



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2012

Sixty-first General Assembly

Fourth Session

2:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordon Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. As it is our tradition on Budget Day, we will commence with the motion for Resolution No. 1, respecting the estimates.

The honourable Minister of Finance. (Applause)

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to a notice of motion given by me on March 30, 2012, and the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly, I have the honour, by command, to present a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia, relating to the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, which is:

“I hereby transmit Estimates of Sums required for the Public Service of the province, for the year ending March 31, 2013, and in accordance with the Constitution Act, 1867, recommend them together with the Budget Address of my Minister of Finance and any resolutions or bills necessary or advisable to approve the estimates and implement the budget measures to the House of Assembly.

Signed,

Mayann Francis

Lieutenant Governor

April 3, 2012”

Mr. Speaker, at this time I wish to:

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

(2) table the Estimate Books;

(3) table the government business plan;

(4) table the Crown Corporation business plans;

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

(6) deliver my Budget Speech; and

(7) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013, being supply to be granted to Her Majesty and the Crown Corporation Business Plans to be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: The documents are tabled.

The honourable Minister of Finance.

MR. STEELE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Budget 2012 - a budget built on fiscal discipline. A budget that stays the course while protecting health care and education. A budget that supports the game-changing opportunities that lie in front of us after an historic year for Nova Scotia.

Budget 2012 continues us on a smooth path back to balance next year, in 2013, exactly as we said we would when we laid out our plan in 2010.

This government is sticking to its plan because the plan is working. (Applause)

Our plan is working for families in need of better care sooner.

Our plan is working to create good jobs and grow the economy.

Our plan puts kids and learning first.

Our plan is working to ensure that this province is able to live within its means.

As I said last year, there are no magic wands, no silver bullets, no quick fixes on the path back to balance. There is only a good plan, hard work, and sustained discipline. That is what Budget 2012 delivers. (Applause)

M. le Président, le budget de 2012 est basé sur la discipline financière. Il s'agit d'un budget qui reste sur la bonne voie tout en protégeant les soins de santé et l'éducation. Il s'agit d'un budget qui appuie les possibilités à l'horizon, qui apporteront de grands changements après une année historique pour la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Living Within Our Means: Back to Balance

Mr. Speaker, previous governments put Nova Scotia on an unsustainable path to a \$1.4 billion deficit and \$16 billion in debt. There was a problem with their mindset, their methodology, and their math. And that's why they left a financial mess behind.

In contrast, our four-year Back to Balance plan was developed in close consultation with Nova Scotians and reflects their values and priorities. Nova Scotians understand the value of living within our means, of passing along a positive legacy to the next generation, and of looking out for one another. That is why we will succeed.

Getting back to balance has not been easy. If it were easy, the previous governments would have done it. Let me give one example.

I am pleased to inform the House that, for the just-finished fiscal year, and for the third year in a row, departmental spending is coming in under budget. That hasn't happened at least since 1967, a year when Lester B. Pearson was Prime Minister, Lyndon Johnson was U.S. President, and the Toronto Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup. In other words, it hasn't happened for a very long time. Yet it should be the norm. And now, with this government, it is. (Applause)

At budget time last year, we estimated a deficit of \$390 million. We're now forecasting a deficit of \$261 million. That means we beat the budget by \$129 million, almost all on the spending side. Departmental spending is down over \$72 million from budget, and lower debt-servicing costs account for another \$47 million in savings. These are tangible results of our hard work and discipline.

Everyone with a stake in building a sustainable future is doing their part. Every health authority, every school board, every health care professional, every school teacher, every municipality, every civil servant is doing their part to help get back to balance. For example, this government ended March Madness, which was so very prevalent under the previous government.

Our government also held the line on departmental expenses and looked for ways to share services. This year, the province will analyze its overall spending and procurement. We will examine every nickel the province spends in an effort to find even further savings, even greater efficiencies. Nova Scotians expect their government to make smart financial decisions while maintaining the quality of important public services.

We also reformed the Public Service Superannuation Plan, and we did so in a way that was fair to all past and current members and also to taxpayers. As promised in the 2010 Budget, we have been positioning the plan for a transfer to joint trusteeship, and we are now ready to do so. The new governance model will form an important part of this year's Financial Measures Act. Again, this will make the plan more secure for the long term.

The savings resulting from these various initiatives that I've just mentioned are real and long term. My thanks - our thanks - and appreciation to those who made this happen.

We have accomplished a great deal. The plan is working, but we still need continued discipline. Any service or program that is funded, either wholly or in part, by the taxpayers of Nova Scotia must be delivered in the most efficient way possible.

Savings through shared services must be part of the solution. Continued duplication of services at public expense is something Nova Scotia cannot afford. Last month, the province, the nine district health authorities, and the IWK Health Centre announced the merger of several administrative services, including the elimination of up to 20 senior executive positions, providing a savings of \$7 million this year, growing to \$41.5 million.

The leadership shown by the district health authorities is remarkable. They get it. They understand and will do their part. By focusing every possible dollar on patient care district health authorities are demonstrating that we can be both more efficient and more effective.

Let me give another example of streamlining operations. Most other provinces with offices in Ottawa have closed them. I am announcing today that Nova Scotia will do the same, saving more than \$500,000 each year.

In last year's fiscal plan, the deficit for 2012-13 was projected to be \$216 million. In this budget, the projected deficit is \$211 million. In other words, we are almost exactly where we said we would be at this point in our Back to Balance plan. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, balancing the budget is not an end in itself, but it is a necessary step to restoring sense to the province's finances. And sensible finances allow us to get to our real objectives, which are:

First, supporting the jobsHere plan, which will marshal the resources of the government to support learning, innovation, and competitiveness, and by doing so create more good, sustainable jobs.

Second, implementing the Better Care Sooner plan, and strengthening a health care system that promotes wellness and offers the care that people need, all within a financial envelope that we can afford.

Third, putting kids and learning first.

And fourth, helping people make ends meet, in order to make life better for families, wherever they may live.

Let us now look at each of these in turn.

Creating Good Jobs and Growing the Economy

Mr. Speaker, in the past, poor economic performance relative to the rest of Canada was the norm for Nova Scotia. For 20 years, previous governments led Nova Scotia to the lowest average growth in Canada.

Today, Nova Scotia is heading into an era of prosperity - a time when good jobs are the norm, a time when young people who left the province looking for work can come home and build a life here in Nova Scotia. (Applause)

A strong economy provides the foundation for the important programs and services Nova Scotians want and need. But opportunity rarely just drops into our laps. It must be pursued, planned for, and seized. Much careful work and planning went into promoting and landing the opportunities that are now before us. This budget supports those efforts.

In the past few months, this province has turned an important corner: employment is higher now than before the recession hit in 2008. (Applause) In fact, right now, there are

more people working in Nova Scotia than at any other time in our history. And the economic forecast that is embodied in this budget, and supported by external forecasters, shows our unemployment rate heading even lower over the next few years.

That's where jobsHere comes in.

M. le Président, la Nouvelle-Écosse entame une période sans précédent d'investissements et de possibilités. Nous allons tirer profit des investissements que nous avons faits par l'entremise du plan - des emplois ICI - à l'échelle de la province, et nous allons continuer d'investir judicieusement pour créer un plus grand nombre d'emplois et assurer la croissance de l'économie de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

A year after launching the jobsHere plan, the province has already supported the start-up and growth of hundreds of companies in all parts of Nova Scotia.

Small businesses are at the heart of our communities. Three years ago we were the first government in memory to cut the corporate income tax rate for small businesses. For the third year in a row, we will cut the small business tax rate. (Applause) The rate will drop from 4 per cent to 3.5 per cent, effective January 1, 2013, saving small businesses another \$10 million a year beginning in the 2013 tax year.

Our three years of tax cuts for small businesses means a savings of up to \$6,000 per year per business. This is money that business owners can invest as they see fit.

In this budget, we are also eliminating, on schedule, the large corporation capital tax. On October 19, 2011, Nova Scotians proved what we knew to be true - that we can beat anyone in a fair competition. (Applause)

Last week, the Premier and Jim Irving were finally able to tell the story behind Nova Scotia's historic shipbuilding win. It's a story that could not be told during the bidding process for fear of tipping our hand to competitors.

It's a story that began last May with the Premier's commitment of up to \$304 million in loans that, as Jim Irving himself said, positioned Irving to win. And it's a story that will continue for the next 30 years as this province reaps 15 to 20 times its investment in provincial tax revenue from the \$25 billion contract. (Applause)

This Premier recognized and seized an opportunity that will change the history of Nova Scotia. That opportunity fit perfectly within the jobsHere plan and the fiscal plan we laid out more than three years ago. Take the world's best shipbuilders, throw the support of an entire province behind them, and Nova Scotians will reap the benefits. (Applause)

The federal shipbuilding contract, the Lower Churchill hydroelectricity project, the Maritime Link, the dredging of Sydney Harbour and development in the Port of Sydney,

and the hundreds of millions of dollars - almost \$1 billion - Shell Canada has committed to explore Nova Scotia's offshore - opportunities like these are giving businesses confidence and helping Nova Scotia get used to the idea that it's okay to finish first. (Applause)

Now, Mr. Speaker, while some of our long-standing industries are sharpening their focus to grab larger shares of growing markets, others are forced to retrench, refocus, and retrain in order to maintain a competitive position in static or shrinking world markets.

The idling of the NewPage mill in Point Tupper, along with the uncertain future of the Bowater mill in Liverpool, caused us to pause and consider the immense economic resource we have in our forests, and the need to manage them both to meet conservation goals and to maximize their economic value.

Nova Scotia's forestry sector has supported tens of thousands of families since the founding of our province. As world markets change, our government has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the communities, businesses, and workers and their families who are focused on retaining Nova Scotia's position in the world market.

Last Fall, we estimated that with no Bowater mill, no mill workers, and no suppliers, over five years the resulting economic slowdown could reach 2,200 jobs and \$300 million in reduced economic output. But in true Nova Scotia fashion, industry, community, labour, and government came together and with provincial support of \$26.5 million, Bowater continues to operate, offering good jobs and a steady economy throughout southwestern Nova Scotia.

The idling of the NewPage mill in Port Hawkesbury has been a significant reversal for the economy of the Strait Area, and indeed, for all of northern Nova Scotia. But this government has stood with families and businesses in the region, investing a total of \$27.3 million in new funding to protect jobs by supporting the supply chain, and keeping the mill re-sale ready.

We are optimistic about the future of these two mills, which are centrepieces of their regional economies. But make no mistake - a vibrant forest sector is not just about viable, competitive pulp and paper mills.

In year two of the Natural Resources Strategy we will work with all Nova Scotians in the forestry sector - from sawmillers, to foresters and harvesters - to ensure that Nova Scotia's forests can continue to benefit future generations.

Budget 2012 Builds On the Success of jobsHere

In its first year, the province's Productivity Investment Program trained more than 6300 Nova Scotians and helped more than 200 businesses become more productive and competitive through capital funding and workplace training incentives. This year, \$25

million will help more businesses make upgrades in machinery, clean technology, software, and hardware.

Through a \$1.5 million investment, Nova Scotia will focus on developing its International Commerce Strategy, a strategy that will help businesses compete globally and support entrepreneurs who want to go global. An additional \$450,000 for the Business Development Program, \$500,000 to increase the reach of the Productivity and Innovation Voucher program, and \$200,000 to develop a Social Enterprise strategy will support communities and businesses, and enhance their contribution to Nova Scotia's economy.

This year the province will invest \$400,000 to introduce a new graduate placement program, encouraging Nova Scotia students to stay in Nova Scotia after graduating by helping them secure good jobs. The program will provide a 50 per cent wage subsidy for the first three months of employment, up to a maximum of \$7,500. The program is expected to support 50 job placements in 2012-13.

The Strategic Co-operative Education Incentive aims to grow the number of work placement opportunities for students in university and community college co-op programs. The incentive provides organizations with 50 per cent of the required minimum hourly wage of \$15 an hour.

jobsHere is improving resources for employers and entrepreneurs, reducing red tape, and making it easier for Nova Scotia businesses to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia's economic stability is tied to our ability to compete and respond to changes in the global market. This requires a vibrant, skilled, and adaptable workforce. Nova Scotia's Workforce Strategy will build that workforce. The province will invest \$8.2 million this year to put that strategy to work. This includes \$2.5 million for apprenticeship, increasing the number of Nova Scotians in trades, and another \$1 million toward workplace education.

Last Fall, I outlined Nova Scotia's Jobs and Building Plan, which is the capital plan for 2012-13. I am pleased to confirm the Jobs and Building Plan as part of this budget. With 150 projects, this \$610 million plan for jobs and infrastructure will generate direct employment equal to 4,500 full-time jobs, and spin-off employment for a further 3,100 Nova Scotians.

All parts of Nova Scotia will see this plan in action, in the form of school construction, land purchases, capital grants, and upgrades to hospitals, museums, and highways - \$281 million in highway upgrades alone. The replacement of the Indian Sluice Bridge will get underway soon in Yarmouth County, as will construction on Highway 103 from Broad River to Port Joli. And, this construction season, phase 1 of Highway 104 near Antigonish will open.

Although this amount of capital investment is not quite at the levels it was during the two years of federal-provincial stimulus, it is still a substantial investment in people, jobs, roads, and communities. To offer only a few examples, there will be more than \$6 million to make courthouses and justice centres safer; \$1.5 million for renovations at the South Shore Regional Hospital that will reduce overcrowding and improve patient flow; and \$79 million to construct, upgrade, and modernize aging schools in communities like Glace Bay, Baddeck, Weymouth, Dartmouth, New Glasgow, and Liverpool.

This year, once again, our government is maintaining funding for the Community Museum Assistance Program, an innovative example of support for museum programming unlike any in Canada that will protect funding for Nova Scotia's museums.

Finally, under this heading, I would like to mention an exciting development for our agricultural industry. In Truro-Bible Hill, the province is in the process of finalizing a partnership that will position the Nova Scotia Agricultural College as an enhanced centre of excellence for applied research and a national leader in agriculture education. The merger between NSAC with Dalhousie will strengthen NSAC, benefit students, improve the economy of Bible Hill and Truro, and help NSAC fulfill its mission as a national and international leader in agriculture research, education, and innovation.

Better Care Sooner

Health, as we all know, is by far the biggest part of the budget. And for years, it has also been the fastest growing. But under previous governments, that rapidly rising spending hasn't done nearly enough to promote wellness and make Nova Scotians healthier. This government has reduced health-care administration costs to below the national average, and has cut the rate of growth of health spending. That is no small feat, especially compared to the records of previous governments.

Nova Scotia needs a health-care system that is well planned and managed. We need a system that is sensitive to the needs and priorities of local communities, and that acknowledges the hard work of our health-care professionals. Mr. Speaker, the largest portion of the government's investment in health, at 70 per cent of the budget, goes toward paying health-care workers. A sustainable and affordable health budget requires our partners in service delivery, including doctors, nurses, and other health-care professionals and support staff, to work with us in reaching reasonable agreements.

Better Care Sooner is our innovative plan to improve community and emergency health-care services. It is our plan to address the chronic emergency-room closures that became a regular feature of life under previous governments.

Today, Canada's first Collaborative Emergency Centre is providing 24/7 access, with same-day or next-day appointments to see a health-care team. The province is implementing the nation's first emergency care standards, and up to four more centres will

open this year, across the province. This year, the province will invest an additional \$2 million for the staffing and medical oversight of CECs, an approach that will mean fewer and fewer Nova Scotians will wait to see a doctor.

This Premier, and this Party, has long fought the battle to make life better for seniors. Nova Scotians want and deserve to stay in their homes as long as possible. That's why this year, the province will invest an additional \$20 million in home care, including \$6.5 million more for home-care nursing visits in the community.

This government has taken action to ensure better drug prices for Nova Scotians. Our fair drug pricing plan means that Nova Scotians are now paying less at the pharmacy counter. In 2012-13, prices will go down to 35 per cent of brand-name drugs, which is where they will stay. The province is also on track to spend \$17 million less on drugs than we would have without these changes.

Mr. Speaker, mental health services need better support. This budget includes a significant investment - \$3.8 million this year - to revamp mental health and addictions services in Nova Scotia, as part of our plan to provide better care sooner.

