



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 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. Before we begin the daily routine, the subject for late debate tonight has been chosen:

Therefore be it resolved that slashing education budgets by \$65 million over the past two years is having, and will continue to have, a detrimental effect on students and their educational outcomes in this province and call upon government to restore education funding.

It was submitted by the honourable member for Yarmouth.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition on behalf of the residents of Harbourview Crescent in Louisdale, Richmond County. The petition provides a history of their road and the operative clause says:

“We, the undersigned residents of Harbourview Crescent, request that the asphalt, shoulder and drainage be repaired during the upcoming spring/summer asphalt resurfacing season of 2012.”

Mr. Speaker, there are 56 signatures of residents on the road, and I have also affixed my signature.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS****STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Finance.

RESOLUTION NO. 113

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas April 7th marks World Health Day 2012, with this year’s campaign focusing on Aging and Health, with the theme of “Good health adds life to years”; and

Whereas in Nova Scotia we understand the importance of helping our aging population to age well by promoting physical activity and healthy living to people of all ages; and

Whereas this day is a reminder that we should all begin the conversation about how to better protect our health and well-being;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize April 7th as World Health Day and challenge friends, family, and others in our communities to lead healthy, active lives.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Deputy Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 114

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

Whereas 2012 has been designated as the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives, and offers the opportunity to celebrate and champion the co-operative movement in Nova Scotia and beyond; and

Whereas Nova Scotia has a rich and long co-op tradition, bolstered by the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council and 60 years of support and services to individuals and groups who consider the co-operative model for their businesses; and

Whereas Nova Scotia will continue to promote the co-operative movement and the significant contribution it makes to the economic and social growth in communities across this province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in celebrating 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives, and recognize it as a year to celebrate the successes of existing co-operatives and encourage the creation of new ones.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 115

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

Whereas the Boston Marathon is the world's oldest annual marathon and ranks as one of the world's most prestigious road racing events; and

Whereas qualifying for the Boston Marathon is a difficult and competitive task which requires hard work, commitment, and training; and

Whereas Frank Reinhardt, a dedicated public servant with the Departments of Agriculture, and Fisheries and Aquaculture, has qualified for the 2012 race and will participate in the Boston Marathon on April 16, 2012;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Frank Reinhardt on qualifying for the Boston Marathon and wish him the best of luck for the race on April 16th.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, am I permitted to do an introduction?

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MR. WILSON: In the east gallery today we have some special guests from the Scottish cultural community of Nova Scotia. With us today is Albert Matheson, Chief's Lieutenant from the Clan Matheson of Canada; Daniel Campbell, president of Clan Campbell Society of Nova Scotia, accompanied by his wife DiAnne and Mr. William Fisher; Ian MacLean, Clan MacLean International. If you could stand please while I read your name: Carol Moreira, Celtic Life Magazine; Cairns Henderson, president of Clan Henderson Society of Canada accompanied by his wife Celeste; Tom Wallace, president of the Federation for Scottish Culture in Nova Scotia, accompanied by his daughter Kathryn. Also, a very special guest, John and Pam Murray. John is the son of the late Bessie Murray who designed the Nova Scotia Tartan; and Margaret and Don Chisholm. If the members could give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

RESOLUTION NO. 116

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Tartan has become a symbol that is instantly recognized around the world as a reflection of the strong influence of Scottish culture on the heritage of our province; and

Whereas in 1953 the Nova Scotia Tartan made its first appearance at the agricultural exhibition in Truro and was adopted as an official symbol of the Province of Nova Scotia in 1955, and in 1956 was approved by the Lord Lyon King of Arms and registered with Her Majesty's Register Office in Edinburgh, Scotland; and

Whereas the late Bessie Bailey Murray designed the very first Nova Scotia Tartan at the request of the Nova Scotia Sheep Breeders Association to demonstrate the many ways for local wool to be used and as a result created a symbol that will forever be closely tied to our Nova Scotia identity;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House acknowledge the achievement of Bessie Bailey Murray in creating this enduring provincial symbol that

continues to remind Nova Scotians of the contributions of the Scottish heritage and culture to our unique way of life.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

RESOLUTION NO. 117

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources would like to congratulate the Canadian Wildlife Federation on its 50th Anniversary as Canada's largest conservation organization; and

Whereas the United Nations General Assembly declared the period 2011 to 2020 to be the United Nations Decade of Biodiversity; and

Whereas National Wildlife Week is celebrated April 8-14, 2012, and is an opportunity to reflect on the importance of wildlife and biodiversity to all Nova Scotians;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly and all Nova Scotians recognize this week of April 8th to April 14th as National Wildlife Week and congratulate the Canadian Wildlife Federation on its 50th Anniversary as Canada's largest conservation organization.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education on an introduction.

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce from the east gallery this afternoon six students from the Nova Scotia Community College Radio & Television Arts Program - I believe it is specifically offered at the Waterfront Campus - and I ask them to stand.

I believe they are with their instructor, Erin Moore, and I invite my colleagues to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 10 - Entitled an Act to Review the Public School Programs in Nova Scotia. (Hon. Stephen McNeil)

Bill No. 11 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 318 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Nova Scotia Tartan Act. (Hon. David Wilson)

Bill No. 12 - Entitled an Act to Repeal Chapter 11 of the Acts of 2005. The Petroleum Products Pricing Act. (Hon. Stephen McNeil)

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that these bills be read a second time on a future day.

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 118

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

Whereas many Nova Scotians can trace their lineage and ancestors to Scotland; and

Whereas Scottish heritage and culture has contributed to the unique way of life enjoyed by all Nova Scotians; and

Whereas for 25 years Nova Scotia has celebrated Tartan Day as a way of encouraging and supporting Scottish heritage and culture;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House of Assembly support Tartan Day as a way of promoting Scottish culture, and support this important part of Nova Scotia's heritage and traditions.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

RESOLUTION NO. 119

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

Whereas the Grade 5/6 class at Rankin School of the Narrows wrote, directed, and produced their way into the finals of the Canada-wide Classroom Energy Diet Challenge; and

Whereas the challenge, sponsored by Shell Canada and Canadian Geographic, is a competition between Canadian classes from kindergarten to Grade 12 to produce a public service announcement up to one minute long on the importance of youth energy awareness; and

Whereas the challenge is a creative way for students like the ones at Rankin School to learn the importance of powering down electronics when they are not in use and conserving electricity;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Grade 5/6 class at Rankin School on making it to the finals in the National Energy Diet Challenge and wish them continued success with energy conservation.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Richmond.

RESOLUTION NO. 120

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

Whereas Strait Area Transit is a non-profit, charitable organization made up of a volunteer board of directors along with many partners and sponsoring organizations with a goal to provide an all-inclusive, accessible and affordable means of transportation to all residents of the Strait area; and

Whereas Jessica Farrell of Petit-de-Grat recently accepted the position of general manager with Strait Area Transit; and

Whereas prior to becoming general manager, Jessica Farrell held a position of administration dispatch with the Strait Area Transit;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Jessica Farrell on becoming the new general manager of Strait Area Transit and wish her great success in her new position.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Argyle.

RESOLUTION NO. 121

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the NDP's 2009 campaign brochure said, “. . . we'll recruit doctors to cover hard-to-fill shifts so emergency rooms can remain open”; and

Whereas despite making this promise, ERs in Middleton, Tatamagouche, Kentville, Glace Bay, New Waterford, North Sydney and Cape Breton Regional Hospital in Sydney are all looking for ER physicians with many of the ERs in these hospitals being forced to close due to physician shortages; and

Whereas in addition to the shortage of ER physicians, Bridgewater is presently looking for six family physicians, Caledonia is looking for four family doctors, while Chester, Mahone Bay and Lunenburg all have physician openings;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly urge the Premier and his Minister of Health and Wellness to explain why so many physician vacancies still exist nearly three years after they promised Nova Scotians they would recruit more doctors to shorten health care waits.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 122

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

Whereas mental health programs for children and youth in this province are being sacrificed by this NDP Government; and

Whereas supposed investments in reducing wait lists at the IWK is coming at the expense of front-line youth workers who are making a difference in the lives of children and youth in this province by providing valuable program support; and

Whereas providing faster access to assessments does nothing if there is insufficient programming at both the IWK and in the community to provide treatment post-assessment;

Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Health and Wellness acknowledge that funding assessments by slashing program support and inpatient beds at the IWK is ill-conceived and premature and does nothing to help those children and youth on a wait list, who need program support in order to get well.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Cape Breton West.

RESOLUTION NO. 123

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

Whereas Michelle Lahey from Albert Bridge was recently elected president of the Cape Breton University student union; and

Whereas Michelle is the daughter of Brian and Donna Lahey of Hills Road; and

Whereas Michelle won the student election with the biggest majority of victory in Cape Breton University student union history;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Michelle Lahey on this achievement and wish her all the best of luck in her future career.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

RESOLUTION NO. 124

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

Whereas Jessica McGrath is a Grade 12 student at Prince Andrew High School; and

Whereas Dalhousie University hosts an annual Brain Bee competition for students in Grades 9 to12; and

Whereas in this year's 6th annual Brain Bee competition, Ms. McGrath placed second at this prestigious event;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly congratulate Prince Andrew High School senior Jessica McGrath on her outstanding performance in the competition and wish her well in her future endeavours.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Inverness.

RESOLUTION NO. 125

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

Whereas Christie MacEachern gave birth to 16 children and was a mother to 19, devoting her life to the love of her family; and

Whereas Christie was known to enjoy the peace she found milking cows, because that was one of the few opportunities she had to sit down; and

Whereas this woman of strength lived for over 100 years;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly acknowledge Christie for her contribution to our province, and encourage her family to continue their annual June gathering to celebrate the blessing of her faith and her love.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton North.

RESOLUTION NO. 126

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

Whereas 41 school librarians in Chignecto Central Regional School Board have fallen victim to the NDP's misplaced priorities; and

Whereas the NDP Government has chosen to take aim in their attacks on the front lines of our education system, taking teachers and teachers' aides out of the classroom; and

Whereas Nova Scotia's teachers are being taken to the brink and are being forced to do more in the classroom, but with fewer resources;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly condemn the NDP Government's misguided cuts to the core of our education system, and urge the Premier and the Minister of Education to take corrective action immediately.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 127

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

Whereas the Harper Conservative Government recently announced significant changes to the Old Age Security program by raising the qualifying age from 65 to 67; and

Whereas raising the qualifying age will cause significant undue hardship on tens of thousands of Nova Scotians, especially senior women in our province; and

Whereas those federal Conservative changes target the most vulnerable in our province and will force all Nova Scotia taxpayers to close the gap through additional programs and income supports for low-income seniors;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly condemn the Harper Government for those changes, and the Premier and the Leader of the Third Party for failing to speak out on behalf of vulnerable Nova Scotians.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Hants West.

RESOLUTION NO. 128

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

Whereas 100 years ago today *RMS Titanic*, a ship that was thought to be unsinkable, left Southampton on its maiden voyage, across the Atlantic, to New York City; and

Whereas four days later, on April 14th, more than 1,500 passengers and crew were lost when *RMS Titanic* hit an iceberg and sank; and

Whereas the majority of victims recovered from the *Titanic* are buried in three Halifax cemeteries, and some of the most significant artifacts and records related to *RMS Titanic* can be found at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and in the Nova Scotia Archives;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly remember those lost on *RMS Titanic*, and thank the Nova Scotians who have respectfully preserved the memory of those lost in the tragedy.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

RESOLUTION NO. 129

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

Whereas the mission of the Girl Guides of Canada is to enable girls to be confident, resourceful and courageous, and to make a difference in the world; and

Whereas by 1917 the Canadian Girl Guide Association was considered to be of such value to the Canadian people that an Act of Parliament was passed approving the constitution; and

Whereas Guiding still remains true to its ideals of a dynamic organization, changing with the times to reflect the needs and interests of today's girls and women;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Brenda Harvey of Valley, Colchester North, for receiving her 25-year membership pin in Girl Guides of Canada.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

RESOLUTION NO. 130

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

Whereas yesterday Canadians marked the 95th Anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a formative moment in Canada's history and a battle where many say our young country came of age; and

Whereas when the Ridge was captured on that cold Easter Monday in 1917, the fight at Vimy Ridge cost 3,500 Canadian lives; and

Whereas yesterday marked the first major Vimy anniversary without a single living Canadian veteran of the First World War;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House remember the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought at Vimy Ridge and do all we can to keep the memory of the battle and its significance to Canada alive in the minds of future generations.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Preston.

RESOLUTION NO. 131

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

Whereas Colin Colson is a 16-year-old resident of Mineville who attends Cole Harbour High School; and

Whereas Colin has grown up helping out and serving his community on bottle drives, cleanups, community fairs, and rink maintenance; and

Whereas Colin has been surfing for the past five years all over Nova Scotia and this year has qualified for the Canadian Junior Surf Team and will be competing in Panama in April 2012 in the ISA World Junior Surf championships, and his brother Craig also qualified but did not meet the age requirement;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House recognize Colin Colson for his dedication to the sport of surfing and help me in congratulating him on being selected to compete in this world competition.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

RESOLUTION NO. 132

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

Whereas the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design launched 40 weeks of celebrations to recognize their 40th Anniversary in February 2012; and

Whereas since the inception of the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design, professional artisans and craft producers have embraced the opportunity to network to build an ever-growing economy by passing on their skills and knowledge to one another; and

Whereas dedicated staff and volunteers strive to make Cape Breton handcrafted work well-known and must-have products;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate executive director Carol Beaton and her staff and many volunteers on 40 years of accomplishments at the Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design and wish them every future success.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

RESOLUTION NO. 133

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

Whereas the 38th Annual Provincial Volunteer Awards Ceremony and Luncheon was held on April 2nd in Halifax; and

Whereas this ceremony honoured volunteers for the important contributions they have made to their communities and to the province; and

Whereas David Sollows from the Town of Yarmouth, who volunteers for organizations and committees such as the Yarmouth County Historical Society, the Yarmouth County Community Health Board, and Communities in Bloom, to name a few, was among the 70 volunteer representatives being honoured;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate David Sollows of Yarmouth on receiving this prestigious honour and thank him for dedicating so much of his time, effort, and energy into our community.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Argyle.

RESOLUTION NO. 134

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Simon d'Entremont, a Lower West Pubnico native, has been appointed as Deputy Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism; and

Whereas Mr. d'Entremont has more than 15 years' experience working for the federal government; and

Whereas Mr. d'Entremont replaces Sandra McKenzie, who was appointed Deputy Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, and began his position on January 23, 2012;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Simon d'Entremont on his new posting and wish him continued success.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Richmond.

RESOLUTION NO. 135

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

Whereas the Re-Entry to Employment program is a transition to employment program through the YMCA, which has a strong emphasis on life skills and an employment component by having each participant work one day per week in a field of their interest; and

Whereas the Re-Entry to Employment program enables these individuals to experience new opportunities while at the same time becoming better prepared for the workplace and gaining valuable life experiences; and

Whereas on March 19, 2012, I attended a ceremony held at the Shannon Studio in the Port Hawkesbury Civic Centre to celebrate Tanya Munroe, Keith O'Brien, Arnold Kyte, Corrina MacMillan, Shannan Bona, Kendra MacDonnell, Paul Grenier, Juanita MacPhee, Lee Canam, Santana LeBlanc, Jared MacNamara, and Jeffrey Lawrence's graduation from the Re-Entry to Employment program;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating each participant of the Re-Entry to Employment program through the YMCA for their hard work and dedication, and wish them success in their future endeavours.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton West.

RESOLUTION NO. 136

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

Whereas despite being eight months late, the Minister of Natural Resources finally released what was described as a non-technical definition of “clear-cutting” in August; and

Whereas Nova Scotians involved in this province’s billion dollar forest industry are still anxiously awaiting a “clear-cut” definition - not just a 26-word non-technical one; and

Whereas a Truro company announced in February that it was closing down because the current government failed to provide clear-cut regulations;

Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Natural Resources understand the importance of truly defining the term “clear-cut” and stop his government’s constant delaying before he forces other companies out of work.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 137

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

Whereas Emilya Snow, a Grade 5 student at École Rose-des-Vents in Greenwood, was the recipient of the 2011 Kayak Kids' Illustrated History Challenge French Award; and

Whereas Emilya travelled to Rideau Hall in Ottawa where the Right Honourable David Johnston presented her award at the Governor General's History Award ceremony held this past December; and

Whereas this award provides a natural opportunity to encourage promising young students like Emilya to pursue their passion and interest in Canadian history;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly recognize and congratulate Emilya Snow for winning the 2011 Kayak Kids' Illustrated History Challenge French Award and wish her every success in future endeavours.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Inverness.

RESOLUTION NO. 138

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

Whereas Darian Bernard, a We'koqma'q teenager, has taken a leadership role by bringing an anti-bullying campaign to the We'koqma'q First Nations School; and

Whereas Darian believes children need to know the serious effects of bullying, the different types of bullying, and that all are unacceptable; and

Whereas Darian drew inspiration for the campaign while working on the topic for a school documentary film;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly acknowledge Darian Bernard for standing up for what is right and for being a role model for her peers.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

RESOLUTION NO. 139

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

Whereas Alice Housing has provided safe, affordable housing and counselling for women and children escaping domestic abuse since 1983; and

Whereas on October 20, 2011, Alice Housing launched *Healing the Bruises: Through the Eyes of a Child*, a graphic novel written by Lori Morgan chronicling a child's journey from violence to safety; and

Whereas Ms. Morgan, a child and youth counsellor for Alice Housing, has been awarded the Minister's Award for Crime Prevention at the Nova Scotia Crime Symposium held on March 28, 2012;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House of Assembly recognize Lori Morgan on her dedication to this project and the families of Alice Housing, and congratulate her on this award.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton North.

RESOLUTION NO. 140

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

Whereas Lenten ecumenical lunches at St. John's Anglican Church in North Sydney provide fellowship for those who attend, and raise awareness and money for The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, which is the Canadian Anglican response for emergency relief, refugees, development, and justice; and

Whereas The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund was established by the Anglican Church following the Springhill mine explosion in 1958; and

Whereas before the lunches there are church services, singsongs, guest speakers and discussion groups;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the many volunteers who make weekly ecumenical lunches a reality during the Lenten period.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 141

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

Whereas Bedford residents Emma Travers, Isabel Sarty, and Julia Sarty as a competitive team took first place at an Acadia University robot programming competition for middle school students; and

Whereas the girl's team, called E-I-J Robotics, created a pre-programmed robot, made primarily of Lego parts, which was judged on design, research, core values and performance in an obstacle course; and

Whereas E-I-J Robotics' win at the Acadia competition entitles the team to go on to compete in the North American championship in California in May;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate Emma Travers, Isabel Sarty, and Julia Sarty on their first-place win and on their participation which has in itself motivated other girls to join the robotics competition.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

RESOLUTION NO. 142

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

Whereas the 38th Annual Provincial Volunteer Awards Ceremony and Luncheon was held on April 2nd in Halifax; and

Whereas this ceremony honours volunteers for the important contributions they have made to their communities and to the province; and

Whereas Aurel Mooney from the Municipality of Yarmouth, who dedicates her time to the Yarmouth County Historical Society, IODE, and athletics and arts in her community, was among the 70 volunteer representatives being honoured;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate Aurel Mooney of the Municipality of Yarmouth on receiving this prestigious honour and thank her for dedicating so much of her time, effort, and energy to our community.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: Question Period will begin at 2:44 p.m. and end at 3:44 p.m.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

EDUC.: CUTS - MIN. COMMENTS (2011)

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, on April 21, 2011, one year ago, when asked about funding cuts the Minister of Education stood in this House and said, “. . . I trust that the impact will not be felt by the students in the classroom.” A year has passed and boards have seen another round of this government’s short-sighted budget cuts. Students, parents and teachers are feeling the impact and it’s not positive. They are concerned, again, about the future impacts this will have on public education. The evidence can be found in every board across this province if the minister wanted to look.

My question to the minister is, how can the minister defend the statement she made in the House in April 2011, knowing that her government’s cuts are having a negative impact in the classroom?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, we are making sure that the funding is appropriate for the students in this province. The ratio is 12.9:1. We've increased funding per student. We are meeting the needs of our students in the Province of Nova Scotia.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, school boards are starting now to approve their budgets and to announce the negative effect that this government's cuts are having on education. In particular, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board has announced that it will lay off all librarians and library technicians in every school in that board.

