



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2012

Sixty-first General Assembly

Fourth Session

12:00 NOON

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordon Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we start the daily routine, the motion for the late debate has been submitted:

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly immediately demand the Minister of Health and Wellness provide a detailed staffing plan for home care so that Nova Scotians are not waiting in their homes four months later, not knowing when home care is on the way.

It was submitted by the honourable member for Cape Breton North.

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

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

RESOLUTION NO. 321

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

Whereas National Immunization Awareness Week occurs in Canada between April 21st and April 28th; and

Whereas immunization has long been a cornerstone of our public health system; and

Whereas immunization is cost beneficial as a health intervention that contributes to keeping Nova Scotians safe and healthy;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House recognize the importance of marking National Immunization Awareness Week, and thank all those in our public health and health care systems who participate in administering vaccines.

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 Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, could I be permitted an introduction before I do my resolution?

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw the attention of members of the House to our east gallery, where we are joined today by some guests, whom I will name. I'll ask them to stand as I introduce them. We're joined this afternoon by a guest from Nova Scotia Power, Rob Bennett, the president and CEO of Nova Scotia Power, and Angela Blencowe, executive assistant to Mr. Bennett. I would like to thank them for joining us here today and I would ask members of the House to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 322

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

Whereas organ and tissue donation can improve the health of others by giving a person a second chance to live a full life, and it creates an enduring gift of kindness and compassion; and

Whereas this year, like last year, Angela Blencowe, an employee of Nova Scotia Power, with the support of her boss, Rob Bennett, started a campaign in her workplace to educate her colleagues about the importance of being an organ and tissue donor; and

Whereas through Ms. Blencowe's efforts, she also enlisted the support of her colleagues in other companies and businesses across the province, such as Nova Scotia Power, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation, Sobeys, the Wooden Monkey, Halifax Regional Police, and The Westin Nova Scotian;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate Ms. Blencowe for her continued dedication and commitment to organ and tissue donation.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 42 - Entitled an Act to Ensure a Supply of Physicians in Rural Nova Scotia. (Hon. Stephen McNeil)

Bill No. 43 - Entitled an Act to Bring Newly Trained Doctors Home to Nova Scotia. (Hon. Stephen McNeil)

Bill No. 44 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 195 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Health Act. (Hon. Stephen McNeil)

Bill No. 45 - Entitled an Act to Require the Accountability of Nova Scotia Power Incorporated to Ratepayers. (Mr. Andrew Younger)

Bill No. 46 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2004. The Electricity Act, Respecting Renewable Energy Providers. (Mr. Andrew Younger)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 323

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the honourable member for Cape Breton Nova, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas the 90th annual convention of the Antigonish Diocesan Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada will be held from April 27-29, 2012, in Sydney, Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the Antigonish Diocesan Council and its 3,092 volunteer members plan, support, develop, and encourage programs in support of religious, charitable, and community activities; and

Whereas these volunteer members strive to contribute to the understanding and growth of religious freedom, social justice, peace and harmony;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate the Antigonish Diocesan Council of the Catholic Women's League on their dedication and commitment to their community, and wish them 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 Leader of the Official Opposition.

RESOLUTION NO. 324

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

Whereas this week marks Education Week, a time when we recognize the hard work of teachers and education partners in the educating of our children here in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas this dedication and commitment of our educators is paramount in our students' success; and

Whereas the mark of a good teacher lasts a lifetime and can be seen in all aspects of life;

Therefore be it resolved that on the occasion of Education Week, Nova Scotians take a moment to think of the undeniable impact teachers have had on their lives, and congratulate the 23 educators and five partners who have received awards for providing students tools for lifelong 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 Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

RESOLUTION NO. 325

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

Whereas last night Alberta's Progressive Conservatives were elected to form a majority government; and

Whereas a record number of Albertans turned out to vote to elect 62 Progressive Conservatives; and

Whereas Premier Alison Redford is the first female elected as Premier of Alberta;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate Premier Redford and her new caucus on their accomplishment, and wish them the best as they work to make lives better for Albertans.

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. 326

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

Whereas Donna Bullerwall of Caribou, Pictou County, is actively involved in keeping traditional arts alive in Pictou County by teaching traditional arts such as English bobbin lace and the art of wool spinning; and

Whereas Donna Bullerwell also promotes local artisans and is the co-founder of the Artisans In Action festival, which showcases traditional arts and artisans and is held in Pictou, June 13-16, 2012; and

Whereas it is hoped that Donna Bullerwell will continue her support of traditional arts and by doing so make her community of Pictou a more interesting and diverse community to live in;

Therefore be it resolved this House of Assembly thank Donna Bullerwell for sharing her artistic talent and time with the people of her community who enjoy working with the traditional arts such as English bobbin lace and the art of wool spinning.

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. 327

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

Whereas Shannon Sampson of Isle Madame is the founder and head coach of Richmond Cheer Athletics which is made up of several junior and senior cheerleading teams; and

Whereas Shannon has been a very dedicated coach to the Richmond Cheer Athletics teams and even when she recently relocated to British Columbia, she often attended practices via Skype or FaceTime and has stayed in close contact with the team members; and

Whereas Shannon Sampson, head coach of Richmond Cheer Athletics, was nominated and chosen to receive the Canadian Coach of the Year, which is the highest honour a coach can receive, at the 2012 Cheer Expo Nationals held in Halifax on March 24-25, 2012;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Shannon Sampson for receiving this exceptional award and thank her for her commitment to Richmond Cheer Athletics.

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. 328

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Monsieur le Président, à une date ultérieure, je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante:

Attendu que le service d'incendie de Sainte-Anne-du-Ruisseau et districts a tenu son banquet annuel le 26 février 2012, honorant leurs pompiers bénévoles et surtout trois membres de long service; et

Attendu que des prix d'appréciation ont été présentés à Donnie Warner pour 28 années de service dont 21 en tant que chef adjoint, Carol Warner pour 21 années de service, et Erwin d'Entremont pour 20 années de service qui prennent leurs retraites; et

Attendu que le service d'incendie de Sainte-Anne-du-Ruisseau et districts a présentement 30 membres dirigés par Hector Babin qui est chef depuis 21 années;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de cette Assemblée remercient Donnie Warner, Carol Warner, Erwin d'Entremont et Hector Babin pour leur service exemplaire et les remercient pour leur dévouement à la protection du bien être de leur communauté.

Monsieur le Président, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas the Eel Brook and District Volunteer Fire Department held its annual banquet on February 26th and honoured three long-term members; and

Whereas awards of appreciation were presented to retired members Donnie Warner for 28 years of service with 21 as deputy chief, Carol Warner for 21 years of service, and Erwin d'Entremont for 20 years of service; and

Whereas the Eel Brook and District Volunteer Fire Department has 30 members led by Hector Babin, who has been chief for 21 years;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Donnie Warner, Carol Warner, Erwin d'Entremont and Hector Babin for their exemplary service and thank them for their dedication to protecting the well being of their 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 Lunenburg West.

RESOLUTION NO. 329

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

Whereas Mr. Paul Kelly is a well known Canadian artist living in LaHave on Nova Scotia's South Shore; and

Whereas Mr. Kelly's works have been displayed in many prestigious Canadian galleries including the Roberts Gallery, the Hollander York Gallery, and the Gallery Moos, and have been collected by many individuals and companies like the Royal Bank of Canada, Shell Oil and Redpath Mining, to name a few; and

Whereas Mr. Paul Kelly is about to launch an international promotional campaign which will allow his works to be seen by many more private and corporate clients around the world;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate Mr. Paul Kelly on his success in the arts and wish him well in his future career 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 Leader of the Official Opposition.

RESOLUTION NO. 330

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

Whereas health care in the Capital District has been severely disrupted due to the actions of this NDP Government; and

Whereas patients throughout Nova Scotia have felt and will continue to feel the brunt of the potential strike of health care workers in the Capital District; and

Whereas it is not uncommon for patients from Annapolis to travel to Halifax for much-needed specialty surgeries and treatment;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly acknowledge the role that the NDP Government has played in creating chaos in the health care system, the undue stress and anxiety they have created in patients, and the risk that they put in the safety of Nova Scotians due to their failure to respond to the CDHA labour dispute in a timely manner.

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. 331

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

Whereas John Malcom, chief executive officer for the Cape Breton District Health Authority, came to Cape Breton around 15 years ago to share his broad base of experience and knowledge in the health care sector; and

Whereas John Malcom's strong leadership and passion help to guide the district's health care team on a daily basis; and

Whereas John is respected by many in the health care system and throughout his community for his integrity, strength, and ability to lead;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate John Malcom as he begins his well-deserved retirement on June 1st, and wish him well in his 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 Cumberland North.

RESOLUTION NO. 332

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

Whereas volunteers, supporting and mentoring the youth and elders in communities across Nova Scotia, are an invaluable contribution to the health and welfare of these groups; and

Whereas Donald Cooke, Jr., was one of six men honoured as unsung heroes and featured on the African Heritage Month poster in February 2012; and

Whereas Mr. Cooke has for a number of years given freely to his community by providing jobs, delivering food to the elderly, assisting the homeless, and mentoring the youth of Cumberland County;

Therefore be it resolved that this House join me in congratulating Donald Cooke, Jr., who was featured on the African Heritage Month poster in February 2012, as an unsung hero for his support and mentoring of the youth and elders in Cumberland County.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 333

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

Whereas Mayflower Chapter No. 2, Order of the Eastern Star, is the oldest chapter in Nova Scotia and P.E.I.; and

Whereas on June 22, 2012, they will celebrate their 90th Anniversary; and

Whereas the Order of the Eastern Star is involved in worthwhile projects such as scholarships for local schools and donating to local hospitals;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly recognize and congratulate Mayflower Chapter No. 2 on their 90th Anniversary and wish them well 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 Victoria-The Lakes.

RESOLUTION NO. 334

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

Whereas Grade 5 and 6 classes at Wagmatcookewey School participated in Drug Abuse Resistance Education, a comprehensive school-based drug prevention program better known as DARE; and

Whereas Constables Shawn Cornelisse and Ed Newell of the Baddeck RCMP educated the students about the importance of the harmful effects of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco; and

Whereas through the DARE program, along with creating awareness, educators hope to build a positive relationship between police and youth;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly applaud and provide thanks to Constable Shawn Cornelisse, Constable Ed Newell, and Principal

Marjorie Pierro and her staff for organizing and conducting the DARE program with the students of Wagmatcookewey School.

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 Clare.

RESOLUTION NO. 335

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

Whereas Mrs. Phyllis Comeau, Mrs. Annette Maillet, and Mrs. Lorraine Thibodeau of Foyer Sigogne in Salmon River have been sewing dresses, shorts, and t-shirts to aid local missions in Haiti; and

Whereas this group of seamstresses has created over 700 dresses, 250 pairs of shorts, and started to make t-shirts for the earthquake-ravaged orphans in Haiti; and

Whereas the Wesleyan Church in Yarmouth, and the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Belliveau Cove are coordinating the projects to aid local missions in Haiti;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking these dedicated volunteers from Clare for the contributions they have made in helping those less fortunate in Haiti.

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. 336

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

Whereas Paul Fiander, formerly of North Sydney, is now the new police chief in Miramichi, New Brunswick; and

Whereas Paul graduated from the police academy in 1979, and now commands 55 officers and support staff who handle about 12,000 calls a year; and

Whereas serving the community runs in the Fiander family, as four other members of Paul's family are presently involved in police work;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in saluting Police Chief Paul Fiander, and thank the Fiander family for their brave public service.