Keeping Nova Scotians well, and preventing them from becoming unhealthy, is an ongoing priority for this government. In this budget, \$2 million in new funding will go toward a plan, to be unveiled this spring, that will help make Nova Scotia a place where children eat well, move more, and grow up healthy.

We will also make investments this year to reduce the time Nova Scotians wait for receive orthopaedic surgery. And, Mr. Speaker, in the coming weeks our government will announce details of an ambulance fee initiative, with a particular emphasis on the fees for ambulance journeys involving seniors in long-term care facilities. This is just one more step in making life more affordable and providing better care sooner. These investments and measures will enable the province to use our valuable health dollars more efficiently, and will help Nova Scotians get healthy, stay healthy, and receive better care sooner.

M. le Président, ses investissements et des mesures dans le budget de 2012 permettront à la Province d'utiliser les fonds affectés à la santé de façon plus efficace, et aideront les Néo-Écossais à rester en bonne santé et à recevoir de meilleurs soins, plus tôt.

Putting Kids and Learning First

Education is the second largest piece of the provincial budget. We are dealing with a school system that has 30,000 fewer students than it did 10 years ago. This education budget will meet the needs of students in our schools today.

The province's new P to 12 education plan, Kids and Learning First, will better prepare students for post-secondary education, good jobs, and active citizenship. Our

education plan is the first to recognize that we all must do a better job of educating our children. It lays out a plan to do just that in a challenging environment of rapidly declining student enrolment.

Parents want the very best for their children, including an education that's as good as anywhere in the country.

Mr. Speaker, while the school system has strengths to celebrate, provincial assessments are showing no significant improvement in math and reading, and in some cases students are losing ground.

Kids and Learning First is about doing things differently and improving results by focusing on students' needs.

This \$6.7 million multi-year plan will introduce a manufacturing trades course linked to shipbuilding. The plan will expand career development support, including more career coaching workshops for parents; the plan will double the number of schools offering skilled trades courses; and the plan will triple the number of students taking courses through virtual schools.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, a new grants program will allow more community groups to use schools for physical, cultural, and education activities, and students will soon be able to earn a personal development credit in the community through organizations such as the Cadets, 4-H, Junior Achievement, and Nova Scotia Dance.

Pour la première fois, ce budget réserve des fonds spécifiques pour le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial en ce qui a trait à son mandat culturel, qui est un mandat unique au CSAP. Ce budget réserve également des fonds pour ce que l'on appelle la - francisation - des jeunes apprenants, dont plusieurs fréquentent les écoles du CSAP sans avoir de bonnes bases en français. Nous sommes fiers d'être le premier gouvernement à reconnaître, par une allocation budgétaire, ce rôle unique et important du CSAP.

Making Life More Affordable

Mr. Speaker, keeping post-secondary education affordable for Nova Scotians remains a top priority of this government. From 2004 to 2010, provincial funding for universities increased by 64 per cent, which was not sustainable. A new approach to funding was necessary.

Last year, the province invested \$42.5 million to keep tuition below the national average, increase assistance levels and the grant-to-loan ratio, and cap student debt for the first time in Nova Scotia's history. This was the single largest annual investment for students made by any Nova Scotia Government.

Mr. Speaker, we believe the government has a responsibility to find a balance that provides adequate funding for universities and a fair tuition for students, while continuing programs and services that benefit our communities and our economy.

With that in mind, the new memorandum of understanding between the province and Nova Scotia's 11 universities aims at keeping tuition at, or below, the national average, increases research and development opportunities, and invests \$25 million - \$13 million this year - in a new Innovation Fund for universities to help them become more sustainable. It's a plan aimed at protecting Nova Scotia students and helping universities remain competitive and sustainable for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to announce today that as part of Budget 2012, our government is investing \$5.5 million more in student assistance. Details of the investment will be announced in the coming days, but suffice it to say, for today's purposes, that it will target even further improvements in student assistance that will demonstrate this government's continued commitment to university and college students.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to inform the House that for the second year in a row, the Income Assistance Personal Allowance is going up. This July, it will increase by \$9 per month. This comes on top of last year's \$15 increase, the largest boost people on income assistance had seen in a decade.

Furthermore, effective July 1st, families will see an increase of 5 per cent in the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, helping 24,000 families and almost twice as many children.

At the same time, both the Affordable Living Tax Credit and the Poverty Reduction Tax Credit - each of them an initiative of this government - will be increased to help reduce the impact of rising prices on everyday needs.

The province will also invest \$863,000 in enhanced employment support services to help more people on income assistance access training and find and keep a job.

Funding to the Independent Living and Alternative Family Support programs is going up by \$900,000, helping persons with disabilities to live more independently.

And while I'm talking about affordability, I want to make it clear that this government will not tax home heating or home electricity. The previous government said they wouldn't tax home heat, and then they did. We took the tax off home heat, and we will keep it off.

Making life more affordable means a lot to this government because it means a lot to Nova Scotians. Our plan will help. It already has. Today we can see the brighter future. We are getting there. And when we get there we will have choices. That means ensuring Nova Scotians pay no more in tax than they absolutely have to for the services they receive.

Next year, this province will have a real, sustainable surplus based on reliable revenues and reasonable expenditures. After that, our balance sheet will improve to the point where we can reduce the harmonized sales tax by 1 per cent in 2014, and by another 1 per cent in 2015. Those reductions are now built into our four-year financial plan.

We are sticking with our plan because it is working. Now Nova Scotians know our plan means HST reductions, when they are affordable.

Making Life Better for Families

As I said earlier, there are more Nova Scotians employed today than at any time in our history. We also know that the combination of growth in our economy along with our aging workforce will lead to significant and long-term labour challenges, beginning as early as two or three years from now.

Immigration will be a necessary component in addressing the impending labour shortages here in the province.

Our immigration strategy is a comprehensive and focused plan to attract and keep innovative, skilled, and professional immigrants. It's based on a solid business case that complements our workforce strategy and jobsHere to meet labour market and skills shortages. This year, we will invest \$1.5 million in our strategy, to help immigrants settle and stay in Nova Scotia.

Earlier this year, the province successfully negotiated an agreement with Ottawa that means the RCMP, which has provided high-quality policing to Nova Scotia communities for almost 80 years, will continue to keep streets safe for the next 20 years. This year's provincial contribution to those costs is \$104 million.

As a government, we are working hard to balance cost recovery with affordability and accessibility. I'm pleased to say that Budget 2012 does not include an across-the-board increase of provincial user fees and charges. Fees will be kept at their current level.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, this budget will include another HST cut for first-time home buyers.

Furthermore, increases to non-refundable income tax credits will provide \$7.5 million in personal income tax reductions for the 2012 tax year.

After the previous government separated provincial income tax from federal income tax, they allowed a number of credits to fall behind. We are pleased, in this budget, to bring three major credits back up to a more appropriate level.

This budget increases the dependant amount to \$8,481 to match the basic personal amount. This non-refundable credit is claimed by filers with no spouse or common-law partner and who have children under the age of 18, providing total savings of \$1.4 million, or an average benefit of about \$100 for about 14,000 tax filers in Nova Scotia.

We will also increase the spouse amount to \$8,481 to match the basic personal amount. This non-refundable credit is claimed by filers with a spouse or common-law partner. This increase will provide total savings of \$4.6 million, or an average benefit of over \$100 to more than 44,000 tax filers in Nova Scotia.

And this year's budget will increase the disability amount to \$7,341. This non-refundable credit is claimed by filers who are disabled or who have a dependant with a disability. It will provide an average benefit of over \$250 to about 6,000 Nova Scotians.

The province remains committed to ensuring that any senior whose income is low enough to receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement will get a refund of their provincial income tax. This initiative - which was a personal initiative of the Premier's - is putting \$7.7 million, or an average of about \$450, into the hands of 17,000 seniors.

Conclusion

In a word, this budget is steady. We are doing what we said we would do. We have a good plan, and it's working.

Bref, ce budget est stable. Nous tenons parole. Nous avons un bon plan, et il est efficace.

We're making the right decisions to bring Nova Scotia back to balance. We're living within our means. And we're seeking out and seizing opportunities that will lead to growth like we've never seen before.

The finances of the province are in steady hands with this Premier and this government, and that means important public services like health, education, and support for the poor and disabled are more secure than they have been for a very long time.

And now we can look forward to next year, when we will bring forward, as promised, a balanced budget for Nova Scotia. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

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

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to give a reply to the Budget Address on behalf of the Liberal caucus, as I am the Liberal Finance Critic. Budget Day is always a day of a certain amount of pomp and circumstance, similar to what we saw last week. It's a chance when the government likes to

congratulate itself and use a lot of hyperbole and rhetoric to wrap up, I guess, what their plan is for the coming year.

We've had a few hours to look at this large stack of books and to read the Budget Address and to try and get a little bit ahead of what has taken the Finance Department many months to prepare. I realize it's a very big job. We certainly thank the Finance staff who do their work and answer our questions in the lock-up as well. I know it's a very big day for them.

As a member of the Liberal Party and as the Finance Critic, I have to say that we are disappointed with this budget. There is nothing in this budget that will help the majority of Nova Scotians. We looked at this and see that post-secondary students are going to pay higher tuition. We know that their fees are going to go up. We already know that the MOU has cut millions of dollars out of the university budgets.

There is no help for sky-high gas prices; there's no help for the crushing weight of Nova Scotia Power costs to Nova Scotians; and there's no help for the rising cost of living that is reflected also in the high price of food. So we're looking at this and saying, what is in this budget for the average Nova Scotian? Certainly there's some tinkering with tax credits, and I know that the minister - in speaking around the province to chambers of commerce, and to different business groups - had alluded to an income tax cut that was going to come. He was careful to say it was moderate, but really, I think the speculation was that it would be more than what we've seen today. This is really piecemeal. Even in listening yesterday to some of the speculation - it was that he might touch bracket creep, that this might be the time to reverse that. The minister referenced how that had come into effect under the previous Progressive Conservative Government, but we've done nothing there.

The business community has been saying to us for a long time that we should be increasing our basic personal exemption. I see we have an increase now to try to bring the exemption, or the credit, for disabilities, for dependants, and for spouses, but the tax measure that would most help all Nova Scotians is the basic personal exemption. That is really the amount that we all see as the amount that we don't pay tax on. It would have helped every Nova Scotian taxpayer and it would have brought us more into line with the rest of Canada, because we have one of the lowest tax exemptions in the entire country. We were disappointed, because that is not one of the measures that the minister was announcing today.

We see as well that there will be education cuts. That budget has gone down by millions of dollars, and the fact is that our children who are the most vulnerable are going to feel this in the heaviest way. I know the calls I'm getting as an MLA and that my colleagues are getting, have to do with the students who need special supports in the classroom, needing either an assistant to be with them or some special learning supports. That is going to be cut because every single school board is feeling the pressure. Every single school board is having to squeeze a little bit more out of every school, every

classroom, every teacher. It is not easy to do, and the children who are most vulnerable are going to pay the price for that. We'll have a chance to go into that much more when we get into estimates.

We feel that there will also be a lot of hurt on the front line of health as well. The budget's gone up slightly, but that will not even cover the cost of contract negotiations, the way it looks right now. There's a lot of worry as well on the health front.

It is true that our Finance Minister is very boastful today. He's talking about restraint and discipline and how they've been so good at coming in under budget for three years in a row. I think it is important that members of the Opposition point out how that is achieved. It's very easy to be the first government in years to come in under budget if you consistently overestimate your spending and underestimate your revenue. That's easy.

It's evident in this budget today. It's evident. We see things like the gas prices being estimated at \$1.23 in the coming year, when if you go to fill up today it's \$1.43 here in Halifax and more elsewhere. We have chosen in this budget - the Government of Nova Scotia has chosen the figure of \$1.23 as the average price for the coming year, when we know we haven't even hit the summer months, which are always the highest months for cost. Last year's average was \$1.30. We're going to think it will be \$0.07 less in the coming year. That's the estimate in this budget. That's definitely a lowball budget because you know that the cost of gasoline is going to influence the amount the government will estimate for their HST and for their mode of fuel tax. It helps to deflate the revenue of this province.

That's a contrived thing. That is a manipulative measure, and that's just one example in this budget. It's easy to be boastful, as I said, if you consistently overestimate spending and then come in under budget. Wow. That's not such a big trick.

There's a lot of hype in this, and a lot of rhetoric. I understand it's the government's time to take the stage and try to make a lot of what is really a piecemeal approach. The Liberal Party and our Leader have said consistently that we need to review the entire tax regime of the province to look at a comprehensive tax review. That's not being seen in this piecemeal effort to put a little bit here and there and just rejig a few small taxes. You can't really make the best impact if you haven't analyzed which taxes should be changed and where we're going to make the most impact and help Nova Scotians across the board. Maybe that's a business tax that will stimulate employment or maybe it's personal income tax so that you can have people spending more and more disposable income but we don't know that, Mr. Speaker, because we haven't followed that route of looking carefully at all of the taxes that Nova Scotians are charged.

So, again, there has been an effort to choose a few taxes to rejig in this budget and, again, we really are sorry that it was not something that would be affecting all Nova Scotians and helping business. They say that if you had changed that basic personal

exemption amount, you would then help them and they prefer that to increases in the minimum wage, which are coming into effect anyway, but it's a better way to put money back in the pockets of Nova Scotians. So that is a big disappointment that we don't see any movement on that whatsoever.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few measures in the budget, definitely, that we think are positive and I think it would be important to mention that they are there. Certainly capital projects are going to help different parts of the province. We're going to see some improvement there. Eliminating the office in Ottawa is probably a good move, I think we agree on that. I'm happy to see home care is going to be increased because, you know, as we have often discussed during estimates, it's an area that can help many people stay in their own homes. That has been a tenet of the Liberal policies and platform over the entire time of the three elections and before that I've run.

So I think that those are important measures and I'm sure there are a few others that we can talk about when I have more time in my address but I do think it's important to mention that the claim that this is a disciplined spending and a controlled approach doesn't really hold water. One of the things that concerned us was an increase in spending in administration and, frankly, the Department of Finance itself has seen the department of the Minister of Finance go up 30 per cent in spending since 2009 so it sort of flies in the face of the restraint and the discipline that the minister is so happy to talk about here today.

This is a concern to us when we look at administration and want to see what kind of spending we have within our own controlled budgets and I don't see that discipline in the Department of Finance and in a number of other departments when you look at senior administration and the cost to run offices. So it's just something that is a concern.

In my address today - and as I say, I only have time to begin today - I think it's important that we look at all the costs and capital projects and how they are impacting an increase in our debt and that is something that Nova Scotians can ill afford. When you look at the debt, there was a slight drop last year but just a slight one. We're up considerably from when the NDP came to power in 2009. We're well over \$13 billion in debt which is \$13,000 for every man, woman and child in Nova Scotia - more than that, really - and has gone up by quite a margin since you and I were first elected, Mr. Speaker. It has risen considerably and a lot of that just in the last two and three years. So that has been under the NDP watch.

Again, that is a concern and there was no mention in this boastful Budget Address today about the debt and what measures might be taken to control the debt. So I just want to raise it today so that both the government and all Nova Scotians will be aware that this is a concern. This is at a time when we have some of the lowest interest rates really in memory, and they've stayed low for the last number of years, but we can't count on that. So the cost of maintaining - just servicing the debt is going to rise, certainly, in the future. We know it will. Any homeowner is thinking the same thing. So we're waiting on that.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General brought this subject up and has challenged the NDP to pay attention to the debt. I would like to say that that is what we think you should do as well. That needs to be part of the discussion today - not just boasting about the small piecemeal changes that have come in in this budget but to talk about what our future holds and how you're going to control the spending and the servicing of the debt, which has no benefit to any of us really, as you say, and is left for our children to bear the brunt of.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to take too much time today because today is only the start of my reply. Again, I feel the budget is disappointing and I know that members across are anxious to hear more about the reasons that I feel that. We will come back to that in the near future, at a day. I would like to adjourn debate today on the budget.

I would like to adjourn debate today on the budget. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The motion for adjournment has been made.

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

The motion is carried.

We will now begin the daily routine. The topic for late debate has been chosen and I will now read:

Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Wellness explain how taking treatment money from children and youth mental health programs at the IWK in order to pay for more timely assessments provides better mental health care for the patients.

