. We listened to what we were told and based on what we heard, we developed the plan that we have here today, which we believe will work best for our province. As I said, it's a made-in-Nova Scotia solution. It's a balanced plan. It's designed both to get better drug prices for Nova Scotians but, as well, to recognize and extend the scope of practice for pharmacists.

With respect to pharmacies in small communities and isolated communities, there has been some mention made that the department has set aside a small bit of revenue to support pharmacies that are very important to a community because they are the only pharmacy in that community. There are many, many pharmacies in Nova Scotia, as people will recognize. We see pharmacies now when we go to the Superstore, when we go to Wal-Mart, when we go to Sobeys, when we travel in our communities.

The pharmacy industry, long before this bill was envisioned, has changed quite significantly in our province. You will go into small towns and see very large Shoppers Drug Marts and other big pharmacies. The industry has changed without a bill like this, but there are places in the province where you won't find the big-box Shoppers Drug Marts. They are one-pharmacy areas and we have put aside a bit of revenue that we would consider using in the tariff arrangement to make particular supports for pharmacies that are isolated and that communities are dependent on, so that communities will not be disadvantaged.

I know the honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park in Committee of the Whole House talked about the seniors in rural communities. As a Minister of Health who has 80-plus-year-old parents who are seniors in a rural community, I understand entirely the importance of having access to a local pharmacy. This is something that the department is very well aware of. It's something the government is very well aware of, and it's something that we certainly have and will take into consideration as we implement the Fair Drug Pricing Act provisions.

I know that we've heard, in front of the Law Amendments Committee it has been expressed that this bill is being moved too quickly. With all due respect to the various presenters on this, we have been working on this for quite some time. The Pharmacy Association has been very aware and, as I said, very involved in the discussions about this for quite some time. This is not something that has just appeared on the horizon in this session of the Legislature by any stretch of the imagination, and I find it a little ironic because, I think in my first term here as Minister of Health, I actually underwent a bit of criticism for not doing enough, fast enough, on bringing the prices of generic drugs down.

You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. I think what we have done is we've taken a very prudent, a very thoughtful, a very considered approach to a problem that everybody identifies and accepts. And there is consensus on the fact that the costs of generic drugs are too high, it's not fair the prices we're paying, and we need to have government take a more active role in public policy and regulating this particular scenario and that there will be great benefit to the public.

Now we also know that there is a concern from some of the pharmacies that all of the pieces haven't perfectly aligned in terms of the tariff agreement and the working group on remuneration for scope of practice. As I said, we still are working to ensure that that, in

fact, does occur, particularly the tariff agreement. I have great confidence in both sides at the table, as I said, that they in fact will get a tariff agreement in place, that it will align and that it will be a fair agreement we all can accept and live with. Then we'll be able to get on with the business of using the expertise of pharmacists more fully in our health care system, which I have to say, Mr. Speaker, is something that really will give me a great deal of satisfaction when we get that in place.

Prior to being here in this Legislature, I was a member of the Faculty of Health Professions at Dalhousie. Pharmacy is a very big part of that faculty. Pharmacists have always, in my view, been underutilized in our health care system in terms of their expertise and their capacity to really not only address illness and disease, but to really help people in terms of prevention and wellness, and the sooner we're able to tap into that the better we will all be, so I think this is certainly the way to go.

Once more, I just want to reiterate, I directed staff to continue negotiating the tariff agreement with the association. They're at the table, they'll continue to be at the table, and I want that negotiation to conclude as soon as possible.

We will continue to work with pharmacists in terms of the larger role they'll be playing in delivering health care to Nova Scotia through new services like ordering lab tests, prescribing medications in certain situations, and even giving vaccines. While that is separate from the tariff agreement and compensation for dispensing drugs, we recognize that new services to our health care system will require pay compensation. Again, that is something that we certainly recognize and will be working toward having in place.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that, frankly, the reason I went into politics was to make a difference in the lives of people in this province and we in this Chamber are all here, I believe, for that reason, we want to make a difference. This particular bill will make a significant difference. It's not easy for a government, for a minister, for a department, to have to make choices around what drugs get listed and what drugs don't get listed simply on the basis of whether or not you can afford them. We need to be able to list drugs and sustain our Pharmacare Program on the basis of what is good and effective treatment for people. That means we need to have sensible strategies for keeping our costs effective, that we're spending the money of the people in the province in a very effective, principled way, that they are getting value for dollar and that as a government, we are doing the best we can to ensure this.

This piece of legislation is, I think, very indicative of what's required to sustain our Pharmacare Programs in the province; it's one piece of what's required to sustain our Pharmacare Programs in the province. It's what we know is the right thing to do. Generic drugs should be affordable, they should be available, we shouldn't be overpaying for those drugs and the savings that we realize we should have available to allow us to compensate people properly in the pharmacy industry, for example. If they are providing new services, they should be available to allow us to list other drugs, they should be available to help us

keep from having to offload the burden of paying for our drug programs onto individuals through user fees.

This is a good piece of public policy, it's in the public interest and, frankly, Mr. Speaker, it makes me very proud to be Minister of Health and Wellness to see this bill go forward.

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

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring the attention of the House to the east gallery. Everybody in the House knows that I represent the beautiful riding of Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank and I would like to bring attention to the gallery because these are some of the individuals who make the riding so beautiful.

We are being joined this morning by Girl Guides, the 1st Canal Girl Guides, and I will ask them stand along with the leaders, Gayle Smith, Kristiana Brideau, Shera Lee Kerr and Kelly Casey. I would ask the House to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: I hope you enjoy today's proceedings.

The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: It was certainly important to stop for that introduction as we have our debate today. We are very pleased to see people visiting us and I'm particularly pleased to see a large group of young girls coming in and learning something about the Legislature as well. We are only 12 women out of 52 here in the Legislature, but it's interesting that as they come in, they see a Health Minister who is a woman and a long-serving member of the Legislature and the Health Critic on the Liberal side is also the member for Halifax Clayton Park. So I hope that they are inspired and get more involved in politics and community. (Applause)

As members of the House know, we've had a fair amount of discussion here in the Legislature around the different readings of this bill - Bill No. 17, the Fair Drug Pricing Act - and we had three full days of many pharmacists and representatives and supporters coming to the Legislature to speak at the Committee on Law Amendments. I think there were two or three in all of the speakers who spoke in favour of the bill as it is with no changes or no call for just slowing down a little bit, but nobody criticized the intent of the bill.

Actually, this morning has been interesting and good to hear from the minister herself again to be able to give her the opportunity to respond to some of the individual statements that were made at the Committee on Law Amendments. I know that the other

members of the NDP caucus are certainly supporting her in that with a loud round of applause to recognize her points that she raised today. It hasn't really changed very much of what I see as the concern here and it's a concern around the timing.

I'll go back to yesterday's comments in Committee of the Whole House on Bills so you'll have to bear with me because I think some of them need to be said again. The bill's intent is to lower the price of drugs - for the clarity of the public, it is the generic drugs that we're talking about, not drugs that are recently released or still under patent that are held by the brand name companies. These are drugs that are now off patent and become much cheaper and become available by a number of companies through generics.

We are talking here about what we will do about the high price of generic drugs in Canada and particularly here in Nova Scotia. The minister said we have the second highest cost in the country, which is a very important issue that needs to be addressed. I want to be absolutely clear that the Liberal caucus agrees with that. I know the pharmacists agreed with that; we heard it time and time again that they supported what we were saying and what the intent of the bill is. They want to do the best for Nova Scotians.

My comments really, yesterday and again today, will focus on what we heard at the Committee on Law Amendments and what the pharmacists reflected to us about their practice, about their professionalism, about their pride in the work they do for their communities as one of the continuum of health providers in our province. I think many members had the opportunity to sit in at the Committee on Law Amendments to hear pharmacists who came from their communities or from neighbouring communities. We had pharmacists from every corner of this province make the long trip from Yarmouth, from Glace Bay, from corners in between, to drive to Halifax to speak to members of the Legislature to let us know how very important it is to them to be heard in this process.

The minister said very clearly that there was consultation. I mentioned yesterday the owner of a pharmacy in Saulnierville who said that although he was aware this was going on, he didn't realize the impact it was going to have on his business and on his life and on the services that he provides in his community - the most important thing. When a pharmacist sees that their income is going to be interrupted dramatically and that's what they see coming, that's what they fear. If they fear their big or little pharmacy is not going to be able to generate the funds that it did before, then they won't be able to provide the long list of services that they've provided for free.

We're here talking largely about cost containment, sustainability and I think it's important that we talk about what pharmacists do at no cost to the public that is of tremendous help in defraying other health care costs. I will refer again to one of the most expensive things we run into, a common error and problem, which is our prescription errors. That's people having prescriptions that might either be incorrect, if they were incorrectly filled, if they are not taken correctly, if people who have the prescription don't understand how they can be used most effectively and they don't follow instructions.

The only way people can avoid that, with some of the complicated drugs we have and with sometimes people being on multiple drugs which makes it confusing, is to have time with their pharmacists so that they sit down and really work with you about what and how to take this drug. I think, in the future, the biggest savings we're going to see will be the medication reviews that we can do more extensively and an improvement in our education, for the public, and who is best placed to do that education? In our entire health care system, it's the pharmacists - they're front-line, they're dispensing the drug and talking to the patient right there. They know more about drugs and drug interaction than any other health care provider. They know more than your doctor knows because doctors don't specialize in that. We have to integrate them more and use their skills more.

The minister referred to the fact that pharmacists have been under-utilized, perhaps, if we look at their traditional role in serving the public, and that now we're moving forward. It's very positive that we are doing so because they can save a tremendous amount of money.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke, as well, about the three changes that are coming at pharmacists at once and we could even add four with the passage of Bill No. 13, which is that the bill that will allow pharmacy technicians to be regulated and be recognized as a profession as well. That will increase their scope of practice and their responsibilities. For people who don't realize, when we say and use this sort of term that rolls off the tongue, scope of practice. What is that? It means more responsibility, it means more liability. It means more pressure, really, more responsibility on the shoulders of each of those individuals.

If we increase the pharmacy technician's role, they are going to now be responsible for some of the prescriptions that go out the door at a pharmacy counter. They are taking responsibility and the pharmacy has to ensure that they've covered liability, that they are covered through their college or otherwise, that there are provisions made for training and all of the things that go with that and there will be an additional cost.

Again, when I ask the government about the additional cost on that bill, we were told that is not a matter of concern, really, to government, because they are privately employed, they are employed by the community pharmacies, so that just falls as an extra cost to community pharmacies.

At the same time, pharmacists have told us, absolutely clearly, that a second component - and for them the most important component - is the tariff agreement that they have pending with the government, that because of these negotiations that are currently underway, they are not determined, they're left hanging.

The tariff agreement has been an ongoing thing. It expires and another agreement is written, just as we have agreements with our unions, just as we have agreements with

doctors. They are almost constantly in negotiation because they are negotiating one, usually retroactively, as the minister referred to, often being months behind.

The pharmacists want to know what the tariff agreement arrangements are going to be before they're hit with a decrease in generic drug prices and a dramatic change to their revenue and their ability to provide services. We heard, as a result of the revenue decrease, that they are letting people go. They are not keeping part-time pharmacists on staff. We've heard time and again pharmacies that had three or four pharmacists say, we're going to have to retrench to two, or a smaller pharmacy saying, I'll have to do it alone, there'll just be one pharmacist, I'll have to cover all the shifts. That means there will be fewer hours that the pharmacy is open. We're going to have to restrict our service at the counter.

They talked about other measures they are already making because of the uncertainty that is surrounding this bill. That included not hiring any students in a number of pharmacies. Many of them said, traditionally, in their little communities they would hire three or four or maybe even more students but certainly this year they are not. I refer to Liverpool in particular; the Pharmasave in Liverpool said they not only hired students every year and at Christmas, but they gave them a bursary at the end of year of \$1,500 to each student to help them go back to university.

They did that because they want to help young people in their community work in that community and help inspire them to perhaps enter health professions and provide jobs for the young people who live in that town. They feel really badly that they are just saying I can't do it this year, because July 1st is when their agreement should be in place, but there is not a high level of optimism that is going to happen. I asked a number of the presenters how they felt, did they have any certainty - well, nobody has certainty - but did they have an optimistic view that would take place, and they do not. They have a very fearful view that they are going to be hit with this bill coming into play on July 1st, and no agreement on their tariff.

The tariff - which again sounds like a sort of obscure name and idea - covers their operations really and their agreement with government through the Pharmacare Program and other points, but the biggest one of it is what they are paid to dispense a drug at the counter. Right now they are paid less than their cost to dispense that drug. The fee for dispensing the drug is \$10.62 per prescription and, in fact, they said if you look at the costs of pharmacists who have to be paid at the cost of the overhead - the lights, the running a location, a store, for people to come into - all of that is much more than \$10.62 per prescription. They estimate it's over \$14 - there's over a \$4 difference in that prescription dispensing fee if it was to cover all their costs.

What has happened in the meantime is other arrangements have sprung up over the last 20 years that have, in fact, actually filled the shortfall in the dispensing fee, saved government money because the government hasn't had to cover the full and actual costs. Because of those arrangements, again, there has been money in a pharmacy to provide all the free services. I talked about the extra time they spent to counsel people, which is going

to save an enormous amount of money down the road; and we know that they do compliance packaging, which means individual packaging for seniors, particularly, who are on multiple drugs who otherwise might be taking them in incorrect ways - and when that happens they end up at the door of the emergency room at great cost to the government, and they end up sick, maybe hospitalized, maybe something worse.

We are saving funds by supporting pharmacists, and I think the minister knows that. I think she recognizes that over the years pharmacists have been a partner with government and have worked to save money for government, and have worked in good faith at all of the negotiations year in, year out with government.

I want to read one of the comments that were brought to the Law Amendments Committee, which talked about the shortfall. I will quote it - I don't know if I need to submit it. It was submitted to the Law Amendments Committee, Mr. Speaker, but I'll just read this anyway - it says, "To date, pharmacies have relied on rebates from generic manufacturers to compensate them for these services because dispensing fees from the government have not been adequate to cover expenses like wages and other business related costs. As a pharmacy owner I now have to ask myself how will I cover these costs if there is no funding put in place to bridge this gap?" The gap is very real and I think the government acknowledges that, as well. This pharmacist goes on to say, "Will pharmacies across Nova Scotia survive? Some will not some will struggle. We need to discuss how pharmacies will be compensated, before these cuts are made."

That is really the essence of what the pharmacists have been saying. These arrangements, many of them said they are antiquated; they may not be the right financial arrangements; we may need more transparency. But you can't dramatically change the foundation of a business and a service - especially an essential service like this - without first addressing the other outstanding unknowns. From the very onset of our discussion of Bill No. 17, the point that needs to be raised again - and has been raised - is the uncertainty. That is, I think, what we all need to just keep in mind, that we've created a very destabilized environment for pharmacists. We have the pharmacy technicians I spoke about; we have the tariff agreement coming down without any knowledge of whether or not it will adequately cover the existing costs - and now cover another shortfall, which will be in place because of the other changes coming.

As well, we don't know what the impact will be of the scope of practice or that increased responsibility that we're going to give to pharmacists. Now, the bill is passed for that to allow them to have more scope of practice, but the agreement is not in place between the working group that the minister spoke about, with pharmacists, with doctors, to say what they can do and what would be a fair payment for that.

As one pharmacist told us at the Law Amendments Committee, even if you told them today what the actual costs will be for the extra scope of practice duties, the

prescribing, ordering tests, individual consultations, all of that, even if you told them - the injections as well - they'll do things like travel injections, flu shots, and those kinds of vaccinations. Even with that, even if they knew today what the cost will be that they will be reimbursed, they said they have no idea what the demand is, they can't really factor that in to say oh, we'll now be doing this, this and this and for that money we will be able to make up the shortfall that's coming from Bill No. 17. They don't know all the facts and they need time to put it in place.

We are dealing with a very uncertain situation and that's why I said that it's not business as usual at the negotiating table. This is a high-stakes game for all parties. The government certainly wants to move forward with Bill No. 17 and the reduction in generic prices right away, immediately, we hear that. But we also say that every other jurisdiction in Canada sat down at the table with their pharmacists and did look at all the factors together. They didn't do it just one at a time or piecemeal, I think they did it in good faith, in better faith than we're seeing here with our made-in-Nova Scotia version.

I think that sitting down with all the facts is the fair way to recognize the professionalism of all the players around the table, the government representatives and the pharmacists who are representing their professional association. We need to sit down with them fairly, we need to show them all the facts. We need to be honest and upfront about all of the implications.

The minister indicated that she had listened on some points and had taken note of things during the negotiations and I think that is good to acknowledge, that there are some things in the bill that have been put in place because of the requests of the pharmacists. There may have been some give and take at that point.

The lining up of these dates is crucial and the minister has not lined up the dates. She said she trusts that that will happen, she has directed her staff to hurry up. We are about six weeks, seven weeks from July 1st, it's not very long, and I think that's a case of wishful thinking to think that it's all going to come into play by July 1st. The pharmacists, as well, are not comfortable, they don't believe this is going to happen. That is why some of these dramatic and drastic steps are taking place at community pharmacies.

Again, there are a lot of different types of pharmacies across the province. We have 50 communities in this province with just one pharmacy - 50 towns, villages or small communities that are served by a single pharmacy. With this destabilization that's taking place, we could lose those pharmacies. Some of them will be gone, I have no doubt. The trend across other places where this has been coming, where the generic drug prices have been changing - and again, as was said, the industry is changing in that respect - has been consolidation. You're losing the independence and you're getting a consolidation into bigger stores and into places where the seniors and others have to travel a lot farther to get the service they need. Mr. Speaker, I think that's another cost that will come down on all Nova Scotians and on seniors, if they have to travel farther.

I particularly talk about the seniors or disabled population because maybe they're not able to drive, maybe they're in a small community where they're able to be served with delivery services that come from those pharmacies. Again, that was a free service in many locations that's provided to shut-ins and people who have difficulty getting out. That may not be available any more if the pharmacists don't have the money to provide it and the pharmacy may now be 20 minutes away or half an hour away, rather than five minutes down the road.

It's easy to ask your neighbour to help you and pick up your prescription for you if it's five minutes away. It's not going to be easy to ask for that kind of help when you say could you please drive half an hour away to pick up my prescription and help me.

As we know from other social service issues, in rural Nova Scotia it's an aging population and there are fewer and fewer young people, younger adults or middle-aged people who can do those errands and who can help each other. That means there is a group of seniors that is at great risk and it undermines the community yet again in those small communities. So as I said, there are 50 communities served by only one pharmacy, Mr. Speaker, and of those, we don't know how many will be at risk or how many may be lost.

Again, the minister knows that there has been work done in her department to identify them, there should be a mitigation amount of money that should be put aside to help those pharmacies. We don't know whether it's just a handful, we don't know if you can just count them on one hand or whether there are 20 or 30 or maybe all 50 that are the single suppliers in a community. We do need to know that, the pharmacists need to know, and the communities need to know, especially, are we on that list? Have we been identified? Will there be any way to help mitigate the impact on our pharmacy as we go forward? People are dependent on that service and they not only depend but they know that pharmacist, they are such an important part of the community. When people, particularly in these smaller communities, have a problem, their first point of contact is the pharmacist. So the role they play is enormously important.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke about some people coming to the Law Amendments Committee that represented three generations or more that have been pharmacists in a community. We know ourselves that many small communities have a family name on the sign and it has been up for several generations. We did have presenters come where the father came with his daughter or son, or another younger generation was with them, or currently pharmacy students. There is a real sense of this being a calling, a profession that is important, and one that there is a lot of pride around.

The pharmacists want to continue in an expanded role, they are so excited about what is to come in terms of their new role and that is something that really struck me was in the midst of their fear and uncertainty, and the real distress that they expressed to us, some came with some sadness and, certainly, they were appealing to us to slow down. But the

biggest thing in the midst of that fear and uncertainty was they still expressed a real excitement about how they want to adopt these new practices, how they want to spend money to fix their pharmacies to accommodate the greater responsibilities and roles they are going to play. They'll need rooms set up in their pharmacies where they can talk to patients, where there can be some privacy, which isn't in place in a lot of the older pharmacies now, they're going to need a place where they can do the test or do the vaccinations.

They're ready to invest in that and they are ready to play a bigger role and they encourage the people in their community to come and do that. But they just don't know what they are even going to be paid for it so while it's a time of great excitement, it's also a time of great uncertainty.

What the members on this side of the House and the Liberal caucus are calling for is fairness. We're asking that in all fairness when you move forward with something that has as laudable a goal as this bill has, when you're trying to create a system that's more sustainable, when you're trying to bring down the price of generic drugs so that all Nova Scotians will get drugs at a fairer price, at the same time you don't want to create costs in another part of the health care system or take away services, threaten services that are currently being offered through the pharmacies in Nova Scotia. I think that's where you want to find that balance, and the minister is, I hope, struggling with that balance because it's great to consult up front and to look at what should be in the bill, but now we're talking about a question of timing and a delicate question of timing.

We're calling on government to show finesse in their negotiations and to respect the pharmacists and their view that this is destabilizing, that this is threatening their very existence, in some cases. I think we will see the loss of pharmacies not only in rural Nova Scotia, but in ridings like mine, Halifax Clayton Park, and Halifax Fairview.

I mentioned a small pharmacy yesterday that I think will be in jeopardy because the 12 Medicine Shoppes in this province get 95 per cent of their revenue from dispensing of pharmaceuticals. Not from selling pop and chips and not from selling toilet paper and Kleenex, they have very small stores. The bigger stores like your Shoppers and Lawton's have moved into food, they have entire aisles, they even have freezer sections, some of them, to provide you with food and dinners and all kinds of things. They've gone way beyond milk and bread. That's because they are trying to supplement their income and have an offset for some of these changes that are coming. But a little store like the Medicine Shoppe doesn't have the floor space, they are very small, they're designed to be a place where people come for good advice, for health care delivery, for the services you can get in your community. They're playing a vital role, just as the pharmacists are as well in larger ones, but they will be more in jeopardy because 95 per cent or more of their revenue comes from the dispensing of the pharmaceuticals.

We heard that some of the other stores are perhaps about 80 per cent, and then if you're talking about the big box stores, it would be a tiny percentage that comes from their

pharmacy. The big box stores are really using the pharmacy as another service to their customers who are coming to shop in a Sobeys or Superstore or Costco or WalMart. They're a very different model again. I think we want to be able to protect the small independents and the community pharmacists. They are the ones who are providing these extra services, the extra care and programs, clinics, information, helping people to be wiser about staying well.

We heard again and again how chronic illnesses are dealt with at the pharmacy. They will do clinics for diabetics, clinics on weight management, clinics on high blood pressure and diet, all kinds of things - foot care for seniors - so many of the things that they would not otherwise have access to this information. Those kinds of clinics keep people well. I just want to stress, again, how many of the services that are provided for free at our community pharmacies are saving us funds all the way through the health care system.

If someone calls the pharmacist, or is able to drop in and talk to them about what they're feeling or their health concern, that can be addressed right there, a lot of the times, and prevent a visit to the doctor's office, which may not even be an option in some communities because of the lack of doctors or the long waits to get in, or the other alternative, off to an emergency room to get some help. So the pharmacist is saving money every day in helping that.

Another thing we need to remember is that pharmacists, being professionals and guided by their college and their code of ethics and their pride in the role they play in the health care system, are in a unique situation. When they are presented with a request to fill a prescription, they may, in fact, review that, speak to their customer and suggest they not take that drug. That drug might interact badly with another one they're on, that, in fact, it's one that they don't need anymore because they may have been on it for a long time and not be critically assessing whether it's still needed. It's the pharmacist that will say, no, there's something better or there's something less expensive or there's another way you can treat this and we're not going to fill that prescription today.

That's a unique situation that their profession dictates that they give the best advice and the best care possible, as do all of our health professions. You can't just categorize them as business people because this isn't just business, this is health care and this is the provision of health care. They are independent within that system, but they depend on the government's tariff agreement to pay them and provide compensation for that service. It is extremely important that we look at that and look at how this is going to impact them. I know you could probably quantify - I'm sure there are people in the Department of Health who can look at that and quantify - how much pharmacists save our system every year and every day as they really advocate on behalf of the patients that come to them. That is something that needs to be recognized here today and something we heard from them directly.

I think, to see the number of pharmacists come before us in the last three days of the Committee on Law Amendments, it was quite amazing. I don't have a total count on how many came, but I believe it's over 40 who came from around the province. They represented every type of pharmacy. They represented the little ones that I mentioned, the very small rural communities; they represented the Medicine Shoppe model, which is a very small, roughly 1,000-square-foot stores; they represented chains like PharmaChoice and Pharmasave, who are independents who have joined together in a group so that they can compete in the market and be able to survive.