Libraries are the hub of learning and the research in schools. They are essential in fostering independent learning in literacy and in preparation for post-secondary education. Boards are forced to eliminate library services in order to respond to this government's short-sighted budget reductions.

My question to the minister is, will the minister stand on her feet in this House today and tell the students in Chignecto-Central Regional School Board that she will restore funding to the board to ensure that their libraries are protected?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, it was extremely disappointing to hear what Chignecto-Central has decided to do. As I understand, there have been no final decisions. The Hogg formula very clearly does allocate appropriate funding to their board for library services. This government stands behind supporting our libraries, and we do that through our formula.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, "disappointment" is putting it mildly when you talk to parents and teachers and students in Chignecto-Central and other boards around the province. The students at Cobequid Educational Centre - one of the largest high schools in the province - are concerned about the library in their school. They know the value of their library, their librarians, and the opportunities that library provides. They know that these decisions were forced on the board by the NDP Government. Those students get it.

Once again, they're questioning the minister's decision. She failed to stand up for students during last year's budget decisions; she's failed again to stand up for students during this year's budget decisions. Those students are planning to walk out tomorrow in protest of losing this valuable resource.

My question to the minister is - she has time, if she's interested in supporting students, to stand up now for the students of Cobequid Educational Centre and other high schools in Chignecto-Central and give the money they need to keep their library open.

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat that we are making sure we're funding school boards appropriately, and through the Hogg formula there is a line there for support of the libraries. They have \$3.8 million in their budget line in Chignecto for their libraries. This is a decision that the school board is making, and I would like to have an

explanation from the school board on how they are going to ensure the students of Chignecto have library services next year.

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

PREM. - CHIGNECTO-CENT. REG. SCH. BD.: LIBRARIANS - CUTS

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, just before the holiday weekend, 41 librarians of the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board found out they would be out of a job - every single one of them. My question is for the Premier.

This is proof that the cuts imposed by the Premier's government are being felt at the front-line level of service, a service valued by all Nova Scotians and certainly by those students and parents in the Chignecto-Central region. It is a sacrifice that is sadly not felt by the Premier's own Minister of Finance, who finished last year with a forecast 216 employees in his own department, but who in his budget is going to fund 257 full-time employees in the coming year, an increase of - guess what? - the same number of 41.

My question to the Premier is, why are 41 newly funded positions in Finance more important than 41 librarians at Chignecto-Central Regional School Board?

THE PREMIER: Well let me be really clear - any board that says it is going to cut the entire library service from their budget cannot be taken seriously. (Applause) It's an abrogation of their responsibility to the children in their charge. As I said, I want to be very, very clear that this is nothing but a political game being played by the school board. They are funded for those positions and if they don't use the money for that funding, then maybe they just don't want the funding.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, any Premier who stands by and watches 41 librarians fired while 41 more bureaucrats are going to be added in Finance does not deserve to be taken seriously either. And it doesn't stop at Finance. The Department of Education finished the most recent year with 177 full-time people in the forecast for the year just ended, but has a budget for 194 in the upcoming year - an increase of 17.

So I'll ask the Premier this again, if he wants to be taken seriously. Why are 17 more bureaucrats at the Department of Education okay while firing 41 librarians at Chignecto-Central School Board has to happen? Which is his real priority - more in Halifax and less in Chignecto, or the other way around?

THE PREMIER: Well unfortunately the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party wrote that question before he heard my first answer. The simple fact of the matter is that the school boards knows that to the families and children that they are supposed to serve, those cuts would be unacceptable. They are unacceptable to them, they are

unacceptable to the community, and they are unacceptable to us, Mr. Speaker, be assured. (Applause)

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, what is unacceptable to the people of Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, the parents, the students, and in fact all Nova Scotians, is that they have a government that is adding 553 new full-time equivalent positions at the centre of government while watching 41 librarians - and multiply that across the province - being cut at the school board level. If he truly wants his own answers to be taken seriously, will he explain to all those parents and all those students why those cuts have to happen while he adds more bureaucrats at the department level like Finance, like Education, in Halifax?

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, not only has the Chignecto-Central School Board been playing games, but obviously he wants to participate in this as well. He knows that there are hundreds fewer employees on the rolls of the provincial government now than there were - he knows that. In fact, we have all shared in the restraint that is necessary in order to get the province back to balance and to deal with the hundreds of millions of dollars - no, billions of dollars - of deficit left behind by the Progressive Conservative Government.

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

PREM. - EDUC.: CUTS - RECONCILE

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, this NDP Government has attacked our public education system by slashing more than \$60 million from the budget. In 2003 the Premier said: "This is the NDP's key commitment- to ensure that every student receives the individual attention they need in the classroom."

We now have fewer teachers, fewer teacher assistants, larger class size, Mr. Speaker, and this government has made it impossible to ensure that every student receives the attention he or she may need. My question to the Premier is, how can you reconcile these statements in the past with your current actions that are costing students essential services and additional support?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Leader of the Official Opposition says, the per capita funding for students is going to be at its highest level in our history and the student-teacher ratio is going to be at its lowest.

MR. MCNEIL: And the bureaucracy in the Department of Education is going to be at an all-time high as well, Mr. Speaker.

Members of the Premier's Party have also extensively warned about education cuts. On May 9, 2000, the now Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal

tabled a petition that he personally signed on behalf of the residents of Yarmouth. The petition declared: “We, the undersigned, protest a reduction in the Public Education Budget recently announced by the Minister of Finance. These cuts will have a devastating impact on the students of our province.”

This government has made more than \$60 million in cuts in public education over the last two years. My question to the Premier is, how can the NDP Government defend more than \$60 million in education cuts today when they were so opposed to them in 2000?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, and I’ve pointed out numerous times, there are 300 more teachers in the system today than there was 10 years ago - when there were 10,000 more students. We have the highest individual per-student rate of funding in our history; we have the lowest student-teacher ratio in decades.

MR. MCNEIL: This government argues that they’re merely basing education funding on enrolment in the number of students. On March 6, 2002, the now Deputy Premier wrote an op-ed in response to Jane Purves’ comments that dollars must follow the students. He wrote that in a time of economic transition our survival will depend on vision, knowledge and skill; it will require an education system that will equip the next generation with these tools, not a crude, per-capita-based funding formula that will lead us to educational discrimination.” So my question to the Premier: Why is his government pursuing a funding approach that the Deputy Premier called “crude and discriminatory”?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I just want to apologize to the Leader of the Official Opposition because I made a mistake in my answer to the last question - I said we had 10,000 less students than we had a decade ago, we have 30,000 less students than we had a decade ago, 300 more teachers, highest per-capita funding in our history, and among the lowest student-teacher ratio in decades.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on a new question.

PREM. - EDUC. SYSTEM: CREATION - EXPLAIN

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, it’s clear that public education is not a priority for this government - we have fewer teachers, fewer teacher assistants, and growing class sizes. During a March 26, 2008, presentation of the Halifax Regional School Board, the now-Health and Wellness Minister said, “When I imagine the schools in the community I [sic] so lucky to live in . . . I don’t imagine fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and bigger case loads or longer wait times for specialized staff.”

We now have fewer teachers, larger class sizes, bigger caseloads and longer wait times for specialized staff. My question to the Premier is, if the NDP couldn’t imagine such an education system in 2008, why is this government creating this kind of system today?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we're not. In fact, we're making investments in education that are going to improve the opportunities for our students. That is why we have a new skill trades centre going into Cole Harbour, it's why we've put money into ensuring that exactly the services that the Minister of Health and Wellness talked about are available for students, it is why we are ensuring that the per-capital funding for students continues to rise, and it is why we are continuing to ensure that the number of students per teacher continues to go down.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, to the point - why did he raise the cap size? Not only is the diversity of the classroom much different than it was in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, when all of these statements were made, he's adding new programs at the same time he is cutting funding. The Premier is quick to not accept responsibility for his actions, but blames school boards.

I want to quote the member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage in 2005, "They" - the school board - "are not holding us hostage, the province is." So my question to the Premier: In 2005 the NDP said the school boards should not take the blame for impacts on the province's education cuts - what has changed?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, last year we saw the Central Chignecto School Board come forward with all kinds of dire predictions about what was going to happen and how many school teachers were going to be lost and, do you know what? It didn't happen. Of course, it didn't happen and it didn't happen because this is simply a game being played by that school board - and I say by that school board. We're going to make sure that the kids who rely on the services - whether they are of librarians or other services, or adult learners who need adult education in that board - are going to get the services they need.

MR. MACNEIL: Mr. Speaker, are those communities that are opposing school closures playing a game - the decisions made by this government? Are parents across this province who are suffering the devastating educational cuts playing a game? Let's be clear. There's only one government. There's only one place where a cheque is written in this province for public education and it's squarely at the feet of the Premier of this province. It is the Premier of this province who is taking \$60 million out of public education and asking school boards to deliver more with less. That's the game we're playing in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, in 2001 in The ChronicleHerald op-ed about government cuts the now Finance Minister said, "Are they going to cut services to the sick, the young, and the poor?" This government, as I've said many times, has cut \$60 million out of public education in the last year. So my question to the Premier is, it's the same question posed by the Finance Minister in 2001, why, especially in these anxious times, is your government so keen to cut, cut, cut?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I've pointed out, the amount of money that's going into education is increasing and not decreasing. Every student in the public

education system will be funded at a higher rate this year than they have in past years. We are providing the services ensuring that the boards that are supposed to be our partners in the delivery of the services get the funding that they need in order to provide the services that people need.

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

COM. SERV. - DAYCARE: ALLEGED ABUSER - DEPT. PROTOCOL

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Community Services. Under questioning last week about the protection of kids at the daycare from an alleged abuser, the minister continuously referred to some protocol that she followed for this situation.

Well, we've been asking for that protocol ever since, Mr. Speaker, and I can just share with you that we were provided with an awful lot of material just a few minutes before Question Period today but nowhere in that material is anything resembling a protocol for the situation that the minister was asked about last week. So my question to the minister is this, is there a real protocol that covers the situation that we asked about or just an imaginary one?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, as I stated last week, this is a very serious and sensitive issue and in the Department of Community Services and within this government we take the safety of our children very seriously. The fact is that we have said over and over that we took immediate action. There is a protocol. We gave the member opposite that information and it shows what that protocol is.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the government knew about this situation, where there's an alleged abuser employed by a daycare, months and months and months ago. What is unique about this situation is the government knew because it is an active participant in litigation where the alleged abuser is named in the litigation and the government knew that this alleged abuser is employed at a daycare. There is no protocol that says that the minister could not do the right thing and pick up the phone when she became aware and inform the daycare of the risk that they were running.

So my question is, where is it in this so-called protocol that it says you can't do the right thing and call the daycare?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, as I have said before in this House, we took immediate action. We were informed and received information on November 15, 2010. The very same day we took action to contact the authorities. We contacted the Halifax Regional Police and the RCMP/HRP Integrated Major Crimes Unit. We also did an internal investigation and we checked the Child Abuse Registry. We took every immediate action that that protocol states. Thank you.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, it appears the minister did everything but pick up the phone and call the daycare itself, where the risk was being run. The RCMP will conduct a criminal investigation and the Department of Community Services has their own investigative powers, but common sense tells us that someone would pick up the telephone and call the daycare and let them know the risk they were running.

The fact of the matter is there is no protocol that says you can't do that, but it appears the minister did everything but call that daycare. My question is, will she just admit, yes or no, did she call the daycare to tell them the risk they were running? Yes or no?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the member opposite and his Party should reflect on the fact that this is a serious, sensitive, and emotional situation that affects people's lives. They should not be taking this information and these facts and trying to create misperceptions in the public that the daycare did not know.

I would like to table, Mr. Speaker, three articles that clearly state that the daycare was informed of these alleged allegations over 10 years ago. That Party knows that and that Party is sickening to try to turn this into political gains.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

EDUC.: SCH. BD. FUNDING - CUTS

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, in 2002 the Deputy Premier was very concerned about education funding by the previous Tory Government and the impact it would have on students in Cape Breton. In a March 6, 2002 op-ed to the Cape Breton Post, the Deputy Premier wrote, "If there is any will at all to build a new economy for Cape Breton, it must include a commitment to education."

Mr. Speaker, since this government took office, the Cape Breton Regional School Board has seen several schools close, including Holy Angels High, Ashby Elementary, and Cornwallis Elementary. Will the Minister of Education tell members of this House how the Deputy Premier upheld his "commitment to education" while your government made the decision to slash public education funding and force the Cape Breton Regional School Board to close these schools?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: I would like to say that I stand behind my Deputy Premier and with this government, that we are making sure our funds match the needs of our students in the province today.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, in the same Cape Breton Post op-ed from 2002, the Deputy Premier noted his concerns with the funding formula that was used, "In a time of economic transition, our survival will depend on vision, knowledge and skill. It will

require an educational system that will equip the next generation with these tools, not a crude per capita-based funding formula that will lead us to educational discrimination.”

In 2002 the Deputy Premier called the Hamm Government’s per-student funding formula - the very same formula they are using today - crude and discriminatory. My question to the Minister of Education is, did the Deputy Premier ever inform the Minister of Education that the way your government funds school boards is crude and discriminatory?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, there are two aspects to his question. First, I would just like to clarify that this government changed the funding formula, along with - there were 24 meetings that we had with the school boards in this province, to make sure that the funding we are providing to the school boards is allocated appropriately. So the funding formula has been changed and we’re making sure that we’re strategically investing in the needs of our students in this province. I would also like to say that we are making sure that the students in this province that are interested in skilled trades are getting it. We’re doubling our capacity.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, this is but one more example of what the NDP said in Opposition is completely opposite of what they say while they’re in government. Due to the funding cuts made by the NDP Government, both the Cape Breton Regional School Board and the Strait Regional School Board have been forced to announce school closures which have caused great distress amongst teachers and the communities. The Strait Regional School Board itself has voted to close three schools because of the funding changes made by this government.

My question to the Premier is, would he advise us as to whether he believes that the Strait Regional School Board was simply playing games when they voted to close three schools in our board?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, all the boards are given money in order to be able to provide the services that they dictate are needed by their students. So when they make decisions on schools that are outdated or have very low enrolments, that’s the decision that is made by the school board quite appropriately.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

JUSTICE - CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES: INMATES - SAFETY

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the evidence speaks for itself. When it comes to justice in this province, the NDP are putting lives at risk. Even the Minister of Justice admitted in a September 2010 news release that the escalating inmate violence at the Burnside facility is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. The minister talks a big game but does not follow through. Just days ago, a 21-year-old Burnside jail inmate was

sent to the hospital with serious head injuries following an alleged assault with a weapon. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident.

Violent offences in correctional facilities appear to be happening on a regular basis under this minister's watch. My question for the Minister of Justice is, when will the minister admit that he has failed to keep staff and inmates safe in our province's correctional facilities and take real action so no more Nova Scotian lives will be put at risk?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that question. I want to assure everyone in Nova Scotia that I take violence in any form - whether it's in an institution or in our community as a whole and our record stands very sound of taking positive steps to change behaviour.

I will outline to the member though that the clients that are housed in those institutions are there because they have failed to follow the rules and regulations within society and the level of violence amongst that segment of our society is higher than the general population of society. So will incidents happen in there? Certainly, but the professionalism of our staff there is second to none. They maintain a highly qualified institution. Incidents will occur, we're saddened that this incident has occurred and there will be incidents in the future. We're taking all the steps to ensure the safety of each and every person.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, when in Opposition the NDP seemed to have all the answers when it comes to the management of our correctional facilities. In fact, back in 2008 Premier Dexter told reporters that problems at the Burnside facility could be boiled down to just simply a staffing shortage.

Interestingly enough, at the same time, guards were pushing to secure a new labour agreement. In the Fall of 2010 the minister announced 30 more part-time staff would be hired at the Burnside facility but as we've seen, the violence has continued. The minister followed the Premier's advice and hired more staff but that failed to stem the violence. Which is it - was the Premier wrong or is the minister going to give us another excuse for his government's mismanagement at Burnside?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, it's no secret that I spent a lifetime on the front lines of policing and dealing with the criminal element in this province. I want to assure you that violence occurs on a daily basis and I respect and follow and admire the officers that are out there to do that job, as well as the correctional officer who has a very trying job to do. I find them very professional; they do the utmost to ensure the integrity of the facility to maintain safety.

I want to point out to the member that this government is sensitive to those issues, take them seriously and we have the proper resources in place. We're in the process of building a new facility and changing some of the steps that were taken. I do recognize

though that coming from the Third Party, where there was virtually limited policy, limited direction and accountability, this government is accountable and has taken action.

MR. MACMASTER: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the evidence speaks for itself. This minister has failed to keep Nova Scotians in our correctional facilities safe. (Interruption) And I don't find anything funny about this; in fact, people who are incarcerated, while they may have committed wrong, they are entitled to reform themselves. They should be able to do that in a safe way without feeling risk for their life.

This minister has failed to keep Nova Scotians in our correctional facility safe. In another unfortunate example in May, a Burnside inmate was thrown down a flight of stairs during a fight with another prisoner and he ended up on life-support. Mr. Speaker, this inmate, regardless of his crimes, has family and friends who love him. My question to the minister is, what does the minister have to say to the friends and families of inmates who have been seriously injured or lost their lives under his watch?

MR. LANDRY: I don't think the evidence shows that the institution - I think the evidence shows that there have been progressive steps made to improve the quality of service in there, the accountability and what goes on there. What the member is failing to understand is the culture within those institutions or the life of certain segments of society. Yes, it's sad when anyone gets injured in our facilities and I am compassionate to the families and the people who are affected by that; however, we are dealing with a very difficult segment of our society. They are in there for a reason. They are in there to be protected and the public needs to be protected.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

EDUC.: ORANGE LUNCH BAGS - FUNDING

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education recently handed out orange lunch bags to Primary students in four school boards: Annapolis Valley, Cape Breton-Victoria, Strait Regional, and South Shore Regional. These bags cost over \$35 each for a grand total of \$124,030.51. Parents of students with special needs are worried about their children losing education assistants due to NDP funding cuts, all the while the Minister of Education is handing out orange lunch bags. Will the Minister of Education tell the members of this House today how many education assistants a board could hire for around \$124,000?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Thank you very much for the question. The lunch bags - which is actually almost a derogatory term for what we have provided for our students - what we have provided is a bag full of things for our families of our youngest students coming to school. So when a child is coming to school in Primary, they are going to receive a bag filled with tapes and books and information for parents, crayons and scissors and construction paper, and I could go on. What we are finding is that children are

coming to school not having the experience of sometimes that back-and-forth language development that they're having in their communities and with parents because, unfortunately, many of our children are spending too much screen time.

This was part of the Succeeding in Reading, that budget line was with the Succeeding in Reading budget line that we provided and it took awhile for us to compile that. We did it within the department and they are in a bag that goes home to the student, which they can reuse for whatever they choose to reuse it for.

MR. SAMSON: It's quite ironic, Mr. Speaker, that we now have a government that is trying to tell parents how to raise their children and how to properly educate their children before they get to school. Even better than that is what the Minister of Education failed to say - that the little trinkets she included in her orange bag were made in China - just what Nova Scotia parents need is things made in China to give their children to play with before they go to school. Parents are looking for answers as to why this government feels that extra supports for students are being cut by this government. So my question to the minister as an educator herself is, will she tell members of this House how getting lunch bags full of trinkets will offset the damage done by increasing class sizes for Nova Scotia's youngest students?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, it's very important that we are making sure that our children are successful. We need to make sure that children coming into school get the supports they need, so they can be successful as they move through our system.

We recognized that our literacy levels needed to have some improvement and the department worked very carefully with all of the school boards in this province to see where we could make sure children can be successful. So this is part of Succeeding in Reading, to put the literacy in the hands of our youngest children when they come to school. Thank you.

MR. SAMSON: Maybe the minister will be kind enough to table in this House correspondence from the school boards that actually ask for the orange lunch bag to be sent to children coming into their boards. Mr. Speaker, school boards are laughing at the orange lunch bags, in case the minister is not aware.

Thanks to this government, boards are being forced to close schools to reach budget targets. Communities feel the review process is biased to close schools because boards simply cannot afford to keep them open. Two schools in the Strait Regional School Board are under judicial review; parents and communities are worried about losing schools and having young children spending additional time on school buses.

Mr. Speaker, the minister slashed education funding, boards are being forced to close schools, teachers are being laid off, class sizes are growing, school supports are being lost and the minister is handing out orange lunch bags. My question is, will the Minister of

Education stand up to the Premier and Minister of Finance and demand that cuts to public education stop?