It is submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, before tabling a petition, may I beg leave to make an introduction?

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, after a rally organized by people concerned about the proposed elimination of emergency surgery at Inverness Consolidated Memorial Hospital, a young woman approached me because she wanted to start a petition. I was impressed to see such leadership from a young Nova Scotian and the petition that I am about to table was one that she helped to draft, and she and her family were personally responsible for 912 of the 3,257 signatures.

She has a sister who was born by way of emergency surgery at ICMH and knows all too well how valuable this service is to her community. I would ask 11-year-old Erica Wright to please stand and accept the applause of the Legislature for her initiative. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: We welcome all guests to our gallery and hope that they enjoy today's proceedings.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, if I may, just throw in that she is joined by her mom, Judy Gillis, and her sister, Kaitlyn, and her brother, Jake. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition about emergency surgery at ICMH, Inverness hospital. It is addressed to the House of Assembly, the operative clause being:

“We the undersigned, call upon Premier Darryl [sic] Dexter and the Nova Scotia provincial government to restore emergency surgery at the Inverness Consolidated Memorial Hospital (ICMH).”

I am tabling it on behalf of 3,257 people who signed this petition, and I will affix my own signature to that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Finance.

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table an Order in Council Respecting Additional Appropriations.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

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

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand before you today, and other members of the Legislature, to reaffirm our government's strong commitment to revamping mental health and addictions services for Nova Scotians, and particularly to correct inaccurate information about recent changes made to youth mental health services by the IWK.

Mr. Speaker, before I was elected as a member of this Legislature, most people know that I worked as a social worker in the area of youth mental health. I have seen first-hand the need that exists for young Nova Scotians to be able to get assessments, diagnoses and treatment for mental health in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, I have also seen the negative impact waiting can have on kids and their families. Before I became Minister of Health and Wellness, I was very critical of the unacceptably long wait times that children and families faced when they needed mental health services. It was clear - and it's clear - that the system is not working when more than 900 children are on a waiting list for 18 months or two years without any contact, while only a very small number of the children with the most urgent needs receive medical attention.

Mr. Speaker, the IWK recognized and agreed that they needed to address and fix this problem. They knew they needed to make changes to assess more children earlier as outpatients and there are excellent results to support this approach. This is why they undertook a process of developing a strategic plan for mental health and addictions. All mental health staff at the IWK provided input based on their clinical experience. The IWK also consulted with patients, their families and health partners across the province. The IWK executive leadership team supported the process and it was carried out by the IWK's Mental Health and Addictions Program.

Hospitals are not the place where children and youth with mild to moderate depression, anxiety disorders, and behaviour problems should be. They are for people who are very sick and, Mr. Speaker, as I've stated many times through media interviews, research shows that this type of institutionalized, medicalized care often can do more harm than good as it removes children from their homes, schools and communities. Kids with mild and moderate mental health difficulties tend to do much better when they are in programs during the day and in their community with their families involved. Because family is involved and they are at home at times during their care, it can help them transition more successfully to their regular lives when they are ready. On the other hand, consider the difficulties that can be faced when a child comes home after residing in a hospital for an extended period with no time at home and limited contact with their families.

The IWK's strategic plan sets a new road map for mental health services for young Nova Scotians. A program that is better able to meet the needs of all kids who need these services and ensure they get them in a timely manner. As a result, Mr. Speaker, the IWK is

redirecting resources to invest more in programs offered in the day and not in the hospital for young people with mild and moderate health issues. This will help make sure they are seen and treated faster. Timely assessments and early diagnosis and treatment are critical for most kids. To do this you need a mental health team made up of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, occupational therapists and youth care workers, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of inaccurate information has been communicated about the IWK and their new mental health strategy. The IWK has not closed their Compass and ACT programs for children and adolescents, they are reducing overnight and weekend stays for young people who can go home, putting an increased focus on day treatment programs. Any young person who needs 24/7 care will still get it. Young people with more serious mental illnesses will continue to receive care on 4 South at the IWK.

Mr. Speaker, after the changes there will be 120 youth care workers working at the IWK; however, the IWK has determined fewer youth care workers are needed in the ACT and Compass programs. The resources are being directed to hire more staff, clinical staff such as psychologists, social workers and nurses, to deal with assessments so that children and adolescents can be diagnosed and receive treatment earlier. So far, five more clinical staff have been hired and five more will be hired soon.

Mr. Speaker, not one nickel in funding for mental health services at the IWK has been cut. It is exactly the same as it was. In fact, I directed that in the budget process for this year, that mental health services be protected in all of our DHAs and the IWK.

Mr. Speaker, the resources are being redirected to hire clinical staff to work in day programs and programs in the community where the demand for service is the greatest. The inaccurate information is causing undue concern and worry for young people and their families who are struggling to cope with these issues. This is unfair. Through these changes wait times will be shorter, intervention will take place earlier, and more kids will receive services faster. It is the right thing to do.

I also want to address how the IWK reviewed its wait list. In health care it is standard to contact people on the wait list as a means of updating information and making it as accurate as possible. Sometimes people have received help elsewhere, such as through their family doctor, or they may no longer require care. The IWK is continuing to verify if those they have not heard back from still need care, by contacting their family doctors. So far 600 children and their families, who were not urgent cases and have been on the waiting list, have received an assessment by the end of March. This, too, is very good news.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to improving mental health and addiction services. The advisory committee has been hard at work, consulting with more than 1,200 Nova Scotians, reviewing research and so on. Soon they will present their report and recommendations to me. Shortly after, I will provide our mental health and addiction

strategy, Nova Scotia's first. With this new strategy important changes will be made to mental health services. These changes will herald a shift toward more community-based services and earlier intervention, as well as a focus on youth.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, I would like to table, and ask the Pages to circulate to all members of this Legislature, a copy that describes all of the mental health and addictions programs that are available for families through the IWK.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. However, unfortunately this marks the end of my pleasantries. The minister, in her comments, made a number of statements for which she needs to be challenged. Quite frankly, the minister is looking at this whole issue from the wrong perspective. It is vitally important that supports are in place to address the needs of those on the wait list, first and foremost.

What happens, Mr. Speaker, if the assessment of the 600 on the wait list shows that all 600 would receive the best possible treatment through the ACT program? Yet, in order to pay for the appropriate resources to conduct the assessments, the IWK had to lay off staff in the ACT program. As well, over 5,000 bed-nights are being cut. Any mental health worker in the province will tell you the weekends are, in fact, the most challenging time.

Perhaps I'm missing something here, but this is looking at the problem from the wrong end. Wouldn't it have been better if we put the assessment piece in place and then determined the future needs of programming? With all due respect to the minister, this boils down to a facility trying to address wait lists with limited resources. The minister can speak all she wants about the fact that budgets weren't cut. However, the only way the IWK could address the wait list challenge - and yes, I admit it's a challenge - was to free up program staff to pay for the assessment.

With respect to the model changing from 24/7 to 24/5, my question to the minister is, is she confident that there are programs and supports in place for families to transition their children back to their home community? Certainly, we have heard countless concerns about this void throughout the province. Now the minister agrees that it is possible to change the model of the ACT program without assurances that the needs of the child or youth will be met two days of the week back in their home communities. Mark my words, without proper support for families, these children and youth will end up in the ER. I lay the blame squarely at the feet of this minister.

We have been waiting for two years for her mental health strategy, and there has been silence. Three years in her mandate she's allowed a wait list to grow to 1,100 and did absolutely nothing. That is irresponsible. That is not meeting the mental health needs of children and youth in this province. We can have the greatest wait list management

assessment model in the world, but without programs in place, without the community supports, all this minister is doing is moving children and youth and ultimately their families from one late wait list to another.

Mr. Speaker, 22 workers are out of a job. These individuals have skills and talents and, as families have attested and will attest, have been lifesavers. Yes, this minister is content to let them go. If the Nunn Report is going to be a living document in this province, these mental health youth workers could be at work helping youths in our schools and in our communities, but no, this NDP Government is content to let them go. That is a total waste of talent and does nothing to help children and youth in our province.

My family, like many others, holds the IWK in the highest regard. By their own recognition we do know there are challenges in their ability to provide youth mental health services. These services need to spread throughout the province, and yet we have a minister who freezes and cuts the budget, which makes this an impossible task. The blame lies squarely across the floor of this Legislature. The blame lies with the minister.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank the minister for providing her statement to our office earlier today. Mental health services for young people in our province is an important subject, there's no doubt about that. As a matter of fact, in the late debate tonight we'll be talking about this very issue once again.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't tell us anything today that we hadn't already heard from her or read from her department. As a matter of fact, that was a very long ministerial statement that really didn't say anything at all. Shorter wait times for children and families in need of mental health services is something we all can agree on - every one of us here in this House of Assembly. But the time for talk is over. It is time for this government to take action.

Just yesterday my colleague for Hants West introduced a bill that proposed a real plan with real timelines to get our kids the help that they need. We all want the same thing on the subject. I want to take this time to urge the minister to take a serious look at the Fair Treatment of Children bill.

We can all be proud of the IWK. It's a great facility. It is one that we all believe has the best interests of our children at heart. It's strange that the IWK has developed and is implementing a new strategic plan outside of the mental health and addiction strategy that the minister continues to promise.

I can't help but think about the supports and community that can help kids at risk for mental illness, addictions, and many other things. Programs like SHYFT in Yarmouth. As members know, supportive housing, the youth focus team of SHYFT has been

providing overnight shelter and outreach programs for youth at risk since January 2011 - and we all know funding to this program was denied by government last week. The effects of that on many SHYFT clients, they may have no other option than to sleep on the streets, and that just doesn't fit with the Health and Wellness Minister's promise today of important changes that will herald a shift towards more community based services and a focus on youth. It flies in the face of what she just had to say today.

As the Minister of Health and Wellness prepares her new strategy, I would urge her to speak to her colleagues in the Departments of Community Services, Justice, and others. By working together, they have the best chance of making real and positive impacts on the lives of our young people. Thank you.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NOTICES OF MOTION

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: Question Period will begin at 3:27 p.m. and will end at 4:27 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HEALTH & WELLNESS: IWK YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH WORKERS - CUTS

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the NDP Government is cutting 22 youth mental health workers at the IWK, and at the same time the government is growing administration within the Department of Health and Wellness. My question to the Premier is, how can he justify this?

HON. DARRELL DEXTER (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I believe the Leader of the Official Opposition just received a full explanation of the situation at the IWK; in fact, what the government is doing is delivering better service to young people who have mental health problems. That was set out - and I'd just like to correct the last part of his first question which is in fact that the health administration is being cut. We have gone from where we were left by the previous government, which was some of the highest levels of health administration in the country, now to below the national average.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Premier read the document that was just introduced. Maybe the DHAs are cutting administration, but it's certainly not being cut in the Department of Health and Wellness. If anything, it's increasing. The

question was very simple. How can the Premier leave Nova Scotia families, who need their support, on their own while at the same time increasing funding to the Department of Health and Wellness administration?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Leader of the Official Opposition of course tries to construct a fantasy about what's happening in the department. But I will ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to explain yet again to him.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to have an opportunity to tell members of the House that it was this government, this Premier, that combined two health departments into one, that eliminated a deputy minister, that eliminated a political staff to the minister in doing that, and that eliminated other administrative staff. So, quite the contrary to what the Leader of the Official Opposition is saying, it is the exact opposite. We have eliminated administration and we have brought health administration below the national average.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Minister of Health and Wellness has just stated - there is absolutely no question they combined two departments, but the fact of the matter is with their combined department, administration costs and senior management in the Department of Health and Wellness has gone up under this administration.

This government is more content to spend money on senior management in the Department of Health and Wellness than support family and children at risk in our province. The question to the Premier is, when are you going to support family and children at risk in our communities?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, after years of neglect by the former Liberal Government and the Progressive Conservative Government, in fact those services to people, to children who need assistance, is being provided. As was pointed out by the Minister of Health and Wellness, this year with respect to mental health services, not only was it protected with respect to the IWK but she directed that that portion of the budget be protected right across the district health authorities.

MR. SPEAKER: Before we continue, I would remind all members in the Legislature that during Question Period all electronic devices, BlackBerrys, laptops and other devices, are to be put away during Question Period.

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

PREM.: HST - PRE-ELECTION PROMISES

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, today we learned that a typical Nova Scotia family will be paying \$4,000 more in extra HST as a result of decisions of this Premier and

this government. That is a far cry from what they were promised in the last election. It was a cynical promise that the Premier made to the people of Nova Scotia then. It remains a cynical promise to the people of Nova Scotia today. So I would ask the Premier, will he now apologize to the people of Nova Scotia for making and breaking such a cynical pre-election promise on the HST?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the increase in the HST took place as a result of the legacy of the former government. The Progressive Conservative Government left us with a structural deficit of something in the order of \$1.4 billion. If there is anyone who ought to be ashamed of their record, they sit on that side of the House and they sit there for a good reason.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, that answer is a sham just like this budget is a sham, just like every budget that that government has brought in is a sham, and it was started on the very first day by a sham. The fact of the matter is that the audited financial statements for the year 2009 contained a surplus, an audited, real, honest-to-God surplus of \$19,700,000. I will table for the Premier's proof the message from the minister for that year, the last year before they took office, signed by the current Minister of Finance, by the way, the member for Halifax Fairview. (Applause)

In light of that fact, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier finally admit now, in his fourth budget, it all started with nothing but a sham?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, four of the most noted economists in our region sat down and looked at the position of this province and what it was that we were left with after the election. (Interruptions)

What conclusion did they come to, Mr. Speaker? What they said was that the former Progressive Conservative Government left this province with a \$1.4 billion hole that we had to pay off. (Interruptions) Well, we are finally at a point where we can pay it off and the people of Nova Scotia are going to reap the benefits.

MR. BAILLIE: Well, Mr. Speaker, apparently the word of the Auditor General is not good enough for the Premier, just like it wasn't good enough for the member for Halifax Chebucto. But it is the word of the Auditor General, the Auditor General who reports to the people of Nova Scotia. The very people who now pay \$4,000 more in each and every family because that Premier broke his promise. The very people who are now \$6,000 more in debt because that Premier broke his promise not to run a deficit or drive up our debt.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has the outright gall to make a new cynical pre-election promise about the HST. My question to the Premier is, how can he expect Nova Scotians to believe him now?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the former government put in place cost increases over the coming years. They put in place a program, they built programming on the basis of revenues from commodities that went through the floor. They left this province in the worst position that it had been in for more than 20 years and that was coupled with, of course, 20 years of some of the worst economic performance in our history.

Mr. Speaker, we, on this side of the House, have finally been able to pay off the credit card charges that were run up by the Progressive Conservative Government. We've gotten the province back to balance. We are on the precipice of the greatest prosperity that our province has ever known. That's where this government has taken this province.

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

PREM. - FIN. MIN.: DEPT. - REDUCE

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, for the last three years the Minister of Finance, leading up to his presentation of the budget in this House, has gone around the province asking Nova Scotians to live within their means. At the same time the Department of Finance has grown by over 30 per cent. My question to the Premier, when is he going to ask the Minister of Finance to live within his means?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, all of the departments of government live within their means. I'm very proud to say that this year, for the third consecutive year, we have come in under the budget forecast, the first time that that has happened in at least 45 years, something that neither of the other Parties can say they did.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the NDP Government has told school boards that there will be reductions of 3 per cent, they also told school boards across this province they were going to have to absorb the cost of living within sight of their fiscal envelopes. Can the Premier explain to Nova Scotians why he's willing to cut classroom teachers and supports to students at the same time he is increasing the staff at the Department of Education?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what he is referring to but I'm sure it's incorrect as it usually is. What I can say is that we are calling upon all the departments of government, all of the funded organizations that we fund whether they happen to be district health authorities, the school boards, or municipal units, to recognize that because of the expenditures made by the former government, because of the position that they put this province in, it is necessary to exercise restraint to ensure that we can afford to pay for the public services that we require. Thankfully, over the last three years, the Minister of Finance has been able to ensure that we get back to balance and that we are able to properly support our public services.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I think that at the beginning of the Premier's answer he was suggesting we shouldn't believe in the numbers that were put in his document today, but we've been trying to tell Nova Scotians that for the last three years.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier might consider this a game but, in fact, we have the lowest funded education system in the entire country and under this government we've seen cut after cut, year after year. Can the Premier explain why he believes it is more important to invest in senior management in the Department of Education than it is to invest in classroom teachers and supports for students?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Leader of the Official Opposition engages in this kind of misleading of the people of the province, so let me just set the record absolutely straight. This year, in this province, the Minister of Education, in co-operation with the Minister of Finance, will provide to the people of Nova Scotia the highest per-student funding in the history of our province and we will have among the lowest class sizes in our history.