The minister is right in saying that over a number of years the whole model of pharmacies has changed and they're now competing against big box and large, large stores. In order for them to compete, and be able to offer other products, they have joined into large chains. We're very fortunate, in this province, to be the headquarters of one of those, the PharmaChoice chain originated here in Nova Scotia, and represents stores here but also stores right across the country and has their headquarters, I believe, in Dartmouth. That's something to be proud of and we want to be able to support and allow that kind of ingenuity and innovation to continue because that's innovation to continue the community pharmacy with a buying group behind it. That's very important and a number of the others I mentioned do the same thing.

Independent and community pharmacists have recognized for years that it's a changing environment and they need to adapt and be prepared to do things differently. They are doing that and they are doing it in the most professional way possible. I have nothing but the highest respect for each and every one who came before us to say that this should be slowed down, that the passage of this bill should be delayed until the tariff agreement in place. That is really the key point that needs to be made today, that this still has got to be slowed down.

There's no reason in the world to assume that we're going to have an agreement in place by July 1st. As I said, if you look at the experience in this province and in any other province, it takes months and months to negotiate the agreement and to bring it to a point where it is implemented. Even when you ink the agreement, it's not done. You'll sign the agreement and it will take some months for that to actually be implemented on the level of a community pharmacy, for all of the ducks to be in order.

We were told that a number of years ago the government negotiated an agreement in record time, apparently a little over seven months from the time it was begun until the time they had it in place and every other province was marvelling at how that could happen so quickly. Here we are seven weeks away from the deadline with negotiations that I'm told are fairly far apart at the moment because there are so many unknowns. The pharmacists know that this is a very critical negotiation they are in, that they won't get a chance to go back and make this right again and that there are a lot of things the government is holding back on. The government isn't telling them what they are going to be paid for their extra new responsibilities, what they're going to be paid for a tariff

agreement which has been short by \$4.00 on every prescription for God knows how long because it's been going on for quite some time.

The tariff agreement for dispensing has only changed by about \$1.00 in the last 10 years, so it's been short of their full costs for a long time. We heard a number of figures presented on that that people had been in business for years and seen scarcely any movement in that dispensing fee. So we have years of shortfall to accommodate in this negotiation, plus we have to look forward to saying, can they weather the storm of changes coming at them, the extra costs for their more highly-trained technicians on the shop floor? Can they cover the costs that are going to come, of training and adapting? All of those things are coming at them. You can be sure that the pharmacists are there in good faith, wanting to get this in place for their members because their members are desperate to see it clarified, they want to know where they stand.

As I said, it's a high-stake negotiation, it's not business as usual, so you're not going to see that streamlined seven months that went through in the past. Even though there's a lot at stake to get it arranged by July 1st, I don't think this is very likely, I really don't.

The minister said they're at the table and they are negotiating, but we know that twice the negotiations were postponed and put off in the past, that that had come up in this round, I mean we're behind schedule already. During the week of the Law Amendments Committee, just this week, the working group was set to meet the next day, I guess the negotiating team was set to meet the next day, it would have been one day this week, and that was cancelled. That was brought up at our Law Amendments Committee meeting that night, that the negotiations, were proceeding on schedule, would have been underway then next day but it had been cancelled.

Now we don't know why it was cancelled, but that doesn't look like good faith when you're in the middle of discussions with pharmacists and when they're coming out in record numbers to say, I'm worried about my community and I'm worried about the people who work for me and I'm worried about the people I serve at the counter. How is that good faith if the government cancels the meeting the next day? Maybe there is some great reason or explanation for that, but it sends out a very bad signal. It may seem like a small thing to the government, but it sends out a very bad signal to the people who are anxiously waiting and listening to every nuance of the negotiations, and that is very important, that we say why should we trust you, is basically it - I think it was the Minister of Health and Wellness who said that in the past to the Progressive Conservative Government - why should we trust you now?

You're asking for a lot of confidence from a group who is feeling really mistreated at the moment, and I think that's putting it mildly. They're feeling under the gun, unappreciated, they're feeling that they are being disregarded, and I think that we need to

keep that in mind, that this is a time when emotions are running high. As the minister said, with all negotiations there are emotions, but I think this is particularly emotional. The minister has not seen other unions come out to talk to us in those numbers, or other groups come and talk to us in those numbers.

I think that it's very important that we remember the role that the pharmacists play. They're professionals, they're not accustomed to being adversarial and they're certainly not accustomed to coming out from their communities far and wide to make a trip to Province House. (Interruption) That's right, they don't come down here and sit around or address us as we sit at the table at the Law Amendments Committee. It's intimidating and it's adversarial to a degree, and I don't think they wanted to be in that role. I don't think they see themselves, ever, in their mind as being in conflict with government, because their history has been to be partners with government and to work together to lower the prices of drugs.

In the recent round of negotiations that they had engaged in, government came to them and said - it was the previous government - we have to save money, we desperately have to cut the budget here on Pharmacare and drug prices, and you have got to help us. The pharmacists made a suggestion to the committee - to their negotiations - that we pick the top 20 prescribed drugs and they will bring the price dramatically down on those top 20 that are most frequently prescribed and dispensed at pharmacies. That was a suggestion brought by pharmacists that saved not only the amount of money that the government had aimed for - I think it was \$5 million the government said they wanted to save - with the help of pharmacists, they saved much more than that.

At the end of the day it was a very successful negotiation for both parties because the pharmacists felt that they had played a critical role in helping the government achieve their aims. Their mindset and their attitude is that they have been partners and they have used their expertise to help government find ways to make ends meet or to control prices. They want to be there at the table as this goes forward to cut drug prices for the generic drugs. They know this is the right way to go, and there has been no question about that. Each and every presenter said we should lower our generic drug prices and we know it's a priority of government, and it should be a priority of all of us in order to save the money that will ultimately help some individuals.

Again, as we said, we're talking here about the costs that will be dictated under our Pharmacare Program, and the minister said that about \$70 million of the \$300 million in Pharmacare was generics. That's a lot of money, and that \$70 million will be reduced as a result of what we're doing here today. But we don't know really what the savings are that government hopes to achieve. They've talked about \$6 million in the first year, but our figures from the pharmacy association and from some individuals who came to speak to us was that is probably not the true figure - and that's being a little bit disingenuous. It should be probably quite a bit larger than that, but the government isn't putting their cards on the table and they are not telling us what the true savings could be if this bill is enacted as it goes through third reading here today.

They're not being up front really about the costs and the amount of money that will be there for the negotiations, and I think that's important. Again, every jurisdiction in this country that has tackled generic drug prices - and I know they all will eventually because it's important - but all the ones that have gone before us have sat down with a full package of information for their pharmacists and for the industry and profession. They've been honest and up front about everything that's going to impact the pharmacists.

That has not happened here and the government with their made-in-Nova-Scotia approach has decided to do a piecemeal approach. Believe me, that has created an atmosphere of uncertainty, it is threatening people's livelihoods and there is a loser in this game, that's really what I want to say. A good negotiation is a win-win negotiation. It's where you sit down and there's room to manoeuvre on different aspects of the bill and the other unknowns that are coming. If they're all on the table at once, you can trade off costs on expanded services the pharmacy will be providing, with the tariff agreement, with the price that's going to be dictated by this bill.

I think it's really important that we remember this province has not done that and that's why there's an outcry here today. That's why there's a destabilization. That's why there are pharmacies right across the province, rural and urban, that really can't see a good future for themselves when they sit down and look at the dollars and cents that are involved in keeping their doors opened and their services available to the public. I know we'll hear more from other members around rural pharmacies and the impact on rural communities and it's very real.

Mr. Speaker, my time is beginning to run down, I believe, so I want to get right to the point (Interruption) 17 minutes, I did want to check with you.

Because there are so many factors at play here, the fear and distress of the pharmacist caused by all of the different dramatic changes to their business that is coming at them and to the provision of their profession. The services they provide to their community, the fact that they're going to have to say no to people who need their help that they've traditionally visited to help with the packaging or with arranging their drugs. They're going to have to say, I can't do it, I'm the only pharmacist on duty now, I can't leave the store to come and deliver or to help. They're cutting delivery services. They're cutting their involvement in community sponsorship and advertising, which in small communities they may have been one of the biggest groups out there to turn to for help. They're having to curtail so much because of the uncertainty that this bill causes.

It's not business as usual, Mr. Speaker; it's a high-stakes game and I'm calling on the government to deal in good faith. To lay the facts on the table and to say we need to have a win/win situation here. A slight delay in bringing this forward would create an environment which acknowledges the role of pharmacists and their professionalism. Which acknowledges that this bill will affect them in a very fundamental way and perhaps,

their very existence, in some instances, will be threatened. It would acknowledge that and it would help to show that the government has considered the actual dollars of saving, which right now we're not being told the truth on that really. We want to know the exact amount of saving so you know how you can reinvest in rural pharmacies and how you can reinvest in the tariff agreement, which as I said has been short from day one practically.

We're talking 25 years with very little movement in that price and what's happened in the meantime, which the government is taking exception to, is a commercial arrangement which has helped pharmacist to make up the shortfall from the public system. In that shortfall they've been able to stay in business and provide free services that save the health care system money. While everybody agrees that needs to be limited over time and that it will, in fact, the government is also disingenuous in saying its hasn't legislated it out of existence because when profits lower that professional arrangement will probably cease to exist. You're allowing it to take its natural course, really, and the pharmacists know that too. It's good political optics but not really the truth.

Mr. Speaker, The ChronicleHerald wrote an editorial about this whole issue last Saturday. They supported the Pharmacy Association and pharmacists in saying that it isn't fair, the way this is being done is not fair right now. It said that while it's right to lower the cost, the editorial also said that we have to find a way to help replace lost revenues and that should be in place before this bill becomes law, before we actually proclaim and enact and right now nobody knows the true story. This is something that resonates not just here in the legislature but in every community across the entire province.

Mr. Speaker, again, the Liberal caucus supports the intent of this bill, we want to see the generic drug prices come down but I'm going to just quote from the minister for a moment when she spoke in her introduction to third reading. She said at one point that government wants to work with pharmacists, they want to involve them and support them through this change. If they want to do that, then they had an opportunity through amendments to this bill. The amendments would have done exactly that, they would have recognized that the timing is the critical thing here and that even a few weeks can make a difference, in terms of how this is going to line up.

The minister spoke about retroactivity, that they'll go back and say, well your tariff agreement can be - even if it takes us until November or December or January next year, we'll pay you the difference, we'll go retroactive to July 1st.

Mr. Speaker, I heard from pharmacists who said they have things like demand loans with their banks and their banks aren't going to be satisfied that later on there will be some retroactivity. If they can't pay their bills and pay their loans, they are in financial and dire jeopardy. If the minister wants to support this and support pharmacists and recognizes the very important role they play, which is what she told us - if that is indeed the case, I think that the opportunity was there, through amendments at the Law Amendments Committee and they were rejected. Through amendments here yesterday in the Committee of the Whole House on Bills, where we had a fairly lengthy discussion and amendments were put

forward again, to keep the same decrease in the amounts that are set out in regulation - that is, the aim is 45 per cent, 40 per cent and then 30 per cent of the brand name price to be the new level for generics. If that can still be done - and we proposed how it could be done over a longer period of time rather than just over a single year.

Mr. Speaker, those opportunities passed, they were voted down by government members. The intent of trying to work with the pharmacists seems to have been rejected. Again, the minister's own words - work with them, involve them and support them through this change. I think that's what we want to see here on this side of the House as well.

Mr. Speaker, before I close my comments on third reading, I would like to move a motion that would amend the wording of this motion. I move the motion be amended by deleting all words after the word "that" and substituting the following therefore: "Bill No. 17, an Act Respecting an Insured Prescription Drug Plan, Including Fair Drug Pricing, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day three months hence."

MR. SPEAKER: The member has moved what is known as a hoist motion. The motion is in order and is debatable.

We will now begin debate on the amendment. I remind members that we are now debating the amendment.

The honourable member for Richmond. (Interruptions)

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Ha, ha, question, I don't think so. There is a certain question being asked, it is by pharmacists around this province in asking why are negotiations not completed before this bill is put into effect? That's the question that has been asked and that's the question that was asked repeatedly at the Law Amendments Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion as presented by my colleague, the member for Halifax Clayton Park, that this bill not be read now but that it be read three months from this date. The message we heard at the Law Amendments Committee from pharmacists was very clear. They are not necessarily opposed to the intention of Bill No. 17 - they are certainly not opposed to lower drug prices on generic drugs in the province - but they want to see a tariff agreement in place prior to the implementation of Bill No. 17.

I have not seen anyone who has explained to me or explained to the pharmacists why that could not be done. Once again this seems to be an example of something we've seen all session, where a government seems to be rushing through legislation when all the homework has not been done. I think we'll have a chance to speak a little later on the

Dartmouth Common bill, for example; another one, the Elections Act, for example, something that is being rushed without allowing proper time for examination.

I think you'll also see another bill today, the Government Administration Amendment (2011) Bill, that will get rid of Voluntary Planning when there's little or no discussion with Nova Scotians on that topic.

What this amendment would do is move the passage of Bill No. 17 three months from now. We've been told by the Minister of Health that she expects to have a new tariff agreement in place by July 1st. After July 1st, it makes sense that this bill would come into effect. By then, the pharmacists will clearly know what the new compensation package is going to be with the Department of Health, and we'll be able to move forward.

We believe this is a reasonable amendment. This is not unnecessarily delaying the passage of this bill. In fact, in my 13 years here in the Legislature, I have seen on numerous occasions where the NDP party has moved forward amendments. For the most part, (Interruptions) well, whatever. Let me help, the New Democratic Party - their motions were always six months. I don't recall ever hearing one of their delay motions be less than six months. Instead, we've looked and said we don't need six months here; three months would be adequate to allow the tariff agreement to be in place. I believe, once again, the Liberal Caucus has shown it to be more reasonable than what the NDP has been in the past.

This would allow some time (Interruption) the member for Guysborough-Sheet Harbour says political posturing. Well, let him stand on his feet and tell us what his pharmacists have to say. Let's hear what the pharmacists have told him, from Canso, Little Dover, so many communities throughout his riding. I haven't heard him say a word. In fact, I have to tell you, I can't help but say, I've read so many letters to the editor from that member, before he was elected, that I said to myself, and many said, when that individual arrives in the House of Assembly, look out. He's going to be on his feet, you're never going to hear the end. I have to tell you, I think I saw a squirrel crossing the road the other day that made more noise than that member has made inside this House. (Interruptions)

He knows how many letters to the editor he sent, so I'm glad he's laughing at that because he knows himself that the poor readers of the Reporter have had to endure so many letters to the editor from him criticising previous members from Guysborough-Sheet Harbour and yet once we got in here, I'm sure they were all anticipating that member was going to be raising the issues of Guysborough-Sheet Harbour so that no one in this Legislature would say they don't know what the issues are in that area. That hasn't happened. (Interruption)

The Premier said he has solved them. I'm sure the students who go to Canso Academy and some of the other schools that are in danger, would certainly love to hear how The Premier has solved this. The Premier says - although those are school boards - but his Minister of Finance, sitting next to him, stood in this House and in response to a question said, this government will not close schools. Who do we believe anymore from

this government? The Minister of Finance has never retracted that statement so when any schools that may close in this province, this government will have broken another promise to Nova Scotians.

It was clearly stated they won't fire nurses, they won't layoff teachers and they won't close schools. That's the statement from the Minister of Finance in Hansard. I can certainly send a copy to the Premier in case he missed it. We'll certainly be more than happy to make that available to him.

Here we have a group of pharmacists, and my colleague for Halifax Clayton Park has spoken very passionately about this, not only as our Health Critic but certainly as someone who has taken the time to learn this issue and to hear the concerns of pharmacies throughout Nova Scotia. We've heard from pharmacies in HRM, we've heard from Cape Breton, southwestern Nova Scotia, from every part of the province. I have to echo the comments made by my colleague for Halifax Clayton Park - I don't believe pharmacists ever intended to come to the Legislature to speak at the Committee on Law Amendments.

In the last two years, pharmacists have been holding a reception for elected members of this House, which has been very well attended, and I think it's been appreciated, because it's given them an opportunity to speak to us directly and to promote some of the concerns that they have and to promote the exact work that they do. I have had the opportunity to speak to some of my pharmacists, locally, and I've been very impressed at the type of information they've been providing and the services they've been providing to their customers.

We take it for granted that pharmacists just take a prescription from a doctor and then hand it back to you and that's it. That's certainly not a proper reflection of the work they do, which is why when I saw Paul Zinck from MacDonnell Pharmacy in St. Peter's come here before this committee and to speak very passionately about his concerns, I knew what his concerns. Just a few years ago, not very long, I think it was during the last election campaign, where Paul and his business partner, Jill MacLean, who is a pharmacist as well, two young pharmacists in Richmond County, living in the St. Peter's area - Paul lives in River Bourgeois - but when they went to buy MacDonnell's Pharmacy there came about a legal dispute with their previous employer, which was Lawton's.

Madam Speaker, there actually was such an outcry from the community that Lawton's was trying to prevent these two young pharmacists from purchasing this pharmacy that there was actually a public rally held. So when I've seen some of the NDP supporters on Twitter saying pharmacists are just trying to line their fat pockets, I find that so disingenuous. I believe that's almost a reflection of what this government's belief is, that pharmacists are rich, they have big pockets, they're full of money, why should we be concerned about what they are saying?

I can tell you, when you look at young pharmacists such as Paul Zinck and Jill MacLean, who have just made a major investment in purchasing MacDonnell's Pharmacy and allowing that pharmacy to stay in our community and having two young pharmacists stay there with their families, that's something that got the public behind them with a public demonstration. I have no doubt that played a role in Lawton's finally abandoning their legal action against these two young pharmacists.

I believe this government has misread the public support that pharmacists enjoy in Nova Scotia because while I have yet to hear from anyone talking about lower drug prices, I've certainly heard from many concerned about the future of their pharmacies.

Now one of the questions, being a reasonable Opposition, is that the Minister of Health and Wellness has indicated she does have a plan to deal with pharmacies at risk. As a rural member, I'd like to know, is there a plan to help Dooley's Pharmacy in Arichat, the only pharmacy serving Isle Madame in the Louisdale area, is there a plan for MacDonnell's Pharmacy in St. Peter's or Lawton's pharmacy in St. Peter's should there be significant financial consequences for these pharmacies that may not allow them to survive?

We asked for that list, the minister indicated she had a list and indicated she had a plan but we haven't been able to get that list, which leads us to believe that it doesn't really exist. Naturally we haven't been able to get the plan, which leads us to conclude there isn't one either.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you our community in Richmond County has been faced with doctor shortages on many occasions. Even today we don't have enough doctors, especially in the communities of St. Peter's and L'Ardoise. The thought now that we may have a loss of pharmacies is of tremendous concern. I know many have spoken about the work that pharmacists do in Richmond, as I've said before in this House, we are blessed with young pharmacists; we still have George Dooley in Arichat. While he may not fit the definition in age of being young, I can tell you that George is certainly young at heart and if anyone questions that, you just need to see the glasses that he wears to see that he still is very young at heart.

Still, in Dooley's Pharmacy you now have Tracy Martell, a recent graduate of pharmacy, who has decided to come back home, work at Dooley's Pharmacy, recently married, they are planning on building a home and making major investments in our community. We need to make sure that these young pharmacists stay in our community if we're going to be able to have a well-functioning health care system and if we're going to be able to continue to attract young professionals to our area.

The message we heard from pharmacists is that they want to see the tariff agreement in place before Bill No. 17 proceeds. Now, Madam Speaker, we find ourselves with a majority government in Nova Scotia, a majority NDP Government. Now because of that, our attempts to bring forward amendments to respect the concerns raised by pharmacists have been rejected by the majority. As I mentioned to some of the presenters,

there's more members of the NDP than of the Liberal caucus or the PC caucus, so we can't stop the government or we can't impose amendments to their own legislation. Instead, we're left trying to give the government more time to reflect on some of the changes they're making.

Madam Speaker, if you look at some of the editorials coming out, it's obvious that we're not the only ones who share concerns with how this government is behaving. If one looks at the editorial - actually, I have to say I thought it was a bit harsh but it certainly was to the point - dealing with the cancellation of the Voluntary Planning board, and then today we see the editorial dealing with the Premier's attempts to unilaterally decide what will happen on the Dartmouth Common, from here forward. Again, there was an editorial on Bill No. 17 as to how this government was dealing with the issue of lower drug prices and dealing with the challenges facing pharmacists in this province.

As Paul Zinck pointed out and gave examples, we're actually quite fortunate right now because within the Strait area we have seen a number of pharmacists retire and sell their business to young pharmacists. That's the type of thing that we can all celebrate in Cape Breton, seeing young professionals making investments and coming back home. No one disputes that we need to have lower drug prices in this province, but there is a process that needs to take place. This process has been flawed. That has been the message. Pharmacists came here, they took time out of their days to come here and make presentations themselves. I think everyone who came to present, almost to a T, said they weren't comfortable making a presentation, that this wasn't what they did. One guy said, I'd be much more comfortable talking to you in my pharmacy than talking to you in the Red Room at the Legislative Assembly. I think that's honest and sincere.

These are individuals who are health professionals, who have made major investments in their communities and continue to push for more changes in the way our health care system is done. If we're going to be able to address some of the challenges in health care, we need pharmacists to be part of that solution. All Parties in this House supported amendments that were made to expand the scope of practice for pharmacists. Pharmacists themselves are embracing those changes, but those changes come with a cost.

At the end of the day, we need to make sure that the system put in place does not put our pharmacists at a disadvantage and does not impact them economically. While older pharmacists may be well-established in their business, young pharmacists who have made these types of investments have a major liability on their shoulders. Any suggestion that the revenue coming into the pharmacy is going to be unilaterally changed by government is clearly something that they have every right to be concerned about.

With this amendment, as an Opposition Party, one of the few tools that are available to us - we can't stop Bill No. 17. Under the British Parliamentary system, we just cannot do that. The Government House Leader, eventually, under the rules that we have,

we will be allowed maximum amount of debate, but when that is done, a vote will eventually be called and, as I mentioned before, the New Democratic Party has a majority in this House and they will exercise that majority in order to pass Bill No. 17, irrespective of the issues that have been raised by pharmacists throughout Nova Scotia.

By introducing this amendment, my colleague, the member for Halifax Clayton Park has very reasonably given the government the option of delaying the passage of this legislation for three months. That's not an unreasonable request. I think pharmacists themselves would be very pleased to see a tariff agreement in place before the passage of Bill No. 17. We want the opportunity to give the government the time necessary to finish these negotiations. Some of the presentations that we heard - and I believe the member for Halifax Clayton Park expanded on that - are that these negotiations are nowhere near being complete. In fact, the concern was raised that these negotiations may not be complete before July 1st, which is of tremendous concern to everyone, not only those involved in negotiations, not only pharmacists, but members of this House and I believe all Nova Scotians.

Giving the government three months to delay the passage of Bill No. 17, I believe, will allow them to focus specifically on having these negotiations take place and meeting their self-imposed deadline of July 1st. I believe it is, as I mentioned, a reasonable approach. It is something, I must add, especially for the newer members of the NDP caucus who may not have been around here in previous sessions, but I can tell you that while in Opposition, the NDP caucus would on a regular basis introduce these types of amendments. The debate on some of them - I recall very well - just on the amendment, would be 20 hours, and then it would be another 20 hours when it reverted back to third reading.

When the members of the backbench are questioning why this is being done, this is once again something that we learned so well from the NDP when they were in Opposition. It was fine then, but now that they're in government they don't seem to be as pleased with having the option of extended time of passing their legislation. It was something that was done regularly by the NDP for very extended lengths of debate and so I believe this is a perfect bill to have three months prior to its passage. This is not a bill where the government can say, well, it's just the Liberal caucus that's being difficult, they have nobody behind them, they are just being difficult. Anyone who sat in on Law Amendments Committee, this was one of the bills that has attracted the most amount of presenters at Law Amendments Committee.

Last time I saw that many presenters, I believe, may have been for the Off-highway Vehicles Act. That one certainly attracted many presenters and if I want to go back even further, the other bill that would have attracted lots of presenters would have been Bill No. 68 which was brought in under the former Hamm Government dealing with nurses' ability to strike, which as well attracted presenters for days on end. But the Pharmacy Act, seeing pharmacists take the time to come to Halifax to speak individually about their concerns with this legislation, about the potential impact, I believe it tells us that we need time to

reflect on these changes, that while we're all in support of lower drug prices we must do so in a responsible and fair manner. The way this is being done clearly is not the proper way for these types of changes to have taken place. The message was clear the tariff agreement should be completed first and then Bill No. 17 should be allowed to pass.