MS. JENNEX: Our student funding is increasing. We have the lowest class sizes in the history of this province. We are strategically investing in Kids and Learning First plan to make sure that we are providing the services that our children need to be successful. We are making sure that we have skills trades available in our schools, that we have the ability for students to get a credit outside of the school system, in an area that they are interested in.

Kids and Learning First is a plan for every child in this province to succeed. Thank you.

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

LBR. & ADV. EDUC.: LBR. BD. - UNION CERTIFICATION APPLICATIONS

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. Last week in allNovaScotia.com, we learned that the Labour Department has seven union certification applications. It's only a matter of time.

Propeller Brewing Company is just one of those seven that is facing unionization, most likely as a result of this government's risky new labour law. Propeller is one of those local Nova Scotia success stories. For the last six or seven years Propeller has been growing by between 15 and 20 per cent a year but, because of the NDP, Propeller could have a third party force unpredictable labour costs upon it and harm its ability to grow and compete successfully with a Nova Scotia product.

Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the minister is, will the minister admit that the government should be helping business propel themselves forward, instead of giving them the shaft?

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the members of this Chamber that the right to unionize and to begin collective bargaining is guaranteed under federal legislation. Certainly we recognize that having a stable labour relations climate in this province is very critical to building productivity and also building the prosperity of our province.

There have been seven applications to the Labour Board for certification. Some of those began before the first contract legislation was implemented, which I think was January 21st. None of those, to date, have been granted. As I said, they are still in process. It's my understanding that there have been no applications to the Labour Board or to the department for any of the first contract privileges or benefits. So no one has asked for that yet. It has not been actioned, and certainly when information is available on that, we'll be

able to provide it to the House, but there has been no flurry of applications. This is the ordinary number of applications to the Labour Board for certification as part of normal business in this province.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Speaker, the right to unionize has been there for 100 years. All this government has done with its first contract arbitration is make it a lot easier; that's all. Small business owners in Nova Scotia are barely able to keep their heads afloat. They make incredible sacrifices and bear extreme financial risk just to live out their passion and employ a few deserving people.

Propeller's owner, when asked by allNovaScotia.com about whether or not he's a wealthy man, said, "I drive a 2001 Suzuki Esteem. We call it the low self-esteem." I bet you the Premier's right-hand labour friend, Rick Clarke, has pretty high self-esteem these days.

Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the minister is, who does she side with - an employer trying to provide meaningful jobs to local families or her government's special-interest labour friends?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that this government respects the laws of the country and respects due process, and that's what we're enforcing.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing Propeller is not bidding for contracts in shipbuilding. They would be facing uncertain costs at the worst possible time, because it would have an expensive contract forced on them by NDP job-killing legislation. So that we don't run the risk of blowing the opportunity from the shipbuilding contract, the NDP should be helping Nova Scotia businesses compete against other places.

So my final supplementary to the minister is, Mr. Speaker, when will she commit to rip up her job-killing legislation and give Nova Scotia businesses a fighting chance to compete?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, as I have said on the floor of this Chamber many, many times, first contract legislation is actually to provide more stability, especially when an employer is faced for the first time with a unionized workplace. It gives every possible support to both the union and to the employer to negotiate according to our collective bargaining process here in the province. If it runs into any difficulties, then we have additional supports that we can bring into place. This is helping business in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

EDUC.: HOGG FORMULA - FUNDING CHANGES

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, the government's 2012-13 budget target parameters stated that the review of the school board funding formula known as the Hogg formula had been approved and would be implemented with this budget. So my question to the Minister of Education is this, do the changes in the funding formula take into account declining enrolment?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: I'm going to be up for estimates, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure that a number of those questions can be asked of me at that time, but the Hogg formula is a tool to allocate the money.

MS. CASEY: Well, I would take that as the minister doesn't know, but perhaps by the time of estimates somebody will tell her.

So, Mr. Speaker, prior to changes in the formula, as the minister should know, declining enrolments were addressed and funding responded to enrolment figures from each board. So my question to the minister is, how are those declining enrolments now accommodated in the new formula?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, we have had 24 meetings with school boards. All the school boards in the province were consulted. The funding formula is a tool that is used to make sure that the funds are allocated appropriately to our school boards.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, well I guess it would be three strikes you're out. No answer to the first one, no answer to the second one so we'll try the third one. This is obviously not working and the minister is forcing boards to further cut teaching positions because the formula apparently does not address declining enrolment. With the implementation of the formula, for example, Chignecto-Central is supposed to be reduced by 18 FTEs. In order to balance the books they had to be reduced by 51.6 teaching FTEs. The South Shore board - funding formula would translate into a loss of five teachers, but again, in order to balance the books, they have had to add another 15 reductions for a total of 20. My question to the minister is why has the minister accepted and started to use a funding formula model that obviously does not adequately address declining enrolments?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I guess I will try to answer this by saying that the budget actually is based on our enrolment, the students, in the Province of Nova Scotia. We know that we are in a declining enrolment for next year, 1.7, and we made sure that our target is 1.3 to accommodate the fixed costs the school board has. The budget target is actually the part of addressing the declining enrolment. The tool to allocate the money is the formula.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

LBR. & ADV. EDUC. - NSCAD: WINDSOR REPT. - MIN. RESPONSE

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, NSCAD is a world-renowned institution and the only fine art institution we have here in the province, however, its future is in question. As a result of the Windsor Report that has come out NSCAD has been asked to put forward a business plan to this province, yet we haven't heard a response from this government as a result of that business plan. My question to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education is, when can the folks at NSCAD expect a response and what is this government's intention when it comes to the future of NSCAD in the Province of Nova Scotia?

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I received the report the end of March. My officials are analyzing the information in it and I expect to be able to respond to NSCAD within a matter of weeks.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the answer to the question, however, there was another report that was done earlier, entitled the Hogg formula. This report was actually buried by the government and its information wasn't released until someone made a freedom of information request. In this report they highlighted the fact that it's actually the funding formula to our post-secondary institutions that put NSCAD at a financial disadvantage. My question to the minister is, why was that report buried by this government and not acted upon?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Hogg was invited to analyze the financial situation of NSCAD and he reported back in 2010. It was sort of a snapshot in time of their financial situation. The Hogg report was one of a number of reports that government used to realize the severity of the financial challenges facing that institution. Because of our commitment to fine art programming in this province, we took all the information from the reports very seriously and we wanted to work with NSCAD to make sure that it was sustainable into the future.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the first report wasn't taken seriously, the report that highlighted the fact the way NSCAD is funded through the province puts it at a financial disadvantage. However, the next report, which put all the blame on NSCAD's administration, was acted upon. My question to the minister is, is there an agenda here to close NSCAD University and an agenda against our arts community?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, to the contrary, this government has invested \$6 million extra to NSCAD for funding over the last three years because we value the excellence of programming in that institution and we are giving them time to work out a sustainability plan so that they continue well into the future.

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

NAT. RES.: STRATEGY - REDUCTION EXPLAIN

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, after an eight-month delay, this government released their watered down, inadequate Natural Resources Strategy. A FOIPOP obtained by a media outlet showed that the minister acted like a dentist and he removed the teeth from this strategy. He deleted the chapter that required external reviews of the program, he deleted the section clarifying which departments are responsible for which resources and he deleted the section requiring management plans for woodlots used in energy production. My question for the minister is, if the minister was serious about producing a strategy to transform the way Nova Scotia's natural resources are managed, why did he reduce it to just a puff piece?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite clear what the honourable member is asking. It's right, we released our Natural Resources Strategy on August 16th of last summer and we've been working very hard within the department to meet the number of goals. One of them in the forestry sector is to reduce our clear-cutting to 50 per cent within five years; we're well on our way to that target. We are working with industry and non-governmental organizations and woodlot owners and Nova Scotians in general. We are working hard on our biomass practice within the code of forest practice, we're working on mineral resources and parks review and biodiversity - a number of good initiatives that are all underway at this point in time.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, by removing these sections, actually the minister did a clear-cutting of his own strategy. This minister has produced an all-sizzle and no steak document that does little to provide answers to Nova Scotians. He is failing in his obligation to provide real leadership to a sector that is vital to our province's future. My question to the minister is, will the minister admit that his do-nothing strategy and that his natural resources plan for 2012 is to say precious little about what this province needs to do?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, I wonder who writes these questions for the honourable member. We've been working on a number of positive initiatives in forestry, in biodiversity, in parks and in geological resources. For example, in forestry, we've had a number of good initiatives on the ground in eastern Nova Scotia as the member may be aware, in Guysborough, Pictou and Antigonish Counties, as well as in Cape Breton, working directly with the forest contractors, working directly with the harvesters to find new ways of doing forestry in this province, based around getting away from clear-cutting and looking a lot more at category seven types of initiatives, more silviculture, more long-term investment in the future of our forestry. As I mentioned, there are a lot of good initiatives and I'd be willing to sit down with the member and detail all of those, if the member has time.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians have been waiting for more than 15 months for a technical definition of clear-cutting. The NDP clearly has something to hide

with this strategy; they took all the teeth out of it and businesses are suffering as a result. Hodgson's Chipping Ltd. of Truro has been supplying wood chips to Northern Pulp. In February, it announced it was closing down because this government failed to provide clear-cut regulations. My question to the minister is, how many other companies do the minister and his government plan to force out of business, before coming up with a real answer?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, under previous governments, all we got was clear-cut, clear-cut, clear-cut; 96 per cent of our woodland was being clear-cut. That's unacceptable and Nova Scotians have told us so; it's not right. We have a plan, we have an initiative - it is called our Natural Resources Strategy 2011-2020. It is a way to get away from clear-cutting and go on to a more sustainable forestry in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**HEALTH & WELLNESS - MENTAL HEALTH/ADDICTION PROGS.:
CHANGES - EXPLAIN**

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, last week Nova Scotians learned of changes to the ACT program at the IWK Hospital - changes structured to reduce wait times for those needing evaluation - by reducing treatment programs for children and adolescents. It seems like these aren't the only changes, Capital Health is discontinuing its Compass Program for adults on July 1, 2012. So come this date, there will be no in-patient structured treatment for adults with addictions within the Capital District.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is, why are Nova Scotians seeing such drastic changes to mental health and addiction programs when we have yet to see a province-wide mental health and addiction strategy?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, mental health services are extremely important services to people in our province. For too long too many people have suffered because they have not been able to get access to the services because services were focused more on in-patient than day programs.

We are changing the model of service delivery to ensure that more people will be seen earlier - children, adolescents and adults - so they get the treatment they need at an earlier opportunity. The results tend to be much better, it's a better use of our health care dollars, and we will see a much stronger mental health system as a result of these changes.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, like last week, we see changes happening in programs in order to put additional resources in other areas, without any evidence showing that the programs being sacrificed do not play a valuable role in the continuum of supports in the first place. Instead of providing additional resources on the community end for treatment, we find the financial resources for investment by dismantling other services.

Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well this is wrong. How does the minister intend to deal with increased wait lists for adults deemed by other health care professionals as requiring more structured treatment for addictions, when all of our provincial capacity is disappearing, down to one program in Middleton?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I know that the honourable member and I will have an opportunity to get into the details of new expenditures in the budget. There is an additional approximately \$4 million of new investment in our budget for mental health and addiction services.

The mental health and addictions strategy is expected later this Spring. We will see targeted intervention to improve a variety of mental health and addiction services across our province as a result of this work.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, when the Compass Program in Capital District closes, it will leave one residential structure treatment program in the province, as I said earlier, the 21-day program in Middleton.

With the closure of Talbot House, which offered residential treatment of even longer duration than Compass, we are rapidly losing capacity . . .

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

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party on an introduction.

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, just very briefly, I would like to welcome to the House of Assembly today Mr. Todd Graham, who is the operator of McKenzie College and a prominent member of the Sydney business community. I encourage you, sir, and all members to welcome Mr. Graham to the House of Assembly and our proceedings today. (Applause)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

Res. No.1, Estimates: CWH on Supply - Referred - notice given March 30/12 (Hon. G. Steele)

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

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday I had an opportunity to begin my comments on the budget and I'd like to continue again today to just recap where we were in terms of this budget and how it's going to affect Nova Scotians. Principally, we said this is a very disappointing budget. I'd like to begin with the fact that the minister himself called this a steady budget. He said if there is one word that can define it, it's steady.

So the NDP feel it's "steady as she goes" but I can tell you that the people of Nova Scotia don't feel that things are very steady in their financial lives. The people are feeling the effects of the higher HST which has been on them for well over a year now. It's pushing up the price of virtually everything that we buy and our power rates have gone through the roof. They've risen precipitously, it's hurting business and it's hurting our individuals.

The cost on individuals have gone up just this year alone under the URB by 9.1 per cent but that doesn't begin to count the increase that goes along with having demand-side management, which has been a way that the government has spun off other costs that used to be Conserve Nova Scotia and put them onto the ratepayers of Nova Scotia by adding this new fee that only ratepayers will pay. That's hurting everybody. That's a \$40 million cost to Nova Scotians which has been taken out of the budget of the Energy Department and put onto the backs of ratepayers in Nova Scotia.

That's the way the government is curbing their costs, that's the way the government is downsizing or showing restraint but, in fact, it's still on the backs of Nova Scotians. It's still a cost that Nova Scotians have to bear.

This is the kind of smoke and mirrors that we're seeing in this budget, honestly a pretend budget that says there are all kinds of restraint when in fact what we see is a lack of accountability, really. Essentially a lack of accountability, a way to just change people into another department; take the long-term care administrators and put them into the DHAs, all of a sudden the Department of Health and Wellness has cut staff, apparently. Same thing goes with the Conserve Nova Scotia people and others. There are a lot of examples like that. Soon we're going to see the Department of Agriculture unload a whole bunch of people from the Agricultural College and it doesn't mean there has been any restraint, it means that they've just spun them off into another entity and I think that that's something that people have to realize as we go through this, that life is a lot harder for Nova Scotians under this government.

We talked about gasoline prices going up and they've risen something like 38 cents since 2009 when the government came into its current mandate. That's a huge increase, Mr. Speaker, it's the largest that it has ever been.

I'm glad to see the members on the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker, are listening, I think that's important because I think they have to ask themselves how they're going to answer to their own constituents; their own constituents are having these problems. Well, I frankly can tell you my own power bill has gone up tremendously and I know if I've seen it so have my constituents, so have other people. I'm sure all of you have seen it too and it does hurt people in the pocketbook.

It's interesting to note when you look at just our economic facts here in this province that our consumer price increase last year was the highest in Canada at 3.8 per cent. It was largely driven by heating fuel which went up 25 per cent and because so many Nova Scotians heat their homes with heating fuel - in fact 60 per cent of Nova Scotians - that's the reason why we had a much higher increase than other provinces. The heating fuel went up in their provinces too but they only have a small number of people that heat their homes that way. So that reliance on heating our homes with that kind of heating fuel has pushed our consumer price index to the highest in Canada.

So what has happened with our earnings at the same time, Mr. Speaker? Well, we have the second-lowest weekly earnings in the country next to P.E.I. Our weekly earnings are \$765 a week, whereas Canada's average is \$873 a week, more than a \$100 more on average per person, per worker. Combined with the highest cost of living increases we're seeing some real problems on the ground with individuals in this province and nobody can deny that, these figures come from Stats Canada. They come from organizations like the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council and so on.

APEC, the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council said there was virtually no job growth in Nova Scotia in 2011. Halifax saw a growth in jobs but that was more than made up by a loss of jobs in rural Nova Scotia and in Cape Breton. Those are very sad things. We have a predominance of members representing rural Nova Scotia and Cape Breton here in this entire House, we do. There's many members representing those ridings and I think it should be of grave concern that that's happening at a time when all of this is going up.

Our power rates have been rising far faster than other places and I realize it's because there is a dependence on coal and oil, but from 2002 to 2010 we've seen a 36 per cent increase and at the very same time, over a billion dollars - between 2002 and 2010, more than a billion dollars was transferred to Emera, Nova Scotia Power's parent company. That's a huge amount of money going out to another entity that is buying up power companies in the States, in the Caribbean, and who knows where, that's coming from the ratepayers of Nova Scotia, and I think that's very important in the context of this budget. We'd like to know what measures the government will plan, to do something about

the affordability for Nova Scotians, for people who are really trying to make ends meet in this province.

I've talked about the price of gasoline going up tremendously and that hurts not only commuters and people working, but also businesses that have to import or move their product around. Any kind of transportation has gone up and that means our food prices are also feeling it. That is something that, again, is affecting the consumer price index which, again, was the highest increase in Canada here in Nova Scotia. So despite the amount of advertising that the government is doing to try to create a sense of buoyancy, the fact is people see their bills coming in every month and they know that costs are getting higher and more and more difficult to manage. That is in the face of large loans and forgivable loans to all manner of companies. We'll get into the IEF, which is now called jobsHere and we'll just see.

I mean, jobsHere, a great title and I said - APEC says there was virtually no job growth in Nova Scotia in 2011 so it doesn't matter how many times you run ads about the great jobs, they're not here and you are really misleading people who come home and they're not materialized yet.

I know there is some good news around the corner with the ship contract and I hope that it will materialize to the full extent that is being projected and sometimes being exaggerated. I do hope that it will become a reality, but what I'm trying to tell you is the reality of today, and today there are a lot of pressures on people from one end of this province to the other and many sectors are feeling it. A lot of people that we've spoken to in small business have said that they would like to sell their businesses, that they're not making money; it's too difficult.

They've talked about the lack of disposable income. I'm thinking particularly of a round table we held not long ago in my riding where businesses were saying that there is less disposable income and so if you're having a restaurant or a retail operation, they're just not seeing the sales that they did in the past. At the very same time, they're seeing enormous electricity charges and high costs of operating their business.

There have been increases in the minimum wage, which I know helps workers, but to go back to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, they said clearly they would prefer the government to change the basic personal exemption for workers in Nova Scotia. That would mean that government would make the hit so that more people would have more money in their pockets. That's the best measure to help people and it doesn't hurt business. It would allow the government to leave more money in the pockets of individuals and they, therefore, have more money to spend; they can take that money and use it in many ways that would spin through the economy. That's what the government talks about, the ripple effects.

I think there are so many things that business has pointed out and that the government has not done. Their claim to fame here of taking off the corporation tax - I think it was the capital tax - is something that was actually a commitment made by the Progressive Conservative Government before the NDP came to power - I think it was in the 2006-07 budget - and I'm glad to see that has been followed through on. The slow decrease of half a percentage point a year - I think we had a 5 per cent tax on small business and it's now down to 3.5 per cent - that is a steady continuation on lowering the small-business tax for any income over \$400,000. That was something, again, that has been talked about and committed to by previous governments. It's good to follow through on those commitments and not to create a state of cynicism, but don't take all the credit for it because it's something that was begun in advance of this government.

Really, I think the key thing for us is the cost of living and the affordability, which is so difficult in Nova Scotia today. At the same time, as people are struggling with their own services, high taxes and the additional HST, which the government chose to put on, we're seeing services cut to Nova Scotians, and that is especially evident in health and education services.

Today during Question Period we heard some very hard-hitting questions around the cost of education and around the difficulty that school boards are having in adjusting to less funds to run their schools. They are under tremendous pressure to offer a quality education with less money, and the direct correlation between the number of students and the spending just doesn't hold water. We started in 2003 with the lowest per-student spending in the country, and as we increased spending the results got better. To turn around now and start to slash education is the wrong way to go - absolutely. It's regressive, and at a time when you're in any kind of economic turmoil, your best way out is through an educated population.

Today I read in an article that 25 per cent of our adults - people over 20 - don't have a high school education. Clearly, we need to invest in education to make sure that more young people graduate and more of them are able to take the jobs that are coming in the future. The government has shown some investment in a trade centre at Cole Harbour High School - and that is important, certainly, that we get ready for the trades that are coming - but we have to take people who are in the workforce now who are not capable of accessing those jobs that are going to come and we need to do some retraining at that level as well. That really is a dreadful way to have it, that 25 per cent of your population doesn't have a high school education.

It's not going to get better if you cut librarians and if you cut services out of our schools, and frankly, the librarians have a very direct relationship to literacy and to graduation. They have a lot to do in the schools. They play an important role and they may be seen as expendable, but that is not the case in reality. They are needed in every school, and we need them to be well qualified as well. That's a direct link to literacy, and literacy

appears nowhere in the Throne Speech this time around. It's not even mentioned as a priority for this government.