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

PREM.: HST PROMISES - TRUSTWORTHINESS

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, the Premier told the press yesterday that he was planning to slowly reverse his HST hike of 2009. However, people will have to wait until at least 2014 to see any reduction. Given that in 2009 the Premier broke his election promise not to raise taxes if he was elected, how can we trust the Premier in his latest HST promise?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, when we set out the path back to balance what we said to the people of Nova Scotia is there was no way that we could have known the mess that was going to be left behind by the former government. What that means is that it is necessary, as the economic panel recommended, to raise revenues, to cut expenses and to grow the economy. We have done all three of those things. What the people of Nova Scotia have seen is a plan that is working and one that will bring us back to balance and allow us to restore the HST to 13 per cent.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that he had no way of knowing. However, I take exception to that because our Leader had a way of knowing. We knew; we didn't make election promises. That's absolutely the case. There's a certain element of caution. Once elected, the NDP government hiked the HST, and they hiked 1,400 user fees at the same time. The cost of electricity is soaring, as we know, and food as well. The price of gas has never been as high in recent memory - maybe never.

Nova Scotians are definitely struggling to make ends meet. There are no measures in today's budget to help Nova Scotians cope with higher living costs. Why is the Premier ignoring these pressing needs?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recommend to the member opposite that she actually read the budget, in which she'll find that we increased the Affordability Tax Credit and increased the Disability Tax Credit. The honourable member might also remember that we took the HST off home heat - something that her Party voted against.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier is missing the point that there are some pressing costs that all Nova Scotians are facing, and that the piecemeal approach in the budget is not hitting Nova Scotia Power. It is not touching gasoline prices. It won't drop the cost of transportation and gasoline. This budget doesn't offer any relief to average Nova Scotians. How can the Premier expect anyone to believe his self-serving current HST promise when this budget so clearly ignores the pressing needs of average Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Again, Mr. Speaker, I just think she ought to read the budget. We will return all of the income tax paid by seniors who receive the GIS. We will increase the funding to students who are going to university. We will increase the level of the Affordability Tax Credit. We will increase the personal allowance and ESIA. All of these measures are designed to make life just a little bit better for people. I'm sure they can understand that.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

**HEALTH & WELLNESS - INVERNESS HOSP.:
EMERG. SURGERY - ELIMINATION**

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Today I tabled a petition with 3,257 signatures, a petition started by 11-year-old Erica Wright, who is with us here today. The Minister of Health and Wellness supported a decision to eliminate emergency surgery at Inverness; 3,257 constituents of mine disagree. How can eliminating emergency surgery mean better care sooner when people in my area are told by the NDP Minister of Health and Wellness that they must travel two or more hours to get it?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, what occurred in the Inverness hospital was a review of the surgeries that were being done there over an 18-month period. The district health authority found that after hours and on weekends at least 80 per cent of the surgeries could have been scheduled during daytime hours.

The pressure on health care workers to provide 24-hour coverage for surgery was affecting the scheduling of staff in that facility. The district health authority made a

decision to have surgery conducted during the day, and if an emergency surgery occurred at night, then that would be dealt with in the regional hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the district health authority is now reviewing all of the surgical programs at the Inverness hospital.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the review came by way of the efforts of the community. This is another example of NDP insensitivity to rural Nova Scotia. The district health authority has recognized that their decision was made too quickly and without consultation. We have seen the Premier travel to Ottawa to ensure that Nova Scotians get a comparable quality of care, as found in other provinces, yet here within Nova Scotia his government supports decisions that leave people who live in rural Nova Scotia behind.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister, will the minister reassure Erica and our community that their safety is her top priority and promise to restore emergency surgery here today?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I first want to say that I'm probably as aware of the needs of people in rural Nova Scotia for health care as any member of this House, given that I come from the Strait of Canso, my mother still lives there and my father had a fair amount of excellent care at St. Martha's and in the surrounding area in the past year and a half.

I am very committed to high-quality, safe health care in all parts of our province including in Inverness. We will await the outcome of the review, an independent review with respect to surgical services in that particular facility before any final decision will be made.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, we have a good thing going in Inverness. The care has a local flavour and in my mind it is better. I have seen it myself with my family and I even have marks on my own body to prove it. The community has raised \$2.3 million to support the recent hospital expansion, a significant amount of money. It is time this government starts treating the Inverness hospital as the asset that it is to our Nova Scotia health system. For the sake of a few thousands dollars and the few nights of the year when the people need it, are not the people of the western side of Cape Breton Island worth it?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member and I do agree that they have an excellent health care facility there in Inverness. That community is fortunate to have such an excellent health care facility and they will continue to have that facility with a very high-functioning emergency department, for example, to deal with emergencies. However, the question of surgery - surgery is not done in every hospital and some types of surgery are only done in certain places, we all know that. People in Nova Scotia routinely travel for surgery that cannot be done in a facility close to where they live because the equipment isn't there, because perhaps the specialists aren't there. As I said,

this is complex, we're looking at the review and I will await the outcome of that review before any final decision is made.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay.

ERDT - HFX. SHIPYARD LOANS: FUNDING - SOURCE

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: The Halifax Shipyard will get up to \$260 million in a forgivable loan for upgrades to handle \$25 billion worth of combat vessels. Everyone in this province and everyone in this country knows Irving is the best company to build these vessels, plain and simple. In total, government is delivering \$260 million in a forgivable loan to Irving. This is a tremendous amount of public funds to give to a company. My question for the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, from what department is this money coming?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise on this very important issue and this very important question. The money for the ships will be spread out over the extent of the contract; it will not be a lump sum of money up front. I just want to really emphasize that the money, up to \$260 million, is an incentive-based pot of money that will come from Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, since May of last year we've seen the ads and promotions of Ships Start Here. We know it was a good initiative and the Nova Scotia Liberal Party and their Leader have been championing this idea. Other jurisdictions were up front with what incentives they were prepared to offer for the shipbuilding contract, but the government did not tell Nova Scotia taxpayers. Government was asked last year whether or not public funds would be involved and the NDP Government refused to tell us.

My question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, how long has the NDP Government known this agreement would cost Nova Scotians \$260 million?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear - this is the most important event certainly in my lifetime. One of the things we did not want to do is jeopardize the risk of not getting the contract. Because there were negotiations going on at a very, very high level, it was important that we keep our cards close to our chests, as well did Irving.

Mr. Speaker, when an agreement was signed, we revealed what the numbers were. The agreement was just signed - I don't think it has been quite a week yet - so we revealed the numbers at an appropriate time and when it was at no risk or at little risk to the Province of Nova Scotia.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, certainly we all recognize the importance of the ships contract and, in terms of the high level of conversations, I think the taxpayers and

Nova Scotians and the Nova Scotia Legislature would probably qualify as being included in the high level of discussions.

We're asking the questions Nova Scotians are asking us, because the NDP Government is out of touch with Nova Scotians, Mr. Speaker. We know that Irving is a first-rate company; we know that it's the best company for the job and that's why it was chosen, but taxpayers deserve to know their contribution up front so they can evaluate the costs and benefits of this massive deal. So my question to the minister is, why didn't the NDP Government tell us a year ago what our provincial contributions from taxpayers' dollars would be?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I will pass that down to the Premier, at his request.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I think it is a question that bears a response, and this is it. Under the terms of the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy we were bidding, along with Irving, to ensure that we would be successful in getting the \$25 billion combat vessel contract, which we did. The return on that to the people of Nova Scotia will be somewhere in the vicinity of \$2.6 billion in tax revenues, thousands of jobs at the shipyards. As Mr. Irving put it, had we not done that, they would have a parking lot down on the waterfront instead of a shipyard.

You see, Mr. Speaker, that was the way that for 20 years, the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives did business. We have a message for them. Those times are gone, you had your 20 years. It's over. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

ENERGY - GREEN ENERGY: COST-BENEFITS - STUDY

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. Yesterday the Public Utilities Board in Newfoundland and Labrador said it didn't have enough comparative information to approve the Muskrat Falls project, but the government there quickly promised to get all the information by June and open the Legislature for debate - and I'll table a copy of that information. The NDP Government has time and time again rejected doing the hard work to put all the possibilities on the table and to do a proper cost benefit analysis.

Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the Minister of Energy is, will the minister commit to getting all the information about all possible ways to get affordable green energy for Nova Scotians in doing a proper cost benefit study now before we get too far down the wrong path?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable member for his question. Certainly, you know, we're in close contact with what's happening in

Newfoundland and Labrador. We know that there have been various studies there through Manitoba Hydro and through Nalcor. We're keeping close contact with them and certainly we do know here in our province, we have the Utility and Review Board that will be looking at all those previous studies and will be bringing in their own expertise as required.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, later this year the power company will file an application with the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board asking all of us to pay \$1.2 billion for the subsea cable. Look out, here comes another rate increase for Nova Scotians.

There's the information on that as well, Mr. Speaker. The minister should be able to tell us now if this is affordable for Nova Scotia families and businesses. My question to the minister is, how much does \$1.2 billion equate to an average family's household power bill and what per cent increase will that be?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, we do know that this renewable green energy from Newfoundland and Labrador will certainly provide stability in our province. It will provide 35 years of stable rates that we cannot get anywhere else but, really, the cost of it is to be determined by the Utility and Review Board after they have done a very thorough investigation of all the details, all the information, all the expertise that is out there and they will determine exactly what that rate shall be.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, Emera is incented to big build capital assets because they earn a guaranteed rate on the investment. The Muskrat Falls project is the Cadillac of big, expensive projects. Nova Scotians wouldn't buy a car without knowing how much the bill was going to be, so my question to the minister, whose side is the minister on - the people of Nova Scotia who want a cost-benefit analysis of the Muskrat Falls project or the power company that is trying to keep it quiet?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, again this project provides us with reliable power at stable rates for the next 35 years and we cannot get that anywhere else. Our Utility and Review Board has the duty and the obligation to protect Nova Scotians, to make sure the best possible rate is there and in the end we are going to have good, stable, renewable energy for decades to come.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay.

ERDT - IRVING SHIPYARD: PRIVATE CAPITAL - ACCESSIBILITY

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal caucus has supported the Irving shipyard from day one and we will continue to do so. They are an excellent example of business success in this province. What is worrying me is that one of the most successful companies in this province could not get a loan from the private sector. They are on the cusp of receiving \$25 billion of government money and they could not get private financing, obviously.

Private capital is afraid of Nova Scotia, even in the light of the Irving shipyard contract. My question to the Minister of Rural and Economic Development and Tourism, what does it say about the state of our economy when one of the most successful companies in our province could not access private capital?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, the Irving Company approached the Province of Nova Scotia. They made us aware of this shipbuilding bid. They asked for our assistance. What we did, we weighed the consequences; we looked at this. When we saw what our investment potentially was going to be and the return on that investment, Mr. Speaker - and I'll use the words that I think I've heard a member from one of the Opposition Parties use - that it was a no-brainer for us, for a \$2.8 billion return on this investment, it is considered as a good one.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we know that the Irving story is an excellent example of success and certainly a reason for optimism. While I support their efforts, I am concerned that the business environment in Nova Scotia is so poor that they could not access private capital.

The Premier continually tells Nova Scotians that economic prosperity is only a day away but it does not seem that private capital agrees. If the Minister of Community Services wants to talk about Business 101, we can talk about job targets and we can talk about all these things that (Interruption). We're not allowed to ask questions, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Nova Scotia and the tax dollars that the government uses. Is that where we're at in this House, Mr. Speaker?

This government had three years to address our lack of economic competitiveness and they continue to insist that we'll wait until tomorrow for things to get better. We're dead last as a province in this country in economic growth, Mr. Speaker. Nova Scotians can't wait. Our businesses can't wait. We cannot afford this government, so my question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, why does the government continue to pursue policies that chase private capital away from this province?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, my first answer is that we were last. That's no longer the case. We were last and now, under this government, we've seen the economic fortunes of this province grow. For the first time, this province has a plan, a plan that's working and we are going to stick to it.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as long as businesses struggle to access capital, our economy will struggle. As long as businesses struggle to access capital, our government will continue to sign cheques. Our province's economy is struggling and this government keeps making things worse; the worst growth, the very worst growth in the country, yeah, congratulations on your record. Congratulations to you and the minister, you're doing a great job steering our economy. As long as pools of capital for businesses as large and successful as Irving are dried up, businesses of every size need to worry. My

question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, why is this government dragging its heels and failing to address what is clearly a crisis of capital in Nova Scotia?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, the member has his history confused. For 20 years, up until the time we came into government, this province was last in the country. Under our regime, this province has turned that ship around, no pun intended.

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

ERDT - IRVING LOAN: ADVICE - SOURCE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism. The minister has a number of business advisory boards at his disposal, including the Industrial Expansion Fund Advisory Committee, the new Jobs Fund Board, the Economic Investment Committee and even the Ships Start Here steering committee. I have a very simple question for the minister, which of these august bodies did he consult before committing to lending the Irvings \$304 million?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, first I will say that the IEF is no longer, so that board is gone. We consult with all of our advisory councils when we move forward on initiatives.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia has become the banker to the Irvings. Not just any banker, but a very forgiving banker. My question to the minister is, given that he consulted with all these groups, will he commit to releasing all the details, all the discussions, all the paperwork around how the government decided to lend the Irvings \$260 million in a forgivable loan? (Interruptions)

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, it's . . .

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

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I hate to think what it would be like in here if we had lost that contract. Those committees, what they are is - they give advice. They advise myself as minister on transactions that come forward. We value their opinion, their views, that's why they are there. We will continue over the life of this government to make valuable use of those committees and those boards.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that we could live in a province where we win a contract like that on merit and don't need to lend \$260 million to the Irvings and then write it off, because we're already a competitive, business-friendly province. That's what all Nova Scotians want.

If the minister is so sure, why won't he just say, yes, we will turn over all the documents, so that every Nova Scotian who's being asked to give them \$300 million can make the decision for themselves about whether he protected their interest or not?

MR. PARIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard Mr. Irving say, himself, that if it hadn't been for this government they wouldn't have gotten that contract. This is a time when all Parties and all people of the Province of Nova Scotia should be celebrating a win for Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - IWK: CHILDREN/YOUTH WAIT LISTS - CHANGES

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the IWK made changes to the way it manages assessments for children and youth on their wait list. In order to accommodate these changes, the IWK laid off treatment staff and reduced the availability of in-patient beds in the ACT program so that wait times for initial assessments can be reduced up front. Like many Nova Scotian families who have benefited from the ACT program, I understand the need for timely access to treatment. They also very much value the treatment they have received from the program.