That is why, Madam Speaker, I will be voting in favour of this amendment and I would encourage all of my colleagues throughout the House to vote in favour of the amendment as well, and three months from now I would certainly be pleased to return to this Chamber to see the unanimous passage of Bill No. 17 with the support, I should add, of pharmacists from one end of this province to the next. Thank you.

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: I rise in support of the amendment to the motion that is before us. I do want to start by congratulating both the mover of the amendment, the member for Halifax Clayton Park, on her address followed by the amendment motion itself. I believe she did a very good job of explaining the impact of the bill, if left unamended, on pharmacists. I also want to thank the previous speaker, the member for Richmond, for his remarks in favour of the amendment. We, too, support this amendment. I believe that the previous speakers have done a very good job of explaining the beneficial impact of this amendment on pharmacists.

I would like to speak briefly, Madam Speaker, about the customers of pharmacists, about the clients of pharmacists, about the people that pharmacists actually serve. As much as we want to make sure that there is a sustainable and workable business model for independent pharmacists around the province, we look through them and the services they provide to individual Nova Scotians, their families, their parents and grandparents.

Many of our seniors are reliant on the services that the pharmacists provide, both the dispensing services that we know of that are paid for through the tariff agreement, but also the other services that pharmacists provide often at no charge, whether it's a home delivery of prescription drugs to seniors who are not able to get to the pharmacy or not able to easily get to the pharmacy or who don't have a family member at their beck and call to do pickups for them, or whether it's those customers who use their pharmacy as an initial triage in their health care system, that individual Nova Scotian who shows up to the pharmacy.

This happened particularly in rural areas where the ER may not be open at the right time. They show up at the pharmacy with a headache or with chest pain and pharmacists provide an important triage in our health care system. An individual Nova Scotian who shows up at the pharmacy - this happens particularly in rural areas where the ER may not be open at the right time - with a

headache or chest pain and pharmacists provide an important triage service in doing a quick assessment of the situation and directing that person to the right point in our health care system.

Our pharmacies in Cumberland South like the Ross Anderson Pharmacy in Springhill, for example, that have blood testing machines in their pharmacies that are connected by the Internet to family doctors in the area, pharmacies have provided this service at their own expense. It is a significant upfront cost and a significant monthly maintenance cost to allow people to have their blood pressure checked and other vital signs checked at the pharmacy- without the need to actually have a family doctor visit - and have those results transmitted electronically to their family doctor for further examination. This is another example of the services that pharmacies provide at no charge.

I raise this because I think it is very relevant to the amendment that is before us. Pharmacies have asked for more time for a reason. That is, they have to make decisions about what services they provide based on the information they have before them today. They know the effects of Bill No. 17 on their business. They've estimated a cut in revenues of between \$150,000 and \$250,000 a year, for the average pharmacy. That is a real cut that will result in a real decline in service. Pharmacists will have no choice but to deal with that for months and months until they know the outcome of the tariff negotiations.

One of the previous speakers is quite right. We are weeks away from the expiry of the current agreement. We are miles apart, the pharmacists and the government are miles apart in their negotiations, so far apart that the government saw fit this week to cancel a meeting to negotiate the tariff agreement. This is what the pharmacists of Nova Scotia are telling us.

And the actual implementation of that agreement, historically, in our province and other provinces has taken months to put into place. Members on the government side may throw out an offer that they'll make payments retroactive to the conclusion of the current agreement. But until we have a new agreement in place, until we have a new agreement worked out and implemented, pharmacists have to make decisions about the level of services they provide based on what they know today. All they know today are the effects of Bill No. 17, that \$150,000 to \$250,000 reduction in pharmacy income that they are going to have to deal with.

We can't afford to have this kind of cut in service, whether it's home delivery or whether it's blood testing in the pharmacies or triage in the pharmacies interrupted, even for a few months. Imagine the effect on seniors who rely on those services, even for a few months while the government and pharmacies spend the time that they need to spend to work out a new tariff agreement. That is the effect of Bill No. 17 in its current form, unamended.

With the benefit of the amendment motion that is before us, is that it will align the change in pharmacy revenue that Bill No. 17 requires with the implementation of a new

tariff agreement so pharmacists could have the whole picture so they can make decisions about the level of services they're going to provide to seniors and other customers of the pharmacy with the whole picture in mind so that there need not be an interruption in that service.

What I'm saying is that although we've examined in great detail the effect on pharmacies, we should also be mindful of the impact on Nova Scotia customers of pharmacies. The government likes to claim that this will, ultimately, save Nova Scotians money. It was pointed out repeatedly to the government that the vast number of Nova Scotians who use Pharmacare, many of whom are our seniors, will see no savings from Bill No. 17 as they will reach their cap on co-payments maybe at a different point in the year, but they'll still reach it.

In response to that, the government said, well, they're taxpayers so they'll see a savings as taxpayers. To that I would ask, which tax is going to go down for them to see that savings? Of course no tax is going to go down. The government will scoop up the entire savings themselves. There isn't an individual Nova Scotian, senior or otherwise, who's actually going to have a nickel put back in their pocket if they're a member of the Pharmacare Program because of Bill No. 17, the only significant saver is the government.

We're not against that; in fact we agree with the intent of Bill No. 17, as does the other Opposition Party, as do all Parties in this House. Lower drug prices, lower generic drug prices are a good thing, and saving the government money through the Pharmacare Program is a good thing. No one wants to deny those savings to the people of Nova Scotia through their government, or for those who are not covered by some drug plan or other. We all want that to happen.

No one wants to see an interruption in service while the government sorts it out, either. It's a very reasonable request of pharmacists and by the Opposition Parties on behalf of the customers, of pharmacists, that the impact of Bill No. 17 and the tariff agreement and the expanded scope of service be lined up. The government has stood up in this House, and representatives have, and they have said the problem is that people don't like change, that pharmacists don't like change - and this represents change. Well, how arrogant is that?

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, if the government were listening, what pharmacists are asking for is actually more change, not just the first step which is the step that saves the government money; they want all the steps, including the new tariff agreement and including the scope of service agreement. Pharmacists are actually asking for more change than the government is prepared to give them.

That is the reality if only the government would listen. One would think that they would have listened, because we had an incredible lineup of pharmacists at the Law Amendments Committee - more than 50 appearing at the Law Amendments Committee or

wanting to appear at the Law Amendments Committee in order to make their point, all the same point. Both Opposition Parties introduced amendments in the Law Amendments Committee that would have the same effect as this current amendment would have, which is to align all of the changes at once so that no interruption in service needs to happen, so that pharmacists can make good decisions about investment in their own small independent businesses.

The government members said no in the Law Amendments Committee. We tried again in Committee of the Whole House on Bills; the government members said no in Committee of the Whole House on Bills. Now we try once again with the amendment motion that is before us, once again to try to give the government a chance to do the right thing, which is to deliver the entire package of change that pharmacists are asking for that will be beneficial to the level of services that pharmacists provide to Nova Scotians.

I'm hopeful the government, in this one last opportunity, will see the error of their ways and agree with the amendment so we can get that alignment in place before real service levels have to be reduced, even if it's for a short-term period of time.

So, Madam Speaker, with those brief remarks, I will just conclude by encouraging all members of the House to support the amendment, to give serious consideration to the consequences of defeating the amendment, to think about not just the pharmacies and the businesses that those pharmacies are themselves, but through them to the seniors and to all Nova Scotians who rely on those services, both the dispensing services and the other services that pharmacists provide. They are an integral, a very important part of our health care system - they actually provide services that save money in a lot of other places in our health care system, like emergency services, keeping in mind we can't afford an interruption in those services even if it is for a few months.

Madam Speaker, I believe the amendment makes perfect sense, and I encourage all members to support it when we get to the vote. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think that's to get me back for calling you Mr. Speaker a number of times, so touché.

Madam Speaker, I wish to speak only briefly to this motion. This motion gets to the heart of the primary issue with Bill No. 17. We have, as the Official Opposition, tried to move amendments in the Law Amendments Committee and in Committee of the Whole House on Bills, which would do exactly what the Minister of Health and Wellness committed that she is going to do anyhow. So it struck us as rather odd that the minister and the government would not, in fact, support those amendments at those times, and specifically the fact that the Minister of Health and Wellness stood up and she indicated, I believe, quite accurately, that pharmacists had asked to see the bill and the regulations in advance of looking at a tariff agreement. I think that's probably a fairly accurate statement.

However, they did not say, pass that bill, they said they wanted to see it so that they could look at this as a package. Instead, what we have is a government that has decided to ram this legislation down the throats of pharmacists and then hold them under a gun to negotiate the tariff agreement. That is not bargaining in good faith.

In fact, the pharmacists have asked to be a partner in this. The pharmacists lined up at the Law Amendments Committee and very clearly indicated to members of the government that their primary concern was not the reduction in price on generic drugs, it was the fact that their expanded scope of service, and the tariffs associated with it, had not yet been negotiated and without any guarantee in legislation that this would not take effect until the tariff agreement took effect, that it was unfair. It could put some pharmacies at risk, but more important than that, it was fundamentally unfair.

The pharmacists want to support the delivery of health care. They stood here last year, in concert with the government as the expanded scope of service was implemented. They stood here and said that we as pharmacists will help deliver better health care to Nova Scotians, we will deliver more timely health care to Nova Scotians, we will ensure that people have access to things such as routine prescription renewals, blood testing and counselling; that they would be the front-line health care workers for people across this province; that they would be partners in not only delivering more cost-effective health care in this province, but better health care, and yet now this is how the government has chosen to treat them.

The point of the hoist motion today is it is one additional attempt. Is it the cleanest attempt? Of course it's not. Had the government chosen to support our amendments at the Law Amendments Committee, or had they chosen to support the amendments when they were introduced again by the member for Halifax Clayton Park at Committee of the Whole House on Bills, we would not be here right now, but we would be passing this bill with the unanimous consent of the House.

There seems to be no reason why, that I can fathom, that the Minister of Health and Wellness would not have chosen to support those amendments at the time because they were exactly in line with what she said she was going to do anyhow, which leads us to the question, how do we trust that's what the minister is going to do when she won't support amendments that would put that into law?

The Minister of Energy, just a week ago, supported amendments to his Electricity Act to put what he said into law. He did that because what he was saying publicly was what he intended and he had no fear of putting that into law. He said, you're right, we should put it into law, it's what I committed to and I'm not scared of doing that; but the Minister of Health and Wellness, with the almost identical request in Bill No. 17, refuses to do the same thing. It makes people around this province wonder whether the Minister of Health and Wellness is going to live up to the commitment that the tariff agreement would be in

place before the generic drug prices change. The two, very much, go hand in hand. It is why the pharmacists asked to see the bill and the regulations in advance. They wanted to work with the government to have an Act and a tariff agreement that went together in harmony and serve the interests of the government, but also protect pharmacists and protect Nova Scotians, not only in rural Nova Scotia, but across Nova Scotia.

Today, the Minister of Health and Wellness chose not to support the cleanest options for dealing with this issue - the cleanest options being setting this and the amendments to specific dates. Instead, we find ourselves with one last option which is to put a three month delay on voting on it.

Madam Speaker, if the Minister of Health and Wellness is being entirely accurate in what she said to the House, which is that the tariff agreement would be in place in that time, then we would come back here and I believe that you'd probably have unanimous consent for this bill to go forward. It's as simple as that.

It would have been easier to have just made it part of the bill but again, we're asking the government to take one last, sober, second look at this and to recognize the fact that all we have tried to do since the Law Amendments Committee and through Committee of the Whole House on Bills and today, is put the minister's own words into law. A vote against this is a vote against the Minister of Health and Wellness and a vote against the commitment that the Minister of Health and Wellness said her government is going to live up to. That's what this is about, it's about putting your money where your mouth is. It's about standing up, just like the Minister of Energy did and I gave him full credit for that in third reading - he stood up and said, you're absolutely right, I made this commitment and we will put it into law, we will amend our bill and put it into law. I congratulated him for doing that; I thanked him for doing that.

Now is the opportunity, it's been the opportunity at the Law Amendments Committee, it's been the opportunity in Committee of the Whole House on Bills. We're here with the third option to do this and allow the Minister of Health and Wellness to live up to the commitment she has made publicly. I certainly hope the government will reconsider their opposition to moving this way and will support this motion as we move forward today. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to the motion before us, a classic hoist motion to try to move the whole discussion up a few months. As we've spoken about on many occasions in this House, whether it's in second reading, in Committee of the Whole House on Bills, in the Red Room for the Law Amendments Committee - we have been listening to pharmacists. We've been listening to Nova Scotians, we've been listening to long-term care facilities when, of course, Bertha Brennan came in and talked about what she felt was going to be the impact on the seniors in her long-term care home.

This is a bizarro piece of legislation in its real essence. I can tell you, after eight years in this House, nothing really surprises me of how things are going to get done or how they are run through the House of Assembly. This is one of those things that maybe the government thought that we would miss something, maybe the pharmacists are going to be too busy, they are not going to realize what's going on so they're not going to come to the Red Room, they're not going to consult with the Opposition Parties, so maybe we can ram this one through and no one would have known.

Ultimately, if you look quickly at the bill, it's something that everybody can support - fair drug prices for Nova Scotians, more services where and when we need them being offered by pharmacists. So if you look at it quickly, you can say, I really support that, it's a good idea, let's move it forward and let's get it done.

The thing we heard over and over again, over 50 times in the Law Amendments Committee is, we don't feel we were consulted, we're too busy doing the work that we need to do to truly say there was a true consultation happening. We feel that in the businesses we have that it is too much of an effect too quickly in the model of business that we have and how remuneration - how they are paid to do the work they do. It's too quick, it's too much, we can't bear it the way you've got it laid out.

So, of course, we tried to bring in amendments as well. Those amendments would try to find a way to push the implementation of this bill out a little bit so that a tariff agreement can be negotiated, so that when everything happens the pharmacists, the small-business owner, know where the money's going to be; how they are going to continue to run that business and offer the services to their communities; how they're going to be able to keep the lights on, keep the pharm techs in place, keep the front-end staff, the cashiers and those kinds of people available; how they're going to be able to continue to offer delivery to either homes or individuals. They're worried about it because of the way things are laid out, quite inconspicuously, within this bill.

By putting this motion in, to move it out for three months, means that it gives a little more time to negotiate the tariff agreement. There has been some work done on it. We understand things are still too far apart, the Pharmacy Association and the government are quite a distance apart. There are going need to be more meetings, more time in order to really hammer out the expanded scope of practice and of course the tariff agreement that will pay for it.

The member for Halifax Clayton Park talked about the seven months, doing it lickety-split - that was the fastest that any government has been able organize a tariff agreement. Here we are, six weeks away from the expiry of the current tariff agreement, and with no decision of what the tariff agreement is going to be. Then there is the electronic system. They've got to take that agreement, turn it into billable services and transmit that to Medavie Blue Cross, which will get into the system, which again takes time.

We're a long way away from being able to tell the pharmacists, here's what your compensation package is going to be so that they can say, okay I now look at 45 per cent of brand; I can now look at 40 per cent of brand; I can now look at 35 per cent of brand, which is what this bill does, all within about a year.

The second amendment that we tried to put in was trying slow that process down a little bit too, giving these pharmacists maybe three years to adapt to the new funding model, make sure that cut wouldn't happen all at once. We've tried all the avenues that have been at our disposal in this House of Assembly. We do have a set of rules that are very descriptive on how our bills, our legislation, can be amended or not amended but what it really boils down to, Madam Speaker, is that we have a majority government. The NDP has a majority vote when it comes to any vote that happens in this House of Assembly and therefore can accept or not accept any amendment that comes before it. We've tried, they've voted against what we would qualify as being very sensible, good additions to the bill but unfortunately they feel that they need to ram this bill through the House, be darned of anything else.

This is unfortunate because it's really telling the pharmacist and it's telling small business that we're going to muck around in your businesses. We're really going to make a difference to you and we're not going to talk to you about it, we're just going to do it. We've seen that a few times, whether it was Bill No. 100, really start to muck around in how things are decided upon, how that business model really works. We're really talking about the paving plan - without any consultation, they are going to change how the paving businesses do the work in the province of Nova Scotia, without any, or very little, consultation.

This keeps happening over and over again that they are really impacting the lives of Nova Scotians in sort of the guise of - don't worry about it, it will be okay. Well if you went to a bank and said, I need to borrow money to do this to my pharmacy, today - we heard this a few times in the Law Amendments Committee, that because of the expanded scope of practice that they are going have to be constructing consultation rooms. Not all pharmacies are a Shoppers Drug Mart that might already have a really nice consultation office built into it. So some of these small pharmacies in rural Nova Scotia, some of them right here in Halifax as well, in the HRM, are going to have to go out and build things.

They're going to be going to the bank and saying, I need to borrow \$25,000, \$50,000, \$100,000 in order to do that kind of renovation. The bank is going to say, I just heard you're going to have your bottom line yanked out from under you so we're not actually going to loan you any money until you can get that all organized. The expanded scope of services, of practice, is going to have to wait until some of those things are actually done.

This legislation trips a whole bunch of things up. It's getting in the way of how pharmacists, I believe, feel that they should be treating their patients, how they feel that they should be part of their community.

With those few words, I have to say that I hope the government supports this motion. This side of the House, of course, supports it. We'd be more than happy to come back in three months time to see that the tariff agreement process is in place and to be able to say, good, we support the bill. Let's have unanimous support of that bill and get fair drug prices for Nova Scotians. It's a very small thing that we're asking for and I look forward to this bill actually getting what it's supposed to do, which are those fair drug prices. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: I too am pleased to rise to speak to the motion put to the floor by the honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park who did a great job of laying out the challenges pharmacists have and Nova Scotians have with the particular bill that's in front of government.

When I spoke on this bill in second reading, I talked about how I believed it was the government's intent to have the tariff agreement arranged by now before this bill was going to be brought into the House of Assembly. I acknowledged at that time that the tariff agreement negotiations had been set aside twice with the agreement of all parties - not just government but the pharmacists as well. I also said during that period of time, if that was the spirit and intent of government at the time, why would they not want to delay the passage of this bill, or at least put a clause in the bill that says this piece of legislation would not take effect until after a tariff agreement has been negotiated with pharmacists in a proper and open way that would make everyone happy?

With this motion that's been put forward by the member today which speaks about delaying this for three months, it really speaks to what the minister said was her intent. That was to have this piece passed as well as having a tariff arrangement in place and as well as putting in place an expanded scope of practice. It would only make sense that all of that would happen together. The minister has acknowledged that, has said that in this House and we would agree with her. What we're trying to figure out on this side of the House is, what happened? What has changed? Why has she moved away from that position?

This motion that is here today, the amendments we had asked in the Committee on Law Amendments to be included as part of this piece of legislation, didn't change the bill at all. What it talked about was the implementation part of the bill. It talked about making sure we negotiate in a fair, open and transparent way with pharmacists to deliver their pay package, what the services are that are going to be received by Nova Scotians as they walk into a pharmacy. Those are all things we should be doing in unison, not in isolation.

The member for Dartmouth East spoke about the fact that the minister often has said in this House, not only during debate on this bill but during Question Period, that pharmacists wanted to see this bill and they did. Absolutely. They will tell you that. They

wanted to see this piece of legislation so as they negotiate their tariff agreement, as they negotiated their expanded scope of practice, they would have the full picture of what it is and how it would impact on their business. They did not say, they never once said that they wanted the minister to bring this piece of legislation into the House and pass it by itself in isolation. They have openly said, we know things are going to change and they have to change, but we want to have a negotiation that is open and transparent, with all of the changes at once. Imagine if we sat down with any union in the Province of Nova Scotia and started talking about their salaries were going to change, how they did their business, but we did it one piece at a time and we passed that legislation and then went back to the table.

Who is going to do that? No one does that, it doesn't make sense, so why would we do it now? We have said we support the spirit of this legislation, the intent of this legislation. What we've asked for, which has been reasonable, is let's delay the implementation part of this bill until we've had that entire tariff agreement and scope of practice changed.

Madam Speaker, this is a wonderful opportunity, quite frankly, and it should be an exciting time for communities across this province, really. We spoke in this House about the expanded scope of services pharmacists are going to be able to offer. That's an exciting thing for many communities. It's another way for us to access health care, it's another portal for us to come into the health care system and be able to see better service up front, in our own communities. Pharmacists are embracing it, you hear, and I'm sure you hear it in your own community, members hear it in their communities, Nova Scotians were embracing the idea. Many times we go in now and ask for advice from our pharmacists.

This should be an exciting time. Pharmacists should be getting ready to embrace their new role, to get a chance to tell the community that this is what we can offer you. But in the kind of chaos we're in now, debating this bill without looking at what the tariff agreement is going to be and not looking at what that expanded scope is going to be, instead what we have is a lot of communities with uncertainty in them. Pharmacists are telling people who come in through the door the challenges that are being faced because people are hearing about this in the news. Instead of being part of this exciting new opportunity that is there for many of our communities, what we have is uncertainty.

The motion that was put in today would alleviate much of that uncertainty. The member for Halifax Clayton Park is asking for the implementation to be delayed three months. Madam Speaker, that is not too much, it speaks directly to what the minister has said she was hoping to do. It speaks directly to what the minister has said she is going to do, so why not take that part of this bill and allow that negotiation around the tariff agreement to take place at the same time? Equally and probably more important is to allow communities to understand what that expanded scope of practice is going to look like, what services pharmacists are going to be able to offer, allow them to adjust their business model to do that for communities. All of that should be taking place together, not in isolation.

Madam Speaker, it is our hope that the minister will take the motion that is here, encourage the members of our caucus to support it because it is exactly what she said she wants, that is to have the tariff agreement, fair drug prices, all completed and negotiated at the same time. This amendment will allow her to do that and it will allow communities across this province to be certain that whenever the changes come in around the fair drug prices, it will not impact the services they presently receive in their communities. If anything, it would allow pharmacists to be able to reassure them, no, we've negotiated our entire package and here's the expanded scope of practice that we're going to be able to offer you in our communities.

Madam Speaker, I would encourage members of the government to listen to their own Minister of Health and Wellness when she said it is her intention to negotiate the tariff agreement at the same time with this bill, and put it into law so that communities across this province would have some certainty. So while they might not want to listen to this side of the House, I would encourage the members of government to pay attention to the Minister of Health and Wellness and support this motion. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to stand here today and speak on this motion as well. As we've heard from my honourable colleagues, there seems to be unity in our feeling on this matter. We sometimes wonder how much insight this government has into, in this case, pharmacists and the impact they're going to have on them and, more importantly, on the people who use their services all over our province.

I'm going to talk about the pharmacists for a bit but I also want to make sure, for anybody who's listening, that they understand the focus of our points are on the end user, whoever it is out there in Nova Scotia who needs to go to a pharmacy to pick up medications for themselves or family members. This legislation can have an effect on those people. I'm just going to go into a little bit of background because I've spoken with a lot of pharmacists. We have a number of pharmacists in my area, in my region of Inverness, and we know that they've been compensated in various ways over the years. An industry that has evolved the way it has - and I know that there was a rebate system in place for them and that was offered by generic drug companies to list their drugs and to encourage local store owners to sell them. Now local store owners depend on that rebate to generate profit.

I know that local pharmacies are only allowed to add a very small margin on drugs and the purpose of that is to ensure that pharmacies aren't being rewarded for selling more drugs and more medications because that would have an obvious negative impact. That is why the drug companies had to find a new way for retailers - who deliver their products and the medications that we all have come to know and what we need for our health, in some cases - to be able to run their businesses because when they turn on the lights in the

pharmacy, when they stock the shelves, when they turn on the heat in the wintertime, maybe the air-conditioning in the summertime, that all costs money and, of course, to actually deliver the service.

You have people - we have many Nova Scotians who are working in pharmacies. They may not even be pharmacists but they may be working in a pharmacy and their employment really depends on what we're talking about in this bill - another reason we support the motion to delay its passage and consider all the impacts that it will have. Madam Speaker, that is a bit of the history, as I understand it, how it's been explained to me, from some of my local pharmacists. I'm happy to stand up for them and for the people they serve every day when they open their doors to serve Nova Scotians.

Some people might say that pharmacists make too much money and I hope that is not the impetus for this bill. That would disappoint me because I know that yes, perhaps pharmacists may make more than the average Nova Scotian but I think we need to respect that they've worked hard to get the training they need to become pharmacists. Madam Speaker, I can't imagine why anybody would begrudge pharmacists for doing the job that they do.