I think we know where the priority of this government is, and it's certainly not with the parents. It's not with children. It's not with health care and health care workers. In fact, a lot of the cuts that are coming are hitting those two sectors, and I think it's worth noting that many of the employees who are being impacted are women. We saw that when the member for Bedford-Birch Cove recently had shown the figures showing that the disparity between women and men's income is higher in Nova Scotia than it is in Canada, where it has actually been reversing. Ours is going in the opposite direction, and that's not a good signal for the many families that depend on two incomes or on the mother's income. So we have to see a change in that.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to point out again about some of the estimates that I think were not very clearly tied to reality, perhaps one could say. I mentioned in my opening the other day that the budget over the last number of years under the NDP Government has had the revenues depressed and the expenses overstated. By so doing, you can easily control your spending because you've estimated a lot more spending than is actually likely to occur - you've taken a worst-case scenario. It's the same on the revenue. You've put the worst-case scenario assumptions in place, and your revenue is going to be depressed. If anything better comes along, your revenue looks a lot better and you've got reasons at the quarterly updates to give rosy news to the people of Nova Scotia.

I know the Finance Minister enjoys that each time, that he can come back and say that he's under budget again - under budget and still neglecting to point out that it's still millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars in deficit; nevertheless, running a tight ship, if you listen to the Finance Minister. I mentioned the other day as well that the Finance Department's spending is up 30 per cent, just since 2009. You know, for a Finance Minister who's talking about restraint and control, it does really raise some questions, and I think it might make some people even more cynical than they are now. I hope when we get to estimates, we can really review what has been going on at the Department of Finance, but on the surface we see about 85 more people working there than previously and the budget is up significantly - 30 per cent, as I say, in that one department alone. So I think that is very important to look at.

Now, one of the estimates that I think is important for everybody to look at is the estimate on what the price of gasoline will average out at in the coming year. We all know that right now it's over \$1.45 here in Halifax - it went up again on Thursday - and that's really almost an historic high, I would say. I can't remember it being that high in the past. We expect it to rise more into the summer months, when the demand is highest.

Madam Speaker, what would you expect that the average might be for the coming year? Again, take into account that last year's average was \$1.30; today the price is \$1.45 in metro; and we estimate in this budget, if you can believe it, that gasoline prices in the

coming year will be \$1.23 on average. To me that just seems completely ridiculous, it just does.

If you use the price of gasoline as a way to calculate your motive fuel tax or your HST that you are going to take in, then that will help to depress your revenue. It's one of the measures that we look at in the revenue side of this budget. Again, I just think it doesn't have any bearing in reality, Madam Speaker.

I think what is clear to say - I've talked about the difficulty that Nova Scotians are having with their own bills and with just affording life in Nova Scotia - what is important is that when they pay high taxes, they certainly expect to have quality programs in place. That's why I'm so concerned about the cuts to education and the cuts that we'll be seeing in health care as well. Really, we've been given less for what we're paying than we had previously. Under the NDP Government it has, in fact, been much less and I think there are no two ways about that.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to talk a little bit about the budget there for Economic and Rural Development and Tourism. Again, there have been a number of departments that have seen changes in their spending and this is one that has grown quite tremendously. I think it may relate right back to that jobsHere fund or the new version of the Industrial Expansion Fund, which is - and has been called by members of the current government - a slush fund. It's something that makes funds available to businesses and to new enterprises or to shore up businesses that might be in trouble. It comes after those businesses have failed to meet the standard of Nova Scotia Business Inc.

Nova Scotia Business Inc., NSBI, was set up by the previous government to give an arm's-length, honest opinion about where investments were warranted and where they were not. It was to take the politics out of those investments. I know that many members supported that in the sense that it was wrong to have a fund that had no oversight, other than Cabinet, and really no rigour, no level of analysis and would largely be driven by political concerns. That is what we have today, only on a much larger scale. I don't care if it's called jobsHere or not. I remind you again that we have seen virtually no job growth in Nova Scotia in the last year, and that is from the Atlantic council.

So we know that's already a measure and I look to see what happens in 2012, we'll see where we go in this coming year. It has not been successful to date and yet the amount of money that has been pumped into it has been just amazing. It has been so large and it has all been diverted away from that rigour and that careful analysis that we would expect from Nova Scotia Business Inc.

Again, Nova Scotia Business Inc. has a board. They are business people. They have a responsibility. They take their time and do the analysis and they are not, in any way, influenced by politics. They say no when it is necessary to say no.

Now, Madam Speaker, in the meantime, the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is going from an estimate of \$125.6 million last year to an estimate of \$187.3 million this year. That's an increase of 50 per cent over what it was last year. In fact, if you calculate the increase from the forecast of 2011, which is the more accurate figure - the forecast is where the department is actually coming in at year end - and you compare that forecast to what they are estimating right now, it's an increase of 60 per cent in that budget.

Now most of the spending increase is due to the jobsHere fund - which again, I remind you, was formerly the IEF, the political slush fund which has been called exactly that by members who are now in Cabinet today - that is largely accounting for the increase. The budgeted spending in this fund is set to quadruple this year, to \$73 million, although actual spending under this fund is hard to predict because it can be topped up at any time, at the request of Cabinet. So any time there is a crisis or an emergency or not, you can top up the IEF, or let's call it the "jobsHere Now" fund.

There are an awful lot of jingles in the budget and in the Speech from the Throne. I think there's a term, jingoism, I think - would that cover that? I have my expert in front of me who says no. But, it's all jingles. It's jingles and communications and we're going to look as well at the increase in communications. One thing the government does really well is pat itself on the back and it runs a lot of ads. That has not been lost on Nova Scotians who are paying for those ads. When they turn on the evening news and through some of the most popular shows on TV, see all kinds of ads for the Nova Scotia Government: for the "jobsHere Now", starts and health care and education and everything is so great.

Again, I think Nova Scotians know it, that the money's coming out of the government coffers, while at the same time librarians are cut from schools and special education teachers are cut, as the most vulnerable students can't find the help that they need, we're watching ads that are run at a great expense every night, on television in this province. I'm sure it would be interesting to compare how much our government does, this kind of self-promotion compared to other governments in Canada. I bet that's one measure where we'll come out on top instead of the bottom.

I've given you the ones where we come out on the bottom. There are many more that I think this government's taken no cuts whatsoever to their self-promotion and the effort to advertise and try, I think, to mislead Nova Scotians.

As I said, I think Nova Scotians are smarter than that and I think they can see it because they know what kind of costs they have; they know their concerns for their children finding jobs in this province. I happen to be at an age where my children are entering the workforce and it's not, really, a very positive picture for Nova Scotians. I know why so many young people choose to leave. They leave reluctantly, I think, but they often have to go in order to find good work and to get paid a decent amount for the work they do.

I don't know if you had heard it last time, but in Nova Scotia, the average weekly earnings are the second-lowest in Canada, only P.E.I. is lower and it's more than \$100 lower than the Canadian average, our average worker makes \$765 a week. In fact, 50 per cent of our taxpayers are in the lowest tax bracket, 50 per cent in the lowest tax bracket. I think that's a terrible thing in itself. You might have a family income of \$45,000 but that's usually two people working and that's two people working and paying taxes in the lowest tax bracket that we have. Again, that's a very sad commentary on our province.

There's a lot of work that needs to be done. I'm not sure that the way to get there is through propping up a political fund that doesn't have the scrutiny of experts that it should, that has diverted funds that could have been perhaps lent through Nova Scotia Business Inc. and would have had more validity. There is not the validity in this kind of fund and the way it's being spent.

There's a government that, when they were in Opposition, railed at previous governments about transparency, about accountability, about slush funds and they are perpetuating, and not only perpetuating these funds, quadrupling them. That one quadrupled. It really leaves one wondering, what the heck?

The budget again, going back to Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, last year their communications - I wanted to talk about the communications they're doing - it came in over budget last year by 20 per cent and this year it's now set to increase by 25 per cent, or another \$175,000. That's in communications alone. I just don't think that is where the people of Nova Scotia want to see money spent. It may seem small in the scheme of things, in a \$9.5 billion budget, but it is significant and if the government is serious about saying that they're cutting costs and that they're looking after the well-being of Nova Scotians, you've got to start cutting things like communications. You don't need big communications staff, you can use the media and get your message out the way everybody else does, the way other governments do. You don't need to buy all this media at the expense of Nova Scotians.

I think the two examples I've just given, the IEF and the example of the communications budget within the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, both of those show where the priorities are for this government. The priorities appear to be a bloated, unaccountable slush fund that Cabinet uses to hand out large amounts of money for political purposes, and secondly, increased communications and marketing that try to mislead Nova Scotians about what's really going on in this province. I'm all for having a positive attitude and being buoyed and looking to the future, but let's not waste Nova Scotians' money - their hard-earned tax dollars, which we're entrusted with here in this House - let's not divert them to things that are as useless as a lot of self-promotion and advertising on television.

At a time when we're experiencing cuts to the classrooms, to teachers, and - we heard today - to librarians and educational assistants, the NDP have chosen to focus on ads and pre-election hand-outs.

I talked about how there are a number of ways that staff have been siphoned off, taken off the books of Nova Scotia, and I'd like to just recap that as well. We have the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, and I believe July is the turnover date for that. They're going to be absorbed by Dalhousie and come off the books of the Province of Nova Scotia. I am interested to know - there will be a savings there, because it will now become something the university manages, but what happens to all the assets of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College that we built up - all the land, the building, the equipment, all of the scientific labs, everything else? We had a huge investment in that facility in Truro, and that's just going to be gone. That is just being handed over to a private university. So that's just a question. I think we'll see a very large write-off coming in a few months time when that gets passed over to no longer be an asset for the Province of Nova Scotia. I think there could be a loss there to us as we go forward. However, I see the staff will be spun off, and it will look like they've done something in terms of tightening their belts.

Conserve Nova Scotia was spun off; it's now separate, it's no longer on the books of the Department of Energy, but we are paying - every single one of us, through our Nova Scotia Power bills - a surcharge that adds up to \$40 million, the budget of the new Efficiency Nova Scotia. It's coming out of our pockets, but it's not going to be seen as a tax. That's how the government is hoping it will be seen, as being absorbed by Nova Scotia Power, but people are paying that, and that \$40 million is a big hit when it was previously absorbed in the Department of Energy.

It's a very worthwhile cause. Encouraging conservation is really important, but if it's so important, why couldn't we keep it in the Department of Energy and do it that way, rather than forcing people to pay twice? We're still paying Energy. (Applause) We still have to pay the full shot for the Department of Energy and we pay extra on our bills for Nova Scotia Power. I think people need to be aware of that and to feel it as well.

I mentioned that the Department of Finance is another one that has not shown restraint. Estimate to estimate, from the time that this government came to power, it's up 30 per cent in spending, and in FTEs - which is full-time equivalent employees - it's up 85 per cent since 2009. Those are really not positive things for the people of Nova Scotia at all.

Communications in the Department of Finance also increased. I'm not sure why that has to go up tremendously. It's up 13.4 per cent. I think if we looked at every department and every minister's budget we'd see communications up, up, up. Why does the Department of Finance need a bigger budget? Maybe it's to rename things like the capital plan the "jobsHere Now" plan. Maybe that's why. You have to have some big thinkers to come up with that - repackage things - but that's not being honest about how

you're spending the money of Nova Scotians. That's trying to put a lot of spin on it, and I don't think that's what people want.

We know the Controller's Office has increased by almost 85 per cent. It's up \$175,000 again, and that's since forecast 2009-10. We know there has been some reorganization there, and I know that the controller is now seen as an associate deputy minister, but there has to be something more than that in that department.

Let's have a look at the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. For the service delivery line within the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, they've seen their budget allotment increased by - it's amazing - a whopping 567 per cent since the estimate of 2009-10, the first estimate from the NDP Government. It's not a typo. It really is 567 per cent. It went from \$157,000, which isn't too much, to over \$1 million dollars. In fact, just in this year alone, it's a 325 per cent increase from last year's estimate to this year's estimate. One wonders what has been going on there to have it increase 500 per cent?

The executive director for Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, within that department, saw that budget allotment increase by 70 per cent since last year's estimate. At the same time, the grants and contributions to municipal units is flat at 0.1 per cent growth. That's negligible growth, I have to say. I think that at that point, it is worthwhile talking a little bit about the impact that the province has on our municipal units. I had a few points about HRM which relate more to my riding or just to ridings here in metro and I'm sure it would relate to others, as well.

The government has very few grants and supports to our municipalities, so they have to raise all the funds to operate from property taxes on the commercial and on the residential home owners. That is putting a tremendous strain on our businesses; I spoke to you about business suffering under the high cost of power. They are also here in metro suffering some really significant increases in their property taxes. Even though that is up to the city to set the rate, there is no question that if the city was getting proper support from the provincial government, they wouldn't have to do some of these things. Some of it doesn't even require a lot of money.

I want to mention the HRM pension issue which has come up repeatedly. The HRM pensioners, particularly in the 2006 election, were actually organized and speaking to all of the candidates that were on the doorstep, those were both the people collecting pensions and those who are currently working for the HRM, and that's more than 4,000 people who have jobs with HRM, Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you know, having been a former councillor. HRM has a requirement to work out their solvency on a going-concern basis. If they were to cease operation, they have to have enough money to pay out all of their pension obligations on that day. It doesn't take into account the fact that there will always be a municipal unit and that when Halifax and Dartmouth ceased to be separate units, they were re-visioned, I guess, as HRM and still continue to operate and still continue to take

care of their obligations. Really, it's very similar to the exemption that was just given to Dalhousie University.

Dalhousie was on the precipice of a strike with their faculty and one of the things that allowed them to avert that strike was the ability to offer a different method of working out your solvency. This change for Dalhousie was something that, I think, seven out of 10 provinces allowed their universities to do, it said we agree that you're going to continue to exist. Even at the Law Amendments Committee last Fall, there were faculty members who came and spoke at the Law Amendments Committee from Dalhousie and they pointed out that the assets alone of the university were more than enough to take care of all of the pension requirements and all of the other debts of the university. So there was really no risk in changing that rule and allowing the university to relax that requirement for the solvency of the fund. They are still solvent, but to a different standard and this makes a huge difference, but HRM isn't getting that same break.

I want to draw the members' attention to the issue that's really at hand here. If we hold HRM to this higher standard of having to have a going concern solvency, I guess, paid-in amount, they have to then charge their members a lot more, it's going to be a crushing amount for the people who work for the city. They currently pay something like 10 per cent of their income into their pension fund, it's going to go up significantly and that, again, takes us back to affordability - less money in their pockets today, less ability to continue to really fund their needs, to enjoy life in Nova Scotia and to be productive in Nova Scotia. We can change that, with just a simple rule change, it doesn't have to come to the Legislature, a simple rule change would allow HRM to change their solvency method of calculation and then those workers would have more money in their pocket, they wouldn't be under this tremendous stress.

The point, again, is that if the employees have to pay more, guess what? The city has to pay more because the city is the employer. If the city has to pay more, they have one source to increase the money, the millions of dollars they would need, and that is from, again, their property taxes and commercial taxes so we'll come right back to home owners and doubly so to the commercial taxpayers in the city because the commercial rate is more than double the residential rate and it's not capped as residential rates are capped. It will unduly hurt the commercial sector in HRM.

This is a change that the provincial government, the NDP Government, could choose to do today, Madam Speaker. It's a simple change. It costs us nothing. The risk is very low. Other provinces give their municipalities this break, essentially, this ability to keep their costs down, but we have not chosen to do that even though we've just done it for our university. I don't see a big difference. We often talk about the MUSH sector - the municipalities, the universities, schools and hospitals in one - and that is a group that kind of fits together. I think that if you offer it to universities, you should certainly offer it to the municipalities.

This is going to make a tremendous difference here in Halifax, not only for the many employees, the over 4,000 people who work for the city, but also for the taxpayers - every one of them - and as we know that's 40 per cent of the population of our province. That's a very important thing that the government could choose to do, which wouldn't cost money, which would be prudent.

Another thing that they certainly could do would be to review the tax break they just enforced again for Imperial oil refinery. That is actually meddling in the business of the municipality. When it came before the House initially in 2003, the NDP members all voted against doing that. They realized it was meddling. I don't know what has happened, if that was then and this is now, but it is complete meddling. Of course the Imperial Oil refinery is important to the province but I think changing the municipal tax rate is wrong. If you want to support them, go back to your slush fund and support them that way. You've got this huge - four times the slush fund that was there previously.

I think that there are other means available to the government rather than meddling with the HRM tax rate and if you do it in one case you're going to be under pressure to do it in others. I think that's why the NDP, when they sat in Opposition, saw that that was not a wise choice whatsoever and they voted against it with the exception of the member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage at that time - it's worth noting there was one dissenting vote at that time. It was a Progressive Conservative move to do it initially and now it has been perpetuated in just a very recent move by the government.

I wonder, Madam Speaker, if you could tell me how much time I have left.

MADAM SPEAKER: Around nine minutes.

MS. WHALEN: Oh, it's very short. Thank you very much. That's important to know. The third thing, I think, that would help the city a lot would have been a faster answer on the convention centre. When the business plan was in the hands of the provincial government, the NDP Government, it took a long time to get an answer and that answer came back on the cusp of a federal election, which again delayed the project. We're really hoping that will go forward. I think it has a lot of promise for our city. Really, if it helps Halifax and HRM, it will help in a lot of ways through that hub that we are here. It will help lots of other parts of the province. We need to see that go forward and that created uncertainty, which was unnecessary on the part of the government.

As I said, Madam Speaker, I don't have too much time left. I'd like to mention the increase as well. I talked about Economic and Rural Development and Tourism. I've talked about the Department of Finance and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, all of which have some significant increases in line items in their budget and significant increases in people, just like the Department of Finance. The Department of Education, which is seeing the most drastic cuts on the ground, on the front line where teachers, EPAs, assistances, teacher assistants who can help with the children that need special education

and special help - they've all seen cuts and we've seen one school board take the rather drastic move of cutting all librarians and we hope that will not have to come to be.

At the very same time that those cuts are coming down the pipeline, we're seeing a 21.3 per cent increase in the senior management budget in the Department of Education. It was 32.9 per cent up from the forecast last year, and again, for members who look at the difference between the estimate and the forecast and for anybody who does look at our budget - for Nova Scotians who look - the forecast is the most accurate for last year because it's been updated periodically through the year when the Finance Minister has the opportunity to call out the press and say how we're doing as a province.

If you take the correct number from this current year to the estimate coming up, it's gone up 32.9 per cent and all that at a time when we're seeing cuts on the front line of education.

AN HON. MEMBER: Shame.

MS. WHALEN: It is a shame, it's an absolute shame. We don't know why that sort of tightening of the belt and leading from the top wouldn't have been evident from the Department of Education - you know, even if it's one person more in the minister's office, it doesn't show restraint. It doesn't show that you're taking care of the budget the way you should, at the same time as you have to go forth - I'm sorry, at the same time as the minister must go forth and talk about cuts to children and to education.

Madam Speaker, as well, the Department of Justice is not left out of this. The office of the deputy minister is increasing its budget in Justice by \$207,000 this year over the forecast last year. It's up 13.6 per cent in the Department of Justice, and this is at a time when we're finding it more difficult to access services.

And last year's cuts in Health and Wellness were seen in each board. I won't have time to go through all of this, Madam Speaker - I know you'll be sorry to hear that - I have some of the cuts that were seen last year, even when there was an increase to Health and Wellness. We have to remember that one of the biggest costs in Health and Wellness is the cost of the people who work in the system, and if they get pay raises, which they have been, then that is going to absorb all the increase they've been getting, and more. So even though they had a slight increase last year, the Annapolis Valley Health Authority did get a budget increase last year from the estimate over estimate, but they still had to temporarily close medical beds at Soldiers' Memorial; they closed an operating room for the equivalent of three months and they had a corresponding closure of surgery beds; and they reduced hours at the Berwick clinic - and all of these changes impacted patients.

Now, this coming year they've got a budget increase of only \$300,000. Last year it was \$3.6 million; this year it's \$300,000. They still have all the costs of their staffing and

the increases and increments that have been put into place, so you know we're going to see more cuts on the front line of health care in that Annapolis board.

In South West Health last year they had a budget increase of \$4 million and they did not fill an RN position in the maternal children's unit; they reduced their home visiting program; they increased parking fees; and they increased the rates in their satellite blood collection site at a time when people are finding it harder to make ends meet.