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. 337

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

Whereas Gerald Clarke has served as an educator in the Halifax Regional Municipality for over 30 years; and

Whereas over his career Mr. Clarke has also been a 40-year member of the Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia, including three years as its executive director, and chairman of the Dalhousie University Student Relations Committee; and

Whereas Gerald Clarke has announced his retirement as the principal of Akerley Campus of the Nova Scotia Community College - a role he has served in for the past three years;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly recognize the contributions of Gerald Clarke to education in our community, and wish him success and enjoyment in the future.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton North. (Interruption) Cape Breton West.

RESOLUTION NO. 338

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you. All I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, is I'm the one with the beard. (Laughter)

HON. WILLIAM ESTABROOKS: And all the pavement. (Laughter)

MR. MACLEOD: You know, we have one of the finest Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal Ministers - I'd even go to say that that gentleman is probably the best Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal Minister we have in this government. (Laughter) Now, back to the business at hand.

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

Whereas Dr. Mahmood Ali Naqvi, after nearly 50 years of working in health care, approaches each day with the same vigour he showed as a young doctor fresh from his residency; and

Whereas in 2009 Dr. Naqvi was appointed to the Order of Canada, which recognized him for a lifetime of contributions to health care and a career that has earned a variety of professional and individual credentials, licenses and awards; and

Whereas Dr. Naqvi's vision of an improved quality health care system for the citizens of Cape Breton is still very much alive;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate and recognize Dr. Naqvi's many years of hard work and his commitment to improving health care for the people of Cape Breton.

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. 339

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

Whereas Jacob Horton, a 13 year old from Cole Harbour, has been in the minor hockey program for five years and plays the position of right wing; and

Whereas while participating in the Westville Pee Wee Minor Hockey Tournament he received the Player of the Game Award, as well as in a previous game, at the same tournament, he received the most sportsman-like award; and

Whereas his team finished the tournament winning a silver medal;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House recognize Jacob Horton for his dedication and enthusiasm for the game of hockey.

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. 340

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

Whereas ringing in the new year is a special time of year for families across Nova Scotia but this year was extra special for Jenna MacDonald-Whitty and her husband, Graham Whitty, a young couple from Ingonish; and

Whereas Jenna and Graham are the proud parents of Cape Breton's first baby of 2012; and

Whereas after the two-hour trek over Cape Smoky Mountain, with Graham's father Chester Whitty at the wheel and Graham at Jenna's side, Jenna gave birth to an eight-pound, six-ounce, healthy baby boy named Marshall Lennox Whitty at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Jenna and Graham on the birth of their baby Marshall Lennox Whitty, and extend congratulations as well to the grandparents, Cathy and Bruce MacDonald and Chester and Susan Whitty.

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. 341

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

Whereas 21-year-old Bedford resident Melani Hatter used her love of skateboarding to help her recover from severe depression; and

Whereas Melani was then motivated to raise awareness of mental disorders, which strike one in five Canadians during their lifetimes, and to raise money to fight these devastating illnesses; and

Whereas this terrific young woman has already raised \$5,000 for the Canadian Mental Health Association, and is planning a skateboarding event in HRM in August to raise yet more money and draw more attention to mental illness;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate Melani Hatter for her courage in publicizing her fight with this disease, applaud her ongoing fundraising efforts, and wish her well in her resumption of university studies.

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. 342

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

Whereas the Ecumenical Bible Study group at St. Matthew-Wesley United Church in North Sydney fosters a child from El Salvador and has also adopted an entire village in Africa; and

Whereas the idea originated with Jean Maclean and Rev. David Luker who, with the help of World Vision, have been able to buy farm animals, school supplies, blankets, trees, and other items to help their village; and

Whereas the bible study group has been contributing to this village for the past four years and also supports local community organizations;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in commending the Ecumenical Bible Study group for their outstanding generosity and humanity.

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. 343

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

Whereas Yarmouth resident Craig Smith's many years of research and devotion of time and energy have culminated in the publication of his book entitled *The Journey Continues: An Atlantic Canadian Black Experience*; and

Whereas *The Journey Continues*, which follows Craig Smith's 2000 book, *Journey: African Canadian History*, is a chronicle of significant events in Atlantic Black history, from Mathieu da Costa in 1605 to the signing of the free pardon for Viola Desmond in 2010; and

Whereas *The Journey Continues: An Atlantic Canadian Black Experience* has been approved to be used in Grade 8 social studies classes and Grade 11 African Canadian studies classes throughout the province;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate Craig Smith on authoring *The Journey Continues: An Atlantic Canadian Black Experience*, thank him for his tireless effort to educate all Nova Scotians on the accomplishments African Nova Scotians have made in our province, and wish him all the best in his 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 Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 344

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

Whereas Dr. Sophie Manimalethu Abraham was born in April 1931 in Kottayam, Kerala State, India, and as a young woman travelled alone by train to study in Calcutta, where she obtained her medical degree in 1957; and

Whereas Sophie married and moved first to Addis Ababa, where she worked at the Menelik Hospital, and then to Halifax, where she was a general practitioner for 25 years at the Nova Scotia Hospital; and

Whereas Sophie raised three children - Anila, Bobby, and Cherrie - and did this alone after her husband died in 1973, and she was known as a supportive mother, a loyal

friend, and a generous supporter of the charity Chalice and its work in India right up until her death on April 9, 2012;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House send their condolences to the children of Dr. Sophie Abraham - Anila Punnoose-Pachikara, Bob Abraham, and Cherrie Abraham and their families - on the loss of their remarkable mother and wish them many fond memories.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

RESOLUTION NO. 345

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

Whereas on Sunday, March 4th, the Annapolis Valley Minor Hockey Pool "A" championships were held in Middleton; and

Whereas with only six forwards, three defencemen, and a goalie, the Digby Ravens Bantam Rec team won their game against Berwick 2 to 1; and

Whereas with so few players the Digby Ravens took home the gold, proving that with skills, experience, and healthy players they could accomplish anything they set their minds to;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate the Digby Ravens Bantam Rec team on their exceptional accomplishment and wish them all the best in their future games.

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. 346

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

Whereas Richmond County Literacy Network and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education partnered to deliver the fourth Age Advantage Plus program in Richmond County; and

Whereas the Age Advantage Plus program is targeted toward individuals between the ages of 55 and 64, with its primary objective to prepare older workers for new and immediate employment in their communities; and

Whereas on March 30, 2012, a ceremony was held at L'Auberge Acadienne Inn to celebrate Andrew Cogswell, Joseph McKinnon, Paula Boudreau, Michael Landry, Rene Richard, Deirdre Boudreau, Andrea Poirier, Larry MacDonald, Marie Bond, Carolyn Broussell, Linda Leblanc, and Thomas Madden's graduation from the Age Advantage Plus program;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating each participant in the Age Advantage Plus program for their hard work and dedication, while wishing them success in securing employment.

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. 347

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 in July 2011, Neil and Shannon LeBlanc of Wedgeport started up a new business that they called Growing Green Earthworm Castings; and

Whereas Neil LeBlanc, a lobster fisherman from Wedgeport, was looking to supplement his income due to the declining prices in the industry and got the idea of creating this business from a newspaper article that he read about worm castings and vermiculture; and

Whereas Growing Green Earthworm Castings feeds and breeds worms and uses the castings to create organic fertilizer and soil conditioner that can be used in gardens, greenhouses, and household plants and can be distributed locally or on-line;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Neil and Shannon LeBlanc on starting their business and wish them well in the future.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

RESOLUTION NO. 348

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

Whereas health care in the Capital District has been severely disrupted due to the actions of this NDP Government; and

Whereas patients throughout Nova Scotia have felt and will continue to feel the brunt of the potential strike of health care workers in the Capital District; and

Whereas my constituents in Halifax Clayton Park are having their scheduled surgeries cancelled and patients are left with anxiety, anger, and concern;

Therefore be it resolved that this NDP Government acknowledge the role this NDP Government has played in creating chaos in the health care system, the undue stress and anxiety they have created in patients, and the risk they have introduced to the safety of Nova Scotians due to their failure in responding to the CDHA health dispute in a timely manner.

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. 349

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

Whereas health care in the Capital District has been severely disrupted due to the actions of this NDP Government; and

Whereas patients throughout Nova Scotia have felt and will continue to feel the brunt of the potential strike of health care workers in the Capital District; and

Whereas it is not uncommon for patients from Kings North to travel to Halifax for much-needed specialty surgeries and treatment;

Therefore be it resolved that this NDP Government acknowledge the role that they have played in creating chaos in the health care system, the undue stress and anxiety they have created in patients, and the risk they have put in the safety of Nova Scotians due to their failure in responding to the CDHA labour dispute in a timely manner.

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 Clare.

RESOLUTION NO. 350

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Resource Recovery Fund Board sponsors the Nova Scotia Recycles contest; and

Whereas the purpose of the contest is to encourage participation in recycling and composting programs; and

Whereas Olivia Mullen from École Saint-Albert in Salmon River was the contest winner of the Grades 7 to 9 magazine advertisement contest;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Olivia Mullen for winning the Grades 7 to 9 magazine advertising contest and wish her 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 Dartmouth East.

RESOLUTION NO. 351

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

Whereas Education Week was first observed in 1935 and recognizes the commitment of teachers helping students forge their own life paths; and

Whereas Paul Ingram, a teacher and guidance counsellor at Eric Graves Memorial Junior High School, is the recipient of an Education Week Award for 2012; and

Whereas Mr. Ingram finds a way to introduce social consciousness in all his classes and is also a leader of an active gay/straight alliance organization;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly congratulate Mr. Paul Ingram on this distinction and his commitment to this year's Education Week theme, Educating Students for 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 member for Preston.

RESOLUTION NO. 352

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

Whereas the Porters Lake Seniors Club was formed in 1997 with President Pat Marsh presiding and has now grown to 96 active members who meet weekly in the Porters Lake Community Centre; and

Whereas they hold many activities such as various dinners, an annual Christmas dinner, monthly dances, weekly bingos and out-of-town trips at least once or twice a year; and

Whereas the members of the club hold variety shows about every month, half of which involve not only their club but their community;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House recognize the many accomplishments and dedication of President Darrell Feltmate and the members of the Porters Lake Seniors Club.

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. 353

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

Whereas Lori LeBlanc, a teacher at Meadowfields Community School in Yarmouth, encourages and supports healthy living at her school by supervising a student leader group, whose goal is to promote a healthy lifestyle throughout the school; and

Whereas Lori LeBlanc is also Meadowfields' staff facilitator for its running club and fitness group, organizes the school's daily morning news broadcasts, and is the chair of the Health Promoting Schools committee; and

Whereas Lori LeBlanc has been named a recipient of the 2012 Education Week awards;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate Lori LeBlanc on this honour and recognize and thank her for her dedication to the health and well-being of her students and her school 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 Digby-Annapolis.

RESOLUTION NO. 354

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

Whereas the African Nova Scotian Music Awards are held each year recognizing the achievements of various musical artists; and

Whereas the Lifetime Achievement Award had two recipients this year; and

Whereas Weymouth resident Alfred T. Bright, also known as Alfie, was one of those recipients recognized for his passion and achievements to gospel and country music;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House congratulate Alfie Bright on his achievements 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 Halifax Clayton Park.