We saw many of them come forward through the Law Amendments Committee and many of them have said they've chosen to live in rural parts of the province, they might make a better salary if they were working in urban areas or even areas outside of our province but they like Nova Scotia. They like serving the people they serve in their communities and they've chosen to live there for that reason, that is their primary driver. I don't think we should be begrudging pharmacists for earning a living in Nova Scotia and I hope that that is not the impetus behind this bill. But I do know that sometimes we hear things from the NDP Government about people who may be making too much money - we can't believe they came here and complained about this, then drove home in their nice cars. (Interruptions) That was a comment that I heard but I'm not going to debate it here.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Inverness has the floor. (Interruptions)

Order! The honourable member for Inverness has the floor.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I guess perhaps I touched a nerve there, but I'm going to carry on with my remarks.

The other thing I think about is entrepreneurs, and when we think about how important entrepreneurs are to our economy and how really they're the people who create jobs for people living in our communities - if we didn't have these people, we wouldn't have much of an economy. If we depended entirely on government services to provide jobs for people, we couldn't support government because it would just be feeding off itself and at some point things would just disintegrate. We need people who are entrepreneurs in Nova Scotia.

I think about these pharmacists. Imagine taking a chance, spending 25 or 30 years running your business, providing a service in your community. Oftentimes, as has been explained to me, the cost of the dispensing fee - and this is one of the reasons why we're asking to delay this bill, because that's under negotiation - doesn't even cover the cost for the pharmacist to deliver the medications to the people who go into the pharmacy. Think about that person who took a risk to start their business. They worked hard for 25 or 30 years, they sold their business, but their payout depends on the success of that business carrying on. Now the government comes forward with a bill to change the business model that impacts the revenues of that business, and now that person who spent their life owning and operating a pharmacy and who is now trying to transition it, this bill causes problems with that transition. You know what that affects? That affects that person's retirement income.

Now, we've talked in this Legislature about this government's decisions around the government pension plan, to support that. Why don't we think about the people who are taking chances in our economy to create jobs for people? Why aren't we also thinking about them and how our decisions in this Legislature affect entrepreneurs? Is it fair to change the business model at the passing of a bill that changes the business model that destroys the succession plan for business and destroys the retirement plans of a Nova Scotian who has worked hard, contributed to the economy, provided a service that was needed in their community, all to be destroyed? That's why I have a concern about this. I think we need to be thinking about entrepreneurs; we need to be putting them up high on the list of priorities.

I'm going to be going to a chamber of commerce dinner in Port Hawkesbury tonight. Do you know one of the questions I'm going to be asking? I'm going to be asking, as their representative, what can I be thinking about doing (Interruptions)

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. The member for Inverness has the floor. A little loud, folks, just keep your conversations a little lower. Thank you.

MR. MACMASTER: Madam Speaker, I'm going to be asking those entrepreneurs, what can I do, as their representative in government, to make life better for them so that they can hire more people? I believe those are the real job creators, the entrepreneurs. I always want to be in tune with what they're thinking, because if we can make life easier for them, we're essentially helping create jobs for Nova Scotians. That's why I've made the comments I've made thus far on this motion - I think it's important for us all to have insight into the lives of entrepreneurs. There are a couple more points that I'd like to cover here.

One of my fears about this bill is that it will create a game of attrition, and what I mean by that is that pharmacy business models, if they're changed, all of a sudden some of them are going to die. There's going to be attrition, and those that are left will still be there to serve Nova Scotians.

I guess the first question that comes into my mind is, is it government's role to decide how many pharmacies are out there? Well, I guess if government totally controlled the economy, like we see in some countries of the world - maybe there's only one car for sale in the country, or there's only one product. (Interruption) I haven't seen any Ladas around lately, Madam Speaker, and perhaps there's good reason because competition makes things better for people.

When we look at pharmacies, what could happen with this bill if we see fewer pharmacies? That means people have to drive further to get their medications. I think about in rural areas where people might already have a 30 or 40 minute drive to the pharmacy. What happens if that pharmacy closes because the business model is not quite strong enough? There are not quite enough dollars coming through the door to keep it open and the pharmacist says well, I might have been here for 20 years but I can't start taking a loss, I think I'd better just close down the shop here, protect against further damage and maybe I'll move away, maybe I'll start another career, whatever the case may be - maybe I'll try to find a job in government. I know the minister mentioned earlier there are some pharmacists working in government - maybe that's a safer place to be, Madam Speaker. I hope that doesn't happen.

I guess what I'm saying, Madam Speaker, if we have fewer pharmacies - and this is really the thrust of my remarks today - that's going to impact Nova Scotians. I think of seniors who are - sometimes seniors can't drive any more, they can't drive 30 or 40 minutes, they have to call upon a friend or somebody in the community to help take them to the pharmacy. They probably feel a little bit guilty about that. They might have some reservations, feeling they are putting somebody at an inconvenience to take them to the pharmacy. Well imagine if they've got to drive an extra 20 minutes on top of that, now the drive is maybe 50 or 60 minutes. Those are some of the things I'm thinking about and I think that's why we should be delaying this bill and I think it's why this government should be making sure that the pharmacists are getting fair compensation for what they're doing so that we continue to maintain the service for Nova Scotians.

I think there's opportunity here, Madam Speaker. There are going to be expanded services that pharmacists are able to deliver and I want to give the government credit for doing that because a lot of pharmacists - and if I may go back to some of my notes - from a pharmacist I spoke with, he said to me, pharmacists do not always get paid when they act as a backup for a physician who may prescribe a drug that has not previously worked for a client. So the pharmacist may have to call the physician, may have to discuss that matter and the physician may prescribe another medication. At the end of the day, the pharmacist is doing extra things and extra time, and needs to be compensated.

Madam Speaker, with those remarks, and I know there are some other people who wish to speak, I'm going to take my place to allow them to have their say on this matter. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Madam Speaker, I rise on this occasion in support of the amendment, obviously. It gives me an opportunity, also, to speak in regard to my past employment. Many in the House may know that I used to be part of a management team in a large format pharmacy in Nova Scotia, in the community of Dartmouth North, so I have great insight into the role that a pharmacist and a pharmacy play in a community. I have great insight into the positive effects it has on seniors and individuals who rely on the knowledge and service of the pharmacy techs and pharmacists.

I think, to start, I'd really like to congratulate and thank the presenters who came to the Law Amendments Committee, who took the time - as the member for Inverness suggested, these are entrepreneurs. Many of us have to realize that these pharmacists, who own their own businesses or who own these large franchises, pretty much spend seven days a week managing their businesses, so to take the time out of their schedules to come here and to participate in the democratic process, I think they deserve some well-due credit for that.

I know today we're fighting at the third stage to have this amendment put in place in hopes that the government accepts it, but I hope that those individuals, who took the time, don't feel that their words have fallen on deaf ears. I think their comments have definitely been captured by the Opposition Parties for sure. I think the importance of the Fair Drug Pricing Bill - I know that both sides of the House understand the implications of having fair drug prices and the impact that it has on our population, the importance of having medications that Nova Scotians can afford.

We have an opportunity here - and generic pricing of medications have been discussed across this country for the last number of years and yes, with my personal knowledge and background, I fully understand the impact of a decrease in the tariff agreement and bringing down the prices of generic medications. We've seen in the past year when the patent was lifted off Lipitor, the benefits that it brought to the government. The savings were over \$7 million, I believe, and we were able to use some of that money to further fund the drug Lucentis. We understand that when there is a decrease in the generic drugs, the benefit absolutely gets passed on to the consumer.

I think the important thing that the pharmacists want the government and the members of the Legislature to understand is the actual day-to-day practices and experiences that they go through. As I stated earlier, many of these pharmacists, especially in rural Nova Scotia in these smaller pharmacies, are pretty much watching their business seven days a week. If they're not working behind the counter, they're in their offices making sure the bills are going through to the insurance companies, they're making sure their front store services are up to par. They really work on creating this overall atmosphere in their place of business. That's a credit to them because it's a valued service in a community.

I know in metro, in Nova Scotia, we have probably per capita the majority of pharmacies, the largest population of pharmacies in all of Canada. That being said, when we look at negotiating a tariff price and decreasing the monies in the generic drugs, it's been stated on numerous occasions that the benefit to the pharmacists in having these added costs passed on to them, it allows them to do more in their business. When we talk about increasing the scope of service, I think that's where the frustration lies with the pharmacists around this province and they want government to understand that.

As it stands right now, we're in negotiations with the tariff process. We're also asking them to embrace the scope of services, which they already have, I believe right now there is a commercial on TV from the Pharmacy Association acknowledging the fact that they, in the coming months, are going to expand the scope of practice which is going to help the government and all Nova Scotians receive better health care. They are embracing it.

I think their frustration lies in the fact that they're being asked to do this, which a lot of them - some of the services, when you talk about counselling, a lot of the pharmacists try to have other organizations in to their pharmacies to do counselling on different days. That is an added value but at no cost to them up front now. But when we talk about having the pharmacists and pharm techs able to do injections and the counselling itself, it's going to come at a cost. Their frustration today and over the last number of weeks has been the fact that they have a real fear and I guess that fear is that the tariff is being negotiated now, they're being asked to expand their scope of practice which they've embraced but what happens if the tariff gets negotiated and that extra dollar value isn't in there? They want fair value for fair work. I don't think that's much to ask.

If they don't get that, if they go into negotiations and by July they get a dollar figure that just doesn't add up, we will see pharmacists make a decision unfortunately because of overhead, labour dollars for staffing, they're going to make that decision that they're no longer going to be able to compete. I think that's another thing that we have to look at too, especially when we're talking about rural Nova Scotia.

With the generic drugs and the money that these pharmacists make off generic drugs, it does allow them to expand and add value to their businesses which adds value to their communities and to the individuals and customers that come to visit them. However, when we look at competition, we have a province that we have some of the large box stores - or what we would call in the retail industry large box stores such as Costco, such as the Walmarts, who come in and their dispensing fees are much lower than you would find in a rural Nova Scotian pharmacy or even in some of the large format stores such as Shoppers Drug Mart or a Lawtons. That's a real concern because those large box stores can lower those dispensing fees for one reason - it's almost like a giveaway to get you in the store so that you can buy all their other products that they are making money on.

When you're looking at rural Nova Scotia, the impact - if these individual pharmacies are going to be asked to do these expansions and asked to do these expanded

services, they realize how important it is. They realize the impact and improvement it's going to have on health care in Nova Scotia, in particular the consumer who would come into their place of business or in the small rural Nova Scotia community that now these folks can come there to get that injection. They don't have to get the flu shot at the doctor, which isn't going to tie up the doctor or the hospital emergency room because they're getting that counselling.

If you take away the value of that and that's where - right now they don't have confidence that this government is going to embrace the fact that there is real value in that. Right now the dispensing fee is - I believe the tariff agreement - at \$10.62, which a lot of the pharmacists have said it's around \$4 to \$5 lower than it actually should be right now.

They want to know that the minister's words mean - coming from her - what the rest of the government feels. I know there are a lot of backbenchers who come from rural Nova Scotia. The NDP gained a lot of seats in the last election from the rural Nova Scotia areas and I believe that they have to be hearing from some of these small pharmacies. Some of these pharmacies, it has been stated, have been in the province and been in their communities for years, 20 or 30 years.

The importance of that is that the consumer who goes there, the seniors who go there, have had the opportunity over the years to really get to know the pharmacist. I know on many occasions there are times when someone would come into the pharmacy and they wouldn't be able to afford all their drugs, the full prescription. Because of the knowledge that they have of this customer, the pharmacist would take the opportunity and give them the medication they needed and when they were able to afford it, then they received the money back and that's a real service.

The confidence has been shaken and I guess that is the real point. Pharmacists today don't feel that the government fully understands that they need this added value. They need this extra income in order to perform the rest of these services. Today they don't have the confidence that the government fully understands that. With the large majority, yes, one swipe of the pen, the decision is made. The Opposition has made the effort, but this amendment is not going to be accepted and therefore pharmacists are going to have to live with the deal that's not going to be an easy pill to swallow.

I want to believe that the NDP Government does understand this. With the amount of individual members who come from rural parts of this province, I want to believe that their voices have been heard at the caucus table, that the Executive Council has heard from those members. Perhaps many of the members themselves use these small pharmacies.

In the last number of years, we know obviously that we have an aging population and as the health care budget rises every year, this is a real opportunity to say to pharmacists, you're front line, we need your help and we value your services and your

opinions and we need your help, but when we ask for help we have to give something as well. We can't just simply take it and expect them to do this without getting something back. In fairness to pharmacists, they have to make money, they're entrepreneurs. There's a real competition out there to have individuals transfer their prescription drugs to the different pharmacies. If a pharmacist doesn't have enough uptake on fill rates, quite simply, they will uproot, they will leave, they will have no choice. This is the education that they paid for. They have families. They need to make money.

Again, I honestly believe that the NDP Government will see this, I really hope that they see this, and that they get this. If they don't, the impact is simply one that, if we can't get past this and once the tariff agreement is dealt with and we come to a resolve but they're not happy, I think it's going to be a real black mark on this government. I say that because we've heard, just in this session, the emphasis being put on small business, the fact that the small business tax is being lowered. I know the NDP Government, in particular, the Premier, has really made a conscious effort to embrace the business community over the last number of years. But if we can't resolve this somehow and keep the faith of the pharmacists, these frontline individuals who really, with our aging population, increasing and doubling in the next 15 years will play a huge, important role.

I believe honestly that in the next six to eight months this will be a real black mark on this government. It will be a real message to the business community. Yes, on one hand we're doing this but on the other hand, as the member for Dartmouth East suggested, we do not bargain in good faith.

I know in years past the discussions with the business community, what business owners want members of the Legislative Assembly to know and some of us in the past, I know there are some members on the government side who have owned their own business - members of the business community want us to understand what they deal with: turnover rates as far as employment, struggles with getting an employee to embrace the message you want conveyed to your customer, tax issues. Pharmacies have to rely on the insurance companies to process their claims quickly enough so that they get those funds back so that they can pay their workers and pay themselves and make improvements in their business. But they can't make improvements to their business if they don't have the funds.

The expectation of the government here, I want to believe, is one of good faith. The minister has spoken and has stated that this Bill No. 17 coming forward was something that the pharmacists had asked for. Again today we've heard that what they asked for was to see it, they didn't ask for it to be pushed through. We had an opportunity today to hear the minister, in her own words, state that what she had wanted was in line with what the Opposition has put forward as far as an amendment, to do this as a package deal; again, as the member for Dartmouth East said, to do it and bargain in good faith.

I know the stresses and pressures these pharmacists are under right now with the expanded scope of practice, pharm techs - my experience as a manager on the floor in the front stores, I have often fallen into conversations with the customers. These pharmacy

techs are going to have to go and expand their knowledge and certification and accreditation to do some of these services which is going to come at a cost.

As it's been stated earlier today, the end result is that the consumer is going to benefit. I think that's where the pharmacists think the government is going with this fair drug pricing. Obviously that's what we want. We want Nova Scotians to be able to afford their medications, but on the other side we want business to also be able to benefit from it as well. It's that give and take and what I believe the pharmacists see is government wanting fair drug pricing. But the pharmacists are frustrated with the fact that they don't feel the NDP Government, the members of the NDP who sat at the Committee on Law Amendments fully understand the impact that this is going to have or possibly have on their business.

If there is not a fair tariff agreement that would add value to their business they understand they're going to lose on the generic drug pricing. They understand and I know, as an employee of a large pharmacy, I understand full well. When we used to get our discounts, the benefit to buying a generic over a regular brand and the difference in the pricing that a pharmacist would make off a name brand is very little, that's where their benefit is.

They understand that, let's say the years of making these, what some would believe are large profits off it, and if we simply think that, as was made mention of by the member for Inverness, that all these monies are going directly in the pockets of pharmacists in Nova Scotia. Well I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that most business owners, if they're able to make money - we want them to make money, we want them to be successful, so they stay and they employ more - but they also take that extra money and they put that back into their business.

Madam Speaker, the request today is to have a delay. I think the member for Halifax Clayton Park spoke quite well to the issues the pharmacists brought up through the Law Amendments Committee meeting, meetings she had held on her own in her community - a three-month delay would build the faith. I'm not sure if there's any other way, if there's another meeting that is scheduled. We had one scheduled, I believe, in the last number of days, that was cancelled. I think that would have been a real opportunity last week for the minister and her staff and the government to sit down with the pharmacists and kind of ease their pain and say, look, we see the lineup of people coming here to the Law Amendments Committee, we want fair drug pricing for Nova Scotians, but we also value, and we appreciate the fact that obviously we've gotten your attention by the roll call that proceeded through this House.

Again, when you think about the pharmacy and many of us who have had to go there, the service we get, the passion that a lot of these pharmacists put into their business, the importance of the role they play with many of our seniors, and many of our seniors to

come, again with our aging population. The member for Kings West is having a real battle right now in his community with prescription drugs and a number of us in our communities are battling with that. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that our front line pharmacists see that every day.

We talk about our methadone clinics. I know that the pharmacy I was employed by a number of years ago, we had individuals who would come in the morning and they would receive their methadone from our pharmacists. We've seen the battles that those individuals had, and the struggles they had, dealing with their opiate addictions. Oftentimes the free counselling that was given by the pharm techs, the compassion that was given to those individuals and those seniors who were unable to afford their drugs or didn't understand why the doctor wouldn't renew their prescription, the real compassion that the pharmacist and pharm techs gave to those customers, really it was important, it was added value at that time.

Now, in this bill, the fair drug pricing and the tariff agreement coming and the expectations of the expanded scope of service, all the pharmacists are saying is that we embrace this, we realize the importance of this, we want to be part of it but we want to know that government and the members of the Legislative Assembly understand how our business operates every day. I know there's been a show on the CBC in the last number of months where they take a politician and put them to work at an average job every day. I remember watching one episode where there was a politician who actually went out and worked on a farm one day, to see the experience that the farmer actually goes through.

I can tell you what the pharmacists had warned us to understand by coming here and the 50-plus individuals who took time out of their day and out their pharmacy and out of their business to come here and educate us, that's what they want, Madam Speaker. They want us to know that they are prepared to take on the challenge. They are prepared to help bring down the health care costs and the budget that has increased for the last number of years and will continue to increase if we don't make changes. They want to play a role but we can't take from one hand and give to the other. It has to be a fair process, there has to be value for that pharmacist or we will lose a lot of those young pharmacists who have decided to come to our communities in Nova Scotia. Whether it be in the urban areas or in the rural areas, we will lose those pharmacists who have had businesses 20 to 30 years in the communities because it does come down to brass tacks, dollars. We know that the government will benefit, obviously and the pharmacists understand that but we can't take from them as well, it doesn't work that way there has to be a balance.

I would encourage the government members to talk amongst themselves, to talk to the minister. I think hearing the minister speak today gave us some confidence; again she had stated that this is what she wants. The member for Dartmouth East suggested the honourable member, and Minister of Energy, chose to put his words into practice and put it into law and that's what we are asking. Those members who sit on the government side from rural Nova Scotia, you can't tell me that you're not hearing from your small pharmacies. I don't want to ever see Nova Scotia come down to just a big band of

pharmacies, Madam Speaker. I'll go back to the competition, the Costcos and the Wal-Marts who are large employers, predominately part-time jobs - we need to keep that in mind - that don't always come with a lot of benefits. But those large businesses can take the hit, they can take the hit because they know you're going to come there and you're going to spend money on other items so it's a loss leader, almost.

The young pharmacists who've chosen to come here, who have come out of school and who chose to buy into a business, have to pay for their education and pay for the business that they've just purchased. If they don't have the value, not just in the tariff agreement, but the dollar value that's going to be implicated in the expanded scope of practice, they're going to pack up and leave and that's going to greatly affect all of Nova Scotia. Right now, per capita we have the most pharmacies in all of Canada and it will decrease and we will, again, see another erosion take place in rural Nova Scotia and I don't think we can afford that.

I'll end by just stating, Madam Speaker, that I think that if the amendment doesn't get accepted, I think that the minister should take an opportunity to immediately set up another meeting. I encourage her and her staff to immediately set up another meeting, the faith has been shaken. I know the pharmacists who have contacted us and the Opposition have appreciated our fight to get government to understand and to hear our points, the points that we're making on their behalf. But I think this has some real urgency, we need to hold faith with the pharmacists, and we need to say that we value it and say you know what, I know you're worried now but our word is our word. I know that over the last two years with this government they've kind of changed their mind.

I saw an editorial yesterday from Jeremy Akerman talking about a flip-flop of government in regard to third party funding. We need to hold the faith of the pharmacists, Madam Speaker. So an urgent meeting in the coming days, I would encourage the minister to put that together to sit down with these individuals and say, you know what, we get it, we heard you, we obviously heard it from the Opposition, you can count on us because we need you. But we can't need them and not pay them either, Madam Speaker, it doesn't work that way. One person, one entity can't gain from this, it has to balance and with those words I'll take my seat.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: I stand in my place to speak in favour of this amendment. In recent weeks I've heard from members from my community, pharmacists and their clients alike, who are concerned about Bill No.17, deeply concerned, concerned about the services that pharmacists will be able to provide to their clients if this bill is pushed through, concerns about jobs in those independent and rural pharmacies that will be most impacted by this bill. What this amendment does is it allows the government to take a breather on this, much as we asked them to do on Bill No.100. Take a step back, engage in

some meaningful dialogue and consultation, and engage with those people who are going to be most affected by this bill - the pharmacies, their staff, their clients and the customers that we all care about and want to support. I mean, it's disconcerting to look at the way this bill has been pushed through this House.

We've heard from the minister that those who will be affected by it have been engaged and consulted, but according to the stakeholders - to the pharmacists, to the clients - that actually hasn't happened. We've seen this pattern before. This has been a consistent theme within this government. They'll make a decision while not engaging the people who are most affected by it. This has happened with Bill No. 100 where a bill was brought through the House quietly, affected a lot of our small business owners, and no small business owners were consulted. We've seen that happen before. We've seen it with education. This government hasn't consulted teachers. They haven't consulted students. They didn't consult the boards before making their decisions to do these cuts to education and we're seeing the impacts now.

It happened with the Yarmouth ferry, a decision that was made that has had severe and long-lasting negative impacts on the economy of Yarmouth in southwestern Nova Scotia and has affected businesses across the province - no one was consulted. The tourism industry wasn't consulted, they weren't engaged. Small business owners weren't consulted or engaged; not even Bay Ferries was consulted on that. This has been the theme of this government - make a decision while not consulting the people that those decisions are going to impact the most.

What this amendment does is allow you, with this bill in particular, to do that. To do what you said you wanted to do - have a meaningful dialogue with pharmacists, with their clients, with all the people affected by this bill, and discuss their concerns, their issues. That way we can bring a bill back that's stronger, that has involved more voices and that will hopefully reach the goals that this government is intending to do in terms of drug prices. All of us agree that we want affordable drug prices for Nova Scotians, but what we don't want to happen is to have our rural and independent pharmacies close because of this bill. What we don't want to happen is that they pull back on the services they provide to our community members, whether it's delivering prescriptions, for free, to seniors who aren't mobile; whether it's assisting people through triage in pharmacy, which alleviates the pressures on our ER system and on our family physicians, which we're short of, as the government knows. This is not what we want to happen.

People are concerned about these things and from what I get from the government, they don't seem to be as concerned as those who will be affected are, and that's a sad thing. I've received letters from approximately 75 people, I believe. These aren't pharmacists. These letters come from their clients, their customers, our community members, who use the services that our pharmacies provide. Over 75 of them, I think, just this week, came into my office because that's how concerned people are about this bill. I'll table these letters. I've already provided a copy to the minister directly, and I thank her for taking those, but I think it's important that the House have these on record. Where are the voices of these

people in Bill No. 17, the customers, the clients, the ones who do want more affordable prices for their drugs, but who are concerned about losing the vital services that they get through our pharmacies. Where are their voices in this?

We hear that our pharmacists have been consulted, but the feedback I received from the pharmacists who took the time to come up to Halifax, from all over the province, who came to Halifax to present to the Law Amendments Committee, was that they felt the concerns that they presented to the Law Amendments Committee were disregarded by government representatives. That they weren't being heard and that their concerns weren't being addressed, and that this government is moving forward with a bill that will have negative impacts on their industry.

These are small business owners we're talking about here - rural, independent pharmacists who have been running family businesses for a number of years, a number of generations. We're not talking about the most wealthy in our society. We're talking about people who are trying to make a living out of this, trying to keep their family legacy going and, in doing so, are providing such a vital and important service to our community members.