Will the Minister of Health and Wellness explain how taking from Peter on the treatment side to pay Paul on the assessment side is providing better mental health care for children and youth in the province?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would hope that the honourable member and I could at least agree that the system where only a few children got services while the vast majority of children and youth got nothing in terms of mental health services, represented a system that was broken and that change was necessary. The people who are best able to determine what change is appropriate are the people who are the clinicians, who work in the system, who developed a mental health strategy and plan to turn that around. This is what the IWK is doing. It will result in better care sooner for more children and adolescents, and I fully support that approach.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows she is defending the indefensible. When you just wipe off 300 names and call 600 others and give them treatment or offer an assessment of treatment sometime in the future, where is it really going? She knows full well that two years of DHA budget cuts, including cuts to the IWK mental health budget, are forcing them to focus on freeing up money for assessments by cutting back on treatment. This minister would have been the first person on her feet fighting the injustice of such short-sighted decisions, yet today she defends the decision. This minister knows full well that the health cut decisions made by the NDP Government are what forced the IWK to make this decision in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has had a few days to think about what is happening at the IWK, will she now admit that timely access and proper treatment produce better outcomes for patients?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's very sad that some people don't want things to improve. They don't want to see changes. They're quite content with the status quo, where only a few people get access to services and the vast majority get nothing whatsoever. But we are making changes in the mental health system. These changes will result in more programs being offered at the community level. This is the right thing to do, and I fully stand behind these changes. These, in fact, are the changes that I have fought for for more than 25 years as a social worker who has worked in mental health.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't look like the minister was in too much of a hurry, three years later and finally making a move. If you speed up assessments and don't have appropriate residential or community-based mental health programs to ensure timely access to treatment, you simply move children and youth from one wait list to another. The mental health providers are telling us that right now across this province. The NDP health care cuts are forcing the DHAs, like the IWK, to fund improvements in access by cutting programs that provide treatment and that is wrong. Will the minister admit that when you pay for faster assessments by cutting treatment programs, you are impacting patient care?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as I said, these changes will result in better care sooner for a much larger group of children. Additionally, kids who need urgent care will continue to get urgent care, nothing has changed in this regard. The 22 youth care workers who provide custodial care, essentially at nights and on weekends, will still see a complement of 120 youth care workers in that facility providing care. This is a model that will see faster, better results for more families. It is the right thing to do and I still stand fully behind this model.

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

COM. SERV. - TALBOT HOUSE: CLOSURE - EXPLAIN

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, for 53 years Talbot House provided residential addiction treatment for men in Cape Breton. Talbot House recently, abruptly closed its doors and left the people of Cape Breton with a whole lot of questions. Will the Minister of Community Services lift the shroud of secrecy and tell the men and their families who rely on these services why the minister closed the doors and removed this vital service from this community?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, we know that the recovery houses that we have throughout the province are vitally important and we have supported

those. In fact, we were not responsible for closing it, so I would think the honourable member should get her information straight. Thank you.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of this minister to ensure that her department can properly manage its programs and guarantee a continuity of service. People in Cape Breton are wondering what other local, accessible, comparable programs have been made available to men needing these services?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that every person who was in that recovery house was well taken care of. They have a placement that they are satisfied with and the fact is that is another organization that is run by a board of directors. The board of directors made the decision, not Community Services.

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

EDUC. - EAST. PASSAGE HS: BOARD - CIRCUMVENTION

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the people of Eastern Passage learned that this government was making good on an election promise from the member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage. The Premier announced \$15 million for a high school in Eastern Passage, where the residents do very much want one, which we understand. But this wasn't on the Halifax Regional School Board's election priority list, so it must be on the NDP's re-election priority list. My question to the Minister of Education is, will she please explain today why she chose to circumvent the Halifax Regional School Board's needs-based process in favour of a politically-motivated process?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud to stand here and answer that. As part of Kids and Learning First, a part of our plan, we were very clear that we were going to increase our skill-trades education in Nova Scotia and we have started that work. We wanted to make sure that we got going as soon as we could to meet the needs of industry and to meet the needs of our students, to give them the opportunities that they need, making sure that we're following our plan, Kids and Learning First.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, in April 2009 the Premier said in a news story that we want to make sure that those are the priorities that the school boards have asked for. Well, times have changed. The government asked school boards to update their capital priority list by April 12th. Yesterday, the sneaky NDP came out with a funding announcement they knew would not make the Halifax Regional School Board's list and they are barging ahead with the high school that politics built. We think that's sneaky.

My question is, which priority projects on what school board's priority list will be delayed or cancelled because of the new Eastern Passage high school? Will it be Sheet Harbour, Hants County - and who will pay for it?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, we're looking forward to April 20th when I receive the priorities of the school boards. Decisions will be made at that time.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, the Halifax Regional School Board, like all school boards in the province, has recently gone through the difficult process of making NDP Government-ordered cuts. The Halifax Regional School Board was forced to make \$3.2 million in cuts and they were told to reduce building upkeep costs. Now the school board is being saddled with ongoing maintenance costs for a new high school they never asked for, maybe preventing building a school in Sheet Harbour that could consolidate four expensive old buildings into one.

Question: since the government did an end run around the Halifax Regional School Board when it comes to capital funding for the new Eastern Passage high school, is the minister also footing the bill for ongoing costs associated with the school?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it was a wonderful day to stand with the chairman and the superintendent of the Halifax Regional School Board and a number of their board members to celebrate the fact that this government is making sure we're meeting the needs of our students. We said in our Kids and Learning First education plan that we were going to increase skilled trades education in the province. This is an opportunity to have more of our young people engaged in learning about skilled trades and therefore I'm very proud to stand here to say that our government does what it says it's going to do.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

YOUTH: EDUC. CUTS - MIN. REVERSE

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, youth in Nova Scotia are getting a raw deal from this NDP Government. Cuts to education have a profound impact on children and youth and their futures in this province. Public education funding has been gutted by this government to the tune of \$65 million over the past two years. Prosperity starts in the classroom and this government is turning a blind eye to the impact that education cuts will have on the children and youth in this province and their future.

When will the minister responsible for youth actually start advocating for youth and fight to reverse these massive and damaging education cuts?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more important than our children, and this government is supporting the needs of our children. We are making more investments in our children than any other government. We are increasing our per student funding in this budget. I would like to remind the member opposite that under the past government there was a 43 per cent increase in costs. Costs were going up, at the same time our (Applause) and maybe they should cheer, but, unfortunately, the results of our

evaluation are showing that our students were not gaining any in their education. Actually, we were losing ground. While those costs were going up, unfortunately our population was going down. This government is supporting the needs of our students, we're investing in our students and making sure they have the programs and the supports they need.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, this government has the nerve to cut \$65 million out of our classrooms and say that they're investing in youth in the future of this province. That defies what educators are saying, that defies what parents are saying, that defies what students are saying - and it defies logic.

And the same thing is happening with our health care system. This government's health care budget cuts are up to 3 per cent this year. Youth mental health workers are being cut at the IWK. Nova Scotians haven't seen any improvement in wait times and young people are being affected.

When the Minister of Health and Wellness announced the DHA budget cuts, the Minister of Youth remained silent. Will the Minister of Youth tell the members of this House when she'll actually stand up for youth and fight to reverse these massive and damaging cuts to our medical system?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to respond to a health question. Thank you.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, there have been no cuts to youth and children's mental health services in Nova Scotia at the IWK or anywhere else and let me repeat what I said earlier, that when we gave the DHAs their targets for a 3 per cent reduction, they were told to protect mental health services in all of their districts. In fact, that is what has been done.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Minister of Youth couldn't answer a question about youth speaks to the value this government holds our youth in our province. The Minister of Community Services has decided not to support the 24/7 model for supportive housing in rural Nova Scotia. Without access to supportive housing, homeless youth are left with very limited options. Will the Minister of Youth finally stand up for youth and fight to reverse the Minister of Community Services' decision?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I will take the opportunity a little bit later to speak to the member opposite to explain about the Youth Secretariat and what that work does, but at this particular time I would like to ask the Minister of Community Services to answer the question on that particular point.

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member certainly knows that this minister and this government care about youth and that's why we created a new model, but they don't understand anything new. They want to do everything

the old way that doesn't work - a band-aid approach. With youth we're serving, these youth will have the opportunity to receive and have model support services throughout the province. Whether they decide to leave from Yarmouth, they will have that support wherever they go but the Liberals, all they want is in one area, a band-aid approach, and they know that. They better get with the times.

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

**FISH. & AQUACULTURE: AQUACULTURE MORATORIUM
- SCIENTIFIC INFO.**

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you will be to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. In a March 16th cbcnews.ca article the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture said, "We have no intention of looking seriously at a moratorium at this time or any time in the future . . . I'm encouraged to bring forward some factual information forward to those who have some possible concerns about aquaculture." I'll table that piece of information.

My question to the minister is, where did the minister find the factual information that he wants to share with those of us who have concerns about aquaculture?

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Well, thank you very much and to the member opposite, I really appreciate this question. I think the timing couldn't be better. Just to review, I have a very well-seasoned staff in the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture that I rely on on a daily basis. We confide in our science base from Fisheries and Oceans in Ottawa, in all the different departments there, so I'm very confident that any information we talk about in aquaculture is up to date. This is something that I think can be done in a sustainable manner and we're there to protect the environment. Thank you very much for the question.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, early in March the minister had this to say about the outbreak of a deadly ISA and the destroying of three pens of salmon: "There's no effect on the traditional fishing industry. I can reassure you, based on scientific information, that there's no effect on the lobster industry. Human health is not in question." I will table that as well.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, can the minister please produce the scientific information he referred to that shows that ISA has no effect on the traditional fishing industry by the end of the day?

MR. BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, certainly I'll ask my staff to - the information that I rely on is on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which is the lead agency on this. I can tell you that we have followed protocol to a T on this issue and I have the greatest confidence that the health of Canadians and Nova Scotians is not at risk. Just as

importantly, the traditional fisheries - especially the lobster fisheries in that area - are not at risk. It is with great confidence that I stand here, and I thank you for the question.

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad he's thankful for the question. I would have been really thankful for an answer. When it comes to aquaculture in this province, this NDP Government is going to blow it if they don't get their act together. Stakeholders have told us that in 2010, in a FOIPOP relating to risks to lobster habitats, the minister's staff admitted that they did not have any scientific data - not one single piece of paper. They said that such data is held by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They said that it was held by Environment Canada and that the provincial staff had never had an opportunity to view that data.

Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister has just said he has based everything on scientific fact. Will the minister admit today that this decision around aquaculture and its risks to traditional fisheries is not based on science . . .

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

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, during Question Period the Leader of the Official Opposition suggested that there were a growing number of FTEs in the Department of Education. For the information of the House, I just wanted to table the actual numbers with respect to the Department of Education, which shows seven fewer FTEs this year than in past years. I'm sure it was just an honest mistake.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm just going to let the honourable member know that it is not a point of order. It is a difference between two members.

The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, just to help the Premier out on a point of order, I believe it was an increased cost of 30 per cent in administration in the Department of Education that the Premier may want to reflect upon. I'm sure we'll have a chance to discuss it further in the days and weeks ahead.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. That also was not a point of order.

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 Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

Bill No. 1 - Status of the Artist Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I now move that Bill No. 1, the Status of the Artist Act, be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the Status of the Artist Bill is a way to properly acknowledge the role of artists in our society and recognize their contribution to the cultural, educational, social, and economic fabric of the province. Developing Nova Scotia's arts and culture sector is a priority for the government. We have listened to their voices and are acting on priorities they have identified to help celebrate, nurture, and grow a healthy and vibrant artistic sector in Nova Scotia.

Since introducing the five-point plan for arts and culture in February 2011, we have moved forward with its elements, of which this legislation is one. In our continued effort to make life better for families in every region of the province, I am so pleased that we are working with members of the sector to achieve success in our commitment to support Nova Scotia artists on their path to creative excellence.

A committee of well-respected members of the arts sector helped draft this legislation. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to mention those committee members by name. They are Jim Morrow, artistic director of Mermaid Theatre; Peter Dykhuis, visual artist and curator; Anthony Black, artistic director for 2b Theatre; and Barbra Richman, executive director of Strategic Arts Management.

This team combed through countless documents on best practices and reviewed similar legislation from across the country - indeed from around the world - and along with department staff developed this legislation that is before you today.

For the artist, the Status of the Artist Bill defines the term "professional artist" in Nova Scotia. It recognizes the role and contribution of the artist while declaring his or her various rights. For government, this legislation outlines the vital role the province plays in fostering and nurturing a healthy and vibrant artistic sector. It makes sure we have the necessary tools to support Nova Scotia's artists and their unique needs.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is setting the foundation for a fair and equitable treatment of artists. It strikes a balance between defining what a professional artist is and enabling government and the arts sector to take measures to support their development. It is an umbrella, if you will, that will allow all organizations that support artistic development, including government, to take steps that will provide for a good quality of life for artists in our province. It will also provide the tools to increase the potential for our creative economy, to benefit communities through jobs and economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, we take seriously our mandate to promote this province's vibrant arts and culture sector. Ensuring the health and vitality of Nova Scotia's creative economy is important as we advance our jobsHere plan to create good jobs and grow our economy. I am proud to say that we are well on our way to realizing all of the points in the five-point plan set out last February to ensure that our arts and culture sector helps shape a positive future for Nova Scotia.

Both Arts Nova Scotia and the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council have been established, and just last week we appointed the first board of Arts Nova Scotia. The interdepartmental committee to coordinate support and funding for the development of the sector has been meeting, and the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council has been researching approaches to developing the creative economy and is getting underway with the work to develop a first-of-its-kind cultural strategy for Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, a lot is going on and it's all based on ensuring the voices of the arts and culture sector are helping government determine priorities for developing Nova Scotia's creative economy. I look forward to the status of the artist legislation being realized and giving Nova Scotian artists a voice in our growing economy. We are so pleased to have so many artists and a sector that is growing here in Nova Scotia, and I want to personally thank all those individuals from around the province, from one end to the other, for their involvement and their commitment on our path to ensure that we meet the needs of our artistic communities throughout Nova Scotia.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

MR. HAROLD THERIAULT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to stand here today and speak on Bill No. 1, because I believe it's a good bill and I'd like to speak about the artist because I am somewhat of an artist, I guess.

AN HON. MEMBER: You've got that right.

ANOTHER HON. MEMBER: Tell us more.

MR. THERIAULT: Not a great speaking artist, but I'm an artist somewhat.

I'm a boat builder; I can build model boats - and I've done that all my life. I guess I get that from my grandfather; he was a boat builder. He built a boat every year. He built it in the winter and he'd go fish it in the summertime and sell it in the Fall and build another one. He did that all his life, so I'm doing that but it's just models - and if I must say so myself I do a pretty good job. So anyway, I like it; I enjoy that. And I enjoy seeing this bill come along to recognize the artists of Nova Scotia, and what this bill does, I believe, it just recognizes those artists finally.

Last year we tabled a bill in this House, the Liberal Party did, that would give artists an incentive to come to this province and be in this province, and that was through tax credits to the artists. I'm hoping that the minister will look at this bill that we submitted last year and somehow maybe adopt it into this bill. I mean, when it comes to bringing artists to this province, just recognition may not grow the population of artists, but certainly the almighty dollar will because everything seems to happen around the almighty dollar anywhere in this country, especially in this province, it's all about dollars, we've been hearing about that all day. I hear about it every day. So a tax incentive for artists, I believe, would be a great thing. Maybe the minister could look at adopting that into this bill.

Like I said, this bill just recognizes - and that's great, I'm glad the artists are recognized. If you like I could show you a few pictures of my boats that I have (Interruptions) Not making any promises, but I can table a boat, maybe I could table a boat, Madam Speaker.

Anyway, with that, I'm looking forward to this bill moving on and like I say, I hope the minister will look at tax incentives for the arts to stay on the road and it may even be a greater help in bringing artists to this province. With that, I thank you very much, Madam Speaker, I'll take my seat.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wanted to look quickly at this bill and at exactly what it does and I want to thank the minister for bringing this bill forward, to support the arts and cultural sector recognizing the role of the artist.

If we look at exactly the statements that are held herein, there are a lot of motherhood and apple pie statements in here and government's support for the sector. It really doesn't get down to a whole lot of detail on exactly what it's going to do and what it really means to the Government of Nova Scotia, itself, and what the actual responsibility in supporting the artist is going to be. Are there taxation cuts or tax cuts you could be able to glean out of this? Maybe, maybe not. Are there grants or other programming that could come out of this? Maybe, maybe not. I think what this ends up doing is maybe it sets a bit of a foundation for future work and we'll be happy to see other work that might come along from this one.

So I'm hoping the minister has further detail, further information of how this is truly going to help Nova Scotia's cultural identity and, of course, the artists who are so important to many of us in this province. With that, again, I thank the minister for bringing this forward, but again, the message here is - let's get some more detail on it, let's see what it's actually going to do for artists in Nova Scotia. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

MS. PAM BIRDSALL: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in my place today and speak to the legislation, Status of the Artist Act. This is the first piece of legislation being introduced in the Spring Session of the Legislature and as ministerial assistant to Communities, Culture and Heritage, and as a lifelong member of the arts community, I'd like to say how significant this is.