Madam Speaker, this has happened in every one of these boards, one after another. The Pictou Health Authority, for example, last year it did have an increase of \$3.7 million. This year they're actually getting a reduction of \$1.4 million, so you know that's going to affect surgeries, it's going to affect front-line care in Pictou. It has to, because they can't keep pace with the increases that they have. Remember, again, each one of these DHAs has the increases in power that we feel personally; they have the increases in costs of travelling, of gas, of so many other things - of food which they have to have in place. So the costs of hospital stays are much higher - there are so many examples of these increases that are hurting people.

I look at the Department of Health and Wellness and see things like the wait times project line item is now down to zero. Now, if that's because the federal government isn't funding us any more, that doesn't excuse us not putting money into efforts to reduce wait times - and I mean genuine efforts, not efforts like sending out letters and then cutting people off who might not be alert enough or literate enough to answer those letters. Cancer Care Nova Scotia is down \$400,000; diabetes care, down \$30,000; and the nursing strategy line is down \$768,000. So these are all very significant changes.

Madam Speaker, I said last week we are very disappointed in this budget. We don't see help for average Nova Scotians, for every one of us who are feeling the increased costs of power, gas, food prices - and, again, we had the highest consumer price index increase in Canada last year. It will be interesting to see where we go this year with the cost of gas already as high as it is. And this is a time really of austerity for the people of Nova Scotia and it does not seem to be as much austerity for the bureaucrats or the ministers, or really the Government of Nova Scotia. We don't see that. We see a lot of the right words being spoken about being careful about money, but we still see the debt rising and I'm sure we'll hear more from that as we go forward. We see that there are a lot of cuts to services that Nova Scotians expect if they're going to continue to pay high taxes.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I don't really believe the priorities of this government are really the same as Nova Scotians' priorities, at least the priorities that I've identified if we can take where the spending increases are. Again, a gigantic increase in the "jobsHere Now" fund, which used to be the Industrial Expansion Fund, entirely controlled by the Cabinet of Nova Scotia. It didn't come before the House and it can be increased. I said it has quadrupled but it can be increased at any time, without coming before the House. So this is

really an unaccountable fund and I imagine there are hundreds of thousands being spent to promote it, no doubt, as well.

We see a big increase in advertising and self-promotion and this government patting itself on the back, I'm sure we're due for more of that. At the same time, we're seeing health care times, wait times growing. We've seen cuts to youth mental health, which I think is really one of the worst places you could possibly cut. We know we have so many young people who need help and families that are desperate for help, yet we see a cut in patient beds. I know the minister said that she wants a greater focus on community care but that doesn't mean you get rid of the few beds that we have because some families desperately need to have their children in the beds.

Madam Speaker, the quality of public education has deteriorated in the last three years. Nova Scotians are not getting pay increases that keep anywhere near the cost of living increases. Power rates, gas prices and government taxes are all making life more difficult for Nova Scotians. Our economy is stalled (Interruptions)

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, the honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park has the floor for the remaining one minute.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our economy is stalled. We had virtually no job growth last year in 2011, as reported in APEC's Newsletter. consumer price index the highest in Canada, average weekly earnings are low and this economy is stalled. All of that says so.

Part-time jobs are up, full-time jobs are down and this budget has done nothing to help those families that are in greatest need and those businesses that are struggling with high power costs and other costs. It has done nothing to help those people stay afloat in this economy, in this province. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Madam Speaker, I'd like to start today by paying tribute. I know yesterday was an anniversary that marked the Battle of Vimy Ridge and I know that about 3,500 lives of Canadians were lost in that battle. I'd like to take a moment to pay tribute to them today in this Legislature because they did it, that's right. Many of them were Nova Scotians and I know many were even from my own home town in Judique. We have a cairn that marks the name of many families, including some MacDonells and some other names of other people who are sitting in this Legislature as well.

Madam Speaker, I was watching a program on the weekend and they were talking about how these men were often digging tunnels as part of the strategy to win that battle. A lot of the men, a lot of the soldiers, were engraving their names and things that were going

on at the time in their personal lives, they were engraving symbols from their uniforms, showing pride in their country. It's kind of sad that I suppose a good number of those men were certainly injured after making those engravings or maybe even have lost their lives, as evidence can still be found in the battlefields there today.

Madam Speaker, I just wanted to pay tribute to those people for what they've done. I just wanted to reference that I'm wearing a pin today in honour of that. I have chosen to wear it above my legislative pin, in honour of what they've done to preserve and to maintain the democracy we have in this country.

Madam Speaker, I also know that today marks Tartan Day, or at least we've seen legislation come forward. I know the good member for Pictou East has provided me with some tartan today and I thank him for that. Just a short note on that, I know that at one time, tartan, as a form of dress was outlawed amongst my people who came from Scotland because it was seen as a way of oppressing the people and driving their pride and their independence out of them. We can see today that has not happened. I know that my own grandmother - I actually have it now in my possession, a piece of tartan that came right from Scotland that was made with real dyes from plants, not synthetic dyes. A lot of the tartans we see now, of course, are all made with synthetic dyes now and we see a lot of patterns and everybody lays claim to a particular tartan.

Way back then, when they were made with plant dyes, the accuracy of the colours was not something you could achieve. You weren't able to achieve it with great accuracy, the colouring. I just wanted to mention that as well, and it's good that we're remembering that's a mark of those people who make up a good part of the province, many of whom live in my own constituency of Inverness.

I will continue with some comments on the budget. I suppose the members opposite won't see anything positive in what I have to say for the remainder of my time, but I will give it a try. When we look at the budget, I think about the budgets of the households right across the province. I think about how this budget may or may not affect Nova Scotians.

The first thing I can think about is the increase in the HST. It's very sobering to note that after this budget year, a family of four in this province will have paid an extra \$4,000 on average in HST. That's money out of their pockets into the government Treasury that's there to help them. Madam Speaker, I wonder if Nova Scotians feel they're getting \$4,000 more worth of services. (Interruption) I heard an honourable member suggest that there's more advertising and we've certainly seen that.

Madam Speaker, if you were to ask Nova Scotians, I don't think they would find they're getting \$4,000 more services for their family. It highlights the importance of the decisions the government has a chance to make. They can choose to tax more which this government has chosen to do and we see that for the average family, \$4,000 more out of

their pocket. Or we could have a government that would choose to maybe live within its means, much like Nova Scotians have to do.

What does that money mean in terms of revenue for the government in the budget? It means an increase of \$400 million a year. I know we talk about numbers here and for most people it would be hard to conceptualize how much \$400 million is - it is a lot of money. In terms of the budget, you're looking at approximately a 4 per cent increase in the budget, which is quite significant. We're talking about a budget approaching \$10 billion and you have \$400 million in HST; 4 per cent is a big number on that budget, especially when we get down into fractions of a percentage. They're still large amounts of money. We're talking about balancing a budget.

There is a lot of new money being brought in. I also want to mention something that happened back in 2007, a significant item by the Minister of Finance's own admission, that they are the benefactors of in this year's budget - about \$186 million new in revenue this year that comes by way of a deal brokered between our former Premier, Rodney MacDonald, and a federal member in the Pictou area, Defence Minister Peter MacKay. A deal brokered in 2007 that would see dollars coming to our province, recognizing the offshore royalties that were coming to our province have been clawed back.

This agreement sees the federal government recognize that essentially Nova Scotia should enjoy the full benefit of those offshore resources. So that deal brokered in 2007 by the then Progressive Conservative Government and the Conservative Government in Ottawa sees Nova Scotians \$186 million richer this year, in this budget. I know that the government now is putting forward a piece of legislation, which we've seen introduced here, that looks at giving the province an ability to verify, to ensure that the amount that we receive is accurate.

I think that's a good thing, Madam Speaker, but I will state for the record here today, to the credit of the member who represented Inverness before myself, former Premier Rodney MacDonald, for his initiative in securing those funds for this province, and I think that's a point that should not be lost.

So with these new sources of revenue, Madam Speaker, that's a net sum of \$586 million of additional revenue coming into this province, we are still seeing in this budget yet another deficit from this NDP Government. So despite the new money that's coming in, they're still running deficits and they're still adding debt - more debt per year, in fact, than any other administration in the history of the province. So I guess the question I would ask, when looking at the budget, why can't this government try to live within its means? We hear them talk about trying to make life more affordable for Nova Scotians - if only they would use that same philosophy in their budgeting.

Madam Speaker, I would submit to you that if we ask ourselves what is driving the debt, the deficit budgets and the higher taxes, we've seen the rating agencies - the

organizations that look at the bonds that the province issues - we've seen them make a comment that this government has softening fiscal resolve, which essentially means that it's becoming lax. It's allowing the budget to get away from itself. It's allowing expenditure to rise without any discipline and we really need not be surprised because many of the same members who sit on the government side of this Legislature today were voting against budgets by the Progressive Conservatives. They were focused on bringing spending into line, budgets that had been focused on government living within its means, so that life for Nova Scotians would be more affordable. Of course, I've talked about the HST. The increase in the HST makes life less affordable for Nova Scotians.

So, Madam Speaker, people don't have to hear it from myself, they can hear it from the rating agencies that have commented that this government has had softening fiscal resolve and I think that is because, philosophically, this government likes big government. They need to feed off hard-working Nova Scotians by way of increased taxes and adding future debt for our children to pay off. This government likes big government and they need that to support their spending.

What I would ask, Madam Speaker, is would the Minister of Finance turn his attention away from March madness, which he likes to speak about, and turn it towards FTE madness, that time of year, which we see right now, where ministers sitting on the opposite side of this Legislature are able to pad their budgets with unused, full-time equivalent positions to make it easier to meet their budget targets and we've seen, in the budget documents, over 550 new positions that this government is adding this year.

So the question becomes, Madam Speaker, are they actually adding these people? Well, they weren't there to begin with last year, although they were budgeted for, and the same was true the year before that. They're budgeting for these extra positions; they are not actually existing, and we know that because at the end of the year the actual estimate number of people working in government is much lower than the estimate. Last year I believe the discrepancy was about 700; this year it's 550. What is happening here is very obvious. Departments and ministers are going along with this, are padding their budgets with extra positions so they have extra money in their budget, and then they're coming back and saying, oh, we've done such a wonderful job of budgeting, we're under budget. It didn't fool me. It didn't.

I guess at the same time, when we see this securing of dollars into the centre of the government, we're seeing what we saw debated in this Legislature today, especially during Question Period. We were talking about librarians' positions being eliminated from school boards, and the government is saying that that's the school board's fault. Ultimately, the buck stops with the government. It's the government that is providing the budget to those school boards and forcing them to make those kinds of decisions.

We often hear a number touted that the funding ratio is higher than it has ever been, but sadly, I think that is largely a result of a decreased number of students in the province.

I know I've seen it in my own area of Inverness, where we've seen a massive decline in the student population, largely because of our rural economy. It's suffering. People have been hanging around for awhile. People are trying to find ways to make ends meet.

We've seen a significant issue this past year with our paper mill in Point Tupper, which employs a lot of people in the Strait area, including Inverness County. I have spoken to some of the workers there. Just in the last number of days, I've been asking them how they're doing. Some of them have told me that they're not going to bother going back, because they don't want to be in the same position in five or 10 years time and they're at a point in their lives where they need to get beyond that uncertainty.

So those are the very people who are at the age they're having children, and when we lose those people we see more decline in our student population. That is why I think it's so important for a government to table a budget that respects the need to support small business in our economy - not by increasing taxes, not by introducing labour laws that small business doesn't want, but by supporting them so we can help to diversify our economy away from these large pulp mills, as one example. Also, that we have a government that should be addressing power rates, because in the case of that paper mill, its number-one cost is power. It's using about 15 per cent of the province's power.

Any time a decision like the Churchill Falls deal is made, it impacts them significantly. I can think of the day when many people were cheering the announcement that this province was going to enter into an agreement to obtain that power. I hate to be a naysayer, Madam Speaker, but I know I was sitting here and I was feeling a bit down because to me it just raised more risks, more questions. The question I was asking myself in my mind was, how much is this power going to cost? It could prove to be yet another nail in the coffin of that paper mill.

I know the member for Guysborough-Sheet Harbour should be concerned about that as well, because if the cost of power skyrockets with the introduction of renewable energy, at an overly-aggressive rate - by this government's own admission, the most aggressive targets in North America, and renewable energy is more expensive than the fossil fuels it's replacing - that is putting a nail in the coffin, and that member is putting a nail in the coffin of the paper mill. I can tell you right now, today, when people working at the Point Tupper power generation plant - and I know because I speak to them - when they replace coal-generated electricity with electricity from windmills, the cost is three times as much.

I think it's wonderful that we're trying to find ways to move away from fossil fuels, but does it make sense when the rural parts of our province - and really our whole province is suffering because of these aggressive moves towards renewable energy, which are unsustainable for businesses like paper mills, but they are also an issue for tire makers like Michelin?

Madam Speaker, I know that many people in this province would say, well let the paper mill die; it's a dying business, let it die. Well, we are still going to need paper. We all have it on our desks here today and there is something to be said for being one of the last mills standing. If some people in this world are going to make paper, we might as well try to make it here. I know in my area, I think - and I'll say this about the City of Halifax, some people might find this odd that I would say this but the City of Halifax, which is predominantly driven by government, should be thankful for the paper mill in Point Tupper because for many years that paper mill brought money into this economy, into our provincial economy, from outside our province.

I know my own cousin, down on the Shore Road in Judique, sold paper. He lived down in Connecticut and he sold paper into the U.S. I know a lot of the money that came into our economy here came from the United States. That's new, fresh money into our economy to pay for things like the centre of government we have here in Halifax. So whenever I walk down the street here and I hear somebody in this city say, let the paper mill die, I like to try to remind them of that fact because for many years that operation contributed a significant amount of wealth into this province and there's no reason why it shouldn't be able to continue.

What is going to be most important, Mr. Speaker, is the issue of power rates. I don't know what the government is working on right now. I've tried to be supportive all the way with this issue, with respect to getting that mill up and running. I've refrained from a lot of comment. I don't see this as a time to take political shots but I do hope that the government is going to address power rates in a meaningful way because just giving a handout to a mill to keep it running for five years is not what I want to see because I see that operation as having been an asset to our province, and at this stage in the game I don't want to see it being seen as an organization that's in need of a handout to survive.

Mr. Speaker, bringing it back to what I was talking about here, in our schools we are seeing a loss of children in our schools. I think that speaks to the need for government to try to right-size government, to make government more affordable so that we can charge less tax instead of increasing the HST, like this government has done; so that we can run balanced budgets instead of running deficit budgets, like this government has done; so that we don't add to our debt for our children to pay in the future, like this government has done, and done so in a manner that no other administration has ever done, at least to the same extent, because they have added more debt per year than any other administration in the history of this province, on average.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that when governments get their house in order, it doesn't always mean bad things. I know the members opposite always like to say, well, what would you cut? They try to put us on the defensive, as if you could never cut anything. I don't believe that's true because things change and does it make sense for government to keep spending money on things that may no longer be relevant or needed? Why not change those things?

I'm going to give you a couple of examples. In the past, when the Progressive Conservative Government - which gave this province eight consecutive balanced budgets before handing the reins over to this government - I'm going to give you a couple of examples of expenditure that was made during times of cost-cutting and balancing budgets. One is in my own area. I'm sure most members here are aware, if you were watching the Masters Golf Tournament on the weekend you would have seen advertisements for Cabot Links in Inverness, the new golf course. (Interruptions) I'm hearing members on all sides of the House acknowledging that they've heard the voice of Donald Sutherland who did those advertisements.

AN HON. MEMBER: A Nova Scotian.

MR. MACMASTER: That's right, he's from Nova Scotia. Mr. Speaker, that was an example of an investment that the government made. In fact, I remember at the time when it was brought to Cabinet and there was an approval for \$4 million in remediation work for the old mine site in Inverness, which is a beautiful piece of land but it was covered in old mine tailings and it had very limited value at that time. But there was an opportunity, a dream of some people in the community of Inverness to build a golf course that had been going on for years and years and years. I must give credit to my predecessor, Rodney MacDonald, for having the initiative and the perseverance to bring that to Cabinet, at a time when a lot of people in the room, I'm sure, were saying here we are trying to gain control of the fiscal situation of the province, to bring a balanced budget, what are we doing here, going to spend money on a potential golf course?

Mr. Speaker, the common sense of the day prevailed and they saw and they had the vision to see that an investment at that time would lead to a golf course and of course we see it advertised this weekend on television. I'm pleased to report that that initiative, this summer, will employ upwards of 145 people, a good investment. So don't let the members on the opposite side of the House tell you that governments can't live within their means and still provide Nova Scotians with what they need.

Mr. Speaker, they're saying they're doing it but they're not. They're raising taxes, they're in receipt of offshore revenues that were received for the first time this year, significant amounts, but yet they're still running a deficit and they're still adding debt and they're still padding their budgets with FTE numbers in every department. Converse that with the record of the Progressive Conservatives, who delivered eight balanced budgets in a row. But if we look at what the members opposite, many of them who are sitting, voted against those balanced budgets at the time, we should not be surprised today when those very same members have such an allergic reaction to balancing a budget today.

AN HON. MEMBER: Gave us a structural deficit.

MR. MACMASTER: The members say that we gave them a structural deficit but, Mr. Speaker, we often hear this \$1.4 billion number batted around but really that was a

model projection out into the future, based on the NDP's assumptions, nobody else's. With modest cost control, this government could have brought their House in order but instead they let it get away from them. We need not be surprised because we always knew that the NDP Government would be a tax-and-spend government.

AN HON. MEMBER: You just said we were cutting.

MR. MACMASTER: Well, actually my remarks today have all been about padding budgets. The only cuts I'm seeing are on the front lines because the government is not focusing its energy on a program review, internally to government. Ultimately, what we're seeing is, they're handing the tough decisions down to the school boards and the district health authorities. We see that with the reduction of librarians in the Chignecto-Central school board.

We see it in part - and I will say in part because there are other factors at play - but I see it in Inverness at the hospital where the DHAs had made a decision to eliminate emergency surgery and they are taking a second look at it now. With their support and with the support of local health professionals, I think the community will get the result in the end that they would like to see, and that is a restoration of the service when it's needed. I know I asked the Minister of Health and Wellness the other day if she would step in and ensure that that happens. She chose not to say yes to that but I'm hoping she doesn't say no should the district health authority and the health professionals come up with a plan to make it work.

I'm going to give you an example of another investment that the Progressive Conservatives made, an investment that was chastised by the government when they were in Opposition, and that was the investment in science for our offshore oil and gas industry, in research. They said that the Progressive Conservative Government of the day should not have invested that money but, ironically, just a few weeks back we saw the Premier standing up and raising his arms in the air and claiming credit yet again for something positive that happened that had nothing to do with him, like the shipyards contract and - but let's stay focused on this. (Interruptions) Well, Mr. Irving got a nice \$260 million - it probably works out to about a 1 per cent profit margin on that shipbuilding contract by way of the forgivable \$260 million loan.

So I have no doubt that Mr. Irving enjoys raising the Premier's hand. We can't blame him for that, he's out to do his business. He's a businessman and we thank him for the jobs he's bringing to our province. But let's not kid ourselves on why he's so keen to raise the Premier's hand - there are 260 million reasons why he's raising the Premier's hand.

Back to what I was talking about, which is the investment the Progressive Conservatives made into research for the offshore oil and gas that is leading to \$1 billion in exploration activity by Shell.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hear! Hear! And will you vote for that as well?

MR. MACMASTER: Well, I'm actually raising it as an example of how governments, when they're reducing expenditures and trying to live within their means - which we saw with the Progressive Conservative Government - can still make investments that are good for the future.

I'm trying to make the point to the members opposite that you can live within your means. (Interruptions) The only choice that you have is not just to raise taxes. You have other choices; you can live within your means. At the end of the day, those were investments that were made at a time when government was balancing its books and, conversely, we see today this government is running deficits while taxing more and spending on big government in Halifax instead of the people's priorities.

When I think about this budget I also think of something else. This, to me, is an item that is largely outside of the control of government, but it's something that I must speak about - and that is the price of gasoline. One day I was at the mall in Port Hawkesbury and speaking with some people there and they were talking about - because the area I come from we do have Strait Area Transit now, which is a great service and I hope it continues to get used more and more as people experience the good service that it is - many people in my area are required to drive. They just don't have the choice; they need to drive to work.