These are the people who care - these aren't the big store owners. These are the small business owners who are in our community day in, day out, who have friends in the community, family members in the community, and they go out of their way on a daily basis to provide these people with help and service in a very meaningful way. This bill, in its current form, jeopardizes their ability to do that - according to them and according to their clients.

Our hope here in the Liberal caucus - and I know our Independent member and the Third Party support this amendment as well - is to take a step back, take the time to have this meaningful conversation with the people who this bill affects, and bring back changes to improve it, or at least wait until the tariff agreements are done so that pharmacists can engage in those negotiations in a meaningful way, in a way where all parties are coming together in a position of equal power, because this bill could change that power dynamic in those negotiations.

I hope this government takes these issues very seriously. They say they do, but we haven't seen action on it. As I said, this is the same approach that happened with Bill No. 100, the same approach that continues to happen with our education cuts, the same thing that happened with the Yarmouth ferry. All we're doing is saying please, this time, this one time, and any time in the future, stop and take the time and engage in a meaningful conversation, listen to the concerns being presented by those who this bill will affect, and please act upon them.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I'd like to say that I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak to this amendment, but I can tell you, quite frankly, I'm not, because we should never had been this far along in this, what should be a fairly simple piece of legislation, a fairly simple bill. It all looked fairly simple and I think for the most part there's a lot of good stuff in it. I think the pharmacists have had their say by way of letters, by way of nearly 40 presenters, I think, coming in over the course of three days last week and saying, look, we're not opposed to cheaper drug prices, it's a good thing, we want to see government be able to get the best buy they can possibly get for the drugs. Somewhere they want to be able to see those savings, obviously, transferred to the consumer.

What we do know is there's no direct saving to the consumer. We know when the seniors go in, as an example, and pick up their drugs, they're still paying the same co-pay - it's just going to take them a little longer to reach that \$482 or \$434 or whatever the magic number is, so there's no direct saving at the cash register for those people. Certainly it does not affect the private plans at all; anyone on a private plan will still pay their prescription prices and their co-pays and their dispensing fees and so on. So there is, somewhere down the line, a savings claimed - I'm not sure what the number is, we're not sure how accurate the number projected is, but there is a projected saving to government on the purchasing of drugs.

Again, nobody is opposed to that. Pharmacists have made it clear that they are not opposed to that. I think most of us probably in here all have at least one pharmacy, maybe some of us more - I have four, I think. I have Lawtons, I have Sobeys, I have the Superstore with the pharmacy, and I have Pharmasave.

Now the folks in Pharmasave are the Triders - Carl and his son Jason and Jason's wife Krista. They came in and gave a presentation on Monday evening, which was great. They were happy to be here and to do that, and very reasonable in their approach and, like all of them, were very professional. It's the kind of people they are. They are wonderful health care providers and they spoke about how difficult this would be on them and the business model for this current year that they've already budgeted and projected and so on when it comes to having to make drastic changes and seeing a cut could be somewhere in the vicinity of well over \$100,000.

The question is, how many jobs is that? It might be a couple of jobs. It's not just about the jobs, but that is certainly important because jobs provide service, provide good customer service in that industry because most of these stores, as we all know, are not strictly just providing medications; they are doing a number of other things. They provide all kinds of health-related products, that's for sure but they sell everything else going, I think. They're almost like a small grocery store in and of themselves. People need to work there and to help with customer service, but better yet it's a great employer. These stores are good employers. They employ lots of people; most all of them employ a number of

people. I don't know exactly how many, Jason did tell me. When they were in they gave a great presentation just like all the others did. It all seems quite reasonable that we would be in no hurry to negotiate or I should say to resolve the tariff agreement.

I guess for some reason it's a big issue. Government is in no hurry to sit down at the table and if they are they're always saying no, no hurry to come to a resolution from what we've seen. If they were, I don't think today would be that big a deal, I think they would probably agree and they would say, okay, no problem, we'll hold it off. What's the rush, if it's not an issue, why are we having this debate? Obviously there's something we're missing here.

The pharmacists certainly don't understand it. Maybe here in this House we may to some degree not have as clear an understanding as the pharmacists do, but they're very intelligent when it comes to their business models and to the business they're in. They're specialists and they're professionals and they're needed. We can't afford to lose one - not one pharmacist, not one store, not one employee. We cannot afford it. We've all listened to job loss numbers in the province being substantial in the last month and certainly over the last couple of years. We can't have that, we need to keep people working, it's important to keep these folks working.

The services that the pharmacy provides are vital. I think about the importance of that and I know at Trider's Pharmasave in Windsor, some of the services they're providing are over and above. Not just because they've been asked to do it, they've just been doing it. They've always done it, it's the way they work and I'm sure it's the same across the province and anywhere else. People are coming in, a lot of folks, the seniors are coming in as an example, we all get a little bit older day by day, we have problems with our vision or our mobility. These folks are not just handing out the thing they've printed off by way of drug description and how it should be used and the contraindications. They're actually taking the time with these folks and they're explaining it all out to them in great detail. They know that's needed.

Some people may not understand when you're dealing with these medications and drugs and contraindications and reactions that continue to happen and can happen, it's important that people understand the importance of how the medication can react with other medications that they take.

Pharmacists are spending a lot of time with certain people who sometimes maybe aren't quite as well educated in these things, don't quite understand what their doctor prescribes for them so they're going to take the time that's needed. But they have a lot of customers, they have a lot of people coming and going, it's just a steady stream. Whether they're coming in with prescriptions and having them filled or whether they're doing the regulars that come in by way of the nursing homes, as an example, perhaps. Filling every day those that are expiring and knowing the renewals are coming up, they're still taking the

time to spend with the customer on the floor while they're in the store explaining these medications to them and all the things that go along with that.

There's no time to think about losses, losses in staff and not being able to do that; that's all over and above. We're talking about an expanded scope of practice which could come into place and a lot of them have been doing expanded things to begin with. There has been a lot of time spent doing different clinics and assisting people and referring people. Nobody does it better than the pharmacists because they're probably the most educated when it comes to drugs, more so than doctors and anyone else.

We talk about the potential loss of these pharmacists and government says there will be no losses, there should be no losses. Maybe. I'd hesitate to say that it's not important to government, I think it's very important to government what the pharmacists do because I know that all these members have them as well. Nobody would ever say the job that they're doing is not in the best interest when it comes to this legislation of everyone concerned.

I believe the intent is exactly that, although it's not being portrayed. To hold off every one of those presenters - they came in, they gave a similar presentation - the ask has been the same or e-mails and follow-ups from those presenters, e-mails and follow-ups from family and friends and consumers and people who use these facilities, people who are paying attention and it's great that they are paying attention because we are getting asked questions on the streets and coffee shops about different things going on here in the Legislature during this session. Some people don't even know that we're here but run into them and they'll ask what's going on and you'll start talking about maybe a couple of bills that are important. We've been talking about the Elections Bill and the changes that could potentially be needed and will come forward and people are interested in that kind of stuff. They are certainly interested in things like pharmacies, what will happen if the drug store loses people or what will happen if a drug store closes.

Fortunately in my area we have four, it may not be quite as harshly affected, although one loss of any would be detrimental to people in the community who have gone there for years and years. There would be transfers that would have to happen of information and so on like that, quite potentially. I know in other areas, Mr. Speaker, where they're more remote and there may only be one pharmacy for many miles around it would be quite detrimental to lose staff and/or a pharmacy that could close. Totally, it sounds like its overreacting perhaps, I don't think so, because when you're talking \$100,000-plus dollars out of a potential pharmacy on the way that they're doing business, that's a lot of money and that could easily sink any business the way things are today.

I know that where you come from, Mr. Speaker, and beyond, there are pharmacies that are out in rural areas where there is only one where I'm sure that they are concerned. I'd be very surprised if anyone were to tell me that the local pharmacy in your area that you represent probably hasn't submitted documentation. The government is saying, look this is

a reasonable thing, we don't mind the bill, we think it's a good idea to negotiate this stuff, we've been looking for a new agreement for some time.

Mr. Speaker, we don't disagree with better drug prices, we would like to see that happen. There is a benefit to everyone, in their opinion when it comes to cheaper drug prices. The big word here is fair and it's interesting this bill is call the Fair Drug Pricing Act when it's anything but that right now when there is no room move on this negotiation. All they want is the tariff agreement in place which does make sense, they would see that as being fair. You should know how you're going to make your money when you're in business. It certainly doesn't make sense to get into a business if you don't know where your profit margins are or survivability margin these days, not so much even profit margins. It's being able to survive, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps a lot of them will be affected and they won't be able to survive.

It has to be stressed with how much they're doing, what they're doing and it's the number of people they're helping but it's who they're helping. I know from where I come from there are a lot of folks, and probably a lot of areas in rural Nova Scotia where we're seeing more seniors, I forget what the numbers are but know those numbers are going up demographically and rising. There certainly will be seniors, we're all working our way there. I know you are, Mr. Speaker, we're all working our way toward, hopefully, living long and being happy and healthy and not needing too much as we're moving along. But we'll always need our drug stores for simple things and some of us will need them for more. We need to make sure and need to assure that they are there and that they're being treating fairly, being paid fairly for the work that they're doing and the business that they are providing.

We can't say enough about that piece of it. It's not something we can just say, oh well, it doesn't matter if we lose one or two jobs here, it's only one or two jobs it doesn't matter. It matters a lot, it matters a great deal because we as seniors, when we get there and certainly the seniors now that are going in there, as an example, or people who are having some challenges by way of their mobility getting out and around. Sight challenges, with their vision, who can't quite read those little pill bottles or understand fully. There are people, unfortunately, whose education may be not quite as good as others. Certainly even the average, fairly well-educated person doesn't understand all the ins and outs of those drugs and those prescriptions and if you're taking more than one or two or three.

I know from my previous experience in health care, there are a lot of times when I would go on an ambulance call and I would go into someone's home and they would have a whole variety of problems and you'd get them out on the stretcher and then somebody would come and say don't forget this, it was a grocery bag that was half full or more of pills. Can you just imagine how that would all end up being mixed up? One mistake, and with some of those drugs a very small mistake, can mean a great deal, maybe a life. How important is it to keep these people in place, these pharmacists, these men and women who

are specialists in that field, not only interacting but having the knowledge; they spend a lot of time preparing these medications, the information that goes along with them and teaching those patients how important it is to have drugs on time and what the potential reactions are to them or interactions when you have more than one medication - what could happen, signs and symptoms, what you might see.

It's too important not to treat these folks the way they should be treated - fairly for the work they are doing. We can't afford to lose any. There's a lot of stuff that we don't think about that these folks are doing. When that doctor writes that prescription, it's easy for him or for her, they can grab that big blue book, it's got every med in it and it's updated annually and they look it up and say okay, what would I do for this particular thing?

These doctors all know what those drugs are but they're still using this big manual to verify the dosages, and stuff like that, when they're writing their prescriptions. Then it is passed off, it is no longer their responsibility, it's off to the pharmacist. That's where the greatest responsibility is, Mr. Speaker, preparing it, assuring they know what they're doing with it, assisting them in numerous ways on how to care for themselves.

I don't know how many but I know there are a lot, I know the nursing homes, just as an example - I have three in my area, right off the top of my head - that are all looked after by a certain drug store or two or three, maybe they all each have a contract with the three of them. There are a lot of patients in each, as we well know. We all have these nursing homes with great numbers of patients. It would be a rare case where there wouldn't be someone on medication in one of these long-term care facilities, so somebody has to manage the system.

These pharmacists play a huge role in places like that. A lot of these drugs are bubble-packed. That's done at the pharmacy. They go and they make sure that everything is right, a lot of times, even if you're not in a nursing home, they look after those folks. Even people who aren't in nursing homes, people who are failing a little bit at home, who are having more difficulties as they get older, are a little confused - what am I taking and when? I've seen pharmacists spend time helping them set up Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and so on through, the pills going in here, and this is how these little boxes are used, so that there are no mistakes.

Those are extras. Pharmacists don't have to do that, they're not getting paid to do that but they are doing it because they are good to their customers. They know the importance, more importantly, they know the importance of what would happen if they mix that up or if they took one too many. Who are you calling tonight if you take one too many, or maybe you forget, Mr. Speaker, you take the medication, you forget you took it. You call your pharmacist - what do I have to worry about? Well, nothing or a great deal, or you need to take this to counteract that.

It's huge, Mr. Speaker, I don't think we totally understand the role that pharmacists play in our communities.

Now, obviously, in a community like mine, there are four and we have a need for every one of them because we're busy enough and we service a big enough area that we need that many because these folks all appear to be successful. Now mind you, two of them are in the grocery store chains, not quite as big, they have a pharmacist or two working there. Then we have a Lawtons, a big store in Windsor, and we have the Pharmasave, which is fair-sized store as well, and they all have their clientele.

Obviously the need is there, as I said, for this number, none of which we can afford any losses of. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I'm not at all pleased to be here, standing and talking about an amendment to a bill that seems so simple that it should never have even been put forward because it should never have been needed. It should have been obvious that it would be fair to pharmacists across this province to sit down and say, it makes sense to have an agreement in place as to how we're going to do this before we pull the carpet out from under you.

There seems to be a pattern here, as we've heard before as well. Why would you do that? Why would you upset so many, upset the apple cart in this case, for lack of a better term, Mr. Speaker? Why not have in place what we're saying is going to be a fair agreement? If it's going to be a fair agreement, put it in place, no problem, and bring this legislation forward when the time is right, whether that's Fall, whether that's three months, whether it's two months. I think there would be any member - take a month, take two months, take three months, take four months.

You, Mr. Speaker, have the right to call this House back on given notice, as you are more than well aware. If the government wants to come back to work in this House, we're happy to come back any time, especially on the importance of bills like this. We have nothing more important than representing the good constituents of the Province of Nova Scotia who we represent. They are important to us and on bills like this they are very important to us. I can tell you for one, that this caucus, and I'm sure every member of this House, would come back to work any day, to make sure that people are being treated fairly in this province. We can't stress that enough, Mr. Speaker.

I guess we've heard an awful lot on it, we could spend a lot of time talking about it and those are just a few points I wanted to make today on this particular issue, through this amendment. We do support the amendment, we want to continue to talk, I guess, we're going to talk as long as we need to on this, as far as I know. It's important that members have their say, make their plea, and ask the government to support the amendment because it makes sense.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I'll be back in third reading on it again and whenever need be, to continue to support this thing all the way through.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I'll take my place.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in my place today and speak to the amendment to Bill No. 17, and to speak from the perspective of a member who represents a very rural part of Nova Scotia.

I want to begin my comments by saying that I listened with interest to the comments made by the minister, and I believe she presented a very passionate and caring message. I believe she is sincere in what she's saying. I know from her past life that she is well aware of and very respectful of pharmacists and, in particular, the role that they play in the whole picture of health care in this province. Now that she has the responsibility as the minister, I believe that will be an asset when she makes some of the decisions. And there are tough decisions that she has to make - I understand that and I acknowledge her commitment to doing what is in the best interest of Nova Scotians with respect to health care.

Having added the component to her portfolio of "Wellness" I think is really where I want to focus today, because the responsibility that we all have to ensure that Nova Scotians are well and healthy is one of the first things that we have to do to be proactive, and take some time - and it will take some time - to get a healthy population because it's a lot less costly to maintain a healthy population than it is to respond to one that is not. So those two portfolios coming together, the minister's understanding of the big picture, and her understanding of the key players in that model for health care is important - and she spoke to that and she spoke to the role that pharmacists play. So I believe that she has in her capacity and in her understanding to make good decisions with respect to this particular bill.

We sat through the Law Amendments Committee and I listened to many of the people who were there as presenters, and their ask was fairly simple and it was one that is not going to cost, but is eventually going to pay off. Those requests were simply that we would not move forward with Bill No. 17 until a few of the details had been put in place, and one of those was the terms and conditions of the agreement that is in the negotiation stage right now. They were asking to make sure that was completed before we moved on with Bill No. 17; they were asking that the details on the scope of practice would be outlined so that everyone who was participating in the negotiations, or anybody who would be living with the implementation of the bill, would have a clear understanding of the rules of the game.

As I said, their ask was simple. I did read where the minister herself had talked about the passage of the bill and the completing of the negotiations would coincide. I believe the minister said that because she would understand how important it is to pharmacists to know the playing field and to know that they were working together with a common goal. And she made the statement; I think pharmacists were very happy with that. We know that in negotiations there can be some delays, and we know there have been in this set of negotiations. The amendment that was put forward was simply to say to the

minister, to say to the pharmacists, and to say to everyone who will benefit from this bill, that we need some time so that the coinciding that the minister talked about as being important, and what she wanted, could happen.

I'm a little concerned as to why the minister's position might have changed on that, and I'm hoping that the minister will see this amendment as an opportunity for her to do exactly what she said she wanted to do and that was have the negotiations and the passage of the bill come together. It's a small ask on the part of our caucus, it's supported by the members of the Third Party and it's supported by the people who asked, all of those who came to the Law Amendments Committee were asking that simple question, what is the rush, can we wait? I know that there are members in the . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Shhhh.

Not you, I'm trying to get you some order.

MS. CASEY: Thank you member, I appreciate that.

MR. SPEAKER: I was just saying there were four conversations going on at the same time.

MS. CASEY: Thank you to the member and thank to the Speaker, I will now continue. What I was saying was that the amendments that were presented will allow the minister to do what I believe she wanted to do and she went out and took a position on that. It is what the simple ask that came from the presenters was, to delay until those things could come together. It was the request of our caucus through the amendment, it's supported by the members of the Third Party and I believe that there will be members in all Parties in this House who would recognize there will be nothing lost by waiting for that to happen, there will be a lot to gain. I would think that the minister would want to be on the side of a winning decision, a winning position so that the pharmacists know the rules of the game. The minister and the negotiating team will have hammered out what it is that will be in that tariff agreement. The scope of practice for pharmacists will be clearly defined and so people, once they know that, will be able to move forward.

Now that takes me to small communities and small pharmacies and I will speak specifically to the benefit to the pharmacy in my constituency in Colchester North, in fact in Bass River, the benefit for that pharmacy and for that pharmacist. The only benefit for the pharmacist is that he will know whether he can continue to open the doors and provide the service or not. Any pharmacist is an entrepreneur as well and he has made a decision that he will buy that pharmacy. He has made the decision that he will invest everything he has in order to buy that pharmacy and take a loss financially, initially, so that he can go in and provide that service. But there's not a very big profit margin, in fact, I don't expect

there is any profit margin there right now. Pushing through this bill with unknowns is something that he is unable to survive.

I know that the minister has said that there are protected pharmacies and I commend the minister for sitting down to look at the impact that this bill will have on some of our rural communities and out of that review I understand there has been a list of protected pharmacies. We have asked for that list, we've not seen that list, we've asked for what is the plan to help those rural pharmacies and we've not seen that. If those lists have been prepared and if the plan has been developed I don't know why we couldn't see it but that was the decision of the minister and I will respect that. But my point is, if they have not been, if she has not shared because she doesn't have it then this amendment allows time for that to happen so that pharmacies in rural Nova Scotia who may be on the protected list and who may be given some assistance so that they can survive, they need to know that. If, in fact, the minister doesn't have that, this gives her time to get it together.

We asked in the Law Amendments Committee of some of those rural pharmacies if they knew of a protected list and they had heard there was one but they didn't know. We asked them specifically if they were on that list and they didn't know. So the anxiety and the unknown that's out there is causing a lot of turmoil in small, rural communities.

I heard the member for Hants West speak about four pharmacies, I believe it was, in his particular area and I think that's wonderful. It's a much larger area from what I represent and even that member has concerns about what will happen when there are four in the community. People have a choice; they have four choices. Well, along the shore between Truro and Parrsboro, they have one choice and if that one choice is gone - I spoke about this before - the people in those communities have a bigger choice to make and that is, do they pay extra in gas to drive to Truro or Parrsboro? Many of them are seniors so they don't drive, so they hire someone to take them to Truro or Parrsboro. Those are added costs, which will soon be eaten up from any of the savings that might come out of this bill. My bigger concern is they will not go anywhere. Many of them can't afford to hire someone to drive them to Truro or Parrsboro, so they will not go and they will not do - as I suggested in the beginning and it's something I know the minister wants - is that we have to get a healthy population.

If we don't provide services close to home for our residents and, in particular, our seniors, they will not take care of their health the way we would want them to and that would be in a proactive way. The services that I'm speaking about allow these folks in my community and others to be cognizant of their health and to have educational programs that will help them understand their illness or their disease' if they don't have that opportunity, which is now provided through the local pharmacy - it's the focal point. It's where residents come for their blood collection, they come there for the foot clinics, they come there for counselling, and they come there for awareness and information sessions on any disease that you can imagine. It is education and it's constructive and it leads to healthier Nova Scotians.

My fear for my constituents, as I've stated, is that if the pharmacy is not on the protected list, if the pharmacist can't participate in the plan that's being prepared or we hear it's being prepared, then they will lose that opportunity and their health will decline quickly. I know that I'm not the only member in this House who represents some very rural communities. I would expect that there are members on that side of the House and on this, who, if they wanted to take the name Bass River out and put their own community in, they would look at that and they would say, gee, that could happen in my community as well. If that little pharmacy along the Eastern Shore is gone or if that little pharmacy up in the highlands of Cape Breton is gone, if it's gone where will those people go? Where will your constituents go? Where will my constituents go?

I know that you want the best for everyone in your community and one of the ways to get that best is to ensure that they have access to somebody who can give them some advice and give them some counselling about their own personal health.

I grew up in Bass River. I know what it's like to be there in the middle of February in a blazing blizzard and probably the roads aren't ploughed and no offense to the member who is the minister, but probably the roads aren't ploughed at 3:00 in the morning and you have a sick baby. What do you do? Well, we heard many times in the Law Amendments Committee that the phone that rings is the pharmacists', it's the druggist's, it's the one who gets called. Sometimes it's just a matter of talking that family through a difficult and perhaps quite a traumatic situation. The services that are there, there can be no price tag put on those. There can be no replacement for those.

Many of those communities - and again, I will refer to mine - the existence of the pharmacy there, depends very much on the existence of the doctor in the community and vice versa. When the doctor is gone, the pharmacy will be gone. When the pharmacy is gone, the doctor will be gone.

So we're not only losing a pharmacy if that particular owner can't survive, the doctor who has made a decision to practice there in the same building, through the same door as the pharmacy, will be left alone. I talked earlier about entrepreneurial spirit here that these pharmacists have, they have to make money. The only way they can make money is if they have, for priority, prescriptions to fill. For the doctor, if you're going to drive 40 minutes to get to a doctor, and then you have to turn around and drive another 40 or 50 minutes or whatever to get to a pharmacist, you're not going to do it. So the pharmacist and the doctor in those small communities co-exist. Neither one of them is becoming rich, I can tell you that.

But they have chosen that lifestyle and they want to make a good living. They both employ people in the community. We're not only looking at the health and wellness of the people in the community and we're not only looking at the viability of the pharmacy, we

are looking at a community and we are looking at destroying what has been able to survive in that community if we don't identify them as protected pharmacies.

What this amendment is doing is asking people, asking the minister, asking the government, asking the members of the backbench to think about their community and to think if we wait until the tariff agreement is finalized, until the scope of practice is defined and then pass the bill, a short period of time, a small price to pay for the win-win situation that can come out of this.

I would close by saying that I would ask the minister to maintain the position that she took. She made that statement publicly. I would ask her to honour that, to respect that, people were comforted by that and to allow the amendment to pass so we can have those things coincide, which she had said she wants, and which I believe everyone in this House wants as well. Thank you.

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

MR. KEITH BAIN: Thank you. I too am pleased to rise in support of this amendment. I also want to echo the words of my colleague, the member for Hants West, when he said it's too bad it would even have to come to this, that we have to stand up in support of an amendment that should be in place anyway.

It's been mentioned by all the speakers before me that this amendment that the honourable member has presented just puts into law what the minister says she already plans to do. Over the course of the last few days we heard from pharmacists and pharmacy owners from across the province. Their concerns are, not with this bill, but with the uncertainty that would be created until the tariff agreement is in place.

I don't think there's anyone in this Chamber or anywhere in this province that's against the bill. We all want fair prices and cheaper prices for our residents. We've been saying this all along. The Liberal Party has been saying it all along and each presenter at the Committee on Law Amendments said the same thing. But, when some of the pharmacists were asked if they felt a tariff agreement could be in place by July 1st, they said they weren't entirely certain. Then we find out that the talks that were scheduled to take place this past week were postponed until next week, further delaying the possible implementation by July 1st.