RESOLUTION NO. 355

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

Whereas in 2003, the first Grandmothers to Grandmothers group was established under the Stephen Lewis Foundation to support African grandmothers who are caring for millions of children orphaned by AIDS; and

Whereas the Rockingham Grannies were formed in 2008 in response to this tremendous need and have raised more than \$67,000 for the Stephen Lewis Foundation through numerous fundraising projects; and

Whereas the Rockingham Grannies raised \$5,298 at their biggest event to date on April 1, 2012, when they hosted a sold-out crowd for a High Tea to commemorate the HMS Titanic through music and stories;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House congratulate the Rockingham Grannies on their successful efforts to help African grandmothers through political advocacy and fundraising and wish them continued success in the future.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

Before we go to Question Period today I would like to draw the attention of the members to the presence in my Gallery of two highly distinguished visitors who have joined us today from the National Assembly of Quebec, and I would ask that they rise when I say their names. They are François Ouimet, Deputy Speaker; and Richard Daignault, Administrative Secretary, Directorate of Interparliamentary and International Relations. I ask that members of the Assembly give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: Question Period will begin at 12:54 p.m. and end at 1:54 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HEALTH CARE STRIKE - MEDIATOR: APPT. - DELAY EXPLAIN

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Friday afternoon after the House had adjourned for the day, government announced a mediator to mediate the dispute between 3,600 health care workers and their employer, the province, a full nine days after talks had broken down. In the same release from the government, “. . . the appointment is an indication of the seriousness of government’s concerns for the health and safety of Nova Scotians, and its desire to avoid more disruption in critical health services to the public.” I’ll table that quote.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the Deputy Premier is, why did it take so long for government to act?

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, as everybody in this House knows we appointed Mr. Bruce Outhouse, a highly respected mediator and arbitrator in this province, and I think all Parties would agree on his ability. We recognized the seriousness by getting someone of Mr. Outhouse’s calibre there and we’re willing now to see how the process goes with such an esteemed person at the head.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, this is not a question of whether or not Mr. Outhouse is a good mediator, it’s a question of why did government wait a full 10 days to act. A great deal of disruption to the health care system has already occurred while government has been sitting by. Patients have been moved, surgeries have been cancelled last week and more are being cancelled this week.

As the clock ticks closer, patients become more and more worried and yet we had a government that failed to act, knowing full well that talks had broken down 10 days ago. So my question to the Deputy Premier is, why didn’t the government appoint a mediator sooner?

MR. CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, the reason why, in these very sensitive situations, is that we need someone in there at a proper time. The proper time was when we announced it. We’re in there and we want - I think everybody in this House should be supportive of Mr. Outhouse and his efforts to conclude this to a successful agreement for all parties. Thank you.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the appropriate time would be before surgeries are delayed. The appropriate time would be when talks break down, that’s when government should have responded.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that government broke their wage-negotiation pattern of one, one, one when they - with little fanfare - sent CDHA nurses to binding arbitration in June 2011. Now, in this very same district, with health care workers who are also essential

to the health care delivery, treating the very same, critically ill patients, the government appoints a mediator and not binding arbitration.

My question to the Deputy Premier is, what makes this situation so different from the nurses' strike?

MR. CORBETT: Thank you again for the question. Mr. Speaker, I guess I'll revert back to the very first answer. We have Mr. Outhouse in there, he's acting as a mediator. It is progressing and we hope that everybody on that side, along with this side for sure, supports Mr. Outhouse in bringing this to a successful conclusion for all parties and that we are ever-mindful of the taxpayers and the citizens who may be ill and the taxpayers who pay that bill. That's what we're looking for, a fair resolution.

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

HEALTH CARE STRIKE - SURGERIES: CANCELLATION - CEASE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the people that members on this side of the House are supporting are the patients who are having their surgeries cancelled as we speak because this government won't stand up for them in the face of a strike tonight at Capital Health.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier was sent the same letter as I was and as other members on this side of the House were yesterday, by Mr. Mack Fiander, who writes that he is concerned about his wife's surgery. She has colorectal cancer and was scheduled for surgery yesterday but her surgery was cancelled. It's just one of over 100 surgeries a day that are being cancelled at Capital Health, where almost 100 beds are going to be closed.

My question to the Deputy Premier is, will he now assure the Fianders, and all Nova Scotians, that his government will not allow any more surgeries to be cancelled or real beds to be closed?

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, we're working through this process, but unlike the Leader of the Third Party, we will not talk about individual cases on the floor of this Legislature. In broad terms, we are working forward to getting a resolution and we would hope that all sides of this House would support Mr. Outhouse in his endeavours. Thank you.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the people who need support are the patients, like the wife of Mr. Fiander, who are having important surgeries cancelled because this government will not stand up for them. The only people who are not at the table with Mr. Outhouse are the patients who are being used as pawns in this labour dispute. I will quote again from Mr. Fiander's letter, he writes: "Cancer doesn't wait for anybody and to have Nova Scotians go through this is totally unacceptable and unmoral [sic]."

I will table that letter for the benefit of the Deputy Premier, Mr. Speaker. The time has come to do the right thing and assure Nova Scotians that their government will save those surgeries. My question to the Deputy Premier, is he for patients like Mr. Fiander's wife and all the patients who are having surgeries cancelled, or not?

MR. CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you this government stands four-square in support of patients, unlike the Third Party, who, when confronted with something like this, gave us Bill No. 68.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, how disrespectful to Mr. Fiander and his family that the Deputy Premier won't stand up for him and his wife's surgery but has to reach back to 1999 and come up with some obscure reference that does nothing to resolve the issue today. (Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, we are less than 12 hours away from a real strike where real services and real surgeries are going to be cancelled. In fact, they're already being cancelled and the one person who has it in his power to stop that from happening is the Premier and his Cabinet. So I will ask the Deputy Premier, since he won't act to save those surgeries, what does he have to say to the people of Nova Scotia, like the Fianders?

MR. CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, what I have to say to all Nova Scotians - to all Nova Scotians - is we will not put our health care in chaos like the last time they were in power, the Third Party, where they threw people out into the streets; or when these guys, the Liberals, excuse me, the Liberals, when they were in power, got rid of nurses and other health care workers. We will work collaboratively with patients and with health care workers and we will make sure that everybody is treated fairly in this province - unlike those other two Parties.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - IWK: INTERVENTIONS - EFFICACY

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the then NDP Health Critic - now Health and Wellness Minister - expressed concern about the wait lists for assessments at the IWK. In response she stated that: We're not doing nearly a good enough job of staying on top of the wait lists for kids who need timely assessments and interventions.

She also called on the minister of the day to commit more resources to the mental health system. The only difference now, besides the fact that the wait list has increased significantly under the minister's mandate, does she no longer think interventions are as important as assessments? My question to the minister is, why are interventions in the form of programs no longer the minister's priority given they were so important when she was in Opposition?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. We certainly have had lots of debate in the last two weeks about this very issue and I have been very consistent in my position - in fact the same position I held in 2005 - which is that timely access to assessments leads to timely access to treatment. This is why the changes that were made at the IWK were made. It has resulted in timely assessments, better access to treatment, and that is my commitment to the adolescents, the children, and the families of this province.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I've stated from the beginning and will continue to state funding faster assessments on the backs of programs will simply move children and youth from one list to another. The IWK ACT program is successful. Families who have been fortunate enough to access it can attest to this fact. Children and youth who have been through the program have also vouched to its success.

However, Mr. Speaker, the reality is the wait time for accessing the ACT program prior to recent changes stands at seven to eight months. How does the minister expect wait times which already stand at seven to eight months to decrease when you cut programs, staff and support to pay for assessments?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Critic continues to insist on trying to support a system that was broken. This was a system under which hundreds and hundreds of adolescents and children sat on wait lists and got nothing - no services, no assessments, no contacts - while a very small number got access to the ACT program.

Mr. Speaker, at the IWK, the clinicians there looked at best practices across the country and elsewhere. They have arrived at a different model. They will be delivering services in a different way and we will fix a system that was severely broken.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, the minister is now saying children and youth should sacrifice quality in order to pay for faster assessments. I'm desperately trying to make sense of the minister's logic in defending changes and I've come to the conclusion you can't defend the indefensible.

This minister made a choice - she has chosen to fund assessments by taking money from programs. While no one questions the merit of faster assessments, everyone is questioning why the minister okayed a transfer of financial resources from programs to pay for them. Why is it acceptable to the minister to fund faster assessments by increasing program treatment wait lists which are already eight months long?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, it's not only assessments that will see drastic improvements in terms of timeliness, the reallocation of resources has meant that there is more clinical staff in other programs that offer services to families. Not only do families get quicker assessments, there's an expanded menu of program staff available to

work with children with addictions, to work with children with behavioural problems, to work with adolescents who have addictions and behavioural problems - and this will result in Better Care Sooner, something every member of this House should support.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West on a new question.

**HEALTH & WELLNESS: MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS STRATEGY
- RECOMMENDATIONS**

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, there is an old saying: The best defence is a good offence. Yesterday this government proved this to be the case when they released the recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Mental Health Addictions, minus their response in the form of a strategy. Whether it's the cutting of mental health programs for children and youth at the IWK or in light of tragedies in 2012 in the form of deaths due to addictions, it was their hope that yesterday's announcement would somehow change the channels - the reality is the channel remains the same.

Will the Minister of Health and Wellness agree that the recommendations, however positive they may be, are only as good as government's plan to actually implement them?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, all members of this House, I think, should acknowledge the hard work and the effort that went into yesterday's report by a very, very dedicated group of people who worked as volunteers without any compensation for the many, many hours they put into what is an excellent report with 61 recommendations. Many of those recommendations have information that we are now analyzing and will contribute to a stronger mental health system at the end of the day when our mental health strategy is introduced in the next few weeks.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, no one is questioning the work of the committee or the 1,200 Nova Scotians who gave input to the advisory committee.

When you go through the recommendations in detail there is actually a glaring contradiction to the reality of changes currently happening at the IWK. According to the expert advisory committee we need to better address wait lists for assessments - and no one in this House disagrees that this needs addressing; however, nowhere did the recommendation state you fund faster assessments by cutting programs to pay for them.

My question to the minister, is the minister prepared to revisit the changes at the IWK ACT program in light of recommendations from the advisory committee?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, first of all, not one nickel has been cut from funding to the IWK; number two, the recommendations in yesterday's report are entirely consistent with what the IWK is doing in terms of early access, early intervention, and early assessment.

Contrary to what the honourable member is saying, there is absolutely no reason to revisit the decisions of the IWK, and I have made it very, very clear that I support the direction in which the IWK is going - unlike the members of that caucus who feel they need to support a system that was very, very broken.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that the ACT program is no longer as it had been for years and done very successfully. To further reinforce the necessity to revisit the changes to the IWK was the fact that one of the four major pillars stressed the need for better collaboration amongst the mental health care worker team.

My question to the minister is, how can we have better collaboration when you are cutting valuable members of the mental health care team to pay for faster assessments?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member does not want to acknowledge the facts. The facts are that faster assessments are part of the IWK strategy, but resources are being allocated so that clinical staff will be added to a variety of treatment programs. That means that people will be able to be seen for treatment as well as faster assessments in a more timely fashion. It's what we call Better Care Sooner, and it's working.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HEALTH CARE STRIKE: HOUSE SESSION - REMAIN

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, we're now less than 12 hours away from a health care workers strike in one of our largest health districts, and the NDP still hasn't taken any preventive action. It appears the NDP are content to let ordinary Nova Scotians wait and suffer while labour takes to the streets. Of course, this is not acceptable. The government has a duty and a responsibility to use every legislative tool at their disposal to get health care workers back on the job. Nova Scotians can't afford any delays.

My question through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Deputy Premier in his role as Government House Leader, is, will the Deputy Premier commit to ensuring the House remains in session throughout next week - as long as it takes - to get Capital Health employees back to work if they go on strike?