For people who are on fixed income, people who are working without a chance maybe to increase their wages significantly, when the price of gas goes up it hurts them the most. They're doing their best, they're doing the best for their families, and they're contributing in a meaningful way to the growth of our province. I feel for them when they have to pay more money for gasoline at the pump - I guess all the more reason why this government should be focusing on the cost that it can control for people, specifically the HST.

As I started out speaking about \$4,000 out of the pockets of a family of four by the end of this year - that's the amount - I'm sure that \$4,000 could have gone to a lot more things. Those are the choices the government has. In my mind, this government has made the wrong choice. At a time when gas prices are as high as they are, government should be doing the best it can. If the government actually cares about people, they should be trying to keep the costs they can control down. But we're not seeing that with this government - keeping the costs they can control down. HST is a cost that this government can control and they're not trying to control it - they're increasing it.

I also think about the cost of power. This is an area where I believe the government has great influence.

AN HON. MEMBER: I think the previous government messed it up.

MR. MACMASTER: Well - and this is an interesting point because the members opposite say that the previous government messed it up . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: And they've done everything right.

MR. MACMASTER: And they've done everything right, yes, exactly. But, you know, if we got off fossil fuels entirely 10 years ago or 20 years ago, as the Premier had suggested - can you imagine the enormous amounts we would have been paying for power bills in the last 10 or 20 years? If the price of fossil fuels rose as high as it did - and I know fossil fuels have risen, I'm not disputing that - had we moved away from fossil fuels when they were that much cheaper, towards renewable energy, that is this much more expensive today, imagine (Interruption) I'm trying to use everything at my disposal to show the members opposite. I guess if we're looking at coal today costing this much and wind costing this much, and coal 20 years ago costing this much, do you want to pay this difference 20 years ago for the last 20 years? Power bills would have been enormous and I don't think that could be disputed. We can pull out charts and I can use my hands in here, Mr. Speaker, but I don't think the members can dispute that.

If you go to the Point Tupper Generating Station today and you see when they pull off coal and move to wind, immediately the price of energy triples. Most Nova Scotians don't know that, they think that wind is free, but the reality of it is - and I'm not against having some exposure to wind energy for diversification and for trying to advance that industry in the province. What I'm against is just blindly moving toward it, without any regard for people's power bills or the impact it has on the economy, again, like on the paper mill at Point Tupper, or at Michelin, or at any number of businesses throughout the province. The more money people are spending on power the less money they can pay their workers; that's pretty simple.

I think what really proved what we've saying all along happened recently. It was about a week and a half ago, I believe when, again, the bond rating agencies came out and they said they revised the outlook for Nova Scotia Power and Emera - Standard & Poor's - from stable to negative. Why was the change? Because of the proposed cost of the Maritime link project, which is \$1.2 billion that is not going to be falling out of some kind of imaginary world into our hands here - it's going to come out of the pockets of you and I and every Nova Scotian who pays a power bill. What is the driving force behind that project? It is the zeal by this government to move into a renewable form of energy without analyzing the costs.

Mr. Speaker, would you go and buy a car if somebody told you you got better gas mileage and it was going to cost you three times as much? You might want to find out what the gas mileage is. You might expect, over time, to make sure that you got three times as much value out of it before it rusted away. The same is true for an energy project and these are really important decisions because once they're made, we're locked in for the long haul.

We've called upon this government - and it's too bad they didn't allocate some money in their budget this year - to do an analysis of the cost of that project, to make sure it is in the best interests of Nova Scotians, even to make sure it's the most efficient form of renewable energy that this government could be choosing. Instead, the government ploughs ahead without any concern for the power bills that Nova Scotians are going to have to pay. I remember asking the Premier, in my early days in this Legislature, I asked the Premier how much power bills were going to go up in the next year because of his move to renewables. He just blew off the question because he didn't want to answer. (Interruption) I should have asked him in Gaelic, I might as well have.

I guess to me that highlighted that this Premier doesn't value looking at the dollars and cents of it all because if he did he might be making very different decisions. This is what happens when you get a government whose philosophy is so strong that it's willing to forget the facts. In my mind, Mr. Speaker, this vision will leave people behind and how will it leave them behind? It will leave them behind in the form of higher power bills and this is not just what we're saying; this is what the bond rating agencies are saying. There are no politics in that. They're purely driven by market forces, by dollars and cents. (Interruption)

Well, it is their God but it's the one thing that you can trust in, Mr. Speaker, is they're going to act in their own self-interest and that's what we have to recognize. I think that should speak loudly and clearly to this government, that if they see this as a risk to investors, then this government should see it as a risk to the people who are paying the bills because the reason why it's a risk to the investor is because it's a risk to the person paying the bill.

I'm going to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government has recognized that it can't just go blindly off into choosing renewable sources and eliminating fossil fuels completely from the energy mix. That was a prudent decision. I can tell you, in my area, there are people who are going to benefit from that and those are the employees at the Point Tupper power generating station. Those people aren't going to lose their jobs because the federal government has decided to allow Nova Scotia to keep that coal-fired operation in operation, recognizing that if you removed it today, you would have an awful hard time replacing the energy that that plant produces and also recognizing that you would strand millions and millions of dollars in infrastructure that could no longer be used. It would be like retiring an automobile that was in very good condition before it had reached the end use of its life, the same thing as retiring a coal plant before the end of its useful life.

So the federal government has recognized that and I think that's sensible, I think that's a common sense decision. I know, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier even agreed with that decision and, to me, that's proof right there that getting beyond the philosophy and into the facts, even he ultimately buys into the reality that we can't just get rid of fossil fuels and move blindly towards renewables. I know that keeping that coal-fired plant operational is going to result in us not giving up about \$40-some million in infrastructure, which would have to be paid for by the ratepayer, with no benefit to them.

I think that in this budget, and we saw it in the Throne Speech, they're talking about how proud the government is for having the most aggressive renewable energy targets in North America. While it might sound great, Mr. Speaker, the reality is only too clear in our power bills and we're going to see more and more of that as time goes on because renewable energy is not free. I know that from my time in the investment world, I still recall an effort being made to gain investment in renewable energy projects, and a couple of years later the same people came back and said, well, we can't make any money at that. The only money you make is in the infrastructure that gets built for those projects because they can't make a profit out of the projects, because they're too expensive.

So I think that tells you right there clearly, Mr. Speaker, that the investment market has found that massive investments in this type of infrastructure don't pay off and we're not ready for them yet as a society. Why would we invest massive amounts in technology today when, quite possibly, that technology could be improved tomorrow? If it can be improved tomorrow, wouldn't it be better to be holding cash, ready to invest in it, than to have spent that money on the old technology which may not be nearly as efficient? We see this all the time throughout our world. We look at the advances in computers, constant improvement, constantly faster, always getting better. The same, I believe, will hold true in the renewable energy sector and better for us to make the investments in renewable energy when it makes sense to do so. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I would like to have seen more recognition of that by this government in its Throne Speech and in the budget. Instead, we see them cling to the pride they take in being the first to cross the finish line, to have the most renewable energy of any jurisdiction on the continent.

Mr. Speaker, that's going to end up costing Nova Scotians on their power bills.

AN. HON. MEMBER: Nova Scotians put us here.

MR. MACMASTER: Well they did and they'll take you out, too.

AN. HON. MEMBER: That's a lesson you guys should have learned.

MR. MACMASTER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to comment on that. The member said that this is where the government is today and I made the comment, well people can take the government out as well.

I think it's important in the next election for Nova Scotians to understand that when they are paying higher power bills that it connects back to the energy policy of the government. We can blame Nova Scotia Power all we want and I would never - I certainly wouldn't be here to stand up for them. They are a private entity and I have no doubt they are doing things in their own interest, but they must operate within the energy policy dictated by the government.

If this government is going to force them to move towards more expensive energy inputs, we're going to have more expensive outputs, outputs in the form of power bills. So, Nova Scotians, when you see that bill come in the mail, when you see that almost orange hue in your power bill, you should link that back to the orange colours of the NDP election signs and remember that the people who increased your cost of living on your power bills was the NDP Government. Maybe we'll use that in the next election campaign, Mr. Speaker, I think that's a pretty good idea.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers don't lie and despite what this government is saying, we know that the investment world recognizes - as we've seen by the bond rating agencies when they downgraded Nova Scotia Power and Emera - we've seen that the investment world recognizes the cash flow of Nova Scotia Power could weaken because they have to fall in line with the energy policy of the government. We like to refer to it as the "NDP Bite the Bullet" energy policy.

We sometimes use that in a humorous way but the point is trying to be made that the energy policy of the government is having a direct impact on power rates. To quote the credit analyst from Standard and Poor's, she said that this will likely drive - speaking about the Churchill Falls project - the need for numerous rate increases that we believe heightens the regulatory risk in the Nova Scotia market. What she means by that is increased costs and increased power bills.

Again, who can Nova Scotians thank for numerous power bill increases but their NDP Government? Mr. Speaker, people don't have to listen to me and I know people don't trust politicians. This government has given them many reasons not to trust them. All we have to do is look at the promises they made in the last election. (Interruptions) Actually I've run out of notes, I have to speak from the heart here. No, I think I have a few more left here.

I spoke today about the HST, well they had promised they weren't going to increase that - they did. I talked about deficit spending, they promised balanced budgets - they didn't hold true on that. Then they promised they weren't going to add to the debt, yet they've added more debt per year, on average, than any administration in the history of the province. That information has been tabled in the past. It has never been refuted because it can't be refuted, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I still have some time left here, don't I? Do I have about 15 minutes? I think I will move into, since we were talking about promises, I think of the Eric Clapton song, *Promises*. You know one of the commitments that the NDP made was to create secure jobs that the Nova Scotia economy needs. When I read this I often think, I know governments always try to claim credit for creating jobs, but I wish governments would stop doing that and recognize that the jobs are really created by the people who take risk in the economy. In this province, by and large, that's your small-business owner.

I would say that this government made a promise that they're going to create more jobs. Well, we've seen an awful lot of decline in jobs; we've seen a lot of lost jobs in this province. I know that I've heard other members say that if the NDP hit their job targets with their investment in economic development, their new investment - if they just hit their targets, it would cost \$200,000 in government spending per job.

Why doesn't this government instead focus on an energy policy that makes power rates more affordable? Why doesn't this government focus on keeping its spending in check so we can have lower taxes, so there's more money to flow around the economy? Why can't this government listen to small business when small business comes to them in droves? (Interruption) Yes, in droves, when we debated Bill No. 102 in the previous sitting of this Legislature. Why doesn't the government listen to small business and tear up that legislation? That would help to create jobs in this province.

I can think of something else and how this moves into another promise the government made: ensuring more young people stay and build a life in Nova Scotia. How can you expect Nova Scotians to stay here when the economic policies of the government kill jobs? People are not going to hang around if they can't find work. We can't even begin to discuss helping children in school, looking after retired seniors, or helping the less fortunate when we don't have a good economy where people can find work to generate the tax dollars to support all those things.

This is why we think Nova Scotians will be looking for an alternative in the next election. We will offer them one. I guess the question I would ask is, where is our future with a declining economy and our young people moving away? I know the people in the area that I represent want to see a future because they love the area. They love the fact that their family is there. I can think of the recent situation with the hospital, how sometimes it takes bad things happening in your life to make you appreciate the good things around you. When we looked at the government decision to eliminate emergency surgery, it made us stop and appreciate how lucky we are to have the health care system we have in Inverness, which in my eyes is a real asset to the province and should be invested in as such.

I know the previous Progressive Conservative Government invested the money in the expansion of that hospital and the construction of the new nursing home. The fact that those facilities have been moved together - they're joined now, and the shared services are going to save government money. Those are good investments.

To my point, in seeing what was happening, we realized the special care that we get in Inverness, and it's one of the reasons why people want to live around home. It's because we have good neighbours and it extends into the government services we receive. The hospital is a great example. I've seen it with my own family members going into the hospital, and the care they receive there - I don't want to downplay the care they might receive at other facilities in the province, but I've seen it to be better there. I think it's better because people know each other.

When you have health care professionals looking after a loved one, they're not just looking after a stranger. They're looking after somebody they know, who may even live in their community. That makes a difference.

I think all the more reason why governments and why I - should I form part of a government someday - will want to make the decisions in government when we're putting together budgets, to make sure that we do things that support those local economies so we can maintain the way of life that we have in places like Inverness and Inverness County. That comes down to having a good policy around taxes, to make sure the economy is competitive with other jurisdictions, to make sure that we have good labour laws so that a company like Michelin, if they decided to invest in another plant in Nova Scotia and say, for instance, they chose the Strait area because of its shipping advantages as being the best port in the province, that they might choose that area because a labour law that the NDP Government put on the books is no longer there.

Mr. Speaker, what I'm referring to there is, now that we have this labour law that was introduced, when the executives from Michelin in Nova Scotia go off to the parent company to lobby for further investment, because Michelin is selling more tires and they need to add capacity to support that growth in sales, that they look at Nova Scotia, that we arm those executives to go to bat for us and we give them a good bat, that we don't give them a bat full of holes in it because we have taxes that are too high, because we have labour laws that make us uncompetitive with other regions around the world and that we have a government energy policy that ensures the plant here is at least going to be as competitive as other areas of the world, for its energy.

If you look at areas across the country for energy, you look at provinces, the provinces that are doing the best are the provinces that have a good advantage, they've found a competitive advantage with their energy. In Quebec you see hydro energy; Alberta, Saskatchewan, B.C., you see a lot of natural gas. If we look at this budget and if I look at the future of my area, I need to see a government putting forward a budget that takes those things into account, that gives us a fighting chance. If we have a government that produces a budget that doesn't give us a fighting chance, we're going to continue to see more of the same and that's more young people leaving and a further decline in the economy.

We have too many good things happening. I know and I can speak - and I'm sure the members feel the same way about their areas - I have too many good things happening in the area I represent to let this government destroy that. I know if Nova Scotians are looking for an alternative in the next election, we're going to put forward budgets and policy that's going to help those areas, so that we can stay alive and stem that tide of out-migration and find ways to bolster the economy.

I can think of another investment made by the previous Progressive Conservative Government in high-speed Internet. I know there are a lot of people in my area who never had high-speed Internet before that have it now, and that opens up doors.

So if only this government, with its budgets, would live within its means, reduce its expenditure, reduce its taxes, but still make those smart investments, we would have some hope in Inverness. Instead, we see more taxes taking money out of our pockets, we see more debt that our children have to pay, we see no regard for trying to control costs here in the centre of government, and we have to put a stop to it. We will be asking Nova Scotians, ultimately they will decide and I know in the next election - I know the Premier said that it won't be this Fall, but I don't know - I know I'm going to be ready should it happen this Fall and I hope Nova Scotians are too. I hope that we are able to clearly explain these things to them, so that they can make an informed decision about who should be running this province.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I shall conclude my remarks. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The Estimates are now referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply unto Her Majesty.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Mr. Speaker, I move that, with the consent of the House, the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that I have up to 15 minutes to speak going into Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes. It's carried, though, the motion is carried. I had to say that before you stood up.

MR. SAMSON: No problem, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure this evening to speak on a matter which is always of great concern to the residents of Richmond County and that is roads, which I'm sure the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal will be well aware of. We've certainly had a level of success in the last few years in being able to address some of the long-standing roads that needed repaving and resurfacing in Richmond County, but needless to say, there still remains a number of significant roads on that list.

Today, rather than speak of the successes we've had, I want to take the opportunity to speak to the House and speak to the minister about some of the roads that remain as a

concern in Richmond County. I'm sure I will not have time to name them all, but I will do my best to highlight some for the minister and for his staff.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to table a petition on behalf of the residents of Harbourview Crescent, which is in the community of Louisdale. Now, Harbourview Crescent is a road which is about half a mile long, I would say, which is right off the main road when you come into Louisdale. I believe there's - I think the number I was given is close to 60 homes along this road, and I should point out that there has been a number of new homes which have been constructed on the road as well, bringing some young families back to our community and making significant investments.

This road has not been paved since a long time ago. I believe some of the dates given were into the 1960s and 1970s. Over the years it has been patched and then the patches were patched and then those patches were patched again. So, needless to say, the road is now at the point that it is completely deteriorated and simply cannot be patched any more. It needs to be resurfaced and new asphalt needs to be placed on that. I'm certainly hoping that the minister will hear the concerns. It's not often that residents in Richmond County sign petitions but it is certainly an indication of how desperate they feel the situation has become on that road.

In the community of Louisdale you also have Silveroak Drive, which a similar situation. It's off the main road, just before the intersection to Grand Anse. As well, this probably was paved the last time that Harbourview Crescent was paved, which was many years ago. It, as well, is at the point that the road is pretty much completely deteriorated. As well Duncan Road, which is another road off the main road in Louisdale, which obviously needs to be addressed.

Mr. Speaker, in previous years I have to give credit to our area manager that we have out of the Port Hawkesbury office that services Richmond and southern Inverness, Mr. Darren Blunden, along with his operations supervisors, who have been very creative with the RIM funding they received.

Now what is RIM? RIM is an acronym for Rural Impact Mitigation, which was special funding that was brought in by the previous government, which was meant to assist some of the local area garages in dealing with gravelling, brush cutting, minor repairs like that that are so important to our rural communities throughout the province. With that RIM funding in our area they were able to purchase asphalt and do a number of smaller side roads, roads that are obviously not big enough to have a capital tender called for them, but certainly roads that have residents on them that need to be addressed.

Unfortunately, as the minister is aware, last year the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal reduced the funding to the RIM program by 50 per cent. This year that reduction has stayed in place, so it's a 50 per cent reduction again this year, which basically means there will be no asphalt work at all in Richmond County this year, because

of the limited funding. It makes it that much more of a challenge for some of these side roads. I do hope that the minister will look at the concerns I've raised. I will be meeting with some of his senior staff very shortly to once again go through some of the priorities and to discuss some of those. Hopefully there's a means of possibly putting a tender in place for the main road in Louisdale, which needs to be redone, and possibly add these side roads as part of that main tender.

One of the other roads, which the minister will recall that I raised with him - in fact he visited with me and came down to the wharf, always good to get a Minister of the Crown on a wharf to speak with fishermen, residents and a local buyer who was there. It's the Little Harbour Road in L'Ardoise; this is a gravel road. The question is how do we get that gravel road paved? The situation has become even more dire for that road because, since the minister last visited, the local buyer and processor has built a live-lobster holding facility which during the construction phase had such an impact on the gravel road making it almost impassable once the soft season kicked in, meaning that there is just that much more traffic on this road.

I know that the department, to their credit, did put in a counter and came back and said this does not have the amount of traffic needed to justify under traditional rules for paving roads. If we use that approach this road will never get paved because it's a seasonal road. The heaviest traffic is going to be during lobster and crab season and I would, again, argue with the minister that this needs to be looked at as an economic development tool for this community.

If we use the traditional rules of, it has to have this many cars to justify paving, that road will never get done. Let's accept that because that will never meet that provincial standard. But I think the minister himself saw the amount of activity that takes place. There are millions of dollars worth of seafood landed at that facility. That is all money that is taxed that comes back to the coffers of the province and for this community that is the economic engine. I do hope that the minister is willing to look outside of the box when it comes to this road to find a way to get asphalt on that road, to encourage development at Little Harbour Wharf, to encourage growth in that area and to ensure that residents, the fishermen, and the workers have a decent road to travel on because gravel simply will not be able to handle the heavy traffic that takes place on that road.

I know that there have been suggestions that chip seal might be a solution but I know that even our local area manager and staff have questioned whether chip seal could handle the heavy traffic that travels on this road. During the height of lobster and crab season there are numerous 18-wheelers that are travelling on this road daily so I'm not sure, and I'm certainly not an engineer, but I would have to raise the question as well, whether chip seal would be appropriate for this road because of the heavy traffic. But I do hope the minister would be willing to look at that again.

One of the other roads that I raised with the minister briefly during the last session, he did indicate he was aware of it, is the Grand Gully Road over in River Bourgeois. That is a gravel road as well and the problem is right about the middle of the road it comes to a point where you're driving right along the ocean - and I have to say it's one of the most beautiful areas in Richmond County - but the problem with it is that road is almost at the same level as the ocean. On the other side of the road there's a bit of a - I'm not sure how'd you describe it - it's not really a pond but it's a place where water gathers and depending on the amount of rain it's either going to be dry or it's going to be full. What happens is often, we saw it again this winter, with high tide and with heavy rains the road is completely flooded. With the cold weather it brought ice; it brought conditions which basically made the road impassable.