I think the pharmacy owners and indeed, I'm sure, the government, wants to make sure there is sufficient time to discuss any tariff agreements so that the best interests of the pharmacies, the pharmacists and the government are served. But with postponements taking place and the ability to sit down and negotiate not happening, this further delays the whole process and leaves everything in limbo.

Mr. Speaker, until a tariff agreement is in place, the pharmacies are faced with uncertainty. They are beginning to look at whether or not many of the services they provide

today for free will be curtailed or even eliminated altogether. During the Law Amendments Committee again we heard from Chelsea Hatcher. Chelsea is the owner of Hatcher's pharmacy in Neils Harbour. Along with being the only pharmacy in the North of Smokey area of Victoria County, the free services and advice that Chelsey has offered to clients, her customers, whatever name you want to put on them, could never have a dollar figure affixed to it.

We also heard from Evelyn Williams of Ingonish who said that she doesn't know what she would do if Hatcher's pharmacy in Neils Harbour were to close. I think the honourable member for Colchester North mentioned it as well. How many people like Evelyn Williams are going to say, I don't have a pharmacy in my area, I don't have the transportation to pick up my prescription, how many are actually going to do without? In rural and remote parts of this province, and there are many, and I think that's what we have to look at, Mr. Speaker, the people who the 52 of us in this House are serving. We have to serve their best interests but we also have to serve the interests of the people who look after their health.

Oftentimes, Mr. Speaker, pharmacists are the front line in health care. Again, this was referenced many times in the Law Amendments Committee as well; they get calls any time of the day or night. I guess the importance of a small rural pharmacy, and I'll keep referencing Hatcher's in Neils Harbour, is that they know their customers well. Why do they know their customers well? Because they are their neighbours. They know their past medical history and know whether or not a medication that has been prescribed for them is the right medication they should be taking.

When I talk about the North of Smokey area with one pharmacy, a small hospital and two doctors. Those doctors who are serving the Buchanan Memorial Hospital in Neils Harbour have served the people for years and have served them very well. Because of the fact that we have a pharmacy in a small rural area, the pharmacist knows the doctors very well because they've been there that long, they work together to serve the best interests of the community.

I also want to reference Graham MacKenzie who owns Stone's Drug Store in Baddeck. We received e-mails from Graham - not one but several - who although he couldn't make it to appear at the Law Amendments Committee, certainly made his feelings known to our caucus and I'm sure the other caucuses in this Chamber. I had the opportunity a week ago last Saturday to stop in Stone's Drug Store and have a chat with Graham MacKenzie. Graham has just finished doing a renovation to his store. It's a beautiful job but the reason he did it was in order for him to be able to provide the expanded scope of services that our pharmacies are going to be providing.

I think in our discussion Graham told me that had he known that this uncertainty would be taking place, he's not really sure if he would have done the tremendous

expansion that he did, but he has an obligation, he has a commitment to his customers. That's why he's doing what he's doing, but he can only go so far. In one e-mail Graham even says, the free services I am providing, I probably just won't be providing them anymore. So who is the loser, Mr. Speaker, in all this? The customer.

I can hear some rambling going on, on the opposite side there. I think they should talk to the small rural pharmacies in their area, see what effect it's going to have on them and on their customers and let them go to the residents and say, sorry, you're not going to have a pharmacy anymore. I'd like to see the member for Pictou Centre do that. I'd like to see the member for Pictou East do it. Let's see them have the audacity to go and tell somebody, sorry folks, your drug store is closing. Let's see what would happen.

We all know the importance of a pharmacy. We know how important a pharmacy is, whether it's Chelsea Hatcher in Neils Harbour or it's the Shoppers Drug Mart here in Halifax, we know the importance of it, we all agree to it. We all want fair prices, but let's slow down. Let's make sure that there is a good agreement in place, that the tremendous job that these pharmacists and the pharmacies are providing to the residents of Nova Scotia can continue, and the best interests of the people of Nova Scotia are served. With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place.

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

MS. KELLY REGAN: I wanted to speak today to the motion that is before us, in part because while I don't live in a rural area, I am very concerned about the ability of seniors to access pharmacies, the various services that pharmacies do offer and I'm concerned about them being able to get deliveries. I'm concerned that any move that will close pharmacies will further depopulate our small towns. I'm concerned because, in my view, this is another attack on small businesses. Pharmacists have indicated quite plainly to us that this could well lead to more closures of pharmacies in small towns. By not having a tariff agreement in place, before this bill goes through, we are putting independent pharmacy owners at risk.

It seems to me that this is a continuation of some of the activity that we saw under Bill No. 100 where something was brought in, people were not consulted about it and it was rammed through. Quite frankly, I don't understand the big hurry. It's important to have improved prices for drugs. We are definitely in favour of that, but why we couldn't make sure that the tariff was negotiated before this went through, I don't understand. I have received letters - not a lot, again, because the pharmacies in my area tend to be bigger ones - from independent pharmacy owners in my area. They're deeply concerned about what is about to happen. They're asking us today that the passage of Bill No. 17 be delayed until the tariff agreement and scope of practice negotiations have concluded with the provincial government. They're not asking for a lot. They're not saying, don't do this. They're just saying, let us know what we're dealing with.

It seems to me that anybody who has run their own business - and there are a lot of us in here today who have - know that uncertainty really makes life difficult when you're a small business owner and you're trying to meet a payroll and you're trying to do the best for your customers.

It just seems to me that, you know, where's the big rush? Why wouldn't we do this properly with pharmacy owners? We're asking them to take on new duties and yet we're brow-beating them on the other hand. When I say, we, I guess I mean the government. I don't mean we, all of us in here, I mean the government. It seems to me that in Bill No. 100, we had small business being run roughshod over. Even this morning, there was a tweet from CFIB NS from Leanne Hachey who is the (Interruption) I'm going to print it out so no worries there. "Cynicism & politics: dozens of pharmacists went 2 law amndmnts asking 4 more time 2 adjust 2 Bill 17; none provided. Wonder y they bothered."

So if you want to know why people aren't voting and if you're concerned about the Elections Act and trying to encourage people, which is what we heard yesterday in the Law Amendments Committee, for the reason for some strange changes that were coming in - well take a look in the mirror folks because, quite frankly, now you have got another group of people who think the system doesn't work, because they went to the Law Amendments Committee and they were shut down. Nobody threw them a bone or anything. Why wouldn't we try to have this negotiation dealt with before it is proclaimed?

I am also concerned about tourists because, quite frankly, my experience of small-town pharmacies has been when I've been on vacation. There are pharmacies all throughout this province that my family has visited, whether it was to buy bandages because somebody had scraped something, or whether it was, for example, a couple of summers ago I suffered my first gall bladder attack when we were down at the Mersey River Chalets and I ended up having to go to the pharmacist in Annapolis - it was the middle of the night when the attack happened and fortunately things cleared up after a bit, but I had to go into Annapolis to get some antacids to try to combat the discomfort.

Every year we would stop in at the pharmacist in Musquodoboit on our way to Camp Kidston, the United Church camp, when I was taking the kids down there - you got a real sense of what the town was like because there would be posters on the wall, on the windows of what is going on, and you'd get to meet people in that town.

Last year we visited the pharmacist in River John, where my son purchased his first razor blade because we finally said, look buddy, you've got to start shaving because it's just sticking out to here. So ask yourself: what is it going to be like for tourists when they come into town and there's no pharmacy for miles and miles? Those pharmacies are more than just filling "scripts" - they're providing a service.

Our chief focus right now is on the issue of lower drug costs and making sure that our rural pharmacies do not close. We've been told there's a list of pharmacies that may be at risk - we have not seen this list. We've also been told there's a plan to deal with this, and yet we have not seen this plan. It seems to me that the government is asking for an awful lot on faith, and they are providing nothing in return to give people any comfort, any assurance that, in fact, these issues will be taken care of. Maybe there is a plan, maybe there is a list but, you know, based on what we've seen, I think we would be naive just to take it at face value.

I received a letter from a pharmacist in my area and he said, I have no problem with these changes, but as a practising pharmacist I really cannot see how we're going to do this without a comprehensive reimbursement model. But we're just asking them again to take a leap of faith without any provision; we're asking them to go climb on a high wire with no net underneath, and I don't think it's fair and I don't think it's right.

I think that once again we're seeing a lack of regard for what small business in this province has to go through in trying to just run a business. We've made it that much more difficult for pharmacists. I do think that it's important for this government to stop, take a breath, take a look - and just because the Opposition is proposing it doesn't mean it's bad because, quite frankly, those pharmacists went to the Law Amendments Committee and they were shut down repeatedly. They were very upset about how they were treated.

I do think it's time for a little sober second thought here, and for that reason I would ask the government to vote in favour of the hoist motion. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the honourable member, I'd like to do an introduction today. In the Speaker's Gallery today we have Deborah Lusby visiting with us. Deborah is the director of administration for the Office of the Speaker. With her is her daughter, Ava Tzagarakis. Welcome to the gallery and I hope you enjoy these proceedings. (Applause)

The honourable member for Cape Breton West.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, welcome to our visitors in the gallery. Before I start I want to make it perfectly clear that I, and our caucus, are indeed in favour of lower drug costs. However, when it comes to why we're here today, I'm a little disappointed. I want to congratulate the member for Halifax Clayton Park for bringing forward what to me, and to many on this side of the House, seems like a very logical and meaningful amendment.

What we heard in the Committee on Law Amendments, time and time again, was that we just need more time. We heard from pharmacists, right across our province, three days worth of presentations that were made. When I get up to speak here today, after listening to my colleagues, there isn't a whole lot left to say.

However, I know that the Minister of Finance is sitting on the edge of his chair just waiting to hear what I can or may add to this conversation. It is interesting. I guess the first thing we should talk about is who are the pharmacists, these people that came here time and time again and told us their stories? Well, the pharmacists are our friends, our neighbours, our relatives. They're community leaders; they're small business people; they are people who have invested in their communities; they are people who want to make a difference in their communities, and most of all, they're proud Nova Scotians who operate a small business in their communities.

Time and time again these individuals came and they told us, we want better prices for our clients and our customers. We want it to be fair, however, you must remember that in the last 20 years they've seen very little raise in their dispensing fees. It's a number that's been stuck at \$10.62 and yet, time and time again, we had these small business people tell us that their dispensing costs went anywhere from \$13 - \$15. Every prescription they filled they were losing money and each one of these pharmacies was filling thousands of prescriptions in the run of a year.

How were they making up the difference? They admitted, time and time again, that they were making it up with the rebates they were getting on the generic drugs. They said maybe shame on them because they weren't more aggressive with government to get a higher dispensing fee. But their main objective was to be sure their clients got the best service they could provide them and they were doing that by providing the services and adding to services and these were being done.

Time and time again I asked in the Committee on Law Amendments, can you tell me what the effect is going to be on the individual who comes in to get a prescription? Most times the answer was, you won't see a big difference. However, what may happen, which will probably happen in these pharmacies, is the services we're providing now for free will have to have a charge on them.

What I wanted to know and I always have some concerns about our seniors who are on a fixed income and they have an envelope of money that they get at the end of the month and they have to see themselves through the next month with that envelope. They have a co-pay they have to pay. Whether they pay that co-pay in four months or five months or six months, they still have to pay it. At the end of the day it's still coming out of that envelope that they have to survive on.

I've heard the Minister of Justice say, on many occasions, well they're taxpayers, and they're going to save money anyway. I don't think anyone would dispute that Nova Scotians are taxpayers and there should be a benefit here, but the question is is that benefit going to be seen by the senior going to the drug store to get their prescription filled? I don't believe they are. Most of the people who are much more informed and have a better idea of all of this than I do, have said in Law Amendments that they don't think they are.

Madam Speaker, I live in a very unique situation in my constituency, I only have two pharmacies. One that's located in Eskasoni, it has a population there of around 5,000 people and it's going to work for them. The other one is a new Pharmasave that was built by a small business person, an entrepreneur who owns a number of drug stores and he told us in Law Amendments, had he known that these severe changes were coming he probably would not have made that investment. A small business, as many here would know, it takes a number of years for it to become self sufficient and to keep growing and with this type of a hit it may be impossible for that to grow.

Now what does that really mean, that the people that live in that area are going to have to drive another 10 minutes to go to a drug store, which they've been doing all along, it might mean that. But it also means that the jobs that he brought to that community are going to disappear. I live in an area of Nova Scotia that has an 18 per cent unemployment rate and we can't afford to lose one job let alone eight or 10 jobs that we might lose in the pharmacy situation that has to close down or downsize.

Madam Speaker, we've been here, we've heard this government say it has to go through, we need to do it now, and we need to be sure that we have this bill in place because on July 1st we're going to have a pack in place to make everything work. But when we listened to the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia they don't seem to believe that that's going to happen. As a matter of fact they were supposed to have a meeting and that meeting was cancelled and put off. Strangely enough that meeting was supposed to take place while the House was sitting and the new date has been put off until after the House may not be sitting. I'm not sure if there is a message in there but if I was someone who was kind of pessimistic I would think that maybe there's something going on.

The agreement that we're talking about and that the pharmacies are talking about, they want to see their dispensing fee and see what that's going to be. There is a bill that we passed that everybody here thought was a great bill about the ability to have enhanced services delivered by a pharmacist and those are good plans, it's a good idea. But in turn for those things what is the cost? What is the cost to the client? The person who has the prescription that needs to be filled and who, at the end of the day, is going to pay for it. I believe that for any government to say trust me, is not going to work.

To say that we're going to have something in place when we need to have it in place, and that you're going to be happy with it, is not the right way and certainly not the Nova Scotia way. The Nova Scotia way is to sit down and deal face-to-face and although we may not always agree with each other we can sit down and have a constructive discussion as to what needs to take place. How do we save these jobs? We sat in this House and we had Bill 100 that attacked small business and now we're here again talking about an attack on rural Nova Scotia and small business. We've seen taxes go up by 2 per cent on the HST, we've seen user fees go up and the government tells us it's all about back to balance. It's all about making sure that things are going to be better.

My question for you, Madam Speaker, and for the members of the government benches who aren't allowed to speak in this House is what is it that the seniors in their communities are saying? I would suggest to you, Madam Speaker, they're saying this is not helping me, this could hurt me, this could make it a point where I'll have to decide whether I'll buy groceries or pay my electric bill or buy my medications. Since this government has taken control in the Province of Nova Scotia, it has put up their cost of living time and time again.

We heard numbers yesterday in this House that spoke about how there are fewer people working in full-time jobs now than there were two years ago. Of course we heard that familiar chorus from the other side of the Chamber that said, that's not correct. Well I can't argue, it's simply not true. I can't argue because I didn't put the reports together. I made the assumption, and I should be ashamed of myself, that Statistics Canada knew what they were doing when they put those together. Maybe, Madam Speaker, that's simply not true, I'm not sure. What I am sure about is that when I'm home on the weekend and when I'm at the Legion and talking to the veterans and when I'm at the seniors' homes and facilities and talking to the people who are living there, they are worried about their cost of living and the cost of their drugs.

What we need to do is take time. We need to take time to make sure that the pharmacists, who are providing employment in our community, who are active in our community, who are members of our community, who are active taxpayers in our province, have an opportunity to make sure their businesses can survive, the jobs that they create can survive and indeed, that Nova Scotia, at the end of the day, is the great place that we all know it to live in.

Now, Madam Speaker, I had the privilege of being in this House in 1995. When I was here there were two NDP members. It seems to me that this government is in a hurry to get back to that position again. It seems to me that every time we talk about something that's important there's a mad rush to make sure we get this through, whether it is the Elections Act or this bill or another bill - we have to do it now, we have to do it now - because they know better than the people of Nova Scotia.

Well when the pharmacists come in here and they tell us what's going on, when the people who go into the drug stores say to us, we need to be sure of what the costs are, we have to look at what our job is here today.

Now I don't know, and I won't speak for any members on the government side of the House, but my job, as the member for Cape Breton West, is to represent the concerns and the thoughts of the people who live in my constituency. I will tell you that the ones I have spoken to, and I haven't talked to them all so I'll admit that, but ones I've talked to have said to me that indeed, they're worried about how the cost of living is going up for

them; they're worried about the potential of losing and paying more for drugs in the drug stores that are in their communities.

Madam Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Health and Wellness, I would ask the Government of the Province of Nova Scotia to listen to what has been said by all my learned colleagues, to take what the member for Halifax Clayton Park has put forward and wait for three months because that will give an opportunity to make sure that there is a fair deal for all Nova Scotians - the pharmacists, most importantly the people who are buying the drugs, and the Government of Nova Scotia. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak to a bill that has now received much attention in this House, as well as in the Red Room through the Law Amendments Committee. It is one that is of concern to all Nova Scotians. All Nova Scotians use their local pharmacy and this bill does have the potential to have negative implications.

As the member opposite, and as many members have pointed out, we come here and we want to work for a better day for all Nova Scotians and if we can get lower drug prices for our seniors in particular, and all Nova Scotians, then that is a worthy goal and we must pursue it to every extent possible.

But to bring in Bill No. 17, in isolation of all the other bills around the scope of practice, pharmacy technicians, the tariff agreement - it just does not make sense. Now we're hearing from everyday Nova Scotians who have also been hearing what's going on at Province House through the media as to why we're here at this time on a Friday afternoon. I have no problem being here, we're here to do the people's business and Bill No. 17 is not in the best interest as a standalone document. We're standing in our places this afternoon because we want fairness for all.

So far, it looks like the pharmacists are going to be disproportionately hurt by Bill No. 17, so we've continued to talk on it and ask government for reconsideration so that the kind of work that pharmacists do in our communities is not in any manner jeopardized. That's the possibility that the tariff agreement may not make up that difference of the monies lost through the rebates on generic drugs. We know that pharmacists are being called upon as front-line workers to do more and more. Amazingly, many have already been doing more and more for many years.

Many of our communities now do not have a family doctor or have a reduced number than what they traditionally have. The pharmacist has become the medical professional to take part in diagnostic work, treatment work, prescribing work and this is a very time consuming part of their occupation. That's why I think the hoist that we brought forward today to have this bill extend out for about three months does make perfect sense.

Then we'll see how it relates to the tariff agreement which the minister indicates is being worked upon.

I think a balanced approach here is what the pharmacists want, it's what we on this side of the House want and it's what we're hearing more and more from Nova Scotians as to what they want to see as well. I think it comes down to the fact that we truly value our pharmacists.

Since arriving here at Province House in 2003, this is the second largest group of people who have come to Province House to speak in the Committee on Law Amendments on a particular issue. If pharmacists are negatively impacted by Bill No. 17, and all that is on their plate currently, when being asked to widen their scope of practice, as well as have greater involvement of pharmacy technicians, then we know they have to let something go.

We've heard definite worst case scenarios of pharmacists who have five stores that will go down to three. Those that have three stores may go down to two, that they will reduce the hours of service and they also will not be able to put on some of the clinics that they do.

They're actually doing some of the best work on preventive medicine in our province with the kind of clinics and services that they offer on a regular basis. Very often, it's not just at the storefront; they will go into a mall and they will go into a public area and put on a clinic for people. We know that they're going to be called on more in the future, during any kind of pandemic, and so here we are loading on to pharmacists without really knowing whether or not they'll be fairly compensated and be able to hire an extra pharmacist that is needed, or other employees, to offer the outstanding services that they have been providing in our communities.

I know in my case, I heard from all of the community pharmacies, the Valley Drug Mart in Kingston, Chisholm's Pharmacy in Aylesford, Wilson's Pharmasave in Berwick. In fact, I heard from a pharmacist who was a former student of mine and this young lady outlined, very succinctly, what they feel is on the line for them. In Berwick, again, the pharmacy there provides a whole range of vital services for the well-being of that community.

I stand here with the hope that there will be reconsideration here and that the motion put forth by my colleague from Halifax Clayton Park will be adopted and that we'll put time on the side of the pharmacist, the side of Nova Scotians, to make the best decision here. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Madam Speaker, I just want to say a few words on this bill. In my area directly it has very little effect. I only have one pharmacy and I believe the pharmacist from that drug store came in support of the bill. I can't imagine why, being a small businessman myself in the past. It's very difficult to make a living as a small business in this province and, indeed, with the new laws and the rules that this government is putting in place, it is going to make it even more difficult.

Small business may be a thing of the future in this province in another few years if the government keeps on changing the rules and making it more and more difficult for businesses. I do deal with some independent pharmacists on a personal basis and I can tell you they are very upset about this.

On the other hand, we also have to make sure that the intent of the bill - I realize the intent of the bill is to lower drug costs for people in Nova Scotia and I think that's very important and I commend the minister for doing that. Hopefully, as this bill moves forward that will happen and, indeed, that the business people who also have to survive in this environment can do so. It's a delicate balance and I know the minister reviewed that, but the comments I've been listening to here of some pretty serious situations in rural Nova Scotia, in really rural Nova Scotia, where indeed a pharmacy may have to close and if a pharmacy closes, a doctor may have to leave the community - that's something that really has to be considered.

Hopefully this motion will be adopted by everybody in the Legislature. It would be nice to see unanimous consent on that, but I would bet that it won't happen. I would like to thank the member for Halifax Clayton Park for bringing this forward. I think it's important that we do this and we talk about these things in the community and see all sides of it to make sure that nothing is left out and people are aware of what's going on and what kind of impact this may have.

When you see your local pharmacy close down and you see the big chain stores take over that maybe aren't owned in Nova Scotia or even in Canada, it's really an injustice to the people of our province and, indeed, to the people who work so hard in private business. With those few words, I'll take my seat and interestingly watch the vote.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is to amend the question to the effect that Bill No. 17 be not now read a third time, but that it be read a third time this day three months hence.

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

A recorded vote is being called for.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[1:40 p.m.]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. A recorded vote has been called. Is the House ready for the question?

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[2:03 p.m.]

YEAS

Mr. Samson
Mr. Glavine
Ms. Whalen
Mr. McNeil
Mr. d'Entremont
Mr. Baillie
Mr. Bain
Mr. Porter
Mr. MacMaster
Mr. MacLeod
Mr. Younger
Ms. Regan
Ms. Casey
Mr. Colwell
Mr. Zinck
Mr. Theriault
Mr. MacLellan
Mr. Churchill

NAYS

Mr. Landry
Ms. More
Mr. Estabrooks
Ms. Peterson-Rafuse
Mr. Corbett
Mr. Dexter
Mr. Steele
Ms. Maureen MacDonald
Mr. Paris
Ms. Jennex
Mr. MacDonell
Mr. Belliveau
Mr. Preyra
Ms. Zann
Ms. Kent
Ms. Conrad
Mr. Wilson
Mr. Parker
Mr. MacKinnon
Ms. Raymond
Mr. Smith
Mr. Epstein
Mr. Ramey
Mr. Whynott
Mr. Morton
Ms. Birdsall
Mr. Boudreau
Mr. Burrill

THE CLERK: For, 18. Against, 28.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

[PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING]

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am obviously disappointed by the results of the vote concluded but I do want to express my appreciation to the member who made the amendment motion earlier today. It is a motion that was appropriate. It is one thing when the government doesn't listen to the Opposition, but of course that hoist motion was just the latest attempt to try to bring this government to its senses on the timing and implications of Bill 17. It's one thing not to listen in the debate on the previous amendment but that was the latest attempt. Amendments were brought by both Opposition Parties in Committee of the Whole House earlier, the government used its majority to vote both those down. Amendments were brought that would have the same effect to align the timing of the implementation of Bill No.17, with the needs of our pharmacists and their customers, it was voted down. Amendments were voted down again in the Law Amendments Committee, Mr. Speaker, time and time again the Opposition Parties have given the government every opportunity to listen to what we are saying and try to make the timing work for pharmacists and their customers. They have used their majority to deny that opportunity.

It's one thing not to listen to the voices of the Opposition Parties, but behind the Opposition Parties were the needs of the pharmacists and the customers themselves. The voices that came to the Law Amendments Committee, dozens and dozens of small and independent pharmacists from across our province showed up one after another after another, asking for the same thing, as all of those amendments attempted to do. We're fine with the intent of the bill, that is what pharmacists were saying, we're fine with the intent of the bill. That is what our Party is saying, we are fine with the intent of the bill. The debate is about the timing of its implementation, that you can't take a whole sector of our small business community, an important part of our health care delivery system, and say we're going to do this part now but we'll do the rest at some later date. We'll put a gun to your head for our negotiations on the tariff agreement and then you can trust us to be fair. That is what the vote that just concluded, that is the message that that vote sends to the pharmacists of Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker, and that is a shame because it is part of a pattern.