The arts and culture sector in Nova Scotia has grown significantly over the years because of the tenacity and sheer talent of our people. The calibre of the work in all areas of the cultural field in our province is nationally known and internationally known and this legislation will allow artists to move forward in new ways. Nova Scotia now joins the jurisdictions of Saskatchewan, Québec and Ontario in having this kind of legislation. At some point in the future, I hope that all the provinces in Canada will support their creative communities in this way.

The purpose of the Status of the Artist Bill is to acknowledge the artist's role in building the province's identity and culture and enhance the art that brings the province's social and economic well being. It identifies the terms of a professional artist in our province and also acknowledges the unique conditions that artists work in in our province.

There is one part of this legislation that I find particularly relevant and that is that every year the creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council and Arts Nova Scotia must make a report and present that to the minister - this will keep this legislation relevant and forward moving, and I think it's something that's very, very important.

It took some time to get this legislation moving and it's here right now. Timing is always something that's important and things evolve in the way that they're meant to evolve. My mother, who was a pianist and talented fine-needle worker, always said "slow and steady wins the race." Although we haven't won the cultural race at this point, we have certainly come a long way. The Status of the Artist legislation is considered fundamental to the professional arts sector and, now that it exists, the creative economy will grow. It always seems to happen, legislation like this comes forward in areas where the creative economy is very prosperous and very talented, as it is in Nova Scotia.

After graduating from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in the mid-1970s, I was one of the founding members of Nova Scotia Designer Craftsmen. That was back at a time when calling all the men and women craftsmen was still politically correct. That has

changed, the name has changed, and it all takes time. There are thousands of artists now in the province following creative pursuits. My business partner, Tim Worthington and I have established Birdsall-Worthington Pottery in the 1970s in Mahone Bay, and at that time there wasn't much interest from the government of the day to help develop this sector.

That has certainly changed at this time. Organizations evolved, helpful programs to promote the arts sector evolved, and we are now seeing a government committed to this vital community, it has evolved and formalized the introduction of the Status of the Artist Bill. Our Premier announced in February 2011 the province's five-point plan for arts and culture and to bring in this type of legislation was one of those commitments.

Our minister has spoken about the people who are on the committee who worked on this, along with senior staff from the department, and these people really must be thanked over and over again. The work they did to do a national and international jurisdiction review of similar legislation, just to see what kind of key points we wanted to develop and put in our legislation - they worked very hard. Jim Morrow, Barbara Richman, Peter Dykhuis and Anthony Black are certainly to be commended - they have done such a wonderful job for us.

The response from the arts community since the bill's introduction on Friday has been very enthusiastic. My Facebook postings and comments have moved like the wind. It's very important that this part of the five-point plan that came into effect last week was the appointment of the first Arts Nova Scotia board. As the transition chairman of the committee that worked to define the terms of reference for the Arts Nova Scotia last summer and Fall, I'm very pleased to see this committee up and running. Andrew Terris, the former director of the old Nova Scotia Arts Council, noted that the day the new board met on March 27th was the very same date 10 years ago when the previous government shut down the Arts Council.

When we were in Opposition we were committed to recreating a stand-alone arts council and that is just what we have done. "Another promise fulfilled" as a friend on Facebook said. (Applause) The Status of the Artist legislation I am so proud of today will give artists from every region in our province a clear signal that this government "takes seriously our mandate to promote our province's vibrant arts sector" - from the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

There's one more quote that I would like to relay and that is one that I think is very heartfelt from the artists I've been speaking to over the last few days. It's to quote Ron Bourgeois, the Chairman of the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council when he said this legislation defines "where I fit in the Nova Scotia fabric. Where yesterday there was nothing, today I feel I am recognized, respected as artist within this government."

So as my good friend, the MLA for Colchester-Musquodoboit Harbour would say, I second that statement - the second way of seconding, that is. Thank you.

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

MS. KELLY REGAN: Madam Speaker, we know this is a bill that helps our important arts community. Nova Scotia has a wealth of artistic talent in a number of different fields. It's a rich mix of cultures, beliefs and experiences. The arts play a significant role in our provincial economy whether this is through independent artists or big budget films in our movie industry and there has always been a wealth of musical talent. From the early beginnings of Celtic, Acadian and other roots music to the constantly evolving music of today, Nova Scotia continues to celebrate its artists at home and abroad.

In fact, Madam Speaker, music is probably one of the most culturally significant aspects of Nova Scotia's history and heritage. In every corner of our province music plays an intricate role in the arts community. Participation in arts and culture has significant positive social and health benefits for individuals and communities and I have to say I grew up playing in bands - I wasn't in a cool band, I was in marching bands and concert bands - but I grew up playing in bands and that may account for my hearing loss today. (Interruption) It wasn't the tuba, no, it was the French horn, but we were loud.

It was a huge, important part of my growing up and that's why, for example, I think a program like Artists in the Schools, which is delivered in partnership with the Department of Education, is so important. The program helps develop the creative capacity of students in a different part of the arts and we're pleased to see the government finally moving forward with this legislation. It's something the Liberal caucus supports and we've called on the previous Progressive Conservative Government to enact and this NDP Government to move forward with for some time because the arts are so important to Nova Scotians.

Actors, painters, musicians, sculptors, hundreds of other artists, make up what Nova Scotia is all about and having a healthy arts community works to generate jobs and attracts others to Nova Scotia, boosting our tourism industry. In places like Yarmouth and western Nova Scotia this is particularly important since the NDP Government cut the ferry so abruptly in 2009 and that decision by the NDP Government, without any thought of the devastating consequences it would have on the economy of Nova Scotia, means that fewer tourists are coming to the region to see and hear what our arts community has to offer. Decisions like that by the NDP Government mean we must encourage and foster our homegrown talents even more, making this legislation doubly important.

In fact, that decision shows how out of touch the NDP Government is with most Nova Scotians. A healthy and vibrant arts community is important to our local economies. There isn't a riding in this province that doesn't have independent artists, whether they're painters, musicians or others, and that's why supporting the arts is so important and that is why my colleague, the member for Digby-Annapolis, introduced the sound recording tax credit in the Spring of 2011. That bill provides a Nova Scotia sound recording tax credit

available to eligible sound recording companies for certain qualifying expenditures on eligible sound recordings by emerging Canadian artists or groups.

It's our hope that the NDP Government will call this bill when introduced again by our caucus and we will have support from the Third Party as well for this bill. Anything we can do to sustain and cultivate arts in Nova Scotia is vital because we've lost so many jobs under the NDP Government's watch.

The arts are also crucial to the history and culture of our Acadian and African Nova Scotian communities as well. The rich heritage from our African Nova Scotian community has produced some of the finest artists in this province, indeed this country, and were it not for artists from this important community, many Nova Scotians would not know about the historical importance and valuable significance it has had on our province.

Acadian artists are of equal importance, whether through song or books, or painting, or other genres, we learn about the rich Acadian history of Nova Scotia and how very important it is to our province. That's why we should do everything we can to foster arts in these communities and protect the art, the history and culture they have to offer Nova Scotia. We must protect and cultivate these artistic communities at all costs to ensure future Nova Scotians benefit from them.

The Nova Scotia College of Art & Design is a critical component to art and artists in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada. My Leader, the member for Annapolis, has said he supports an independent NSCAD and considers it an asset to the province. We know how important NSCAD is to Nova Scotia and to Nova Scotian artists of all fields. It's where many artists get their training. But even before people make it to NSCAD, we have children in schools who are learning about art, who are learning about music. I think that this is one aspect of the whole picture that this government has forgotten about: they forgot how artists start. They very often start with a spark that is lit in a school.

I think about the experience that we had in Bedford-Birch Cove when we learned that we were going to get a new high school. A group tried to put together a fundraising plan. In the end, after about a year, they were finally told by the Department of Education that we only do deals with municipalities. When we went to the municipality, we were told by HRM that they had no mandate to build cultural spaces. They said we didn't need a theatre, that it wasn't a requirement for a high school. In the end, there's no theatre. There's a cafetorium. I have to ask, where do they think artists start?

AN HON. MEMBER: Any enhancements?

MS. REGAN: Yes, HRM taxpayers are going to pay for enhancements. It didn't come from this government. It came from taxpayers ponying up extra, through their municipal tax, as the member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville well knows.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. With the indulgence of the member, there has been a request for an introduction.

The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to call the attention of the House to the Speaker's Gallery. In the Speaker's Gallery is a friend and a close associate of one of the members of the House. It is Gerry Goldsworthy. Gerry is here today observing the proceedings from a couple of different angles, I'm thinking. I saw you over there awhile ago, Gerry. Gerry is the husband of Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I certainly welcome all of our guests today in the gallery, and I would remind the member not to speak to the guests. Thank you.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove has the floor.

MS. REGAN: So I would just like to leave the members of the government with this thought: if you look at high schools, if you look at the future actors, the set painters, the costumers, the makeup artists, the directors, the singers, the musicians, the stage crew - many people who work professionally in the arts get their start in high school, so I urge you not to forget them when you are building high schools.

I also want to point out to the government, what happens to arts programs when you start cutting education? They are often the first to go. Sometimes you don't get art programs. Your music program gets cut, your theatre gets cut, and as we've seen, sometimes you don't get a theatre - you get a cafetorium with enhancements that we're still fighting over because we can't get a budget to find out where the money is actually going.

With those few words I would like to thank the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage for introducing this bill and encourage him. If he would like to incorporate some changes, like the sound tax recording credit or theatres in high schools, we'd be most appreciative. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill.

MS. LENORE ZANN: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues in the House who have expressed their support for the arts and culture of Nova Scotia from all Parties.

When our government's Status of the Artist Bill was announced on Friday, March 30th, I was in attendance, and a reporter for CBC, the esteemed Jean Laroche posed the question, "Yes but what difference does this make to artist's [sic] lives TODAY?" It's an interesting question, especially coming from someone working for the CBC, Canada's one and only public broadcaster, renowned for bringing the voice and culture of Canadians to

Canadians. However, I've now had a chance to ponder his question, and I will endeavour to explain why, as a professional artist myself for 35 years, this legislation is so important to me and to artists around the province and how it lays the groundwork for future changes to our lives and, indeed, sets a wonderful example for other provincial jurisdictions.

To put this bill in context, allow me take you back a few years in time. "The unwritten history of . . ." the arts is actually ". . . the history of mankind, for in its essentials that set of human actions which the ancient Greeks . . ." first formalized as what we now call theatre, ". . . belongs to no single race, age, or culture. It is, rather, an act of language, one by which the dangerous phenomenal world is safely imitated and celebrated. This act, lying as it does at the very heart of ritual, has been common to . . ." mankind, ". . . albeit in varying degrees - since man . . ." first evolved. "The sorcerer imitating the stag - in a scene painted on a wall of a cave . . ." and the CBC actor imitating Sir Winston Churchill or Colin Thatcher, for instance, ". . . have a common bond in spite of the twenty thousand years of actual time that divide them." Yes, I think I was in that show, the history of Colin Thatcher.

The history of formulized arts ". . . in Europe begins in Athens more than five and a half centuries before the birth of Christ. There, in a tiny, bowl-like hollow, their backs protected from the cold winds of Mount Parnes and the bright morning sun, Athenians celebrated these rites of the god Dionysus . . ." in music and dance, and that is what eventually evolved into theatre, ". . . one of the greatest cultural accomplishments of the Greeks." Indeed, this new art form ". . . was so intimately associated with Greek civilization that every major town and colony possessed a theater.

"The Greek theatre - or, more precisely . . ." the form that ". . . we have come to know as tragedy . . . originated in the . . ." Choric Dithyramb. It was ". . . a kind of dance performed in honor of the god Dionysus. Since Dionysus was the deity of wine and fertility, it is not surprising that dances dedicated to him tended to be disorderly and the dancers drunk." Aristotle tells us this. In fact, it's ". . . attested to by the very terms *tragedy* and *comedy*. The word *tragedy* - from *tragos* . . ." means goat, and *odé* means song, so it literally ". . . harks back to the village dithyramps, in which the performers wore goatskins and capered about like goats . . . *comedy* derives from *kômazein*, 'to wander around villages' - suggesting that the performers . . ." these first performers, ". . . because of their bawdy rowdiness . . ." and probably drunkenness ". . . had been forbidden to perform . . ." in the actual city.

"The genius who accomplished the transition from dithyramb . . ." to actual ". . . drama was Thespis of Icaria. Playwright, actor, stage director, and producer, all in one, Thespis is credited with a number of innovations. He is said to have connected the chorus with a plot: he seems to have evolved the protagonist . . ." or *hypokrités*, which means the answerer, who is ". . . destined to face a tragic dilemma and forced to answer the ever-questioning chorus." Sounds a little bit like our parliamentary system today. He also made ". . . use of unpainted linen masks; and, if we care to trust Horace, Thespis travelled

about with a company of strolling players on a wagon.” Hence the traditional name for the professional actor is “thespian” - bet you didn’t know that.

Now a Greek ruler, Pisistratus, having seized power in Athens by a coup d’état in the year 560 BC, decided to enlarge the artistic scope of the City of Athens by including plays for the first time in the official program of their festival. He asked Thespis to participate with his troupe; the date was 534 BC when this took place. Upon one such festive occasion a gentleman came, who was a renowned legislator of Athens - his name was Solon. He came to witness one of Thespis’ performances and afterward went to see the artist.

Plutarch, another historian, has saved this oldest, real-life backstage scene from oblivion. Plutarch said, “Thespis, at this time, beginning to act tragedies, and the thing, because it was new, taking very much with the multitude . . . Solon, being by nature fond of hearing and learning something new, and now, in his old age, living idly and enjoying himself . . . with music and with wine, went to see Thespis himself, as the . . . custom was, act and after the play was done . . .” Solon addressed Thespis, “. . . and asked him if he was not ashamed to tell so many lies before such a number of people . . .” - 15,000, in fact - and Thespis replied, “. . . it was no harm to say or do so in play . . .”, after which “. . . Solon vehemently struck his staff against the ground: ‘Ah,’ said he, ‘if we honour and commend such play as this, we shall . . .’ - no doubt - “. . . find it some day in our business.” in the Legislature.

So there you go. So when people ask me today, do you miss the theatre, what do you think I tell them? I have a front-row seat. (Interruption) Yes, we need more thespians in the Legislature.

Indeed, history shows us that the arts and artists of Athens became respected to the point that they were made part of a coordinated institution, whose primary function was to celebrate culture, teach morality, provide the citizenry with a sense of identity and it came to rank alongside democracy itself in its importance, which I think is what this bill is trying to do today. So in light of this historical context, it is my opinion that our government’s Act to Respect the Status of the Artist is a very, very important step forward and, in fact, does affect the lives of every Nova Scotian artist living here today.

Over the years many artists with whom I have worked in just about every discipline, have carried - and rightly, in my view - a small or large chip on their shoulder about how despite the amazing work that they have done and the important role of art in society, how little formal respect and recognition Canadian artists in particular seem to get from governments, from the media, and even the general public. As compared to so many other professions that have formal professional associations, trade unions, various formal understandings with government that define their position and status, artists here in Nova Scotia seem to have next to nothing. Especially here, this was made much worse when the

Nova Scotia Arts Council was liquidated by the previous Progressive Conservative Government.

Artists often get flack that they don't actually do anything useful. Get a real job, they are often told or why do you just suck up government funding like a sponge or just hang around at gala receptions dressed to the nines and drinking champagne in high places, as some people seem to think. So status of the artist legislation gives artists the respect that I believe they are due. It is my feeling that even if this legislation did nothing else, it would still be very important to the large number of artists right across Nova Scotia for this reason alone.

In just over two years I am very proud to be able to say this NDP Government has not only re-established the arm's-length Arts Council, we have also improved our film and television animation tax credits, thanks to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, but we have also now formally established a place for artists within the fabric of Nova Scotia's society and given them the respect they deserve. (Applause) Thank you.

Finally, one last point I'd like to make here is that this bill also, I believe, provides a legislative peg for artists to hang future artistic hats. If, in the future, we want to build guarantees and programs for wage equity, codes of fair practice, tax incentives, levels of investment, arts education, and greater public recognition into this legislation, then this actually affirms that this is an objective of government to improve the lives of artists.