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, the Third Party House Leader wants to call House hours now, I guess, and Opposition Day is tomorrow. But I will assure him that we will be here next week doing regular business. Unlike them, we enjoy our time in the House and bringing progressive legislation for Nova Scotians. So we'll be here. I don't know about him.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, the member for Argyle knows that the NDP's union boss pals are the driving force behind labour disputes. The NDP may not like being on the opposite sides of their buddies, but government has the responsibility to do what's right on behalf of citizens who elect them. So far the NDP Government has failed in that responsibility, so it begs the question, which side are they on?

My question to the Deputy Premier is, is his government on the side of big labour bosses engineering the strike or will the NDP finally do the right thing and stand up for those patients who will be suffering?

MR. CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, with that line of questioning I'm reminded of an old union song of, "Which side are you on, boy, which side are you on?" We're on the side of Nova Scotians.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, which Nova Scotians are they for? Are they for the people who are getting their surgeries cancelled or are they for other Nova Scotians that maybe we don't know about? The NDP Government is afraid to stand up to their big labour buddies, and I can say Nova Scotians are suffering because of it. Already we've seen important surgeries and procedures cancelled, and the NDP's answer? They cross their fingers and their toes and hope against hope. They hope for the best, but that is not good enough by anybody's standard. How many more surgeries, operations, and procedures have to be cancelled before this NDP Government decides to act? (Interruptions)

MR. CORBETT: Yes, I do many crossings on Sundays, but I don't cross my toes and I don't cross my fingers. As I said in earlier answers, there has been a mediator appointed - respected, I'm sure, on all sides of this House - and that process is moving forward. I only wish that they on the other side were as supportive of Mr. Outhouse as we are because we ensure that there will be a successful resolution to this. Collective bargaining is just that, it's the sides getting together and bargaining collectively. We respect that, they don't - that simple. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

COM. SERV. - TALBOT HOUSE: REPT. - TREATMENT OUTCOMES

MS. KELLY REGAN: Last night in budget estimates I asked the Minister of Community Services for an update on the situation at Talbot House. She obliged by speaking for 59 minutes while giving no details, so I will try again.

Mr. Speaker, DCS conducted an organizational review of Talbot House in April. Can the minister please indicate where in the report the treatment outcomes are listed?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I was very clear last evening. I explained to the member opposite the information with respect to Talbot House and its history and the gentlemen who we serve at Talbot House and the care that is taken there, so they would have an understanding of what is taking place with regard to the organizational review. That's exactly what it was, an organizational review that came up with recommendations to the board. Now we're waiting to hear if the board accepts those recommendations. Thank you.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, that took about a minute, which is all it should have taken the minister. In fact, the minister can't identify where in that report the outcomes, either expected or actual, were listed because DCS never bothered to look at that. They complained that processes at Talbot House weren't clear, that paperwork wasn't being done but they didn't even bother to check whether the treatment at Talbot House actually worked. Can the minister please indicate why not?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we were looking at an organizational review. That particular review was focused on whether the organization was meeting the standards that were set forth in the service agreement. That's exactly what we did in the review.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I realize that expecting a results-based analysis of a program might be a novel idea for this government but can the minister please indicate whether her department is actually tracking the outcomes of the gentlemen formerly housed at Talbot House, as well as any other patients in government-funded addictions treatment?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, as I said, with respect to the organizational review, we were looking at whether the standards were being met within the organization itself and we always have communications with other departments, especially Health and Wellness, to make sure that we have an understanding that the services that are being provided are services that work for the individuals. Thank you.

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

COM. SERV. - TALBOT HOUSE REPT.: PUBLICATION - EXPLAIN

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you will be to the Minister of Community Services. Last week in Question Period the Minister of Community Services told this House that when her department decided to publish the Talbot House review on the government Web site, her department officials were in contact with the dedicated volunteer board of the organization.

What the minister failed to disclose last week was the board asked that the report not be made public without significant changes. Those changes were not made and the report was made public anyway, against the express wishes of a volunteer board.

My question to the minister is, what compelling public interest was the minister serving when she allowed the Talbot House report to be published on the government Web site, against the wishes of the volunteer board and does she publish every organizational review in that manner?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I was clear in the House before that the fact was we had requests; we had a FOIPOP request with respect to the organizational review. So it's very important for us to be transparent and that is something that the Opposition would be yelling at if we didn't publish the report. So we were obligated because there was an information request with respect to that, and we informed the board of directors that that was the case.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to hear the minister say she was obligated to supply the information, because we've been looking for information for the last three weeks and she hasn't felt obligated to give it to this House.

Mr. Speaker, a disclaimer on Page 3 of the report says, "This report is for the use of the Board and is submitted to Talbot House in confidence." It goes on to say "The report contains confidential and identifiable personal information." It provides a strong warning that "... the Board of Talbot House consult with legal counsel before disclosing this report beyond the intended audience, or making any use of the report or its contents other than for the purpose . . ." And it goes on to say, "... assist the Board with the improvement of the organization and operations . . ." of the facility.

Mr. Speaker, I will table that report here in the House. Now, my question to the minister is, if the minister expected the volunteer board of Talbot House to keep the review under wraps, what compelling reason did she have for making it public for all to see on the Internet, and why is there such a double standard between her department and a volunteer board?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, our first concern was to do the organizational review and work with the board of directors. It was not our intention to make this a public review and, as I explained, we were requested through a FOIPOP which gives us an obligation because we knew that it was a FOIPOP through media, and it was going to be information out in the media. So instead of just putting it forward or giving it to the media and then allowing it to come out that way, we wanted to be able to put it on our Web site, but beforehand give the board the opportunity and the courtesy to let them know that this was the position that we were in and that the review then would be put on the Web site. So it was out of respect to the volunteer board that we had that discussion.

MR. MACLEOD: Well, it appears, Mr. Speaker, their first priority was to smear a volunteer board and the executive director of Talbot House. It is clear from the minister's answers that she allowed the board and staff at Talbot House to be treated differently than from other organizations. It is clear that they have been treated unfairly and their reputations have been smeared as a result of that minister's actions.

My question to you is, will the minister finally do the right thing, take the review of Talbot House off the Internet, and apologize to the board and the executive director for treating them with so little respect and disregard?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, this is not an abnormal process. We've done it many times in our department, and sometimes they can be challenging because we're identifying where there are some gaps in the organization. We treated this board with respect and, no, we're not going any further - we've explained it.

The ones who are smearing the board is that group over there that keeps on bringing it up and wants to fling it in the media each and every day. They're the ones who have the smear campaign going on, not this department.

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

COM. SERV.: TALBOT HOUSE - BD. PERFORMANCE

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, the standards of care for funded recovery houses were adopted in April 2008. This document outlines expectations of boards for recovery houses. My question is, can the minister please indicate at what point the department communicated its unhappiness with the performance of the board of Talbot House and on which occasions her department offered training to the board?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, how this rolled out was the fact that, yes, there were service agreements in 2008. As I stated before, there were no service agreements prior to that, which was a real concern. When we acted was when we received the letter of complaint, and because we received the letter we felt that - and it's always important. We can't ignore that, because they'd be yelling at us for ignoring a letter of complaint. So we went forward because of that letter and went to the board and said, now we'll need to do an organizational review and compare that with the standards in the agreements and whether you're meeting those standards.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, so from the time this government was elected in 2009 until they went to the board in December of last year, there was no help forthcoming. There were no standards, there was no administration, nobody oversaw the board at all, and then they marched in when they decided that they had a complaint. Yesterday in budget estimates, the minister indicated that the complainant offered to meet with the board, which refused. In fact, the board had pleaded with DCS, begged that they be told who the

complainant was and what the allegations were, and no meeting was forthcoming. They were told by DCS they would be held personally liable unless they went to the police. So they did, reluctantly.

The offer to finally meet with the complainant was in fact made well after the board was forced by DCS to make a complaint to the police. This complaint was prompted by an anonymous person about unspecified acts of commissioner omission. The minister should now be in receipt of information that makes clear that the offer to meet with the complainant was made well after the allegations were made and well after her department had already forced the board to go to the police. Well, it's not 59 minutes, but it might be a little long.

Will the minister admit to this House that she fudged the facts when she said the complainant offered to meet with the board and they refused?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, number one, there were standards. They were in the service agreement. That's what we were looking at: whether they were meeting those standards.

Number two, there's no fudging here. It was a review - the same process that we do with other organizations, and the fact that there were some things that came out in that review with not meeting the standards has upset people who sit on the board. I know that can be upsetting, but the standards weren't being met.

The other factor is that the complainant did offer - we did not force the board whatsoever. The board asked to have some time to do their own organizational review and we respected that request.

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, due to the minister's mismanagement of this file, the community has lost a valuable resource, patients have been moved across the province, board members have been smeared, and a man's reputation has been tarnished. Will the minister admit to the House that her department went into Talbot House looking for a problem because the executive director would not allow methadone to be used in treatment there?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that that's absolutely ridiculous.

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

COM. SERV.: PRIVATE DAYCARES - FUNDING

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, when parents choose a child care centre for their children, they base their decision on the quality, responsibility, and safety of the facility,

not the business model. We have 408 licensed non-profit and privately-owned child care facilities in the province. Well over half of the facilities are privately owned by small-business owners, representing nearly 9,000 spaces for the children in this province. Parents may not make their choices based on the business model, but the Minister of Community Services does.

The minister is not up to the job. She has scared parents and operators with inconsistent statements about whether or not she will follow CUPE's design for care. Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the Minister of Community Services is, will the minister confirm right now that the NDP will not be phasing out funding for privately owned and operated child care centres?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I've been very open and honest with both of the organizations, from the non-profit to the business. I've met recently with the profit businesses and I've explained to them that there are no plans with this government to cut any funding to them, so I don't know where they get their information from. They obviously make this stuff up.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Speaker, it's impossible to get a straight answer from this minister. Let's take a look at the erratic flip-flopping she has done over time. December 15, 2011 - the minister told reporters that phasing out funding for private daycare will be on the table. That same day she told the House that they were considering the P.E.I. model, which does just that. December 22nd - the minister wrote to all child care facilities saying there would be no review of child care funding. February 1, 2012 - the minister told reporters that the government is in the early stages of reviewing the child care system, which included the way it was funded. February 2, 2012 - in a media scrum, the minister said that the idea for a review started when she became minister and is still going ahead. The minister indicated the possibility of change that didn't include the private sector.

February 28, 2012 - a communications officer with her department told reporters, there is no review and there are no plans to review how we fund daycare. Currently, in a meeting with private daycare stakeholders, the minister informed them that changes would be coming this summer. My question to the minister is, which is it, Madam Minister, which is it?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I've been more than open and honest with both the private and the non-private sector. I have told them that we want to look at early childhood development; we want to look at the daycares. That's the one thing that we do as a government, we strategize; we want to improve. They just sat on what existed whether it was working or not. What we said to them was the fact that we would be looking at a review that would include all of Nova Scotians to have an opportunity - that was in the Throne Speech, where we're going to go out to the people of Nova Scotia and talk to them about early childhood development and what their opinions are with respect to that. I'm

sorry, I know they didn't do business like that, but we like to talk to Nova Scotians and get their opinions.