For the locals they know what to watch for, they know it's a dangerous area, but for anyone visiting or anyone coming to the area who wouldn't recognize it and would hit that water, especially with a car, more than likely they would flood their engine or they'd have serious damage done to their vehicle especially if there was ice in that area. The problem with that road, what we're being told by the engineers, is that the road bed has to be built up. It has to be built higher than the level of the ocean and there has to be piping underneath so that the water can freely flow underneath without impacting the road itself. That is going to require significant capital investment which is beyond the budget of the local area manager. So it's going to take money either out of the Sydney office or out of the Halifax office to fix this problem, but it has to be fixed.

The residents have been more than patient but they are very frustrated and they are continuing to ask when they are going to see a solution because it's only a matter of time before there's going to be a serious accident at this location. I know the minister has said he's aware of it. I do hope that either while the House is sitting, or when it rises, he will take the opportunity again, and I want to extend the invitation for him to come to visit in Richmond County so he can see these roads for himself, maybe talk to some of the residents, as he did when he was in Little Anse the last time, when he was over in Little Harbour, and be able to hear their frustrations directly.

Mr. Speaker, as well, some of the other roads I wanted to talk about are some of the ones that require capital funding which, basically, means tenders for paving and resurfacing. We have the Whiteside Road which is just across the street from the Strait Richmond Hospital, again another area that has seen a number of new homes go in. It's a paved road, and it has been patched more times than I even want to think of - it clearly needs to be resurfaced. There's tremendous opportunity there for growth in housing development, but that road clearly needs to be addressed.

As well, the community of Dundee, last year, and I certainly want to commend the minister, there was a tender from the County Line Road coming through Black River right up to the Black River Bridge which is a new bridge that was replaced a few years ago. So that section of road has been done, but when you leave that bridge and you head towards

the Dundee Resort, heading up the St. Georges Channel, the road is almost - let's say it's basically impassable. It's in terrible condition. This is one of the most beautiful drives along the Bras d'Or Lakes that we have in Richmond County and the road is completely deteriorated. I'm certainly hoping this year that the minister will continue the work that was done on the road leading up to the Black River Bridge, and will continue the next section for five or six kilometres which would take you in front of the Dundee Resort up the St. Georges Channel where it will meet the new pavement that was done I believe in 2007. So that entire section will have been repaved and will be a road that will be in great shape.

One of the other roads that the minister will recall that I did raise with him is the Cape Auget Road which is a road off the Lower Road in Arichat and which is where the Clearwater live lobster holding facility is located - I should add, Mr. Speaker, the largest live lobster holding facility in the world. This is a major employer for our community and the road itself leading to that facility has become in a completely deteriorated state. It follows right along the Arichat Harbour with a number of twists and turns. I have to say residents are terrified whenever they meet some of the 18-wheelers coming in, either to pick up lobster or to drop off lobster, on some of these turns because the road is so broken up, especially along the shoulder - these trucks are finding themselves on the wrong side of the road in order to try to navigate.

So it's certainly not a criticism of their driving, but it's a criticism of the condition of the road and it has become a safety concern. It's not just that the workers want to have a nice road to drive on. For local residents, especially parents with school-aged children, they are terrified that there's going to be a significant accident along this road because of the way the pavement has become broken up, some of the major potholes, and even some of the erosion that is taking place along that road.

One of the other roads as well that someone reminded me of recently, and that I know very well because I grew up on it, is the main road leading into Petit-de-Grat which is known as the stretch to Boudreauville Road. This is the main road leading into the community, and I believe the last time it was paved was back in the 1970s. This clearly is another road as well that many people are complaining about. There are a number of businesses located along this road, the ball field is along this road, the church is along this road, and it clearly needs to be addressed - the only way to do so is going to be with new pavement.

Ending on a positive note, I do want to commend the minister for continuing the commitment to complete the upgrading and resurfacing of Route 4. I've heard tremendous comments on the work that was done, and I know many of us who travel to Cape Breton and those who travel further than Richmond County are very happy to see this road is finally coming to a modern state, and I know that the minister is scheduled to call another tender this year which will take the paving from Johnstown west towards St. Peter's with the final section to be done in 2013-14. So the minister made that commitment and I'm

certainly pleased to see that that commitment will be maintained. I do hope that he has taken note of some of the many other roads that need to be addressed in Richmond County.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand tonight and speak for a few moments to a number of projects that are happening in my constituency, maybe underline a few, but also thank the minister for a number of projects that are actually happening in and around Argyle. I just wanted to offer my thanks to the minister, so I'll start off on a good note and maybe I'll end it on a good note as well.

Of course, there's one that I'm very impressed with right now, is the work that's being done on Highway No. 103. Not only are we seeing kilometres and kilometres of work being done on Highway No. 103 from my constituency, Tusket going to Yarmouth; they've actually been marking off the road. I think Maritime Fence has been there putting in new guard rail so it looks good for the area to finally get that final piece of highway done. It's good to see that kind of work happening in our area.

The other thing that I wanted to underline on Highway No. 103 is, many of us who travel Highway No. 103 – I know the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture does a lot as well – it's good to see the work starting to happen around Granite Village into Port Mouton and that area. As they're cutting the line and doing the grubbing, it looks really cool to see the work they've already done up in through that area. To actually see the track of that highway, I know we've been talking about that expansion or that bypass for, I think we're going on six years there, right now. The announcements were made, then they started going out to try to purchase the properties, then it takes on a life of its own and we all tend to forget about it a little bit until we actually see the work actually happening. It's good to see that amount of work being done.

I know for me, who travels that road a couple of times a week and many of the truck drivers and such who will be driving it, it will be welcome to be able to drive on that bypass. It's probably one of the more dangerous points of Highway No. 103, which is down through Granite Village, down through Port Mouton as you get into the Queens County area. I think that's going to be a wonderful addition to our highway system as we finally try to get that highway finished from Halifax all the way down to Yarmouth.

I want to underline a couple of places I'd like to see a little bit of work done. I know the minister is listening attentively and I want to thank him for the work that we did get last year on Route 3, through East Pubnico. There was a really nice stretch of highway done from the 335 which is the Pubnico Road going towards the Willett Road, which is a very good chunk of road. Of course, there's still some need as we continue to go further down towards Shelburne, there's a couple of pieces of road that are coursed right near a number of fish plants there that, over the winter, really got themselves beat. There's lots of it that have chunked up.

I know the OS and the area manager had been looking at that. I know they put some cold patch in to try to keep it, but there's going to have to be some work done near the East Side Fisheries and down near the Lower East Pubnico wharf as it goes along. I just underline that issue. One that the minister and I have talked about on a number of occasions is the Little River Harbour, Comeau's Hill Road. This is a secondary road, so this makes it a little more difficult to find a place for it within his five-year plan, but it is an important road, I think, that does service a pretty neat little community that have been driving on patches of patches of patches and I think it's time that maybe someone looks at it and puts it in a plan to say, we'll continue to do certain pieces of this over the next five years and just get it done. There are a number of places that it's very difficult to drive through, you do have to watch what you're doing. I haven't been there since Spring started, so I don't know what the pothole situation is in that area. I know in the past it has been some concern.

There are a number of potholes around, but not bad this year, I have to say. This has been a good year in my neck of the woods for potholes. I only had the one person give me a jingle, looking for a new tire. I think it was while driving across the Dominick Road which cuts from Highway No. 3 over to, I think it's 334. I might be getting my numbers mixed up but this is the one that goes through Plymouth and all the way down to Wedgeport. There's a little cut-off road that people take and there's a big hole there and unfortunately one of my constituents hit that a little too hard and she did lose her tire. I don't know if she lost the rim on her car or not, but I did refer her to the department so we'll see what the department is going to say about it. If I look at it personally, I think there was a lot of room there but who knows?

Then the secondary roads to the dirt roads haven't done bad either. Coldstream Road, which is the one way at the end of the 308 in the north end of that, in the community of Quinan, there are a number of people who have basically taken cottages, transformed them into their homes, and now live down at the end of this dirt road. It is in need of some ditching and some cross-culverts.

Again, I mentioned this to the area manager, that this is some work that we need to look at once everything dries up, that they can maybe see some time to get some culverts switched out.

As an update to all members of this House who know the concern that we had in the flooding last year in November - we lost one of our bridges, the Tuskent Bridge, which connected along the Highway No. 3. There's a wonderful new bridge sitting there. The company that put it in has done a phenomenal job in constructing it. It is now sitting in one full piece, it seems, sitting up on the foundations. The extent of that foundation seems to have been poured, and the casings are all off it. We are now just waiting for the sloping of that road, basically, and then the paving toward the end of May - I think that was the target date for that one.

I want to thank the minister for his input on that one. I know it doesn't happen often, but I thank government for their work in securing the funding through that, because if I understand, that went through as a little bit of disaster relief as well to help pay for that bridge.

It's funny, because I do take a lot of questions on it - when is it going to be done, how come it's that kind of bridge? That's what I think you get a lot of times as well. It is a Bailey bridge, it is a panel bridge, but as I tell most people, it is a permanent Bailey bridge. Probably through my lifetime I'll never see a replacement for that bridge. Looking at it, I think I'm much more comfortable in saying that because of the kind of bridge that they did put in. It is a bridge that I think will be there for an extremely long time because of its extra construction, of its extra size. I think it was almost a \$4 million installation by the time it was all done.

I can tell you, it's kind of weird, because when you think of it, Highway No. 103 is right next to it. There is a way around, but what we're finding is that there are a lot of individuals who maybe don't like the speed of the 100-Series Highway, who continue to take Highway No. 3. I don't know if the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture has noticed the number of fender-benders and accidents at the Raynardton Road as people come off the Tusket, flying along, and then stop and turn left on the highway, going toward Highway No. 3. It has happened a ton of times now, so it would be good to finally get that bridge back into circulation so we can get that kind of left-turning traffic off our 100-Series Highway.

Then, of course, that goes on to some further updates to that road. I think, maybe in concert with the federal government, that we can get a couple of overpasses that were missed when the bridge was originally built by the Liberals back in the early 1970s. It would be nice to have a completed highway system along there, especially the Pubnico intersection, as a lot of fish trucks come off that intersection. It would be really nice to see a full intersection on that one, but then again, I'm very happy with what I've gotten for the area in the last number of years, so I'm not going to go and extend myself too far on that one.

The final one I want to talk quickly about is the Indian Sluice Bridge. I want to say that I think there's a wonderful project going there. I want to thank the government again. This is two thanks to the government in one night here, but I want to thank them for their inclusion in the - I think it was in the Budget Speech that the Indian Sluice Bridge was mentioned as an infrastructure project. You don't know how important that is to the community of Surette's Island, of Morris Island, to know that their bridge has not only been announced, been talked about - they know what kind of project is there - but to also see the extra commitment that this government has put toward making sure that bridge does go in place.

I'll continue to thank the minister for his input on this, because it wasn't just me beating down on it; it wasn't just certain people beating on it. It was a community group that got their stuff together and was able to present to the minister and to the department, to truly understand that bridge and how important that replacement was to that community. I give full kudos to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal for their input on that one.

Someone did mention osprey there. As you know, last year the community group asked for an out-of-department engineering study of that bridge to be done, because we didn't always necessarily trust everything the department was telling us. So I said, put that in the hands of a contractor, let them look at the bridge, let them tell us what's wrong with that bridge to see if it needs replacement now or later. What happened was they started their work, but what happened was there is an osprey that sits on the top of that centre span, it has been living there for a few years, having its young, dive-bombing people who walk by on that bridge, but for the most part people have liked having the osprey at the top of the bridge but, of course, the work was shut down because that osprey was there having its young and the project got delayed over a long period of time until things were able to get done.

Now, kudos again to the department that they were able to get some dollars available to basically move the osprey nest from here to another site just down the road a little bit. I think you've seen these along the electrical system where you sort of see the power poles and then you see another pole beside it with a big box on the top where either a bald eagle will sit or osprey or another bird that you really don't want on top of the electrical system. This is the idea that the Department of Natural Resources took to take the osprey and move it. They were able to beat the osprey insofar as getting it out before the osprey came around, but within days of that move happening, the osprey came from wherever the osprey comes from every Spring; it's probably much smarter than we are, I'm pretty sure it goes south.

So it shows up and it finds that its house is not there anymore, it's not on the centre span of the big, green bridge. So the osprey has been endeavouring to reconstruct its house on top of our 103-year-old bridge. I don't know how that will impact the work to that bridge this summer; I think we should be okay because I know the steps in that project that will need to go, but we're going to have to find a way to get that silly thing off that bridge and get it into its new home just a few hundred metres down the road.

I think it's just funny because after all that work and all the science that would have gone into moving the structure, I think they're creatures of habit, they like being on top of the big, green bridge where it gives you sort of a panoramic view of the Indian Sluice. (Interruption) I tried to talk to the osprey, but I tell you, it doesn't listen to me so I'm hoping maybe the NDP might have a better chance at it than I do. So we'll see how it goes.

There are a couple of other things that are very important in my constituency that maybe I'll have another opportunity to talk about in the near future that don't necessarily revolve around transportation, even though I do have one more bridge beyond that one that might need some looking at, but I'm not going to worry about that one this night, but there are a couple of projects that have been stalled over the last number of years.

One of them, of course, is the long-term care facility in my constituency which was to see an expansion, a number of beds. That seems to have stalled again so I'm just wondering where that is in process. I know that the minister, during those estimates, I'll have the opportunity to ask her of that.

Also, the issue of the centres scolaires communautaires in our area, the school community centre in Tusket, the Par-en-Bas centre, which, of course, many of you would know houses community offices, a preschool, it holds a theatre and through a number of issues that happen in our area in regard to our RDA, there are a number of unpaid bills to the construction of that facility that have not been addressed yet. I'm just wondering, maybe from the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, we'll be able to have an opportunity to talk about that in the near future as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of the Constituency of Argyle and where we've been over the last year. There are, of course, the concerns of its economy, the economy that happens around it, not necessarily the government jobs, but the jobs themselves relating to the tourist industry, the issues in and around the fishery itself. I know we've had low prices but, of course, they've been landing more lobster than they have ever seen before, so maybe those things have balanced themselves out, yet there is a tremendous concern for that fishery in southwestern Nova Scotia and maybe we'll have the opportunity during estimates as well to speak to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight and look forward to moving on to estimates in this Chamber.

MR. SPEAKER: We have now reached the moment of interruption. The topic was chosen earlier by the honourable member for Yarmouth.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

EDUC.: CUTS - EFFECTS

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in my place to speak to the late debate topic:

“Therefore be it resolved that slashing education budgets by \$65 million over the past two years is having, and will continue to have, a detrimental effect on students and their educational outcomes in this province and call upon government to restore education funding.”

Mr. Speaker, this is a debate that began, as you will recall, with the infamous 22 per cent exercise, the foolishness that boards were asked to go through, and the anxiety and the turmoil that parents, teachers, and students were asked to go through while the government, throughout this ridiculous proposal, or ridiculous threat, that there would be a 22 per cent reduction in education.

Now, anybody who understands anything about education would recognize that that's impossible but it did generate a lot of anxiety and worry, and if that's what the government was intending to do, then I guess they were successful. Boards held their public meetings and they had gone through this 22 per cent exercise and, of course, trying to take 22 per cent over three years out of a budget seemed to be something that was very difficult and would be very difficult to achieve.

One of the real issues with that, Mr. Speaker, was that the minister was maintaining through all of this that no, no, no, this won't have any impact, negatively, on students in the classroom and that, again, exposed I think the lack of understanding of what a 22 per cent cut over three years would do. So after allowing boards to try to work through this and after allowing people in all of our school communities to be anxious and upset and worried, the government came back and said no, no, no, we really didn't mean that, it's only going to be X many dollars over three years. I think they were talking maybe 2 per cent or 3 per cent.

What they failed to articulate to the public in the province was that in addition to cutting boards by 2 per cent or 3 per cent, they were also going to ask boards - no, they were going to tell boards - that they would be responsible for all of the inflationary costs, wages, benefits, fuel costs, and all of those which when boards sat down and looked at, how can we deal with a 2 per cent to 3 per cent cut, and then how can we deal with the extra costs, the real cut to the dollars that those boards would have at their disposal during that budget year would be more like 6 per cent cuts.

So, you know, you don't have to be really good in math, Mr. Speaker - I'm not suggesting that you're not - but to take 6 per cent and multiply (Interruption) Then I'm sure you can do this math. If you take 6 per cent and multiply it by 3 per cent, you come up with 18 per cent - so not far off the mark of the original 22 per cent that the government was suggesting needed to be cut. So if we go back again to what I said started this initial debate, it was the 22 per cent and before this government is finished slashing funding to education, they will have achieved their 22 per cent and the students in this province will pay a price for years to come.

You know, when you look at statements that have been made by the Premier about the pillars on which the government is making its decisions and its policy development, education is not one of them. So that should send a message to Nova Scotians that this government does not value public education. When you look at the most recent Speech from the Throne, a 20-page document with a lot of pomp and ceremony and chest beating and so on - out of those 20 pages in that document, less than two were devoted to education. Less than two pages out of a 20-page document, which talks about the direction of this government and where they want to go and what their priorities are - less than two pages dealt with education. That again has sent a message that this government does not value or care about public education.

Then, if we want to go a little deeper on that, even within the two-plus pages in that document, not one mention of special education. The most vulnerable students we have in our schools, the students who need and deserve supports so that they can be successful, and yet the Speech from the Throne made no mention of students with special needs. You know, Mr. Speaker, that's pretty sad. It's pretty sad to think that a minister and a government can develop a budget, have input into a Throne Speech, and never once mention the very kids who need us the most.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the reason that was an omission, maybe by chance and maybe not, is because the very services that are being taken away from our public school system are the ones that those children need the most. If you don't acknowledge them, if you don't acknowledge they have a need, then perhaps you don't feel you have to fund it because from the get-go there never has been any movement, any suggestion, any recommendations or any decisions by the government that would suggest they do value the special-needs students in our schools.

Last year, over the two years, we're looking at about a \$65 million cut from public education. I've talked to board members, I've talked to parents, I've talked students, I've talked to teachers and I've talked to the general population in this province and they recognize that the government is asking the boards to do their dirty work. They're asking the boards to take less money, do more with less, and it's a bit of an insult because schools have been doing the best they can to try to meet the needs of all of the students in their population.

We have a model of inclusion in this province and it's a model that - I think we have a policy of inclusion where all students are included in the public school system. We're taking away the very supports that allow those students who are included our schools to be successful. If the model isn't working, change it, but don't keep cutting and cutting and cutting and leaving a void. One board member said we'll put up with this for another year. They will have destroyed - they being the NDP Government - they will have destroyed the public education system and it will take us years to build it back.

This whole business of investing in our students - every economist that you would ever read would tell you that one of the most important places, if you want to grow the economy of your province or your country, one of the most important places to make that investment is in education. We know that we have a need for economic growth in this province. We know that we have well-trained teachers. We have bright kids. We have programs that will allow them to be successful and what's happening is that this government is failing to recognize that most valuable resource that we have and they are failing to recognize the damage that will be done, that they are currently doing, so that at the end of their term we will have to do cleanup and catch-up and try to rebuild what's been destroyed by this particular government.

It's not just the members in this House, it's the general public that you talk to who say how can MLAs sit over there and vote for something that they know is destroying the very fabric of this province - that's our young people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Mr. Speaker, as usual, I'm proud to stand in my place to talk about a very important issue to the people that I represent and the many families and young people across Nova Scotia with regard to the topic here today.

Of course, I welcome the opportunity to join in the debate here and to outline the commitment our government is making to ensure our children are receiving an education as good or better as anywhere else in this country. That's exactly what parents want and that is what all Nova Scotians expect from government and our education partners. I'm certainly proud to be a member of this House and stand in this Chamber to represent the fine people of Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville and listen to their concerns.

I have quite a suburban area, it's growing in population and one of the things I certainly haven't heard on an everyday basis are some of the concerns that the Opposition Parties are fear-mongering on. I've had an opportunity to go into a couple of the schools that I represent and talk to the parents, the students, the administrators and one of the administrators said to me the other day when I had a chance to chat with him - I asked, how's morale in the school? He said he's been in the school system for 33 years and this is what he said, "Morale has never been better."

That's because they know that finally within the Department of Education, we have a plan, we have a plan to move forward on something that everybody values, which is our education system. We know that this province is making significant investments in our public education system - \$1.1 billion - even as our enrolments are declining. That's \$1.1 billion, per-student funding and class sizes are the best we've ever seen in this province. It will continue to stay that way under this government.