I was also very pleased to see that there is a mention in there of young people and getting their education in the arts and trying to get that happening here in Nova Scotia so they don't have to leave the province to go elsewhere to get it.

Finally, I think this legislation will help put into practical use by both the public sector and the government, if they work together in the future, and having status of the artist legislation available will now only be of assistance. This is an incredibly positive and exciting step forward for our province. This is why I moved home to Nova Scotia in 2007, not knowing I was going to go into government but wanting to be of assistance to the young artists of Nova Scotia, to a new generation of artists, to give them hope that staying here in Nova Scotia and creating lives for themselves will actually be beneficial and they have much to look forward to.

I think this also shows a government that puts its money where its mouth is and actually follows through on its promises. Yes, it is following through on its promises, our Premier's promise to this sector. Being a lifelong professional artist myself, since the age of 16 years and having to leave this province in order to make a living, I am so proud to be able to come back, as a legislator.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're glad you're back.

MS. ZANN: Thank you, I'm proud to be back. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage and its minister, my colleague from Sackville-Cobequid. I would also like to personally thank, on behalf of Nova Scotian artists from coast to coast to coast, to thank our Premier for approval and support for this important legislation because I believe it shows that he is, as I am, a champion of arts and culture in Nova Scotia, as is this NDP Government, and guess what? We're just getting started. Thank you. (Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was very pleased to rise today on Bill No. 1, the Status of the Artist Act. It was certainly a pleasure to listen to my colleague across the way, the member for Truro-Bible Hill. She certainly is an artist in her own right and a very well-spoken thespian as well, so we learned a little bit in that presentation.

Madam Speaker, this bill actually is of particular interest to me because I have looked at policies and platforms in different provinces in Canada during elections and it occasionally comes up. I know the Liberal Party in Alberta had proposed it - not in this current election but in the previous election and it may be in again. This is something that I think progressive Parties and progressive people think is important, to recognize and support artists in our society. I think Nova Scotia is really almost preeminent in this fashion.

We have wonderful areas, almost artists' colonies, of visual artists, painters, craftsmen, tremendous musicians of many different types of music that are represented. I think for a province of our size and with our small population, we have a lot of people who are making their living in the arts and a lot of communities that rely on that in the summer months. I'm thinking particularly of the different theatre festivals and attractions that bring tourists to various parts of the province. I'm thinking particularly of Parrsboro, where I spend time in the summer. They have the Ship's Company Theatre, which has shows in June, July, August and maybe even into September. It is a wonderful draw for people from the city to go to a smaller town and to experience original and live theatre. I think that is something that we do need to really celebrate and I think that at least recognizing artists and their role is very important.

That's what is in this bill. I was just going through it and trying to identify what the various sections are. It's only a three page bill and a lot of it goes to the definitions of who is who in the bill, but it does commit government to being aware of the artists in various roles that they play and to actually engage them, whenever the government is engaging artists, to make sure that they honour different pay scales and conditions that are set out by the various professions that are represented. It sort of formalizes what we've probably been doing in that regard anyway, which is being respectful of their various unions and organizations.

At the same time, it does talk about recognizing their education and opportunities and that is something that I wanted to look to a little bit in my comments today. I think it's really good that the Creative Arts Council and the chair will be making regular annual reports to the Legislature because I think we need to try and track how well that sector is doing and how it's growing and what government can do to actually support and encourage them and foster that growth. It's not enough to just sit back and say we have great artists in our province, we certainly have some who have received international acclaim, but we have many others who are really working hard to make their living in the arts and they don't earn a lot of money.

I wanted to speak a little bit to that because the bill that my colleague, the member for Digby-Annapolis, referenced was a bill to actually recognize artists in a more - I guess through income tax credits and really through the Finance Act - to recognize that they bring so much more to a community than we can really imagine. They help to define different communities. I think of the Acadian community and the vibrant singing and history and even modern music and dance. Different corners of our province that have really unique (Interruption) The Gaelic College in Cape Breton and the music and very unique dance that is represented there.

We have modern, hip hop, we have all kinds of different music and areas, but what I'm saying is that most of the people who make their living in the arts are earning a very small income. I have members of my family who have chosen that route and I can say to you that it's very difficult to raise a family, to have responsibilities, to own a house, it's really hard to do if you're making your living in a smaller community; anywhere, really, in Nova Scotia is small in the arts scene.

If you're in theatre, for example, we don't have a lot here in metro. We have some great theatres, but not a lot if you're trying to make your living year-round. People have to often travel and go elsewhere. In some jurisdictions, I'm thinking particularly of Ireland, they actually put forth a bill that gave a tax credit to people who made their living in original art and it was for any of their original works. For performances, for an original work of art, if they sold that, it would be tax-free and it was up to a certain amount. If you happened to be enormously popular, like an Alex Colville or a Rita MacNeil or Anne Murray - obviously you're not tax free because you're making a big income because you're famous. (Interruptions) Are there others? I don't know about the member for Truro-Bible Hill but I think she made a good living in the arts, which is really a testament to her skill and talent.

I'm thinking of so many who just struggle to make a living and I think it would be a sign to those people that this is the province to be living in. So much of the work they do is digital and worldwide. You can live in Nova Scotia and build a career in the arts. I think it would make us unique from the other provinces that have brought in legislation, like Saskatchewan and Ontario and Quebec, and it would be a sign that we really want to attract people who are in the arts and do even more to bolster it.

I don't think we would be the first to do that. As I said, Ireland did it for their artists and certainly it did foster a lot of growth in that sector and I think it bears looking at now that we have a bill before us recognizing artists. There is a reason to look further and to see if there's something more concrete we can do rather than giving a nod to the tremendous impact that artists have in our communities. That was one thing.

Also, on the side of taxation which could help artists, we have the tremendously successful Film Tax Credit, which was mentioned as well by a number of members. That has been a tremendous success and it was introduced by the Liberal Government in the 1990s. We were, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the first jurisdiction in Canada to do that and it gave us quite an advantage initially. There was a flurry of activity in filmmaking and quite a number of Nova Scotians have learned new skills, new crafts that are associated with that and made a good living as such. We had to keep increasing it in order to continue to be competitive with other provinces in the country.

But also another bill that was proposed by the Liberal caucus - I believe it was just perhaps last year - was one to offer a tax credit as well to digital media and I think to recordings in digital media. That was something that the arts group had asked for - I believe it has been an official ask to the government as well, and it would be, again, something that would set the stage for a growth in that area. We do have, again, some very successful companies that are doing digital media here, and I think that it would acknowledge that and it would again allow Nova Scotia to start to put their mark on that industry and attract people who are working in that area because, as we know, the cost to do any kind of production is large, and if you have a tax credit it becomes a marketing tool, an advantage to this area.

I know that we could help the companies that are involved in that to grow if we put a tax credit in place, and if I can go back to the tax credit for their income, I think really because so many of the artists have a low income each year, it really wouldn't take much out of the bottom line of the province. I know the Finance Minister is very concerned about trying to manage the fiscal affairs of the province, but I think if you did any kind of analysis you would see that this would not in any significant or really measurable way impact the bottom line in Nova Scotia, but it would make a difference. It would allow us to go across the country and around the world and attract artists by saying that we really value them and that they can be recognized not only through nice words and legislation that recognizes them as a special group, but also with concrete services and concrete measures really that will reward them for choosing Nova Scotia as a province to live in. So I really wanted to say that.

Again, I think that a province like Nova Scotia gains so much from the artistic factor and we have to measure really in tourism and in other ways in terms of the vibrancy of our communities. I have mentioned Parrsboro before you came in, Mr. Speaker, in terms of it being a wonderful community for their theatre - and I think perhaps you've been there. It's the Ship's Company Theatre there, but Antigonish has a theatre program in the

summer, and there is still a small one in the Valley, in Wolfville. Again, if we had some other measures in place, maybe we would have been able to keep their more ambitious theatre that they had, the theatre program that they had in the summer in Wolfville, but I know it has been scaled back.

It becomes a tremendous marketing tool for the province if we have these kind of theatre and music festivals throughout the province. I think that as the other performers come here, or artists come here, they would learn that we are a place that particularly values artists and that we show that, you know, where it really matters - in the pocketbook - that we recognize the struggle that they have to continue to make art and to follow their pursuit of creativity.

I'm not sure if any of the other members had mentioned it today, Mr. Speaker, but I'm sure all members of the House are aware of Richard Florida and the work that he has done under Creative Cities in saying that what is going to define the growth centres and cities in the future are cities that are particularly creative. He has come up with - I think it's an eight-point measure. He has eight points that he measures to say how creative an area is and actually Halifax, HRM, has a high score when you look at it in terms of that. He has been here to speak and said that we do very well. The one measure that outlines a creative city that we are not very strong on is the percentage of people born outside the country, and apparently having a larger number of immigrants in any city also contributes a great deal to the creative vitality of that area.

Those are the kind of cities that young people choose to live in - ones that value the arts and have a lot of artistic opportunity, performances and festivals and shows. That's what young people want and the kind of industry that we want to attract, whether it be media or filmmaking, or digital arts, they require young people to fill those roles. So we're very excited to see that we score well here and that we could improve that even by taking some concrete government measures to take this legislation a step further and actually do something that would help artists in their financial pursuits because I can tell you it is very hard as a parent even, if you have a child who is looking at a career in the arts, you do worry because you worry that it is such a difficult path that they have chosen if they want to pursue an art that they love.

I do believe that people should follow their heart and if that is where they are drawn to, then they should do that, whether it be acting or singing or dancing. I know that it is very hard to really have a career that will sustain you. There's not a lot of security, in fact there's almost no security in that life. So I think that anything we can do - as a government to acknowledge that - is important and to recognize their professionalism, their training and their recognition in their own fields, which this bill does. It talks about artists who may have received awards, artists who are recognized or who hold copyright. It sort of goes through what criteria you would have to achieve in order to be seen as an artist.

It's a very difficult life and I believe that the people who do it do it out of love of their craft and their calling and that we, as a government, should do more because I think we have a higher percentage of artists in our province than in many other places in Canada and that they are really very talented and they contribute so much to the economic vitality of our cities and our towns. That is just what Richard Florida's studies are all about, that where you have that creative core you are going to attract more people to live. When people come in for a festival or an event, the spinoff value is tremendous.

I know we've all sat here and read reports about the economic spinoff, whether it's for a rock concert or a tall ships event or an artist's day of painting, they all have a tremendous impact on the towns and villages and cities where they are located. They draw people in from across our province and from further afield.

In speaking to this Bill No. 1 on second reading, I would like to certainly support the bill. I'm glad it has come forward but I am just suggesting that there is so much more we could do that wouldn't be costly but would send a signal to artists across Canada and elsewhere that they should come to Nova Scotia because not only will they be excited to see the variety of culture and arts that are here, but they will actually be given some small reward for coming to Nova Scotia, some small recognition financially that their work is valued here.

Again, the fact that so much of the work is exported, because it is digital now, they can choose to live wherever they like and do their work. In my community there is one gentleman who is a very well known baroque violinist. He plays with orchestras all across the United States, he plays occasionally in Nova Scotia and he's very generous about making his time available here. He is sought after by orchestras across all over the world, really, and yet he makes his home in Rockingham. That is because he likes the quality of life in Nova Scotia and he values the sense of community in Nova Scotia.

We could attract more people like that who are travelling or recording music that can be sold anywhere in the world or doing art that can be exported anywhere in the world but they could choose to live in Nova Scotia. I think that would be a tremendous boon to all of our communities.

I see one or two ministers paying attention - well everybody I'm sure is - but taking note of what I'm saying is what I mean to say. I hope that will be something that perhaps will be on the agenda to be discussed, if not today then at a future day. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up here and speak for a few minutes on this bill. I want to thank the minister in particular for bringing this bill forward. It has been a long time in coming and I know that

artists have been waiting for this bill. I am delighted to be part of a government that has, in fact, delivered on this commitment to artists.

I want to support, and I support this bill wholeheartedly, for five different reasons and I'd like to put them on the table, just in case I run out of time. One is that it's an important part of a commitment that was made by this Party and this government in the 2009 election and before. We said we would do this and we are doing it. It's part of a broad-based consultation with artists, we are doing it as part of a broad-based consultation. (Interruption)

Mr. Speaker, I hear the members opposite talking about consultation. It was something they did not do when they eliminated the Arts Council. It was what we're doing. The status of artist legislation is based on consultation. It was also something done on listening - apparently the members opposite are not used to that either - but consultation and listening are part of that and this government is consulting and it was listening when it introduced this legislation.

This legislation recognizes the value of the creative community. It recognizes the value of the creative economy to the Nova Scotia economy. What we're doing is we are underlining that with this legislation. Unlike previous governments, this legislation and this government are making very specific commitments to the artistic community and making very specific commitments to developing the creative economy here in Nova Scotia.

Finally, the legislation creates a platform for future initiatives in the creative arts field, whether it's film or digital arts or performance or any kind of creative endeavour that underlines this economy. For these five reasons I'm delighted to support this legislation.

Let me go back then to the nature of the commitment that was made. From 2006 on, one of the first things that happened when I was elected, my constituency association came and said, we need to do something about the Arts Council. We need to make sure that we have an Arts Council that's developed by artists, for artists, in a way that benefits the arts and that's what this legislation does. We made a commitment that this legislation would be developed and we have done it. It was also part of our platform, a platform that was developed in consultation with the arts community. Coming out of that consultation this was the number one priority, and we have done that, and that consultation took place over 2010-11 and I want to commend the minister for undertaking that review and for following through on that commitment.

In terms of consultation, the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage requested that the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council review these consultations and make recommendations. I want to give a shout out to members of that committee, members of the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council who helped to develop it: the Vice-Chairman, Jim Morrow; three members of the Nova Scotia arts community - Barbara

Richman, Peter Dykhuis, Anthony Black; and the Executive Director of Culture from Communities, Culture and Heritage, Marcel McKeough, a gentleman who has been at the forefront of developing arts and cultural policy in Nova Scotia for many, many years and I believe he has now taken a leadership role in this process.

There were consultations held right across the province over six months and I should say I was a part of those consultations. They were an arm's-length consultation. They were a group that was seen as legitimate by artists, by part of the community, and they went right across the province and spoke to as many people as possible. At one of the consultations, I think it was at the Citadel Hotel here, the room was packed. People had to be out in the hallways listening, the cultural community really embraced those consultations.

The result of those consultations were reviewed by the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council and acted on. I should say also that over the course of the past couple of years I have had regular meetings with many members of my particular community in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, who come down regularly - in fact, we have almost weekly or monthly meetings at a place that I'm not going to mention right now. Andrew Terris, Chris Mika, Sheila Hunt, Robin Metcalfe, Gay Hauser, Anthony Black, Erika Beatty, Wendy Lill, Mary Vingoe, Natasha MacLellan - a number of them have come to me or come through my office and said, we really need to do something for artists. I'm delighted to be able to say that in the five-point plan that we have set out, that we have now hit number five of five. We have a plan. We have made commitments and we are sticking to it and we are delivering.

Mr. Speaker, this status of the artist legislation also recognizes artists in a very specific way. It recognizes artists by defining artists, a difficult task in itself, but came up with the definition that the artists themselves have accepted. It also reaffirms the value and the importance of arts and culture in Nova Scotia society. It gives artists what they've also been asking for - just plain respect. They would like the government and they would like the community to respect what it is they do. So this status of the artist legislation then symbolizes the government's recognition of the social and economic value and importance of Nova Scotia's arts and culture community.

Also, Mr. Speaker, it creates a platform for future activities. As I've said, we can now work with Arts Nova Scotia, work with the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council, and do far more. The members opposite have talked about what it is the government can do to build on this legislation and I know the minister was listening very carefully when they were speaking about initiatives. I know the artistic community itself has said that, that they would like to be more involved in this process, and this legislation builds a foundation for those kinds of initiatives and those kinds of activities.