MR. BAIN: Parents deserve to know what the future holds for their child care centres in the province. The fact is, there are areas all over Nova Scotia where the only child care facilities are privately owned. It has recently come to light that parents in this province have no reasons to put their trust in this minister. Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the minister is, what does the minister have to say to parents and staff at the privately-owned Ocean View Children Centre in East River? If the minister can't give this House a straight answer, can she at least reassure her own constituents?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I understand they don't understand the truth when somebody is speaking it. What I have said, what we're doing (Interruptions) They can't handle the truth. What we're doing is we're looking at a sector in Nova Scotia that we want to improve and if there are ways to improve it. We have not said that profit wouldn't be part of that; they're the ones who keep saying that. We want everybody involved and that is why that's a clear message, we want the non-profit to be involved and give us their opinion, we wanted the profit sector to be involved and give us their opinion. It doesn't hurt when you're looking at a certain way of doing business that you become more informed and you look across Canada at what's being done. So that's exactly what we're doing. We're opening ourselves up to listen to Nova Scotians, listen to those parents and see which way they would like to see us, as a province, go in supporting children.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

ERDT - YAR. FERRY SERV.: STUDY - DEFINITION

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier announced that he would establish a new committee to conduct a study of pre-existing studies done by other committees around the Yarmouth ferry, with the intention of evaluating the conditions required for a viable ferry service between Yarmouth and the largest tourism market in the world.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge is that there are different definitions of "viable" out there. My question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, what definition will this new committee be working with?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, the goal of this panel is to look at all the data. We know that there exists some - well I guess there are some myths around the ferry that was in Yarmouth. And what this panel of experts is going to do is it's going to gather together all of the written documentation that has been written about the pros and about the cons with respect to the Yarmouth ferry and they are going to come to their conclusions - an independent panel. I would think that anyone would look at this as good strategy. It's an

opportunity for somebody without a vested interest other than getting to the truth, and what better way to do this than by an independent panel?

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the only myths around this ferry service have been perpetrated by this government - they're the only ones. Businesses across this province have told this government that a ferry is economically viable and needed. Chambers of commerce have, municipalities have, realtors have, and the tourism sector has. There have been three conclusive reports done on the viability of a ferry service between Yarmouth and the largest tourism market in the world.

My question is, who doesn't the minister believe?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the rhetoric coming from the member from Yarmouth, I'm curious as to what really his fear is. (Interruption) I, as the minister responsible, have one interest - getting to the truth.

MR. CHURCHILL: I will tell this minister exactly what I fear and exactly what tourism operators across the province fear - that this is just another waste of time by this government, instead of putting resources to restore ferry service in Yarmouth. That's what I'm scared of, Mr. Speaker, that's what everybody's scared of. There is a problem here, there's no timeline on what this panel is going to do or when they are going to come up with their report.

We are on the verge of another tourism season without our most important tourism link, Mr. Speaker, and we don't know what resources have been allocated by this department to actually restore a ferry service if the panel says that we should. So my question to the minister is, what resources are allocated in the 2012 budget to restore a ferry service?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, first of all there is not a ferry. I don't know why we would put in a line item for something that doesn't exist. Secondly, the fact that we have put together an expert panel has been endorsed by the international ferry association, by individuals and groups and organizations that have far more expertise than the member for Yarmouth does.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth on a new question.

LBR. & ADV. EDUC.: WORKPLACE SAFETY - STRATEGIES

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, safety in a workplace is paramount. Businesses know the value of having a safe workplace and see it as a key in their business success. Business wants to work with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to create safe workplaces, but these requests have fallen on deaf ears.

Why is this department refusing to work with stakeholders, to come up with strategies, identify objectives and implement changes that would be beneficial to all in making a safe workplace, Mr. Speaker - to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education?

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the honourable member for more details because, certainly, our government places workplace safety as a very high priority. I meet on a regular basis with various stakeholders so I'd be interested to know the purpose behind the question. Thank you.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question is that we've heard from employers that this government isn't working with them or consulting or taking their issues seriously. That's the premise of the question.

Everybody agrees that safety has to come first but the department is not working with the employers. These are the very stakeholders who have a vested interest in ensuring that their businesses and places of employment adhere to safety standards. Instead of working with interested stakeholders, the Department of Labour and Advanced Education is pushing administrative penalties on them, Mr. Speaker. Instead of supporting businesses and creating safe workplaces, businesses are being fined left, right and centre with no support for change for safety training. This measure, that is meant to be a deterrent, is only serving to punish business and is costing small businesses dearly.

My question to the minister is, will she tell the members of this House of Assembly and Nova Scotia employers, where revenues generated from administrative penalties go?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention that a couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to welcome the Nova Scotia Safety Council Conference and I opened it. I have to say that it was one of the most moving experiences I've had - not my comments, necessarily. One of our staff within the Department of Labour and Advanced Education and also there was a mother there, representing the Threads of Life organization. She spent an hour talking about the impact of the death of her 23-year old son on her family, on his colleagues and it was one of the most powerful stories I've ever heard. I'm sure there was not a dry eye in the room, from the many employers and safety reps that were there. It just reinforces for all of us how important it is to work together, as a shared responsibility.

The issue of administrative penalties did come up that evening and throughout the conference. Certainly there seemed to be powerful recognition that this was a tool for workers, for supervisors and also for employers, to reinforce the whole concept of shared responsibility for safe workplaces. It seems to be working. I am proud to say that workplaces in Nova Scotia are becoming safer. Thank you.

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, the answer to where these administrative fines are going is clear. They are going to balance the books of this government instead of

actually going back into workplace safety, Mr. Speaker. That is the exact problem that employers have identified. Business wants to be at the table with government to create safer workplaces and this government refuses to work with them. Instead, this NDP Government slaps a fine on business with little support for safety training. In fact, the budget for safety in the department was under-spent by 12 per cent last year. These monies could have been used to create safer workplaces and prevent businesses from being slapped with administrative penalties, which are damaging to their bottom lines.

Mr. Speaker, would the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education explain why revenues generated from administrative penalties are being dumped into general revenue and not being reinvested in training and workshops to promote workplace safety?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased during my turn at Budget Estimates to provide the detail on that. I've mentioned a number of times that we are reorganizing our department to better meet the priorities of government. Workplace safety is one of those priority areas. We are working very closely with our stakeholder groups and our partners, including the Workers' Compensation Board, the various safety associations, and the various sector council groups. There is a cross-government and also a cross-Nova Scotian effort with big employers, medium-sized employers, and small employers to put worker safety forward. It's a priority and we are using the resources that are available to all those various sectors in order to achieve that.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

ERDT - YAR. FERRY: CANCELLATION - ERROR ADMIT

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, we can all clearly see the negative impacts that the NDP's knee-jerk reaction to remove the ferry service between Yarmouth and Maine has had on our tourism industry here in Nova Scotia. Yesterday the Premier finally announced an independent panel to study the studies, but it's three years too late and now just a waste of everybody's time.

My question through you to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, instead of putting the town through more studies, will the minister just admit that he made a mistake by cancelling the Yarmouth ferry and get on with helping the community get a ferry back?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I've stood here in my place time and time again. I've said to the members opposite that it was a tough decision. We made the decision based on the business case. Did we make the right decision? I believe that we did.

This is not a study. This is a panel of experts that has been put together to sift through all of the data that everybody has put forward with respect to whether or not there

should be a ferry from Yarmouth serving the United States, including the data that this government has put forward.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, the NDP up to this point have never admitted that they were wrong on anything, and they're very quick to blame everyone else but themselves for their mistakes. The ferry made sense then and it will make sense again. The business case is clear. It looks like the NDP make the announcement yesterday as a pre-election campaign to eventually reverse their mistake - oh my goodness, maybe we were wrong.

My question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, we need a ferry and the NDP won't admit the mistake. Why does the minister refuse to just get on with it and truly commit to getting a ferry in Yarmouth again?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite, my suggestion is - and he talked about how this might be some political gamesmanship on the part of the NDP. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? My suggestion to all members of the House is, let the panel get on with the task at hand and forget about the gamesmanship altogether.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, as much as I appreciate where the minister is trying to lead Nova Scotians, the ultimate issue is that we are three years too late. When they made this decision, why wouldn't they have put a panel together to make the decision in the first place, rather than the knee-jerk reaction that we got out of them? The inaction on the ferry has been an insult to the tourism operators, the business owners, the municipalities, and the volunteers who have all put tireless work into building a business case for the Yarmouth ferry.

My question to the minister is, will the minister admit that he was wrong and move on with getting a ferry back in Yarmouth or will he continue to sit on his hands and just keep shifting the blame?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we were not wrong. My suggestion, through you to the member, and actually to the whole Third Party, is that they write a letter to their cousins in Ottawa and tell them, ask them (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order, please. Thank you.

The honourable Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

MR. PARIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, write a letter to the federal government, ask them where they were when we asked them to partner with us with the subsidy for the ferry.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ENERGY - FRACKING DECISION: DELAY - TIME FRAME

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. When the NDP Government announced they were delaying their decision on whether to allow fracking in Nova Scotia, the Premier stated one of the reasons was they were waiting for the completion of a study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, scheduled to be completed in 2014. The day after the Premier made that statement, the U.S. Government announced that study would be delayed until 2015. Would the minister please advise whether the fracking decision will now be delayed to 2015 to wait for the study?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, certainly the issue of hydraulic fracturing is an important issue in Nova Scotia. None of us want to see our well water contaminated or our environment harmed in any respect and that's why we've undertaken this review - to get the very best information that's available not only from the study that the honourable member references, but really from a body of study, a whole portfolio of information that will be available to us so we can make an informed decision that will be right for Nova Scotians.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, there's no answer to that. Either the Premier misled the House when he said that or alternatively (Interruptions) and perhaps it was just for an election.

In estimates, the Minister of Energy stated upon questioning that he felt the provincial NDP was on side with the federal NDP in terms of the disclosure of chemicals during fracking. However, the next day the Minister of Environment said they were open to all positions and that was just one of many they were considering. Which minister is correct?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, I've been known to make a mistake once, I'm just trying to figure when it was. Anyway, we're continuing to look at this issue, to dialogue with our federal partners with the Department of Environment, with the experts in the field to try to get the right answer that will determine what is safe and what is best and what is doable for Nova Scotians.

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

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, I move that you do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Supply unto Her Majesty.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise as we are going into Supply, along with a number of my other colleagues today. I want to start by talking about estimates last night and some of the things that happened there and the Minister of Community Services who felt that it was appropriate to spend 59 minutes answering a question - a very serious question on the minds of Nova Scotians - and talk about what she had for lunch in response and talk about all kinds of things that were extraordinarily disrespectful to the people who are very concerned about the situation at Talbot House.

It was disrespectful of the budgetary process, it was disrespectful of the men and women across this province who are obviously working very hard to deliver those much-needed services. Frankly, by taking that amount of time to answer a question and not actually even addressing the question at hand, it was disrespectful to the many men and women who are on income assistance and were looking to have other questions answered yesterday by the Minister of Community Services as to why this government is attacking people in receipt of income assistance and why this government is making life harder for many people who are struggling with addictions and with disabilities. The minister wanted to avoid those questions, and that is what we've seen through this estimates process.

In fact, we can talk about the fact that the member for Argyle and I met with the Deputy Premier the other week, who was more than willing to allow the Public Service Commission to come up in the Red Room to be discussed - and then when that was called, he decided that it shouldn't be called, despite making that commitment and despite many Nova Scotians having questions.

We all know that there are 80 hours between two Chambers that can be used in estimates. I'm sure that we would love to have many, many hours more than that to go through the very detailed answers that ministers such as the Minister of Community Services wish to give to every single question, but we are limited to 80 hours. Unfortunately, it means that you can only spend a limited amount of time on each department, but the Deputy Premier in the Red Chamber has decided that only one department should be dealt with per day over there, which effectively means there are a whole slew of departments which will not come under the scrutiny of the Opposition. In our process the budget is to be scrutinized and the policy framework is supposed to be scrutinized by the Legislature, but we'll have a number of departments that we'll simply

never get to, despite the Opposition Parties being prepared to move forward to other departments on a number of occasions. That's a shame.