The average per-student funding is \$10,372. It's the highest level ever and it will increase again in 2012-13. Services and supports for students with special needs continue to be protected, that's one of the things that this government laid out to ensure that that funding was protected. In fact, this year, my understanding is that funding has been increased by approximately \$12 million. So the member opposite, when she talks about how there's no increased funding, there is. There's been an updated formula and we all know that.

Our government's vision is that every student in every classroom should become well educated, competent and responsible adults. I think that's what we all want, I certainly know that as a new father, even though she's only seven and a half months, I know that in four years from now she'll be going to school, she'll be getting a great education here in this province. That's exactly what we as a government want, that's exactly what our government knows we will deliver on, and that's what parents and students want.

We also know that we have to deal with the realities of today. The reality of today is that there are pressures within our system that we need to ensure that our province lives within its means. We have 30,000 less students today than we had a decade ago; 30,000 less students in our system. Amazingly, over the last 10 years, more teachers were hired, increased spending under the former minister that sits on the Opposition - increased spending and administration grew even though our enrolments were declining. Today, we have 360 more teachers in the system than we did in the fiscal year of 2001-02 when there were 30,000 more students.

Previous governments opted to just increase spending by almost 42 per cent in face of the rapid decline in enrolments. But our government's priority is to focus on ensuring - focus limited resources on today's classroom and not on empty desks. That's what I think the people of Nova Scotia would want their government to do and we, as a government, expect the school boards to do the same. We know that families want the boards and this government to make the decisions that put children and learning first, and we have made that a priority in our education plan.

So: Kids and Learning First. I know that some of the members opposite don't necessarily read those documents, so we'll tell them a little bit of a - I guess they would think it's called a "story." I'll kind of recap what Kids and Learning First is all about. It is ensuring that we put our students first; support effective teaching in every classroom, prepare young people for good jobs and citizenship; and strengthen the links among schools, parents, and the community.

Government's education plan builds on our successes and targets new investments - more than \$6 million over the next few years. There will be supports. There will be more support for students in critical subject areas and in transition years. We will expand Succeeding in Reading in Grade 2 this year and in Grade 3 the following year.

I know that last year we heard this fear-mongering about Succeeding in Reading, the new program that replaced Reading Recovery. When I spoke with teachers in some elementary schools - two, I know in particular - out my way, they said to me that this program encompasses more students, ensures that the kids who need it will get the help, and that they are already starting to see the benefits of it.

Now, of course, you can't necessarily take that just off the cuff. We have to see some results. We'll start to see that over the coming years. We know that students will soon learn from the same math curriculum used in leading western provinces, and Grade 9 will be reviewed to help keep our students interested and motivated to better prepare themselves for high school.

A new Discovering Opportunities program for struggling students is part of that work. High school courses will be reviewed based on what today's graduates need. While students deserve and want choices, courses should reflect the needs of employers and communities. We are linking learning to the workplace, so the skilled trades program is being expanded to 18 high schools from the current nine. This will allow the opportunity to explore the trades in a hands-on way, to enable them to seize opportunities that are coming with the \$25 billion shipbuilding contract.

The education plan also presents new ways and new places for students to learn. We will triple the number of students who can access on-line courses through the Nova Scotia Virtual School, and we will also double the number of courses there.

The province is also - which I think is something very important - expanding SchoolsPlus, a program that brings services and supports for children and families into their schools. A new grants program will also allow more community groups to use their schools for after-hour activities, whether it's cultural events or exercising. Our plan also ensures funding supports to protect our small, isolated schools.

Kids and Learning First is about doing things differently in our education system. It's about better allotting the resources and the programs within the province's existing budget while improving learning and student outcomes.

As I said earlier, as the parent of a very young child, I know how important teachers are to the success of our children. My wife being a teacher herself, I know that all of our staff, our students, and the people within our communities are up to that challenge. The province will continue to work with teachers to develop standards for quality instruction.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to stand here in my place to talk about this very important issue. I will take my place and hear the debate for the other Parties. Thank you.

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

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand here this evening and join in this debate on the resolution that slashing education budgets by \$65 million over the past two years is having and will continue to have a detrimental effect on students and their educational outcomes in this province, and to call upon the government to restore education funding.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot in the last couple of days about education and education funding. We heard today that this government doesn't want to take responsibility for the cuts that school boards are being forced to make. They're not giving the school boards any direction of where the cuts should be taken and actually over the last week we heard the announcement of a new school here in the Halifax area to house students while the Cole Harbour school has upgrades to its trades program.

Mr. Speaker, in my area there is a trades program at a school called Memorial Composite High School. It has trades of electrical, plumbing, carpentry; it has shipping and receiving, and welding. Now, two years ago the government in power today did a review of all the programs in all the school systems and Memorial had a dust-collection system that was outdated - it was built back in 1979. What happened is they shut the program down until they could get a dust-collection system in there that would be efficient.

Well, Mr. Speaker, they have the system in there now but they don't have the vacuum system. They've been waiting now for two years to get this system. They're talking about education and trying to get these trades programs developed. All they need is a vacuum system on that system at Memorial but, no, they have to now cut a few pieces of board, stop, shut the machinery off, clean it up, sweep up the floor, and make sure the dust is not in place and start over again. What kind of effect is that having on the education and trades program at Memorial Composite High School?

This government needs to be held accountable for what's happening in the public education system. They leave the school boards with few choices but to cut at the classroom level. Mr. Speaker, I spoke with the superintendent of the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board and he said last year's cuts were one of the hardest things he had to do. They cut the so-called fat away from the system last year and this year they say the cuts are going to be devastating because that fat is not there anymore.

Today we hear the Premier say that they're blaming the school boards for what cuts are being made, that the school boards are playing games. Then we hear the member opposite talk about the people on this side of the government who are fear-mongering. Well, Mr. Speaker, once the results of this government's poor decision making are known to Nova Scotians, they conveniently step up and blame the school boards. Just recently we had what we call Take Your MLA to School Day and in speaking with the member who organized this in my area, it was so the members of this Legislature could understand what

teachers do, the situations in the classrooms, and how their teaching abilities and skills work in the classrooms.

I can stand here today and say it's probably no wonder that the government doesn't understand the importance of the education system because, Mr. Speaker, 11 MLAs from the government side, including the Premier and the Minister of Education, chose not to attend that day (Interruption) Take Your MLA to School Day. I guess it is not take your Premier or minister to school day. They may say it was scheduling or a storm day but the schools also said they would hold the spots open and they would accommodate those members who couldn't make it to find another date.

The government simply doesn't listen, Mr. Speaker. If they did, they would hear from the experts, the people on the ground in the school system, the teachers, the teaching assistants, the cleaning staff, and all those people who are going to have their jobs cut because of these budget cuts. Chignecto-Central Regional School Board superintendent Gary Clarke describes the cuts as ugly, devastating and/or heartbreaking. Board member Ron Marks said the cuts are going to affect all our children; the parents are going to be shocked. Margo Tait, superintendent of the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board calls the cuts difficult at times and at times excruciating. Vic Fleury, the president of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, said to say these cuts won't have grave impacts on the classroom is naive. This government is naive and the people of this province do not deserve a naive government.

Nova Scotians of all ages are crying out at these cuts that will continue to negatively impact students. The government is not listening to the school boards. They won't listen to the parents and they're not listening to the students. Mr. Speaker, last year the cuts in education resulted in the loss of 128 full-time teaching positions and 425 maintenance, consultant, and support-staff positions. The projection for the Department of Education this year, according to the budget, is they're going to add 17 full-time equivalents in the Department of Education; 553 government positions are going to be added. This year we're going to see even more cuts to teachers, teaching assistants, library personnel, IT, property, transportation, and central and regional office staff.

Nova Scotians understand there are fewer children in the schools, but they don't understand why the government believes that our current students are not deserving of a good education, an education we owe our children if we're going to move forward as a province. If there are 360 more teachers in the system, as the member opposite has said, and the students are down, how come the class sizes are growing? How do you put students first when you're making cuts to the classrooms?

We heard the member opposite say that the funding per student this year has gone up to \$10,372, I think he said. The transition support program was introduced by this government a couple of years back; it allows \$7,200 per student to go with that student. Is that going to increase the \$10,372? Taking resources away from our students will lead to a

lower quality education. All four adult high school programs in the Chignecto-Central region will be eliminated as a result of these cuts. Or maybe the school board is just playing games again. There are 200 adults enrolled in these programs, all trying to make a better life for themselves. These are people who are taking the initiative to finish their education, for many of these programs serve as a way to get them back on their feet and have an opportunity to lead successful, prosperous lives. They want to be productive members of society and that's why they're going back to school.

A student enrolled in this program in Truro told reporters that these cuts were devastating to his lifestyle. For the government to sit idly by when Nova Scotians have an opportunity like this stripped away from them is despicable. Special-needs students are losing teacher assistants. Some of the families have told me that their student has a special needs all day long, not half a day. If you take TAs out of the classroom, so that there's one TA to two or three students, that's telling those parents that their special-needs people are only half special.

From an economic perspective, people who have better education cost the government a lot less. By going on to get a good job, they're able to contribute more in taxes. It has also been shown that people living above the poverty line depend less on our health care system. The bottom line is this, the government has taken great opportunities away from our students. By doing this they are sending those in search of support down a dark path. Rather than make our children pay for their poor decision making, the government needs to find savings at the top.

Making cuts at the front line while inflating their own departments is unethical. Ask Nova Scotians, they will tell us and they will tell us in the next election. As I said, the most recent budget shows an increase of 553 full-time equivalent positions across the government this year. This government supports watching 41 librarians walk out the door in order to put an additional 41 positions in the Department of Finance. It will be interesting to see how the students from Chignecto-Central handle that information. The fact of the matter is, government would rather swell their own departments with more high-paid bureaucrats than give our kids a quality education.

This is a hard pill for our students to swallow and it's a hard pill for our parents to swallow. Hopefully, we can look at this in a different light and maybe add some more funding back and give the students the education they deserve. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I would like to thank all the honourable members tonight for an excellent debate. The time has now elapsed.

We will return to the Supply motion.

[ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY]

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

MR. LEONARD PREYRA: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise here for a few minutes to resume debate here on Supply.

You know, I sat through the first half-hour of this debate on Supply and I felt like I was back in the 1950s and got the feeling that there's nothing more to what government does, there's nothing more to public policy than the filling of holes and the digging of holes and the paving of roads. It's as if governments have no particular purpose other than to dig holes and to fill holes.

The members opposite did a great job of digging those holes, Mr. Speaker, and we are here to try to fix some of those problems that they created.

Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying, attributed as an African saying, but I think it's Greek, that says "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in." - a society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in. It's an interesting proverb; it's a great quote for governments to live by.

I know certainly from personal experience that my parents, both very highly educated professionals, in the middle of their careers decided to leave the country of their birth and their families and their friends and decided to come here because they knew, they believed that life would be better for their 10 children, that they would do better here. Despite their own personal situation being comfortable, they decided to go somewhere else. So for me, it has been a great lesson that we don't ever stop thinking about tomorrow; we don't stop thinking about the future.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, this Supply that we're talking about today, really speaks to the future. It speaks about creating good jobs for our young people; it talks about providing better health care, more into prevention; about putting our fiscal house in order so that we don't impose a financial burden on our children; about helping families to make ends meet; about putting Kids and Learning First, so that they have the education they need to thrive in the world they will grow up in; and creating better energy futures so we don't have to rely on the smokestack industries and the fading industries for our survival.

That's how this budget and this motion should be understood, Mr. Speaker. It should be understood as a way to put our house in order, to position us to do better in the future, and put us in a better position than we find ourselves in today.

Let me say a little bit about how the jobs and the economy section relates back. In my constituency, Mr. Speaker, there's a great deal of enthusiasm, in large part because of this. They know that at the moment we're going through a difficult time, but they know that with some of the big projects - and not just the big projects, I'd like to say something about

the smaller ones as well - with Irving Shipbuilding, with Shell Oil, with the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project, the plan is to put us in a much better position, to put our children and our grandchildren in a better position.

Certainly just in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, there are other projects that are not getting as much attention, but are just as important to the future of the constituency and the future of the province (Interruption) Sorry, Madam Speaker, these switches happen so easily.

On oceans research, for example, we know, Madam Speaker, Nova Scotians have lived and died by the sea, that our future belongs on the ocean and our future has been made on the ocean, yet so little money was invested in developing our oceans. Here we are, with a booming oceans research industry that is now being developed in Nova Scotia with significant investments from the province - in fact, just this week the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism announced more support for developing short sea shipping and feeder lines in our area so that we can position ourselves for more container traffic and more tourism, and a whole range of things to locate us more securely on the Northeastern Seaboard of the United States.

There are developments in immunovaccine - the future of our health care depends on our ability to develop these vaccines; diagnostic imaging, which is so important for early detection and treatment; and digital animation, an industry that is now booming, thanks to investments from the film tax credit.

We have investments in energy, Madam Speaker, financial services. There are so many other things and they have to be understood as part of that strategy to develop a long-term economy here in Nova Scotia. You can get - I mean if the Opposition is interested in bricks and mortar, you can look at the roads and the infrastructure spending as well. In the constituency alone we've spent money on the Court of Appeal, on the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, a new library is being built, and money is being invested in the greenway the port of Halifax is developing, the whole Seaport Market. If you measure a government by bricks and mortar, you can do that as well, but the real test for us is the development that we're investing in for future growth.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, our investments in health care have to be understood in that way. We've invested a lot in just the treatment of people, but we haven't spent a lot of money looking at the future and how we deal with prevention and how we deal with early identification. A lot of the government policy that we are looking at today and looking at in this budget is aimed precisely at that, to help our children and ourselves, I dare say, develop better habits. We've seen legislation, for example, on tanning beds, on wearing helmets in high risk sports, on early detection of colon cancer, dealing more with alcohol and substance abuse, with tobacco; all of those things are focused on the future.

We want to avoid the kinds of risk that past generations, including our own generation, have taken and the huge costs they have imposed on future generations,

including the generation coming up. We know that we need healthy children and healthy children become healthy adults and we need to deal with our health issues at source.

But again Madam Speaker, those initiatives have to be understood as future-looking initiatives. We might not see the short-term gains today but 20 or 30 years down the road we will save a great deal of money. I know the Opposition has talked about the Mental Health Strategy recently. What I know about the mental health strategy is what I read in Merlin Nunn's report. Merlin Nunn said that our system missed a lot of opportunities to help families along the way, that some of the supports were there - the families didn't know how to get to those supports. Merlin Nunn said that we were providing support far too late in the process.

We don't have to assume that everything we did in the past works, Madam Speaker, and certainly the Mental Health Strategy is an example of that. We do have to get into early detection, we do have to get into early treatment, we do have to provide support for families when they need it most and often that means at the very beginning. Given the financial constraints we face, that money has to come out of existing resources and we have to reshuffle those resources because that too is part of the challenge of being in government.

It's the same with the emergency room openings and closings, Madam Speaker. A number of governments have looked at this issue and have not done anything, but we knew that emergency rooms as they currently existed were being used improperly, they were used for the wrong purposes. People were not getting emergency care when they needed it and so we have collaborative emergency centres, we have paramedics, we have nurse practitioners, and we have a number of people providing front-line care closer to home and closer to where people need it.

That too is a way of conserving resources and living within our means, but it provides better care, it provides better care to seniors, it provides better care to families, it provides better care to smaller communities. But it also positions us down the road, Madam Speaker, to do far better.

Similarly with education. I know, Madam Speaker, one of the first things that I faced when I was nominated for election in Halifax Citadel - at the time Halifax Citadel - was the closure of Saint Mary's Elementary School. We said at the time that small schools were at the heart of the community and we needed to do more with schools, we needed to make better use of them. You can look at SchoolsPlus as the keeping of the commitment. The schools can be used for a number of different purposes and I see in my own community people using them for after school, people using them for English as a Second Language, seniors using it for interacting with children. There are a great number of uses for schools and SchoolsPlus keeps that promise. We are doing our best to keep small community schools open and small isolated schools open because we know that communities grow and live and thrive around small schools.

We are also positioning our children for the future by offering courses and programs that will give them good jobs and train them for the future. We're training them to be active citizens, we're training them to be good community role models, we're treating them to mentorship where they can engage with other people. We're also preparing them for skilled work, preparing them to think and live in a world that's going to be very different.

Our teachers are doing a wonderful job, especially in the community that I serve. I did go to Take Your MLA to Work Day, I didn't need that to inspire me. I go to my schools several times a month and I always enjoy the experience. In fact, this time they asked me to teach a couple of classes and I spoke to some law and politics classes and had a wonderful time.

The teachers are doing a great job. There are extraordinary circumstances that many of them are facing, many of them are doing more than just basic teaching. I was very impressed with them and the students. Our students are thriving and they are thriving in more than just education, they're just thriving in general.

Education isn't just restricted to elementary; I have a number of universities in my constituency. On post-secondary education, we introduced a debt cap for students. We provided additional loans and grants. In fact, this budget makes provision for \$5-plus million to strengthen our loans program. We're proud of the graduate retention credit. I spoke earlier about the investments in research and innovation. We've invested a lot of money in infrastructure at universities as well.

We're making life affordable for Nova Scotians by reducing the tax burden on them. We've already talked about tax reductions in the basic amount, in the spousal amount, the dependant amount, the small business tax. There are a whole range of breaks there for people. We are making life more affordable for them as well.

We're getting our fiscal house in order, Madam Speaker. That, too, is a huge burden. When we came into government we had reports from Deloitte and Savoie and a number of highly-reputable people who said that we could not continue on that path, that we had to do something to reduce the burden on future Nova Scotians and we've done that. We've lowered our debt-to-GDP ratio, we've lowered our taxes, we know that when this government finishes, actually at the end of this term, Nova Scotians will be better off, that we will have put them back on the road to balance.

I would like to say a little bit more about energy and the environment because the Opposition has spent so much time attacking our energy initiatives today. The energy initiatives really have to be understood in the same way as the rest of these initiatives, that they are a way of reducing the debt that our future generations face. We know that we have the highest rate of asthma and lung disease, some of that has to be attributed to our energy,

to using dirty energy. These investments in wind and solar and tidal and demand-side management, they are all aimed not just at achieving energy self-sufficiently and cleaner and cheaper and greener energy, but they're there to reduce the debt on the environment, the debt to reduce the health that we will bequeath to our children.

Madam Speaker, I want to conclude by saying, really this government is not just about paving roads and digging holes and filling holes or sticking our heads in the sand about what the future holds. This government is about preparing for that future, it's investing in good jobs, and in health care, and the environment, making life better for our children and making sure that we position ourselves and put ourselves in a much better place than we found ourselves when we were first elected to government. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please.

The motion is carried.

We will now take a short break to prepare ourselves for the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

[6:45 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

[9:59 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

MADAM SPEAKER: The Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House on Supply reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Supply has met, has made progress and begs leave to sit again.

MADAM SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Madam Speaker, that concludes the government's business for today. We will be meeting tomorrow from the hours of 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. I now turn the floor over to the Opposition House Leader for business.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker, following the daily routine and Question Period tomorrow, we will consider Bill No. 10, an Act to Review the Public School Programs in Nova Scotia, and Resolution No. 9, Education: Cuts - NDP Government Reverse.

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

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.
The motion is carried. We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 10:01 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 143**

By: Hon. Keith Colwell (Preston)

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

Whereas Jennette Collings is a resident of East Preston and it was in this community that she and her husband raised their two children; and

Whereas she is an active member of the Shiloh Community Church and serves in its choir; and

Whereas she has been a member of the East Preston Senior Citizens Club for many years;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House formally acknowledge the contributions that Jennette Collings has made to her church and to her community over the years.

RESOLUTION NO. 144

By: Hon. Jamie Baillie (Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party)

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

Whereas Michael Brown, a native of Parrsboro and a third year Saint Mary's University commerce student, is reaping the benefits of his diligence as one of this year's recipients of a \$15,000 Frank H. Sobey Award for Excellence in Business; and

Whereas Michael is a double major in Finance and Entrepreneurship at the Sobey School of Business and is honoured to be recognized by the Frank H. Sobey Fund and to join the ranks of the past recipients; and

Whereas Michael Brown is presently a research associate for the energy sector in the IMPACT program at Saint Mary's and spends most of his free time volunteering at the YMCA Abilities in Motion;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Michael Brown on this outstanding achievement and wish him continued success in all future endeavours.