You can be sure, Mr. Speaker, that we will embark on those activities in partnership with the artistic community and the creative community. We will do it alongside them and

we're not going to impose conditions on them that they themselves don't accept or won't impose on themselves. For these reasons I'm delighted to support this legislation and I would like to thank the minister for bringing it forward. It's a commitment that we've made. It's a plan that we have and we're sticking to it. It's based on broad-based consultation by artists, for artists, and in the interest of all Nova Scotia it recognizes the value of the arts and the creative community and it creates a platform for future activities.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to this bill and participating some more in this debate and, in particular, to engaging the artists in our community and asking them to come forward and speak to this bill as well.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, in Question Period today the member for Cape Breton West requested information on infectious salmon anemia to be tabled by the end of the day. I want to thank my staff for the speedy work here. I wish to table that document on ISA - a fact sheet - and thank you for the question.

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

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues for having their input on this piece of legislation. We're glad to see this legislation go through the process, so it's a pleasure to close debate on Bill No. 1.

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

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, that concludes the government's business for today. I now hand it over to the Official Opposition House Leader for business for Opposition Day.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the hours tomorrow will be from 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. Following the daily routine and Question Period, we will go into

debate on Bill No. 3, Sales Tax Act, and Resolution No. 12, NDP: Cost Pressures - Address. Following that the House will rise at 6:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House now rise to meet again tomorrow at the hour of 2:00 p.m.

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 Adjournment motion was submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park:

“Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Wellness explain how taking treatment money from children and youth mental health programs at the IWK in order to pay for more timely assessments provides better mental health care for the patient.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HEALTH & WELLNESS: IWK YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH - FUNDING

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to rise in my place today and speak about this very important topic. We know that there are many young people in our province who have mental health issues, in fact many of them appearing very early in their lives. This year alone, since the school year started, I've heard from three elementary principals requesting information on what programs could be available to help their staff help their students deal with some of the anxieties and stresses that students were exhibiting in the classrooms. It's starting very, very young and we know now from the research that about 70 per cent of many of the psychoses, the mental health issues that people have throughout their lifetime, we know that many can be treated. However, from time to time we know people with schizophrenia, bipolar, multiple personalities and so forth, will have flare ups and these will become problematic.

The research shows that if young people are diagnosed, are assessed, and have treatment early in life, the chances of very good lifetime outcomes are well established and

well known. This is why, when we are taking from a good program that exists at the IWK, it has become very much the topic on the minds of many Nova Scotians. I was amazed in my community, and also as the Health Critic for the Liberal Party, that I'm hearing from people across the province about this issue.

We all know that change must take place and periodically new models and new approaches are brought forward and can be very beneficial, in this case, to young Nova Scotians that need mental health assessment and treatment. However, it's a case of we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. If we have a program that's working, we keep that while building other capacities.

Over the past week I've had an opportunity to speak with mental health providers in three DHAs across the province. Unequivocally, the answer is, we do not have enough resources right now. People can get assessed but we cannot provide the timely treatment, the multiple times they may need to visit a psychologist, a psychiatrist. This is what we're hearing. It's just a fact that is facing our province and many others with having highly qualified personnel. I think this is a case of where they should have slowed down, taken a look at the resources that we needed, keep in place what we have and build on that.

This is a case here where yes, the clinical work done by psychologists, psychiatrists and other clinicians is absolutely critical in the first phase of assessments and treatment. But I think, perhaps, we've underscored the role of the youth mental health worker. I was surprised today that the minister, in fact, without a long elaboration, kind of summed it up as a custodial role.

Well, I think if the minister would take time to speak to some of these people carrying out this role, that, in fact, she will come away with a very different profile of who these people are. I think she also should talk to parents. I know she has had a background, but talk to parents who have had children literally move forward because of the consistency of the work done by the youth and mental health worker.

We know that the clinician is going to advance a program, but having those people working with our youth on a daily basis, making transitions to home and into community, is a central part of the total delivery of the mental health team that the IWK has in place.

I just wanted to reference a couple of comments that have now been circulated. I know one was in The ChronicleHerald. It says, "Please, do not take the staff away from us; don't take the support program from us. It helps more than anything ever has." That is Ally Dawson, ACT client, in The ChronicleHerald.

During the day of the opening of the Legislature and the protests across the street, I had the opportunity to talk to several parents and a couple of very, very bright young children, but young children who have been hurting as much as somebody with any kind of a disease, a condition or were in an accident. People with mental health problems suffer

deeply. The three young children that I spoke with, they talked about how the Compass program - yes, it's intensive and costly to have the number of people that provide the teamwork, but nevertheless, outstanding results.

For these three young people it was the first time, after several years, from family doctor, school counsellors, that they got in a program that truly helped them on to a better course and time in their life and settling down in school and become good students, the behaviour issues are no longer present, the disruptions in their lives and in their families have been dealt with.

I think here when we're talking about now 17 full-time youth mental health workers and in the program there were just 55 full-time workers, the majority that are in the program are on a part-time, casual basis. So if we're going to take 17 out of the 55 full-time workers, this is an enormous hit to a program that has found these workers to be critical. We know that more outpatient services are needed to address long wait lists, but not at the expense of in-patient services.

This was the area that really surprised me when I asked people at the IWK. They know there is still a tremendous need for in-patient programs. That has not disappeared and it won't disappear. We must find the right balance, but I think we've gone about it here in the wrong way. Without putting in place, in our communities from Sydney to Yarmouth and Bridgewater to Amherst, in our regional centres especially - having enough qualified people is where we should have looked at first.

These 17 people who are likely now to find themselves without work were so critical to the delivery of the program that I think a lot of training, a lot of experience, a lot of value to the IWK program, or to our community or school programs, I think it's a shame we are losing these people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start first of all by saying that I started my work in life as a youth care worker, I know very clearly what was involved in that work, and I have the utmost respect for people who do that work. When I did that work I was 100 per cent - more than 100 per cent - devoted to the kids in my care. I know that the people who do this work feel passionately about what it is they are doing and they do a very good job. This isn't about youth care workers and whether or not they do a good job, it's not about whether or not they care about the work - they do. I accept that; I know they do a good job and I know they care about the work they do.

Mr. Speaker, what this is about is kids. It's about all of those families with children who get no services, who languish on a wait list for days, weeks, months and, in some cases, years, where the only way they can get access is if their condition deteriorates to the

point that they become urgent in what's required for them - then they get into the system. This is profoundly a demonstration of a system that is broken, that requires change, and I recognize that change can be very difficult. This is probably the best example that I've seen of where it is that you do the right thing to make the right changes and you have to be prepared for one heck of a battle to do it. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that if that's what it requires to make this change, a bit of a battle, then I'm up for that because kids and their families deserve better than what they've gotten, and we are going to give them a better system. They are going to get earlier assessment, and earlier assessment means that they are going to have earlier access to treatment with better outcomes. The research is clear on this, there are other programs in this country that are doing precisely what we're doing. I trust the judgment and the expertise of the people who work in the field at the IWK, who have designed this shift in the model, and I will support them not only in terms of standing up and publicly explaining what they are doing and why, but we will support them with resources as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, I hear on a regular basis from families with kids that need services. The ACT program and the Compass Program have provided excellent services to the families who were able to get in that program, but I can tell you that many, many families have not been able to get access. The model was not an accessible model, it provided services to a very small number of people who needed them - and we're changing that. We are going to see more families and more children around the province having access to service, earlier interventions, and better outcomes.

I think it's very important for the public to understand that the ACT and Compass programs are not programs that deal with children who are psychotic. Kids with psychosis are seen on an urgent basis, and they are admitted to the fourth floor - 4 South - at the IWK.

In terms of what is available to families during evenings and weekends, the Opposition has said it's just an emergency room. This is not the case. We have mobile crisis units, and indeed, I've talked to the IWK to ensure that during the transition period there are adequate supports, particularly until we understand what families who have used those services, whose children are just leaving or transitioning - that there are plenty of resources and supports in place for them. This is critical.

I passed out in this House today a list of all the various treatment programs available for kids through the IWK. I did this because I genuinely want members in this House to understand the broad range of services that is available. Is it enough? No, it's not enough, Mr. Speaker, but we have a mental health strategy that is coming. We had a budget today that announced increased funding for mental health. There will be more resources invested.

As I've said, my commitment is to community-based care - it is a priority. It is to children and youth; it is to early intervention. This very much will be an area where we will

not only change the model and ensure that the resources we have are used to their fullest extent, but we will see new investment as well.

I don't like to see anyone in our health care system lose their employment, including any of the youth care workers. We still have 120 youth care workers employed at the IWK after this change in model. The Minister of Community Services recently announced a new program in her department, hiring 10 outreach workers around the province to work with children at risk. The Minister of Education has announced an expansion of the SchoolsPlus program, a program that will be offering more supports and services for young people and their families in the community.

We are, as a team on this side of the House, pulling down the silos between the government departments and we're asking, what are the things that are needed in the Department of Education, in our school system, in our teen health centres, in our schools, with our youth at risk, or with our children in care? What are the things we need to do to build a stronger system that is there for the right purpose at the right time, meeting the correct needs?

The results are obvious. I've had members of my caucus come and talk to me about people who have come into their office in the last few weeks and about the response they have received at the IWK in recent months, based on the changes that are being made - responses that are much different than what they received six or eight months ago. So we are making the changes that are necessary. These changes will result in better care sooner for children and their families. They will mean earlier assessment, earlier treatment, better outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I want to stress that the decision to adopt this new model at the IWK is one that has my full support. It's not one that I'm about to reverse, no matter how much yelling the members on the Opposition benches want to do in this Chamber, because we are doing the right thing. They are stuck in the past. They are stuck defending a status quo that they created, and we are very much moving forward in a way that will see the kind of change that people voted for when they supported our Party and wanted to see a change in government in Nova Scotia. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to do a quick introduction of somebody who's sitting in the west gallery. He's been there for a little bit. I wanted to say hi to Nick Gear. He's from Lunenburg County, and he's been here observing everything today. I'm happy to have him here and I want him to receive the warm welcome of the House of Assembly. (Applause)

Also, in the east gallery we have a number of people from the IWK - from the Compass program, from the ACT program, from 4 South, and all those programs - who

have found out that they no longer have a job. They are here checking out the proceedings here, to listen to what the minister had to say, and to chat to the Opposition Parties to get their issues forward. I want to thank them for being here tonight and I want them to receive the warm welcome of the House as well. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: We welcome all our guests to the gallery and hope they enjoy this evening's proceedings.

The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting topic that we find ourselves in here, and I thought I would try to find a way to maybe bring down what the minister tried to say here today. I thank the minister for bringing this information forward, because we've been talking for a long time about mental health services in this province. Our roles were reversed for a few years and now they're back in this respect, and what I'm seeing is, I know her intentions are there, she's got the information going forward, she started some of the changes, but we're finding that maybe some of the explanation is not there, maybe the implementation of that isn't going quite as easily as she would hope.

I understand the issue of change. I understand the issue of (Interruption) I'm trying to be nice to her, Mr. Speaker. I'm trying to bring her - if she can't take something when I'm speaking well of her, constructive on some ideas - again I'll say, I thank her for bringing this information forward. I thank her for doing the work and trying to bring to fruition the things she talked about when she sat here in Opposition.

But we are three years in. We are three years that - we're starting to see some change, and that change right now is coming with a fight that she says she's willing to stand and fight. Why is this a fight to begin with? Why isn't this a collaborative approach that came from - my goodness, looking at the Throne Speech, there were a whole bunch of strategies, 17 of them, of ways to work with people, and then what we find is that they really didn't ask the people who are visiting us here today. They didn't ask the youth and child workers who are here today how to better accomplish their job, how to better serve Nova Scotian children and adolescents who are finding problems and issues - maybe with programming that's not happening in their areas, and having to move here to Halifax in order to get that.

One of the statements that she made during the ministerial statement that we had earlier today - I thank her for the list of care services under the IWK Mental Health and Addictions Program. We do understand that there are a lot of programs out there. They do lots of great things. Maybe there aren't enough to address all the issues that we have in Nova Scotia, but one of the issues that really caught my attention, and I think caught the attention of the workers who are here today, is that she sort of called the youth care workers "custodial" in how they do their work. There was a "custodial" comment there that I'm

sure we'll be able to grab from Hansard and be able to talk about it. Furthest from the truth, or furthest from the job description of these individual, is the issue of custodial care.

I think the individuals that come before ACT and Compass and all these programs, whether you're even working on 4 South, require the consistency of one of these workers to be able to help them through their days, to help them through the issues that are beseeching them at this time, to find a better way to get them through. These people are so important to the care of these individuals that it begs the question of why this happened - why did 17 of these individuals lose their jobs? Why have they been moved on to the unemployment line? Why did this happen without any real consultation with these individuals?

That is what we heard from the workers as we met with them outside this House today. This is the information that they brought for us and I thank them for the information that they brought to us today in a nice document to all Nova Scotia MLA's and I'll table this once I finish reading read it: Reverse the IWKs cuts. The IWK has given notice of their intention to cut 17 full-time or equivalent youth care worker positions. This will negatively affect the ACT and Compass in-patient programs offered to youth. We asked the IWK to reverse that decision - and of course when we say IWK we can also say the Department of Health and Wellness because they work in concert with the things that IWK does. We ask that the youth care workers be valued for the wealth of experience and professional practice they bring to mental health treatment. We ask the IWK to listen to the continuing chorus of voice and continue to keep the effective ACT program operating 24/7 - because not only is this an issue of losing youth care workers it is also changing the model of care that is actually happening there and dropping the service level down to, I believe, a 24/5, so there are some days that it is closed and there is a three o'clock pick up in some cases for this program.

If you are a working family and you have the opportunity to get your child the help that they need, to get them to the ACT or Compass program, you're going to have to make tremendous adjustments to your work day if you have to pick them up by three o'clock. I don't know how many families that you know have that opportunity. They are very hard-working families and are they going to have to pick them up at three o'clock? So that's a model change that is going to make it very difficult for these families to get the help that they need for their children.

Mr. Speaker, we can look at what the minister has said, and I did enjoy her comments about working together with her colleagues. When we went through the Nunn report, when we went through the Child and Youth Strategy, it talked about breaking down those silos - getting Justice, Community Services, Health and Wellness, Education and all those departments working under one roof when it came to youth, adolescents, and all those individuals that need our help.

Mr. Speaker, I do thank you, too, for the work that you did. I know you were a supporter of that report. What we need to do is continue to do that work and make sure that we do have those programs in other areas of the province as well. There has been no clear indication of exactly how that's going to happen and really that flies in the face of an issue that we're having in Yarmouth County when it comes to the SHYFT program, which in our mind was providing some of these services to troubled youth in our area, youth who were having trouble finding places to live. They were finding themselves on the street and now we have a program that is in jeopardy, where it is now a daytime program where it doesn't have overnight.

We want to have answers to questions and what we find from this government is, we continue to have more questions asked. There's no clear direction. There are no answers to the things that Nova Scotians need to be able to truly make decisions on whether they're doing the right job or not. The individuals that are here today from the IWK would dearly love to meet with the minister and get some straight answers on it and I think that they deserve that.

I hear her mumbling over there as she normally does when she's upright on a question that she is uncomfortable with. I see her there talking to herself, maybe talking to her friends - maybe that is what she is doing over there. But ultimately, when it comes to supports for children (Interruption) Thirty seconds. I mean, I could say "disrespectful." It's disrespectful that I'm trying to present something and all I'm hearing over there is, well, I did that, blah, blah, blah. I think she should have answers for Nova Scotians, and that's what an Opposition Party expects: answers from a government. We don't get them from these people. We never will.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to thank all honourable members for a very excellent debate tonight.

The hours for tomorrow, as set by the Opposition House Leader, are from 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 6:06 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 65**

By: Mr. Chuck Porter (Hants West)

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

Whereas volunteers can be seen as a source of fresh ideas and energy and their efforts can expand an organization's capacity; and

Whereas Lorraine McQueen of Hantsport has volunteered for numerous associations at the provincial and federal levels, and since her retirement at Acadia University in 2001, Lorraine has worked diligently in the Town of Hantsport to create the Hantsport Carefree Community Chorus and to take a leadership role in the creation of the Friends of the Hantsport Public Library, while now serving as chair of this dynamic group; and

Whereas Lorraine is always prepared to assist in whatever way she can, whether it be through organizational advice, bylaw revision, or letter writing;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly commend Lorraine McQueen of Hantsport for being part of an active and healthy volunteer community in the Town of Hantsport and congratulate her for being recognized by the Town of Hantsport as their 2012 Volunteer of the Year.