Then the other day, when we had to move along from Education so we could get to some of the other departments, the Premier said, well, there was enough time in estimates to talk about the needs for special education funding. Well, the Premier knows full well that we could have spent all of that time talking about one issue of education and then there would have been something else that we wouldn't have gotten to. For example, we might not have gotten to the issue of librarians fully. We might not have gotten to the per-student funding numbers and how those stack up and how we're the second-lowest funding per student in Canada. There are a lot of issues that have to be covered in that time. Furthermore, when we look at that very specific request for special education funding, many of the boards are only grappling with the budgetary decisions at this time.

We know there are many boards across this province, Madam Speaker, that have not even set their budgets at this time and have not made the decisions around what those budgets and those impacts would be. The Liberal caucus made the request to discuss the very real and very important need of special education funding on June 13th, after all those plans would have rolled out, after we would know whether people were laid off, whether they weren't laid off, whether there were transfers, what the special needs enrolment numbers were likely to be. That would have been the appropriate time to have that discussion, on June 13th, but the Premier's answer was that there was sufficient time in Budget Estimates.

How can there possibly be sufficient time in Budget Estimates when the government decides to use every possible method to block the Opposition Parties from asking their questions, by providing lengthy 59-minute answers that don't even answer the question at hand. For example, a very real question yesterday by my honourable colleague, the member for Bedford-Birch Cove, a very simple question about how that critical situation at Talbot House was being dealt with or not being dealt with, as the case may be.

These are important issues that need to be discussed. Every department has very important issues, whether it's Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, Justice, Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations - they all have extremely important issues. You're never going to get to every single one of them through the budget process, but the fact of the matter is that the government has decided that there are certain departments that it doesn't want questioned and so it has come up with a plan in the other Chamber that those departments will not be called. The way they're doing that is by filling the time each day when the Opposition Parties are ready to move on.

Frankly, is it within the rules? Absolutely, I would not for a second say it's not within the rules but it's disrespectful of the process. It's absolutely disrespectful of a process and, in fact, members of the NDP in Opposition have said that very thing when the

Tories did it, so for them to change their minds now and say that it isn't disrespectful is quite a change.

Members of the governing caucus have the opportunity, of course, to question the ministers and the departments at caucus meetings and access to which the Opposition Parties do not have. Isn't it interesting that as we move forward, it was the government that pushed to actually even then cut estimates in half further, coming into this budget round, to 40 hours from the 80. Can you imagine how many fewer departments we would have gotten to in that case. We would have had very few at all.

Then the government wonders why the Opposition Parties were not prepared to agree to the request to go from 80 hours of debate to 40 hours of debate on the budget. It's quite simple why we wouldn't agree to go from 80 to 40. The reason that we would not agree to that request was quite simple, it's because the government is already trying to ensure questions don't get answered and to cut that time by half would just result in a further cutting of that time.

There are many issues in many different areas on the minds of Nova Scotians. I'm sure that the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Environment would probably agree that when we did estimates in the other room, there were issues we agreed on and there were issues we didn't agree on. We were able to get some information on some of those, and I know in both cases ministers have committed to getting back to me with information about their departments and questions we had.

But when it comes down to trying to just simply running the clock on an answer without actually answering the question in Budget Estimates - when that is the primary and most important role of the Legislature - that's unfair to Nova Scotians, Madam Speaker. That's unfair to people who had real questions last night about the issue of Talbot House and how that's being handled. If the minister feels that that has been appropriately handled that's fine, she's entitled to that view, but it's also up to her to defend that and to be willing to answer the questions instead of telling us what she had for lunch because that isn't an answer to a very serious question.

How can that be anything but disrespectful to the men and women who have volunteered for an organization like that, the men and women who seek services from an organization like Talbot House, the men and women, in fact, who seek services and addiction services and other services like that from organizations across Nova Scotia. Many of them who were watching last night and wondering how the minister would respond to those questions would certainly have been shocked to learn that the answer to the member for Bedford-Birch Cove's question was a 59-minute rant that included a discussion about what she had for lunch. You can't even begin to pretend that that's part of the policy framework that is covered in the budget and I don't know how the minister can even pretend that it is.

I respect that fact that the minister may have a differing opinion from either this caucus or the caucus of the Third Party on that issue, that's fair enough. I respect the fact the minister may very well believe that that situation in question was handled correctly and appropriately, that's fair enough. It's not fair enough as a Minister of the Crown to be unwilling to answer the questions that the members put before her about how it was handled, why it was handled in a certain way and whether the policies were appropriately followed as they're outlined by the department, which is something that the member for Bedford-Birch Cove was starting to discuss in Question Period earlier today.

These are very real issues and 80 hours isn't a huge amount of time to get into any of the departments or the budgets. I'm sure it's limited to 80 hours for very good reasons because otherwise we'd probably be here till the end of time and it has to have a limit at a certain point.

At the end of the day, the 80 hours need to be used to answer questions, especially answers on issues that are within the minister's jurisdiction and her department, issues which are of grave concern to a lot of Nova Scotians at the moment, issues which are of the public moment, and issues which concern the policy direction, which is paid for through the budget of the province. Whether we agree with the budget or not, it's the most important thing we will do in this session.

We know there are very real issues; we know that there are people on income assistance - and I know the minister knows this because I saw a response from her to an e-mail this morning where they feel that their income assistance has actually been cut and reduced despite the fact the government claims they've increased that amount. There are a number of clients on income assistance who feel that the amount they are receiving has been reduced by backdoor means.

I know the minister is aware of this concern because, as I said, I saw a response from her, an e-mailed response by her to a constituent this morning. Those are the kinds of things, among many issues, that deserve answers, and the place for those answers is in Budget Estimates. For the people who were watching last night, waiting to see what the minister's response to those issues were, understanding what she had for lunch when some of those people couldn't afford lunch themselves, was reasonably disrespectful, Madam Speaker.

The minister may have thought she was being funny by playing that game, but there are a lot of men and women across this province who tuned in to see what the answers would be and what the discussion would be on those very real issues, who didn't think it was all that funny, who found themselves disrespected and under-appreciated, and who felt that their real concerns of affordability and living day-to-day, and actually being able to afford to put food on the table, weren't being answered by a minister who is more concerned with playing a bit of a game.

I guess we'll see what happens today when the questions continue on other issues within that department, and maybe over the next couple of days. Maybe it will come down, over whatever there is remaining - nine hours or something in the Red Room. Maybe there will only be nine questions asked, maybe that's as far as we're going to get, and we'll see, but there are a lot of people who are struggling to survive day to day, who are . . .

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. It seems to me that the member talking about the disrespect of the Minister of Community Services is rather ironic, given that the Liberal Party didn't even call the Department of Community Services in the last budget that we had.

MADAM SPEAKER: That would not be a point of order.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. YOUNGER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that ruling because it isn't even close to a point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order. The time allotted for the member has expired.

The honourable member for Preston.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to talk about a slightly different topic today, although I was just as upset yesterday when the minister spoke for 59 minutes and talked about what she had for lunch.

It sort of feeds into what I'm going to talk about here today - I'm going to talk about the "better deal for today's families" that was touted by this government during the last election campaign. I want to go over what that better deal for today's families is really broken down to over that time. I'm sure that the people in the community who are low income and have difficulty paying for lunch now are going to be interested in what the Minister of Community Services had to say about what she had for lunch.

When this government took power in 2009, the price of gasoline was \$1.05 and today it's \$1.40, but last week or the week before it was \$1.45 - a 40 cent increase in fuel. If you look at home heating oil, it is roughly about a 40 cent increase in home heating oil. So you look at those two things and say well, that goes up, the price of oil and everything is up, but if you look at the GST that's being charged on the tax on tax on gasoline, they have increased the cost to the people of the province, substantially.

So as you go through this process - and people wonder why they don't have the disposable income they had just three years ago to pay for basic things. I don't think most people have figured it out, but I can tell you what has happened, and people will figure this out and they're in the process of figuring it out, as soon as you talk one-on-one with an

individual or a family they are not long to realize, oh yes, the GST has gone up 2 per cent costing the taxpayers of the province \$1 million a day, so that doesn't sound like much. But that means 2 per cent of every after-tax dollar you receive is going back to the government again, that's 2 per cent in lost spending that you could have used to feed your family, pay for your gasoline, pay for the heating in your home, pay for your insurance on your home, pay for your electricity bill.

Talking about electricity bills, the electricity bill has gone up substantially under this government and yet they refuse to go to the Utility and Review Board. They refuse to change anything with Nova Scotia Power, while at the same time they allow Emera to accept \$100 million a year from Nova Scotia Power - \$100 million a year that taxpayers of this province are paying to support a private company which was set up by the former Progressive Conservative Government. When you take the cost of power, the cost of heating oil, the cost of diesel, the cost of home heating oil and all of the other things that add up, all of a sudden you realize, I don't have as much money to spend. I don't have as much money to spend on the essentials I need for my family. If you take a look at that and realize what has happened in just three years, three years is all it has taken under this better deal for today's families - some better deal.

People can't afford to put insurance on their homes anymore. I was speaking to some people the other day who were trying desperately to get their roof fixed on their house because they have no insurance. They can't afford to pay their insurance because they can't afford to get their roof fixed. Why can't they afford to get their roof fixed? Because this government has made it so expensive to live in Nova Scotia that it's just almost unbearable, especially if you're on a low income or a fixed income such as seniors are. Then if you look at the average cost of food, a family of four has roughly gone up \$100 a month, that's \$1,200 a year and that's after-tax money. That is a lot of money for a family of four; it's expensive as it is to buy groceries.

When you factor all of these things in, you see the cost of things escalating under this government and all they seem to do is raise taxes, but yet, they're cutting education substantially; they're cutting health care. It's going to be interesting to see, when this strike is over and they make some kind of deal with their union friends, how much this is going to cost, what it's going to cost. How much more are they going to have to cut out of the health care budget to pay for their union friends getting whatever kind of a settlement they're going to get? It's going to be interesting how this all unfolds as we go further down the road with this better deal for today's families that this NDP Party offered the families during the last election.

Then you look at the incredible amount of advertising they have done to promote these things they're doing, absolutely to promote it, signs on every building you can imagine; it's another growth under the NDP Government. My good friend who represents Digby indicated that they had put a sign up on a facility with Darrell Dexter's name and the minister's name, that the community had fundraised for and had very little input in the

whole thing, but they put their big sign up. I don't know how much it cost them to travel down there and dig the holes for the sign, to print the sign, and to erect the sign, but probably it was very substantial. If they'd taken that amount of money and given it to the organization, it would have helped their organization a lot more, which is helping the whole community. So this is the sort of thing that's happening. Watching TV ads about Better Care Sooner, how wonderful it is, it's costing people money for these ads - a lot of money for the ads - but yet they cut money from health care.

They're talking about the jobsHere program. The jobs continue to reduce in the province, and again, the jobs are reducing because of the regressive tax system they've put in place, an extreme cost for people. I was talking to a gentleman yesterday and he said he's moving to Alberta. He can make more money there. He worked six months in Alberta and came back to Nova Scotia to invest in Nova Scotia, and said, I'm fed up with them. I'm selling my home, I'm moving to Alberta, and I'm going to stay there. He said, I have four friends who are doing exactly the same thing this week. When you realize how expensive it is to live here, how regressive some of these tax structures are, and how it's negatively affecting every family in this province, you realize how devastating this impact is going to be in the province long term, that has been imposed by this NDP Government.