It is obvious where the government's interest lies now. It's not with our pharmacists, it's not with our independent paving contractors, and it's not with our insurance brokers. Mr. Speaker, it's not with the users of our pharmacists either, the people we think about the most, the seniors and others who don't want an interruption in their services that is going to be the result of the misapplication of this bill and the mis-timing of this bill. Now pharmacists will have to react not knowing that tariff schedule, not knowing the expanded scope of service. They'll have no choice but to look at the services they offer.

We've already talked in this House at length about the unpaid voluntary services that pharmacies provide in towns across this province like Springhill, Oxford, River

Hebert, and Parrsboro, those are a few of my favourites. But also Truro, Inverness, Port Hood, Neils Harbour and many, many others who now, maybe they have two pharmacists on staff who are able to provide service and when one is tied up the other can step in. No more can we be sure that that will be the case as a result of this bill. All of that could have been avoided for the sake of a few months so that the tariff agreement can be lined up in timing with the implementation of Bill No.17. That was the intent of every single amendment, in the Law Amendments Committee, in Committee of the Whole House on Bills and then again in third reading with the amendment that was just defeated by the majority NDP Government, Mr. Speaker.

That is the tyranny of what we're seeing today - a government that refuses to listen not only to those elected members on this side of the House, but that is the tyranny that today's pharmacists are seeing. Even when you agree with the intent of the bill, it is not enough for this government. You have to buckle under to their timing and no one else's timing - not the timing of pharmacists, not the timing of their customers, not the timing of those seniors who have the benefit of those services today. So we can only hope for the best, Mr. Speaker, as the next few months unfold.

I'll tell you this - there is one more tool that this government has at its disposal that can still set this right. They said no on second reading, no in the Law Amendments Committee, no in Committee of the Whole House on Bills, and no in third reading - but there is one more tool because if they're determined to ramrod this bill through with their majority, as it's so obvious that that's where this is, where this is headed, then I think the only reasonable request we can have now on behalf of pharmacists, on behalf of their communities, on behalf of their customers, is please line the implementation up with the rest of the equation, which is that tariff schedule. The government has it in its power to choose the date of proclamation, when the bill will actually be enacted into law and become effective.

In Clause 35, the proclamation clause, that remains in the hands of the government, and we can only ask on behalf of the customers, on behalf of the Pharmacare premium payers, on behalf of seniors, on behalf of those communities, on behalf of pharmacists, if you won't listen to the Opposition, listen one more time to all of them and agree today that this bill, if passed in third reading - as it is so obvious that the government is determined to do - will hold off on proclaiming it until a tariff agreement can be concluded and enacted and put into effect, so that then pharmacies can make the best decisions they can with the whole story at their disposal. They can decide what to invest in, what volunteer services they continue to provide, how many pharmacists behind the counter at one time - important decisions that will affect real Nova Scotians, whether they are seniors or otherwise. This is in their power to do.

I encourage the government to do just this and agree today to this last plea, this last one reasonable request - do not proclaim until you have that tariff agreement in place so we

can still come out of this House having done something positive, and shown that we'll listen when things go astray with the pharmacy community. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I move the this question be now put.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the question be now put. If the motion is carried, I will put the question immediately. This motion is debatable, so I will recognize members to speak.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure what the Deputy House Leader is in a hurry for. I would think that Nova Scotians would like to know that the MLAs would get a chance to talk about this piece of legislation.

We have been talking about Bill No. 17 since it was introduced. I want to congratulate the member for Halifax Clayton Park who, at every opportunity in this House, has laid out a reasonable request, laid out a reasonable way in trying to move this piece of legislation forward.

We have said from the very beginning that we had supported the intent of the legislation. We listened very carefully to the minister. At every opportunity that I have stood in this House I have said I believed it was the minister's intent and government's intent to have their tariff agreement settled by now. It was delayed a couple of times with agreement on all sides - not just government, but I believe the pharmacists as well asked to have those talks delayed for a period of time, until they got an opportunity to look at this piece of legislation.

The minister has said on a number of occasions that it is her intent to implement the tariff agreement at the same time as this piece of legislation gets implemented. Mr. Speaker, all we were asking, all we've been asking from the very beginning was that that be put in the legislation, that the proclamation date would coincide with when a new tariff agreement was signed and the scope of practice was laid out for pharmacists across this province. That's all they were asking for from the very beginning, was that be put in the legislation, that the proclamation date would coincide with when a new tariff agreement was signed and a scope for practice was laid out for pharmacists across this province. That's all they were asking for. It's a simple request because the minister has stood in this House and said that was her intent and I believe it, I believe that was her intent.

We're surprised that government wouldn't put in the legislation what the minister was meaning when she said that she would talk about implementing her tariff agreement as well as this expanded scope of practice at the same time that we began to implement this piece of legislation. What was encouraging, I think, for all of us, is that when the presenters

came forward to the Committee on Law Amendments, all of them recognized the change that was coming; all of them are excited about the expanded scope of practice.

It's a wonderful opportunity for communities across this province, a new way for us to access the medical system, a new way for us to get information about our own health, about how we deal with certain health issues without having to go to a doctor's office, being able to access that in our own communities. Pharmacists are encouraged by that. What they were wanting, and what they need to know from their business point of view, is what will that expanded scope look like and how will the tariff agreement affect us?

When we implement this Bill No. 17, we need to be able to look at the entire scope of our practice, the entire scope of remuneration, in order for us to make some business decisions that would allow our service to continue in a community. It's been brought up and it's been said in this House that there will be some pharmacies that will close. During the bill briefing - and I see the Justice Minister shrugging his shoulders: so what, who cares? That seems to be the cavalier attitude from the member. That's fine. I'm grateful that the people of Annapolis are concerned.

At the bill briefing there was talk about a certain number of rural pharmacies that will be protected and it will be negotiated within that agreement. It would be interesting to know what parameters are going to be used around that. It would be interesting to know if they've already identified what pharmacies are going to be protected. Those communities across this province, one of which is in my riding, I know will be in jeopardy. It would be interesting to know whether or not that pharmacy is one the government thinks is worth protecting.

I think there are communities across Nova Scotia that are asking themselves the same question because their pharmacists are saying, we don't know if we can keep our doors open. We don't know. We wanted to negotiate with government the entire package but government says no, we're doing it piecemeal and we're going to ram Bill No. 17 through. The uncertainty that is being felt in communities could have been alleviated here if the government had put the wishes of the minister in this piece of legislation and allowed both the tariff agreement and the scope of practice to be negotiated at the same time as this bill is going to be implemented. That's all they were asking, that's all we are asking.

At every turn when we tried to improve this piece of legislation, when we tried to respond to the needs of Nova Scotians, government continued to say no. We made it very clear to them at the beginning that we were in favour of the intent of this piece of legislation. The only thing we wanted was to have an open, transparent negotiation around the tariff agreement and the expanded scope of practice, the very thing the minister said she wants.

It could have alleviated all the uncertainty in some communities across this province if they had just listened. I know the member for Dartmouth East talked about the Minister of Natural Resources who changed a piece of legislation and put his wishes into the bill. He congratulated him and he thanked him for that. That's the same thing we asked of the Minister of Health, to do the same thing. This issue could have been settled without any problem. We wouldn't have had pharmacists lining up from one end of the province to the other coming in here and making a presentation.

Contrary to what has been bantered around, it's not because they don't want cheaper drugs, it's because they're worried about their business. They're worried about their life's work, quite frankly, they've invested it in their stores. They're worried about providing services to the people who they've been providing services to for decades, in some cases. That's not too much to ask, to ask your government to be a partner in delivering that service.

Not a single person in the Law Amendments Committee said they were opposed to Bill No. 17, not a single person. What they said they were opposed to was the implementation date and they were opposed to not negotiating their tariff agreement and their expanded scope of practice at the same time. What is unreasonable about that?

More often than not when bills are put before this House and people come to the Law Amendments Committee, they're complaining about the bill; they're complaining about the detail of the bill. Well, in this case they weren't. What they were actually saying was, why don't we negotiate the tariff agreement and expanded scope of practice at the same time we support this piece of legislation? They were willing to do that. Why wouldn't we embrace Nova Scotians who are wanting to support their government? No one seems to have an answer for that. The minister hasn't given one. No one in government has given one on why they wouldn't do it together. That's a reasonable request from people who are concerned about their business and about how they're going to deliver service to the citizens in their communities.

You wonder why people are disengaged from the political process. Those pharmacists came in supporting that piece of legislation. The only thing they wanted was to have the expanded scope of practice and their tariff agreement negotiated at the same time. That's the only thing. All reasonable requests. Quite frankly, the Minister of Health and Wellness says that is her intention. Well, if it is her intention, why didn't we put it in the Legislation? It was a reasonable request. Those people came here. Why would they come back again? They wouldn't. It's a rubber stamp. They're not listening. They're going to do as they wish.

As a matter of fact, a little later we're going to debate a bill getting rid of Voluntary Planning, because they don't want to hear from citizens. It's a decision that government is going to make them go with. As I said earlier, it is one thing for them not to listen to us, it's quite another for them not to listen to their own Minister of Health and Wellness who wanted it in legislation. This could have been dealt with.

We started off this debate talking about Bill No. 17 and saying we supported the intent of Bill No. 17. We also started by saying we wanted two changes and it was to ensure that the tariff agreement got negotiated before the implementation of Bill No. 17 and to ensure that the expanded scope of practice was being laid out so that pharmacists and communities knew what was going to be required of them before we started changing their business model. Those are all reasonable requests. This, quite frankly - and particularly the last part - the expanded scope of practice is a positive thing for many communities across this province, and they would embrace it.

Now we're entering into it with some uncertainty because there are business people out there today, the pharmacists, who are going to make business decisions, which means they're not going to have the kind of staff that's going to be required to implement the expanded scope of practice. It just simply won't happen. We could have avoided that and we could have said to the professionals that they are, we appreciate the work that you're doing, we appreciate the fact that you're in here today making reasonable requests in this piece of legislation, for the changes that you're looking for, and we will embrace that because that's what the minister has said she's going to do. Instead, they said no.

We have fought this at every opportunity, not to change this piece of legislation at all, but to improve it and make some positive changes in around the tariff agreement. They have a majority government. They're going to ram it through. They're going to get their wish. As I said earlier, it's my hope that the Minister of Health continues down the road, as she said she was going to do, and negotiate that tariff agreement and expanded scope of practice before she implements Bill No. 17.

As I've said many times, I believe it was her intention to have that tariff agreement settled by now and it wasn't and I've said it before, it wasn't just the government that asked to have those extended, it was also the Pharmacy Association and other organizations that said, let's extend that - which was fine, we appreciated that.

Now that we are here, I would encourage the minister to stick to what she said. It's not in legislation, we're relying on the minister to do that, and that is not to implement Bill No. 17, until a fair tariff agreement has been arranged and pharmacists from one end of this province understand what the expanded scope of practice is going to be for their community and how they can best deliver their business model. Mr. Speaker, with those few words I'll take my seat.

MR. SPEAKER: There being no further speakers, I will call for a vote on the motion for the previous question. Would all those in favour of the motion that this question be put please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I will now put the motion for third reading of Bill No. 17.

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

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 62.

Bill No. 62 - Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. DARRELL DEXTER (The Premier): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on this important piece of legislation. I'm not going to speak for long, I just want to make a couple of points with respect to it. I had the opportunity the other night to listen to some of the debate on this bill and I listened to the member for Dartmouth East talk a little bit about the history, not just of the Dartmouth Common but also of Dartmouth and the fact that Dartmouth is, in fact, the home of hockey and that the first hockey game took place on Lake Banook. (Interruptions) I know there's ample evidence of that fact, although I must say, hockey is a national sport so there's lots of room for credit as to where it began so I, for one, don't mind sharing that credit with Windsor.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to make a couple of important points about some of the things that were said about this particular piece of legislation. It has been treated as if this is a new way to deal with the Dartmouth Common. In fact, as I think it was mentioned by the member for Dartmouth East, this is a piece of legislation in a line of pieces of legislation that dealt with the Dartmouth Common in particular.

I think in many ways that makes it unique as a piece of common land, in that it has been dealt with many times. It was dealt with by a piece of legislation put forward in this House by the Honourable Roland Thornhill when he was a representative of Dartmouth South, back some years ago now. In fact, the pieces of legislation were amended subsequently and then eventually rolled into the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.

Those provisions still exist in the Charter and this is one of the things that has been in error, in terms of debate about this, which is the idea that now the municipality would have to come to the Legislature in order to alter things on the Common. The fact of the matter is that they already have to do that because the measures that exist currently in the Charter will already require that. In fact, this legislation actually provides greater

flexibility to the municipalities to do things with the Dartmouth Common that they were not able to do in the past. For example, to make improvements on the Dartmouth Common, they will be able to do that now without coming to the Legislature. I mentioned in the past that there were amenities that the city took the view in the past they were not able to do, for example, those of us who use the Common frequently know that there are ballfields up on top of the Dartmouth Common.

For many years I played in mixed slow pitch leagues up there and unfortunately there were not things like a maintenance shed, there was not access to dugouts, those kinds of things, because, as improvements that required putting a structure in place, they were not allowed under the existing legislation. That is an improvement that this legislation allows. This increases the flexibility for the municipality to be able to make those kinds of improvements and therefore it means people will be able to better enjoy those particular activities.

They've raised questions about why it is that we wouldn't include other pieces that belong to either the federal government or belong to private individuals and I was quite surprised to hear that this was a criticism of the bill because of course we would like the Common's legislation to be as inclusive as possible. The more pieces of property formally in the actual Common's grant that could be included in the Common's legislation certainly that would be okay with us, but it would be a rather extreme restriction on the property rights of the people who currently own that property.

I found the argument in favour of that inclusion to be in stark contrast to many of the things that have been said in this legislation in terms of interfering in the rights that individuals have to dispose of their own property. I think that if we were to move, particularly, with respect to private property, you would find that it would be a fairly dramatic outcry from those people who found their property rights affected in that manner.

This was an opportunity for us to deal co-operatively with the municipality to deal with what is municipally-owned property. We did this. There were eight months of consultation with the municipality and it's hard to understand when the mayor or the members of council come forward and say there was no consultation, we weren't aware of this. That is a matter they should take up with their staff. The staff at Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations met frequently. I had an interest in this so I asked for updates on how the negotiations with the municipalities were going, how they were working out, what pieces would be included. In fact they came to an agreement that this is what the legislation would like and this is what would be included, so you can imagine I was surprised to hear that given the length of time that those negotiations had taken place, the length of time that we had been in consultation with the municipalities, that this came as a surprise either to the mayor or to some of the members of council.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, and I think I would just like to correct some of the record, one of the things that is not the case, and I think some of the members either didn't know or have forgotten, that in addition to having been the chair of the Dartmouth Common's Committee back when I was a member of Dartmouth City Council, I was also the chair of the Waterfront Development Taskforce at the time. I took what was then the Sperry waterfront report. I'm well aware of what the commercial plans were for the waterfront development opportunities.

I would note that what happened in Dartmouth is that the commercial development that is taking place, surprisingly, if you look at the Sperry plan, has started moving in the direction toward Dartmouth Cove, as opposed to down the waterfront toward the marshalling yards. I suppose that's simply the fact that those lands became available while the marshalling yards have not moved. I led the negotiations with CN at the time. I met with the officials of CN when they came to discuss the movement of the marshalling yards and what that would mean. What it would mean for the downtown and whether or not there were available sites, new sites for a marshalling yard either in Burnside or perhaps even further outside of the City of Dartmouth. Of course this was all pre-amalgamation and much of that would have changed once amalgamation took place.

This brings me to those pieces of property that had been complained of on Geary Street because I also remember those pieces of property were specifically purchased for the purpose of being returned to the Common. That's why they were purchased at the time. We are not only giving voice to the intent of the original purpose of those pieces of properties but also to the waterfront development task force of the day, which was reaffirmed subsequently in the planning documents of the regional municipality.

I don't take any issue with a member of council having the right to speak up and have a difference of opinion with respect to the plans that are in place at the city or for that matter on matters that we bring forward before this House. That is their right, they are elected representatives of their constituents and it is perfectly normal, perfectly expected that they will state their minds in this regard. I just think the record should indicate this is not the case.

With respect to the Sportsplex expansion, I did have the opportunity to communicate through to the mayor that, with respect to the Sportsplex expansion, once they have completed their process and they have approved the expansion that they are intending to go forward with. They tell me this has to do with pieces of the property surrounding the existing Sportsplex that, by and large, are either asphalt or pavement already and this is to expand for the purposes of allowing better service to Dartmouth citizens. The simple fact of the matter is their process has not been finished as of yet so what we would be doing is approving something not knowing what, if we included it, not knowing what it was.

Our position I think is a very reasonable one that we would just like to know exactly what it is we are approving before it is approved. I look forward to hearing from the city in

that regard. I think, as I mentioned during the bill briefing, my history with this goes back to a point in time when I met Leighton Dillman, I remember very well going to his house out in Eastern Passage and sitting with him and talking about the work he did in what is now the Leighton Dillman Park on the Dartmouth Common. He was an extraordinarily dedicated man to the City of Dartmouth and to the preservation of the Common. I like to think that this legislation goes some way in actually celebrating the work he did for so many years in preserving that green space. I think this bill is a tribute to him and to the work he did on the Dartmouth Common.

The last point I would make, it was something that the member for Dartmouth East commented on and that was the long history that the Common has had of hosting various institutions that were for the public interest on its grounds. That is absolutely true.

The old Dartmouth Library was there. Once it was taken down, that was returned into the Common. Predating the Sportsplex was the old Memorial Arena. The member made it sound like that existed a very, very long time ago but the truth of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, when I was a kid I used to walk across the bridge and go over to the Memorial Rink and watch the Dartmouth Lakers play the Halifax Junior Canadians. Some of the most rough and tumble hockey games you ever wanted to see were in the old Memorial Arena on that site. It was truly a place where you could almost feel the building rock back and forth with the fans. It an extraordinary experience as a kid, to be able to go and do that, so I don't think that it was that long ago.

I did, in fact, enjoy much of what the member for Dartmouth East said. I think it's always nice for us to look at our history and to remember what our communities were like in the past and how they have evolved and grown over time. I think this piece of legislation will help preserve and protect what is an ornament to the regional municipality. I hope those who take some issue with it now will, in the years to come, see that that is the case. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the comments of the Premier. Needless to say, I don't want to take the time of the House to repeat the history of the Common from the day before. I do want to address some of the things the Premier has spoken to, as well as some of the issues that have come up.

I will start with the rink, of course. To me it seems like a long time ago because the Dartmouth Memorial Rink burned down the year I was born, so I never actually saw it. It was built in 1951 and burned down in 1974. Of course pre-dated on that site was the very first covered rink in what would have been probably the Village of Dartmouth, I guess, at that time - it was still the Town of Dartmouth, I guess, in the mid-1800's.

I would also like to support the - see, I got a lot of ribbing from the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, which hurt a lot at the time when we talked about where the home of hockey was, so I thought I would just table the documents, some research showing that the home of hockey is, of course, Dartmouth, and began on Lake Banook, just so that clears up any confusion for people who might have thought it was somewhere else in Nova Scotia. That includes, I might add, a poll by Hockey News that ranked Dartmouth as the birthplace of hockey.

I'm sure there will be an interesting debate at some point in the future and it probably won't go down along Party lines, one of the few debates, Madam Speaker, that probably won't fall on Party lines. (Interruptions) Madam Speaker, the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism said I sound like Don Cherry. Hopefully he doesn't think my suit is quite as loud as Don Cherry's.

MADAM SPEAKER: Just the tie.

MR. YOUNGER: Just the tie, thank you. It's really bad when you start getting heckled by the Speaker. There are just a few issues I want to address. The first is on the land issue. In my remarks in the first draft I talked about the private lands, the provincial lands, the federal lands, the ones that are included. In terms of the private lands, what I suggested is that they be recognized, not with the same protections that are in this bill, but that they be recognized just as being within the original boundary of the Common, not for anything to be done on those lands but just as a recognition if we're truly going to recognize this whole area.

I am disappointed that there are provincial lands here that have nothing on them at the moment. In fact, one is an abandoned little piece of asphalt that is not being included in this bill, provincial lands. The municipal lands are included but there are little chunks of provincial lands and the councillors from the regional municipality brought the map in, indicating a couple of parcels that are found between the Scotia Court properties and the Dartmouth Shopping Centre properties that are provincially owned, not included in this bill. It strikes me as a glaring omission; they are vacant lands at this time.

I understand there are some federal lands in there as well although I'm not exactly sure where the federal lands are but the provincial lands are there.

It was interesting because the other day the member for Halifax Chebucto suggested to the media that this bill originates because of the fiasco - his word - around the bridge terminal. I'm not sure that I'd call the transit terminal a fiasco when it was changed as a result of a public consultation process and a consultation with the union. It troubles me that it would be called a fiasco. Yes, it did change and yes, it moved from their original plan, but that was in response to the needs of physically challenged consumers of the transit service, of transit drivers and the police who felt there was a better alignment and a safer alignment for all concerned. That, to me, is not a fiasco; that's public consultation working. That points to where my problem is with the Sportsplex issue.

I spoke to a number of the folks involved with the Sportsplex and, of course, this goes back quite a ways. It goes back to around the time when we were talking about the Commonwealth Games and there was a plan for a field house that would have been dug into the ground. They did a study; just a concept plan. They did a study and the study came back and said, that's not what you need to do, that's not financially viable, that doesn't address the needs of the community. Over the past 18 months of public consultation, they actually do have a plan that they presented at the Law Amendments Committee the other day, which details what it would be used for and so forth and I will table that plan. (Interruption)

The Premier says it hasn't been approved but we're going to get to that point. That plan now was awarded just a couple of weeks ago, \$250,000 by the municipality, to go to final design. Here's the problem. As the members of the Sportsplex board said the other day to the media, they are now in a funding challenge because the municipality is concerned, and rightfully so, that they would go to a final design and then it would be turned down. (Interruption) Well, the problem with that is that they're now in a quandary of, do we risk spending that money to send a final design drawing to the Premier's office to have it turned down and ask for changes, when they understood that here's the footprint, the footprint has been finalized, it's been voted on unanimously by council. All that's left to do now is the final architectural drawings and the tendering and they may very well come to the province looking for funding and so forth, which would have given the Premier an opportunity to turn it down anyway, say, I don't like it, we're not going to fund it.

Now they're worried - and I think it's a legitimate fear - to say, well, what happens if we do a design that is not approved by the province? Now we have to go back and change that design and spend more money. (Interruption) The member for Richmond quite rightly asks, is it the Cabinet? Is it the Premier? I haven't seen the letter, but my understanding of the letter from the Premier to the Mayor says, if I approve of the design - not if government and council or Cabinet, it's very specific to the Premier. Now, I haven't seen that letter, in fairness, but that's my understanding and so I think that is troubling.

They have the footprint and there was an opportunity here to grandfather that footprint in this legislation and say, I know the Premier was concerned - I don't want to misquote the Premier, but my understanding of what he said at the press briefing was, if it's within the footprint of the parking lot and so forth, he would probably be okay with that. Well, that could have been included in the bill to say, within these parameters, go ahead. We know that you're this far along in the process, we've seen the drawing you have, we will approve a 25 per cent (Interruptions)

The Premier says, have faith. This is actually really good because it's almost like the Premier is reading my speaking notes here because that leads directly into my next comment, which is the fact that when the former Premier got involved in the Waterside

Centre down here, the current Premier said, no Premier of this province should meddle in municipal affairs. My goodness, how things have changed.

The fact of the matter is, this is an issue that should have been dealt with by the province. The second part to that is when the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter was passed, there was an agreement between the province and the municipality that changes to the charter would be done with the support of the municipality and the province. That makes sense. I think we would all agree that makes sense. It is my understanding that was unanimously supported by all Parties in the Legislature at the time and yet here is . . .

MADAM SPEAKER: Order please. The chatter's getting a little high in the Chamber. The honourable member for Dartmouth East has the floor.

MR. YOUNGER: Here we have an example of that commitment being broken already. The Premier says, have faith on the Sportsplex, and yet the commitment that any charter amendments would have the support of council and the province hasn't happened in this case. In fact, there's a unanimous vote of council last week against this bill. Unanimous. It wasn't a split vote, it wasn't close - it was unanimous from every part of HRM. Obviously they're concerned about some of the things.

The Premier talked about working with staff and the councillors should talk to staff. As a matter of fact, HRM staff went to a committee of council meeting last week - Thursday or Friday, just before this was introduced - and said this bill was a risk to the municipality. They told the councillors this bill was a risk. That was what the staff said. The municipal staff that the Premier has suggested supported Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations staff in crafting this, they went to the committee in council last Thursday or Friday and said this bill was a risk and that they're concerned this may be coming forward without their support and approval. That doesn't sound like support of municipal staff to me. The fact of the matter . . .