As we see this unfold more and more and more and as people start to realize just how serious this is for their families - and over time, it takes a long time for people to erode their savings, a long time for the credit card bills to build up so high that they have a problem with them. You see more and more bankruptcies in the province, and you're going to see a lot more as time goes on, but it takes a long time for all these things to accumulate. As that slowly accumulates, people are wondering why they can't buy the things they did - and I'm saying the basic things. You need insurance on your home and your vehicles. You need a decent vehicle you can travel to work with. You need a home that you can maintain and look after and you need to make sure that your children have a good education, that children are involved in things in the community that keep them out of trouble.

Today it's very expensive to have children in hockey or baseball or soccer, whatever the case may be, and I would bet you that some families are going to be faced this year with whether or not their children can go in those sports. Those sports are wonderful team builders. They're fun for the children and keep the children out of trouble when they could be doing other things that would cost our taxpayers money.

So as you add this cumulative effect that this government has imposed on the people of Nova Scotia, you're going to see very, very serious consequences. I would think that probably over time, and hopefully I'm wrong, our crime will increase. That will not be good. We've already seen the MOU cancelled by this government. The memorandum of understanding was cancelled by this government to the municipalities, and if you just read it in the paper and say, well, that doesn't really bother me, I'm just a regular taxpayer, it doesn't bother me at all - but what the information I've been receiving from some of the municipalities indicates is that some of them were talking a 2-cent increase per \$100 of

assessment on their property taxes. That's another burden that has been placed by this government on the people of Nova Scotia.

As this all accumulates - it's \$100 here, \$50 there, maybe \$500 there, maybe only \$10 on this particular item, but over time that just erodes your income and your disposable income, the money you have to spend to ensure that your family is well looked after and your property is maintained. I believe that a lot of people, instead of travelling in Nova Scotia to some small vacation or a campground or something this year, may not even be able to do that when they start to finally figure out what this government is doing to them.

As this whole thing progresses and we see more and more and more impact on the people of the province, people are going to figure this out. They're going to figure out, why do I have so little money? This government has also neglected to mention so far that it has increased income tax every year. It's called bracket creep. That means your income tax is going up, so you're getting hit with a double whammy. Your income tax is going up and so is your GST, by a total of 2 per cent. So as your income comes up, that means your disposable income goes down slightly, and your disposable income goes down again because of the GST. I don't know the exact percentage when you factor the income tax per family, but it will depend, of course, on income.

Even though the lower-income individuals will see less income tax they have to pay, it will have a bigger impact. Whereas if someone makes a substantial amount of money and loses a little bit more in income tax or the GST, they just have to adjust what they do and they can survive it. But lower-income Nova Scotians and middle-income Nova Scotians are going to have a great deal of difficulty surviving this economic crisis that is being forced upon them by this government.

They've done very well; this government has done very well. They've managed to put the GST up; put income tax up; the price of fuel has gone up, heating fuel, gasoline, diesel; groceries are going up in price; electricity has gone up in price; property taxes are going up. (Interruptions) What's that again? Yes, everything is going up. The members over there sometimes heckle me when I talk about this stuff but it'll be interesting to see what their constituents say to them in their offices when they come to visit them and what they're going to say during the next election when they realize that this "better deal for today's families" was all about getting this government elected, nothing to do with helping Nova Scotians.

Of course, they have made some major concessions to their big financial supporters, the unions. I've talked about that before. In my small riding where I've been campaigning for a long time, every Party I've ever seen had local people campaigning. We ran into a couple of people in my area campaigning on the same street, the candidate for the NDP was there that day, a very honourable lady, and there were some people supplied from out of province with their clipboards. One of my campaign workers stopped and chatted to them and said, where are you from? They were from out of the province. Where are you

staying? At a local hotel - that's very interesting. We don't have money to put up people in local hotels, so where did that money come from? Was that accounted for in the election expenses? It could be a pretty interesting question to ask. Maybe that's the accountability we should have from this government.

When you see what has happened and you see what is happening and you see all these costs that have increased for everyday Nova Scotians, the people in the province who pay their taxes and work and see what is happening to them, even if it means a local car dealership sells two or three fewer cars a year, that doesn't sound like much, but it is because what will happen is, over time, all of a sudden a parts guy or a salesman or a technician who works on the cars won't have a job anymore. Lo and behold, there won't be another job to go to because they're getting very difficult.

I just wanted to remind Nova Scotians of what exactly has been downloaded on them by this government - a better deal for today's families? I don't think so. They're going to realize it and they're going to react during the next election. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Madam Speaker, I can't resist, I have to do this. It is true that Nova Scotians do struggle with questions of affordability and the cost of living. Probably one of the biggest burdens that Nova Scotians have to deal with is the incredible debt load of this province, an amount of close to - well, I guess it's almost as much as the Department of Education's entire budget to service our debt. That is the legacy of those two Opposition Parties across the floor. They can come in here and they can distort the facts of the programs of this government over the past three years, but that is a fact that no one in this province will forget. That is a fact that is the basis, in fact, for how this particular Party got into government.

I've knocked on doors in this province for many, many years, Madam Speaker, and I know very clearly the reasons why people wanted an NDP Government. They wanted an NDP Government to stop the atrocious abuse of the taxpayers and citizens in this province over a very lengthy period of time. We've been saddled with debt for far too long by the kinds of self-serving approaches that we've seen from the previous two Opposition Parties. So that contributes to the great difficulty that people have day-to-day in this province. That's the first thing I would say.

The second thing that we need to keep in mind here, I think, is that the members of the Official Opposition did not support tax reform; for example, removing the HST from home heating. They stand here so self-righteous around this, but that is the fact. (Interruptions)

Well, Madam Speaker, I was here and the member for Yarmouth was not when that vote occurred.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, the truth hurts, doesn't it? Members on that side can dish it out, but they can't take it. You can dish it out, but you can't take it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. I would just remind the minister that your comments should be directed to the Chair, not to the member opposite.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you. So there is a legacy of very poor decision making that has contributed to the terrible debt load that people in this province are burdened with, that makes it extraordinarily challenging for a government to be able to move this province forward. In spite of that, Madam Speaker, that's exactly what this government is doing, moving this province forward.

The second thing I would remind members from the other side, they conveniently forget that the facts demonstrate the worst economic performance of any province in the country in the past 20 years was this province. (Interruptions)

Well, the member for Bedford says "during the recession." I'm afraid we were not in recession for 20 years in this country, Madam Speaker. We have seen great periods of prosperity during the past 20 years, but not for Nova Scotia - not for Nova Scotia. Opposition Parties did not make the prudent choices, the choices that focused on job creation and job development, required for a robust economy, one that would see economic growth and would allow us prosperity that would not only mean that families were gainfully employed and able to stay in their own province, in their own community, as contributors, but also a way to strengthen our social programs and our health care system, and our education system.

These two Parties have very little to teach this government in terms of economic performance and investment in social programs, I have to tell you, Madam Speaker.

The member talked about the great challenges that families have with affordability issues around energy. You know I represent a fabulous constituency, a very diverse constituency - many, many people have modest incomes, many seniors are on fixed incomes, a large student population, lots of people who live in poverty and lots of working people. Day to day, people do struggle with the rising cost of living. It is something that concerns all of us. We see these problems throughout the western world. We still have a very precarious economic recovery in our world economic system, and we're far from out of the woods yet. But this government has had the foresight to work with vision, to work strategically, to look at what those areas are where we have some competitive advantage.

We know that our harbour and our shipbuilding industry present a real opportunity not only for our existing generation but for generations to come. This is an area where we

have made decisions for strategic investment that will hold this province in very good stead and give us prosperity that will have the kinds of benefits that will not only accrue directly to people who work in the shipbuilding industry but will have spinoff effects throughout our whole community and our whole province.

This is something that we on this side of the House legitimately feel very proud of. We feel that all members of this House should celebrate the success of this kind of focus and strategic decision. All we hear from the other side is negativity at a time when our province really is on the cusp of something that's very significant, that is going to have great benefit, and offers great hope and great promise, particularly for so many young families, young people, and tradespeople who have left our province to look for opportunities elsewhere.

I think this is an insult, really, to have people - members of our Legislature - stand up and denigrate the great opportunities and the great benefits that policy that's focused on jobs and the future and prosperity will give us, and do that in a way that fails to acknowledge the weakness and the failure of previous administrations to do the kinds of things that are needed to move our province forward. It is a little galling to sit here and have the record distorted so completely by members opposite.

The other thing I would say, Madam Speaker, is that we have strategically invested in our social programs, and our Minister of Community Services is very concerned about people who live in poverty. She has worked very hard to bring new resources, to improve social programs, to improve housing, and to invest strategically in various social programs through tax rebates, through improvements in the social assistance program, through better housing, the development of a housing strategy, to put outreach workers in the community, to work with young people at risk - and to have a member of the House stand up and reduce the comments that she made the other evening in debate to her discussing what she had for lunch is thoroughly disrespectful, and it does not represent what occurred here in the hour that she spoke.

All members in this House are entitled to speak for one hour going into Supply. It has happened many, many times with many, many members from all of the political Parties. I believe that to focus on the Department of Community Services and the minister in that way is very unfair. It's particularly unfair given that I've been here in this Legislature for 14 years, and I think last Spring's budget was the first time that the Department of Community Services budget was not called for this Chamber by the Opposition. This never happens. It was shocking to me as the third largest department of government. So people can get on their high horse, I've been known to get on my own high horse from time to time, we're not always right when we get on our high horses. I would just like to point out that that Party did not take the opportunity. If Community Services is so important to them, then why indeed did they not treat it with the importance that they say they attach to it in this particular debate?

I think it's not fair to attack the Minister of Community Services in this way. There are substantial numbers of hours left in Budget Estimates around Community Services and there will be a lot of opportunity to discuss what I think, and what I think we all feel, is a very important department. I really don't think it is called for to distort what the minister had to say discussing her lunch.

Finally, I think, since I have the attention of everybody here in the House, I would like to end by talking a bit about some of the initiatives in my own department that aren't merely about dealing with health, but also are very much helping people with respect to the affordability issue. There is no social program that is more important to people with limited incomes than health care. Every time we invest and expand a health care program, we are certainly making life more affordable for many, many people who don't have to go without services and don't have to go into the private sector to purchase service.

I feel very strongly about our public health care system. It probably, along with education, is the great equalizer in our society. It is the program where it really makes very little difference if you make \$150,000 a year or if you make \$10,000 a year, you get in the queue according to where the doctor puts you in the queue in terms of your need and your acuity.

With those few remarks, Madam Speaker, I thank you and I'll take my place.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay, with one minute remaining.

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Madam Speaker, just quickly, with one minute to respond to the minister, I really don't understand the distinction, I guess, as a first-time member of her Budget Estimates last year. I was the Critic for Community Services. I did over two hours of questions to the minister on housing, on income assistance, on unemployment support. It was in the Red Chamber, but I'm not worried about the TV cameras or Hansard, I had legitimate questions I was asking on behalf of my constituents. To suggest that we didn't show respect to the minister by taking it here, I think is ridiculous and unfair to put on me.

Secondly, with some of her comments about economic development, we have one of the lowest growths in the province as a GDP - in this country, as a province. We aren't pumping out jobs. Rural Canada is shrinking, it's shrinking rapidly. Halifax is doing great, we're proud of that but, Madam Speaker, there are big decisions that this government makes . . .

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please.

The motion is carried.

We will now take a few moments to bring in staff and set up for the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

[2:39 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

[6:02 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 some progress and begs leave to sit again.

MADAM SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We will now proceed with the late debate. The adjournment motion reads:

“Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly immediately demand the Minister of Health provide a detailed staffing plan for home care so that Nova Scotians are not waiting in their homes four months later, not knowing when home care is on the way.”