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: You're not a councillor anymore, Andrew.

MR. YOUNGER: The member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island says I'm not on council. No, the Premier is the one running for mayor here at the moment with this bill. (Interruption) The fact of the matter is, I agree that there is merit in having a bill that addresses issues around the Dartmouth Common. I agree, I don't want to take that away and I certainly support the Premier's intentions in that regard. What I'm troubled by is the fact that you have an amendment to the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter when it was agreed the charter would only be amended with the support of council and that's not happening.

In fact, it's happening against their support. It doesn't grandfather in the Sportsplex, it doesn't include vacant, provincial lands that are within the Common's boundary. We end up with a situation here that the municipality now has to come to the province for approval on these things. I think that's problematic. (Interruption)

The Premier said they had to before, they didn't for the Sportsplex. The legal advice they have is that they didn't. The Sportsplex is moving ahead, they didn't need approval to do the expansion as outlined in the documents tabled. That was approved. There is a perfect example of why it would have made sense to resolve those issues before bringing this legislation forward. The Premier may be right, he may very well be right. Unlike the Premier who tells us that no matter what we say when we disagree with him that our facts are wrong, the Premier may be right but he didn't take the time to work that issue out with the municipality.

It's interesting to note that there's no rush on this because every single piece of land in the past few years that the municipality has taken a building down, they have actually reverted it to public green space. It's not like the municipality is going out there and doing something other than what the Premier suddenly has this urgent need to have them do. It's like the Premier doesn't trust the municipality. (Interruption)

The member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville likes to chirp from the back every time something is said, but it's not just me. The Herald editorial today, on this very bill, I'd like to quote from that editorial and of course I'll table it: "It's overkill for the premier of Nova Scotia to be micromanaging the Dartmouth Common or deciding whether Dartmouth Sportplex can expand its gymnasium - roles that Mr. Dexter has usurped for cabinet in a bill amending HRM's municipal charter." That's the lead editorial in today's Chronicle Herald.

Madam Speaker, this is problematic and the very last issue that I wish to address on this is, here we have bill requiring the municipality to return land to the Dartmouth Common when they take down a building. I agree with that and I think obviously the Premier agrees with it, otherwise he wouldn't have put it in the bill. Yet across the harbour on the Halifax Common, the province isn't doing that on the Halifax Common with its own buildings. In fact the province is doing the opposite. This Premier's government is expanding buildings on the Halifax Common, doing exactly what this bill will not allow on the Dartmouth Common. So where's the bill for the Halifax Common?

I will give you two examples that are being done under the watch of this government, two which have been brought forward by the Friends of the Halifax Common, repeatedly, and again when this bill was introduced. One, Queen Elizabeth II High School is being taken down at the moment and the QEII Hospital has already said that the gardens or urban farm that they are going to put there, temporarily, will ultimately be expansion space for that hospital, and that's under this government. I might add that as much as the member for Halifax Chebucto was concerned about the planning strategies, the Halifax Common plan prohibits that.

The second one is over at the VG Hospital where again, there was originally an agreement to return some of the parking space to the original boundaries of the Halifax

Common as they move out of other spaces there, I think it may have been the nursing building, I can't remember exactly which building. They're now turning that down and that was debated at council in the past couple of months and I'm sure the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island would be aware of that and it's an issue that the Friends of the Halifax Common have been raising lately.

The fact is, that is happening over there with the provincial government making those moves and yet they're saying it's not going to be allowed across the harbour when the municipality hasn't even been doing that. The only expansion space, and the Premier himself said it, is proposed for the Sportplex into asphalt. I think that is troubling that there is no rationale for why it's being treated differently in Dartmouth than it is over on the Halifax side. The only difference I can see is that they haven't included the provincial land on the Dartmouth side; they haven't included the provincial issues on the Halifax Common and that's just because they don't mind dictating to the municipality but they are not going to have the same rules apply to themselves, and I think that's troubling.

Madam Speaker, I think that this could have been a really good bill, I really do. I think that working with the municipality to have a bill where the parties would have agreed where the Sportplex issue was addressed, where the original boundaries of the Common were at least identified in the legislation and where the provincial vacant land was also included in this - not just the municipal land - would have made a lot of sense. It's a shame that that hasn't happened, it's a shame that instead of working cooperatively with the municipal government to get that to happen, instead the Premier has come forward with his own bill, and he's tabling it, he's not even interested. Even the member for Halifax Chebucto said in the Law Amendments Committee that he was willing to consider adding some of the provincial lands and that apparently got overruled too, because it came back without an amendment.

At the end of the day this could have been a very very good bill, a very supportable bill, but at the end of the day the wrong tact has been taken and it has fatal flaws. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 62. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 52.

Bill No. 52 - Government Administration Amendment (2011) Act.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill No. 52. Just before I got up to speak there were some government members saying "Question". Well, that's very relevant because there are many Nova Scotians asking questions about Bill No. 52, because when they look at the title it is, Government Administration Amendment (2011) Act, and what many of them are asking is how could such a bill be the one piece of legislation that abolished the Voluntary Planning commission in Nova Scotia?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: It's a good thing.

MR. SAMSON: The Minister of Justice says it's a good thing. Well, there are many Nova Scotians who have learned only recently that this was even the plan of this government, because I just can't recall during the last election, or previous to the last election, at any point the New Democratic Party saying that they didn't support the Voluntary Planning Board and, if given the opportunity, they would abolish it.

I stand to be corrected if someone can point out at any point where such a discussion would have taken place by some of the members of the government who would have been sitting in Opposition prior to the last election. My understanding was that they supported the Voluntary Planning Board, as we did, especially when one looks at some of the reports they worked on - the Natural Resources Strategy, the Off-highway Vehicle Task Force - and I listed off a number of them during second reading.

Madam Speaker, why the government has suddenly decided to abolish the Voluntary Planning Board remains a mystery. Now I'm not going to repeat what was said in the editorial in the Halifax ChronicleHerald but, needless to say, it was fairly harsh towards the Government House Leader who introduced this bill and it was quite harsh to his comments explaining why the government felt it was appropriate to abandon the Voluntary Planning Board.

Nova Scotians who might be listening or reading can refer to the Halifax ChronicleHerald editorial for themselves. Needless to say, the editorial was not very kind or supportive of this government's move to do this - again, it raised the question of why would the government not bring this as a stand-alone piece of legislation, so that Nova Scotians following this would clearly know that it was the government's intention to abandon and abolish the Voluntary Planning Board.

It's my understanding that some individuals who were actually quite close to the board didn't know this change was taking place and they've been in contact with colleagues in our office trying to get a better understanding of why this is happening. That certainly has not been apparent to us, and I don't think it has been apparent to anyone else. Suggesting that control of the Voluntary Planning Board would now fall under the Treasury Board means that it's under government control, and that means that government can decide how they're going to consult, who is going to be undertaking that consultation, and who they are going to speak with, whereas the whole idea of the Voluntary Planning Board was that it was volunteers from Nova Scotia who were conducting this process, free of politics and with the ability to allow Nova Scotians, regardless of where they were in the province, regardless of their background, the opportunity to speak on specific issues.

What the Voluntary Planning Board has done to upset this government is a mystery to me. Maybe there is something, and they could point that out and then we could have a debate on that. Why this would have been thrown into this bill is, as I said before on second reading, old-style politics - it's throw stuff in a bill that you hope nobody will notice and force the Opposition not to be able to vote against the bill because there are elements in it that could potentially cause them embarrassment.

The other item that I spoke on at length on second reading was the government's unilateral decision to delay a commission of inquiry under remuneration of members of the House of Assembly. This was done unilaterally, and even though the whole concept of that legislation is that politicians should not have a say in their compensation, this government has decided that they should be the ones to determine when that takes place.

It has been buried in this bill as well, called the Government Administration Amendment (2011) Act, so Nova Scotians who might have concerns with this don't see it in the bill, it's not apparent from the title, yet if we, as an Opposition Party, who do not support abandoning the Voluntary Planning Board were to vote against this bill, the Minister of Finance and others would be the first to say this is because the government cancelled the inquiry on the remuneration of elected members, which is not the case at all. Our Leader has already gone public and stated he didn't have an issue with it and certainly wasn't going to object, yet the government should have put that as stand-alone legislation.

No one as yet has provided a defence as to why this is all contained with the Government Administration Amendment (2011) Act. Ironically, those are usually brought forward by the Minister of Justice, but in this case it is being brought forward by the Government House Leader and, I'm assuming as Minister of the Public Service Commission, as the bill also makes a number of changes to department that were made, putting Health Promotion now as the Department of Health and Wellness and I've spoken about our concerns around that. As well, the creation of the new Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, which did not exist previous to that, as well as a number of other changes that have taken place as well.

Clearly, Madam Speaker, I find it unfortunate that for a government that felt that bringing in a Clothesline Bill as a stand-alone piece of legislation would not have done the same for a bill to abandon and abolish the Voluntary Planning Board of Nova Scotia, a board which my understanding is was created by the late Honourable Robert Stanfield, as Premier of Nova Scotia, which is certainly pre-dating my time not only in this House but my time on this earth. (Interruption)

As my colleague, the member for Dartmouth East, says, that was a long, long time ago, as he said about the Dartmouth Common during that debate. But to know something that has lasted through various political administrations - Progressive Conservative Governments, Liberal Governments, how ironic that the first NDP Government would choose to abolish the Voluntary Planning Board. It is clearly something that was not a political creation by Robert Stanfield at the time, it survived Liberal Administrations after it, yet here we see the first NDP Government in the history of Nova Scotia, abolish the Voluntary Planning Board.

I think many Nova Scotians who are still learning of this will be quite upset. When they voted NDP, I don't believe they voted to get rid of the Voluntary Planning Board, but that is what we have in Bill No. 52, which has been presented here today. We have not heard from any government members, either in Cabinet or in the backbench, regarding why they believe their government should be abolishing the Voluntary Planning Board, not one has spoken, which again leads to the question, what is the true agenda here? Is this something that was suggested by the 'Change Secretariat'? Is it something that was suggested by the 'Centre'? I believe that is what they call themselves, the small, unelected group of advisers to the Premier. Are they the ones who said this Voluntary Planning Board is becoming pesky and is causing us problems, so we must abolish it and we'll decide how we do consultations, on what subjects and who we are going to talk to?

We've seen that on the federal level with the Harper Government, where Nova Scotians and Canadians have expressed grave concerns over the level of control being exercised by a government. We're seeing that here more and more. I believe that Bill No. 52, is another step toward controlling the agenda, controlling the issues Nova Scotians get to debate and get to discuss and controlling the information which comes before us as elected members here in the House of Assembly.

As I've said, the Voluntary Planning Board has a long history of dealing with very difficult and complicated matters in the province and I find it absolutely regrettable that with the passage of this bill, because it's a majority government it will pass, there's no question of that, unless we do see the backbenchers finally stand up in this government because we know the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island advised yesterday that the government could fall at any time which is why we had to rush the Elections Act, so this might be an opportunity for the backbenchers to join the Opposition to join Nova Scotians

in putting an end to this failed experiment of the NDP in Nova Scotia. This is an opportunity.

Unfortunately, this would probably not be seen as a vote of confidence but certainly would send a clear message to the Premier and to the front bench as to what Nova Scotians, as to what the backbench feel about this government and what Nova Scotians are saying about this government.

Madam Speaker, I do expect you will see more editorials criticizing the way this government has been approaching a number of issues, more Nova Scotians realizing some of the changes taking place, something that was never part of the NDP campaign, something they never indicated before while in Opposition, yet now have decided to abolish long-standing institutions here in this province.

With that, the government had an opportunity to split this bill, actually could have presented three separate bills, one dealing with the Voluntary Planning Board, one dealing with the inquiry on the remuneration of members, and the third one being the amendments to the government ministerial departments that are contained within the bill as well. For obvious political reasons, the government chose not to do that, again. For those Nova Scotians who might still believe that this government was going to do things differently, this is old-style politics and this is just the same as what we've seen for years here in Nova Scotia. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to stand for a few moments in discussion of Bill No. 52, the Government Administration Amendment (2011) Act. There are a number of clauses within this bill, all that do a little bit of a different thing, basically one of those little omnibus bills that normally don't come with any bit of opposition to it. What we do see in this bill, though, are a couple of things that we find interesting. Even though we agree with the setting of MLA wages to a 1 per cent only, and stop the review of those wages, one that we've agreed with along the way, the biggest piece in here is the abolishing of Voluntary Planning.

Voluntary Planning has always been a good addition to consultation in this province, dating back since the time of Stanfield. It has provided us with the mechanism that when government is interested in doing some more consultation, you can send them out and do some work, or they look at a body of work and say, listen, people are asking us about this issue or that issue, that they can go out and do a body of work and report that back to government. Do we always like the information that Voluntary Planning has brought to government? Well, no. There have been things that have come forward that you're like, oh, I wish that hadn't come out or, my goodness, it's a bit of concentration that we really didn't have time to do this session or in this mandate, but something you have to take on because Voluntary Planning did take it on.

It's kind of ironic too, just the other day, there was a letter, I think, that was circulated via e-mail to, I think, every member in the House looking at boundary review. The gentleman who wrote the letter, at the end of the letter, the ending paragraph said that this issue you should send out to Voluntary Planning to do a little more work for you. You have to write back and say, by the way, the government is getting rid of Voluntary Planning. Thanks for the suggestion, but it's a suggestion that we can't use because Voluntary Planning will not be there.

Simply put, there are a number of pieces within this legislation that we can support. There are a number of issues in this piece of legislation that we'll have to bite our tongue or pinch our nose as this one goes through the House. I just wish there would have been a way - I know there is a way, it's to separate them and bring them in as separate bills. The member for Richmond was very correct, if you can bring in a Clothesline Bill, why can't you bring in a bill that abolishes Voluntary Planning and then we can discuss that one thoroughly and then take the other pieces, like the creation and the naming of the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, leave that one in another bill.

These things can happen separately, but this government decided not to do it in this particular case. We find it a little confusing from the way last session went where it seemed like there were bills for everything. There was a bill for daytime; there was a bill for nighttime, and maybe one for weekends. Those are my quick comments on this and I guess we'll be seeing this bill moving on through the process.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think this is too important a piece of legislation to go by, especially having participated in Voluntary Planning. Bill 52, the Government Administration Amendment (2011) Act does present that conundrum where you want to support one part of a bill and not the other. As my colleague from Richmond rightly pointed out, it is a piece of legislation that should have been two separate bills coming before the House.

We just got through a major celebration in this province, Democracy 250, and it did get us, and engaged many Nova Scotians in thinking about the way our province has one of the strongest histories and heritages in North America in promoting democracy both in its length of years and in the ways we work and have worked to engage Nova Scotians. Voluntary Planning was one of those that came along about 50 years ago to allow Nova Scotians a way of contacting government through the Voluntary Planning process, getting the message directly to MLAs. So it's unfortunate to see that go by the wayside because if we look back through the 50 years, we can actually see the voice of Nova Scotians in some of the legislation that has gone on here in the House. I don't think we are ever wrong when we engage and gain consensus from a significant number of Nova Scotians.

Over the years there have been thousands of Nova Scotians - this is not a process that engaged a few people, it engaged thousands of Nova Scotians. In some major investigations like the off-highway vehicle, Voluntary Planning actually did a major draft and then went back to a number of communities a second time and said, how does this look, what are the strengths, what are the weaknesses, what can we all live with as people with diverse interests? That was the kind of filtering and analysis that went on through that great process called Voluntary Planning, and the exercise that it put us through.

Yes, Nova Scotians do put us in the House to make decisions, but there are times when issues come along which do have those implications for the entire province on our well-being, our environment, the way we will do business. During the term that a government is in office, we should hear from all Nova Scotians or as many Nova Scotians that represent the population, to bring that voice through that particular exercise.

I can only think of the very last major work of the Voluntary Planning Board, because we know that there are other issues that come along that don't engage perhaps as many Nova Scotians as ones such as the Natural Resources strategy. After this week and the Woodbridge Report, I can only think that perhaps if Voluntary Planning is done away with by a legislative Act, maybe it can dismiss some of the views that Voluntary Planning gathered about how we should do the next century of planning for our forest strategy. If it doesn't exist, then it's out of mind. Well we will see, minister, how that comes out, because there were very strong statements made through Voluntary Planning that Nova Scotians want to see embraced.

There is no question, I'm not letting out any secret here, but in talking with some NDP members over the last few days, there are NDP members who aren't happy with this abolishing of Voluntary Planning, and it's unfortunate that many won't rise in their place and say so. There will be a time when members will be called out on this and we heard from a few today, by way of CBC, who are not happy with their representatives, who haven't had a voice on this issue.

I thought one of the great strengths and a real attribute of Voluntary Planning was that it brought diverse groups together. I know during the off-highway vehicle issue, there were people very polarized, but they came together as representatives of 21 different groups. They came to the same table; they were on the panel that went across Nova Scotia, and in many communities they expressed views very different, but when the process concluded, they agreed this is what they could live with. That's what Voluntary Planning does and I think it does a better job than that singular consultant who we send out across the province or sometimes does a report from an office in Toronto.

I think Voluntary Planning on any major issue, major directions of policy, we should not avoid the voice of the people, the voice of Nova Scotians. This bill will, in a single stroke, do away with what has been a very effective instrument in making our work stronger and more reflective of the voice of our province. With that, I take my place.

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

MS. KELLY REGAN: I did want to take a few moments today to speak about the elimination of Voluntary Planning from this bill. I have to say I guess I was, to quote a former member of this House, I was shocked and appalled to hear that Voluntary Planning would not be part of the process, would not be part of the public debate in this province anymore.

Quite frankly, it's a Machiavellian piece of suppression worthy of Stephen Harper, in my view. What's next, the firing of the ombudsman? I can't figure out - no one's been able to give me a good reason why we would do this. It doesn't make sense to me. I believe our caucus has made it quite clear that we have no problem with the issue of salary, I don't have any quarrel with what my salary is or anything like that, but I do have a problem with removing the Voluntary Planning Board from the public debate.

Fairly recently The ChronicleHerald had an editorial on this and they had quite a lot to say that I thought was bang on. CBC Radio, the last two days they have had extensive pieces on Information Morning. Yesterday the former head of the Nova Scotia Voluntary Planning - if you look on their Web site it says - was surprised and disappointed that the NDP Government has scrapped the Board. This morning Ray Plourde of the Ecology Action Centre, and Janet Markman also spoke, and they expressed the same sentiments.

If you look at The ChronicleHerald's editorial on that, and I will table a copy of that editorial, the second paragraph in says, "But, to its shame, the Dexter government is the first one in the board's half century of distinguished service to fire the messenger for not being 'in line with government thinking' to quote the breathtakingly . . ." - now there's a word that's unparliamentary so I can't say it - ". . . explanation offered by Deputy Premier Frank Corbett."

Quite frankly, I do believe that the Deputy Premier was just being very frank - no pun intended - about why this government was getting rid of Voluntary Planning because they think they don't want to hear anything unpleasant. They don't want to hear anything other than what they think is right.

The editorial goes on to say the following: "The bad old way of past governments, he says, was 'to say we've had a report then ignore it' . . ." - and they're quoting the Deputy Premier there - "His idea of a refreshing alternative is to say the . . ." - unparliamentary language - ". . . with getting any independent advice." They go on to quote the minister, saying, "I mean if it's not in line with government thinking . . . why have it?"

The ChronicleHerald goes on to say, ". . . maybe to improve government thinking? To find a public consensus? So much for open and open-minded government." I have to say that part of the reason why people are kind of shocked and appalled is because we

expected better from the NDP. (Interruption) Well some people expected it. I expected better from the NDP but we're certainly not getting that. (Interruption) My honourable colleague from Richmond who has sat here much longer than I had other ideas.

The editorial goes on to say, "The government is free to ignore this advice and insist on its own perspective. But gutting the board suggests that government is afraid the agency has more credibility than it does." I have to come back to that and say, why on earth would you get rid of the voice of the citizenry? Why would you do away with that? Maybe it's inconvenient at times but let's face it, democracy can be messy and sometimes we have to listen to viewpoints other than the ones we agree with. We do that day after day in this Chamber but yet people have their say. Why would we say to citizens who want to be engaged, no, sorry, thanks, we don't want your services?

Really, when you think about it, again this goes back to the bill we were debating yesterday in the Law Amendments Committee, where I said the effect of what they are not doing will have a dampening effect on the engagement of citizens in our public life. If you want to employ voter suppression, boy, there's a way to do it, just tell people hey, we don't want your input.

I have to say that I haven't been here for very long but this particular action I find quite stunning. I'm sure that there are some members sitting on the opposite side who are not comfortable with the fact that we're going to eliminate Voluntary Planning. You know, it may be that there's a report sitting on the desk there right now that they're uncomfortable with and they don't like. You know what? It happens. Governments all the time deal with reports coming forward that they don't like, but the proper response is not to kill the messenger, which is what this is.

I guess I just wanted to say that I'm very disappointed to see the Voluntary Planning Board go and I guess with that I'll just take my seat. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 52. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Madam Speaker, at this time I seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert to Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

MADAM SPEAKER: Is it agreed? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

There are several Noes.

The motion is defeated.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Madam Speaker, that concludes the government's business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Monday at 12:00 noon, the hours being 12:00 noon until 12:00 midnight. After the daily routine, Committee of the Whole House on Bills, Bill No. 59. I move the House do now rise.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion that the House now rise to meet again on Monday at the hour of 12:00 noon.

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 House rose at 3:31 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 1628**

By: Hon. Christopher d'Entremont (Argyle)

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

Whereas On May 12, 2011, the new youth health centre at École Secondaire de Par-en-Bas held an open house; and

Whereas the youth health centre will provide multiple services to the students through a variety of adolescent services from Addiction Services, Tri County Women's Centre including self-esteem programs and Youth Truth matters, which deal with illicit drugs and encourages Grade 10 students to make presentations about drugs to their peers; and

Whereas a nine-person committee followed guidelines and standards set by Health Promotion and Protection and trained two students to help guidance counsellors keep informed on what issues may exist in the schools;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating École Secondaire de Par-en-Bas on the opening of their new youth health centre and wish them continued success in all their endeavours.

Attendu que le 12 mai 2011 l'École secondaire de Par-en-Bas a tenu une journée portes ouvertes pour son nouveaux centre de santé des jeunes; et

Attendu que le centre de santé des jeunes offrira de multiples services aux élèves à travers une variété de services destinés aux adolescents par les Services de toxicomanie, Centre de Tri County Women's y compris les programmes d'estime de soi et de la Youth Truth Matters qui traite des drogues illicites et encourage les élèves de 10e année à faire des présentations sur les drogues à leurs pairs, et

Attendu que un comité de neuf personnes c'est conforme aux directives et norms établies par le département provincial de Santé Promotion et Protection et à formé deux élèves pour aider les conseillers d'orientation se tenir informé sur les problèmes qui peuvent exister dans l'école;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de cette Assemblé se joignent à mois pour féliciter l'École secondaire de Par-en-Bas sur l'ouverture de leur nouveaux centre de santé des jeunes et leur souhaite beaucoup de succès dans toutes leurs entreprises dans le future.

RESOLUTION NO. 1629

By: Hon. Wayne Gaudet (Clare)

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

Whereas La Baie en Joie, a dance troupe from Clare, recently participated in the British Association of Teachers of Dancing Festival of Dance, May 7 and 8, 2011; and

Whereas La Baie en Joie placed first in their category, which included other dancing groups from Atlantic Canada, and had the highest mark for step-dancing; and

Whereas La Baie en Joie placed first amongst the Nova Scotia dancing groups that competed in the category of Nova Scotia Traditional Dancers;

Therefore be it resolved that La Baie en Joie be congratulated for winning the BATD Rose Bowl for Traditional Dance and for winning the Dance Nova Scotia Rose Bowl for Traditional Dance.

RESOLUTION NO. 1630

By: Hon. Percy Paris (African Nova Scotia Affairs)

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

Whereas the Lockview Dragons boys high school hockey team won the metro high school boys hockey league Capital Region Championship on March 20, 2011; and

Whereas Lockview High School student Dylan Cook scored the game's only goal; and

Whereas the Lockview Dragons beat the Millwood High School team, which was previously undefeated;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Dylan Cook on his game-winning goal and the players and the team's coaches and staff for their victory at the metro high school boys hockey league Capital Region Championship on March 20, 2011.