That was submitted by the honourable member for Cape Breton North.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HEALTH & WELLNESS: HOME CARE STAFFING PLAN - PROVIDE

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand here at the moment of interruption, our late debate, to discuss what I think is a fundamental problem in the Province of Nova Scotia, one that I think needs further attention of this government, and has been, I believe, promised by this government on many occasions - that they would be making some dramatic changes vis-à-vis home care and how they treat it, on many, many occasions, either in the House of Assembly or in documents, saying the same thing.

I think what we need to understand when it comes to home care is that home care is, of course, but one component of truly taking care of our seniors, of truly finding the full breadth of services that should be available to someone, depending on where they are in their life and where they are, of course, with different ailments that may afflict them as they age.

Madam Speaker, what we continue to see as these individuals are identified is we see that a number of lists continue to expand, whether that expansion is finding itself in the placement in long-term care or whether that placement is just waiting for some of the more basic services which, of course, home care fits under - then we move into some VON services and those kinds of things.

What we are seeing is that not all services are available in all areas. So one thing that I hope we're going to hear from the honourable member for, I believe, Lunenburg West - we'll be discussing this one - will be what their plan is to truly roll this out to those parts of the province that don't have any services whatsoever, because you know just going on some of the comments that the Minister of Community Services was using, of trying to be fair to all parts of the province, in trying to have a level of service that is equal across the province, what we're seeing in home care is that that isn't necessarily the case. Depending on where you live, you might not be able to access some very basic home care.

Of course moving on from that home care is the issue of maybe the VON service where, of course, individuals who require some medical care are receiving some services through the VON, whether they are seniors or whether they are just coming out of the hospital, but in some cases that is not available to a lot of Nova Scotians in all areas as well.

So what is the true plan of this government when it comes to long-term care, to home care and other services that are available, or should be available, to Nova Scotians?

The other thing that I find, and this is a comment that I know that this government has talked about on many occasions, and I feel it unfortunate because long-term care or home care is being basically used as sort of a buzzword, that we want to provide better care for you - well what is it, what does that truly mean? Especially when we have people waiting three, four months in order to have that service, or in some cases what I've been seeing, as Health Critic, is the identification even of those individuals to receive service.

What I've seen in some cases, of course, is this buzzword that people have accepted, that we need to do more to keep our seniors at home, our loved ones at home, our wives, our husbands, our grandmothers, our grandfathers, whoever it may be - it seems to be that that's what we're being told and bombarded with at all times. So people are trying their best to keep loved ones at home as long as they possibly can.

The concern I have is that there is no identification of those people in a lot of cases. A lot of the time they have taken it upon their shoulders, as a good Nova Scotian would

normally do. They would work their best, try their hardest, to keep that loved one at home. What we're finding, since there really is no system to truly identify and quantify who those people are, is that as their ailment progresses, they don't necessarily - since we don't know who they are, we can't go out and say, hey, we would like to give you a little bit of home care, we would like to give you this, or we would like to give you that. We don't know.

All we find out is that all of a sudden this family can no longer cope. Whether it is the senior or the loved one who gets sick, or whether it's the actual caregiver who gets sick, what happens is that these individuals end up at the hospital in a very critical situation and end up using the health system to its maximum, in some cases, and spending months and months in a hospital recuperating or rehabilitating in order to either go back to the community or, unfortunately, going to another level of service, whether it be long-term care or other.

That's what I'm not hearing from this government, and that's why we truly need to continue down the path of the Continuing Care Strategy. Yes, we're a number of years away from where I had the opportunity of bringing forward the first Continuing Care Strategy in the province's history. What I would maybe ask this government to do, through the auspices of whoever happens to be listening to this tonight, is update the plan. Update that strategy so that we know what the next 10 years are going to look like, so that we know where the human resources are going to come from in order to fill the positions that are required in long-term care, in continuing care assistance, and whatever that level of care is going to be. We don't see that right now. There doesn't seem to be an appreciation of the size of the problem that we have in all parts of Nova Scotia.

During questioning of the minister during estimates, we did talk about long-term care, and of course we talked about the waiting list. The waiting list today for long-term care is sitting at a number that is as high as I've seen it in my nine years here. It continues to fluctuate and we understand that that is more what the true meaning of this is, but as we hit 1,800 or 1,900 people waiting for Level 2, is what we would quantify - those are the people sitting on the list waiting for the service. Why are there so many?

We really need to identify exactly who they are, and from the admission of the minister the other night, the issue is that doctors and those people who do have access to the list do have an opportunity to put people on that list, sort of pre-book people on it.

So is that 1,800 even a true number of people who actually need the service in Nova Scotia or should we have a better system in order to identify them that is not the doctor, that is another method that we know that people are going out in the community who know who their loved ones are. I mean, heck, in a lot of cases we as MLAs, who do knock on lots of doors, who do talk to a lot of individuals, should have an opportunity to say, do you know what, I just knocked on this door, or I just met with this lady or this man and, boy, they need a little bit of loving. They need a phone call a day. They need someone to come in and

check with their prescriptions. They need some kind or some level of service that they are basically not having today.

I think that's the challenge that this government has and all governments have had: the true identification of who those individuals are. Then from that identification is truly the human resource issue of how many CCAs do we need to be training in this province, how many housekeeping positions should be available to the different agencies that are across the province? How many individuals in the non-serviced areas do require that service?

This is a tremendous mountain to try to climb over. We feel, in our Party anyway, that we're not getting any real, direct answers right now. We're not seeing a true strategy. Just take the Continuing Care Strategy, work it out for the next 10 years, and continue working down that path, I think, would be a reasonable suggestion from us. I think that we need to do better for our seniors. We need to do better for those loved ones who need our help. We, as legislators, should actually sit down and work it out together. I think this is one that we wanted to bring forward to talk about this evening. I thank you for the opportunity tonight.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

MR. GARY RAMEY: Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for Cape Breton North for putting the resolution forward and my colleague from Argyle for speaking on this very important topic.

I grew up in a home where I lived in the same home with my grandparents when I was a child. I developed a very healthy respect for seniors at that time, and because I was born in a small community and there were lots of seniors in it, I developed a very healthy respect for the seniors in that community too. I know they're among our most valuable members of the province and our most valuable constituents.

But as Nova Scotia's population ages - we know that's happening, I'm a pretty good example of that myself - we're seeing more challenges to the health care system and the care needs of seniors increase and become more complex. We're not alone in that. There are challenges that all provinces in Canada are experiencing. Indeed, it's sort of a North American phenomenon, and government, particularly in this province, is taking steps to prepare and address current requirements by changing the mix of health care services. This is something we're doing in a number of different areas in the health care system.

In recent weeks the province unveiled its budget for 2012-13, as I think everybody in the House is aware, and I'm proud to say that seniors will benefit greatly from the way we are spending our health care resources. We recognize the changing requirements of seniors and we are rethinking how we use our resources to provide the best care for seniors

at home, where - I have to say, at least in my conversations with them - most seniors want to be if possible.

We want seniors to have options so they can remain in their communities and homes for as long as possible. That's where their support systems are. While we have actively built new and replacement long-term care beds - that's important too - we recognize that building beds is not the only answer. There are some who feel that is the only answer; we beg to disagree.

Home care and supports are a critical part of the continuing care mix and a large part of the solution, we feel, to address the needs of seniors. Last year we delivered two million hours of home support that included personal care, respite care, meal preparation, laundry, and essential housekeeping. These demands are expected to increase based on demographics. (Interruption) Two million hours. We are seeing continued steep growth in home care utilization, about 4 per cent per year, and we're working with the DHAs and the home support agencies to ensure they get the resources they need to deliver home care to people when and where they need it.

That's why the budget for 2013 invests an extra \$20 million in home care - \$20 million additional. It will allow more seniors to stay in their homes longer by investing \$6.3 million for home support visits, as well as expanding the program and adding new services by investing an additional \$5.4 million.

This additional funding will be used to provide more help for clients and their caregivers to deliver more personal care, housework, and meal preparation. We also expect to see an expansion of current services and some new offerings. Planning is underway to determine where funding is needed most, and government will provide updates as programs and supports are developed, because we think it's very important to make sure people are aware of what we're doing.

One of our main priorities is addressing the home support wait list in Capital Health. We are in meetings with Capital Health and the five home support agencies to find ways to reduce the wait list. Capital Health has introduced a Home Again program to support people at home so they can leave the hospital if they do not require acute care services. This approach has been successful and we are seeing results as more patients move out of hospitals and into the comfort of their own homes. Again, exactly where they want to be.

As part of the budget, we allocated \$6.5 million to provide additional in-home nursing care services and I'm pleased to tell you there is no wait list. I'll say that again - I'm pleased to tell you there is no wait list in the province for home care nursing services. While families provide significant care to the individuals who might otherwise need nursing home care, these funds will help deliver extra nursing support to supplement family efforts.

More nursing services at home will also mean more people can be discharged from hospital and/or avoid hospitalization because the treatment they need can be safely delivered by a nurse in their own home. We included \$1.5 million in additional funding to give seniors the ability to adapt their home for better accessibility. We are currently working with the Department of Community Services to assess seniors' needs related to home improvements and adaptations, again, trying to break down the silos between departments. Any additional funds will be invested where the need is greatest - to help address a wait list in an existing program or into developing a new program, if that is required.

We know that many seniors must address mobility considerations and look at ways to manage their medications if they are to remain in their own homes. That's why the government will invest \$250,000 for restorative care to address mobility concerns and to provide supports and tools for seniors to better manage their prescriptions. Later this year, we'll announce a new program to support these efforts.

The budget also contained a significant continued investment to support the new long-term care beds strategy for seniors who need that extra level of care. The majority of these funds are for the annualization of costs associated with the 137 new beds and 377 replacement beds opened in 2011 and 2012. In 2012-13, we will open 13 new beds at Miners Memorial Manor in Sydney Mines; we will open 137 replacement beds, 66 beds at GEM Health Care Group's The Admiral in Dartmouth; and - I think the member for Inverness might appreciate this - 71 beds in Inverary Manor in Inverness.

We have visited 68 existing long-term care facilities to gather information that will inform recommendations regarding replacement and renovation beds to be completed in the future. We also started updating future demand projections for home care spaces and long-term care beds. We hope to finish this work, Madam Speaker, later this year and bring forward recommendations to Cabinet.

In the last few years, we have opened almost 1,000 new beds but our wait list for long-term care remains relatively high, and I think the member for Argyle noted that. This underscores the fact that although the government has been focused on building beds, that approach alone is not meeting demand, so government intends to extend its focus to build more home and community care supports. This does not mean we stop building beds. It just means we're evaluating the best strategy.

All of this new investment, Madam Speaker, is going to be put in place but I'd like to highlight some programs that we already have in place. In recent years, government has introduced innovative programs and supports that help Nova Scotians get quality care in the comfort of their own homes, and I already alluded to that. The HELP-Bed Loan Program provides hospital-type beds to home care clients. The program helps us meet our commitment to support caregivers by giving them the resources they need to take care of their loved ones. The program will also help palliative individuals who are the majority of

users in this program, by the way, to receive care and be able to - and it's a horrible thing to have to say - but to be able to pass on in the comfort of their own home rather than in an institutional setting. That is a great comfort to many families.

This month, government provided funding to the Red Cross to purchase another 50 hospital beds for the hospital bed loan program, to help people receive care in their own homes. We've also introduced the Supportive Care Program which provides funding so clients and their caregivers can hire staff to help deliver home care, providing much-needed support and respite. There are also respite care options available in communities, so caregivers can arrange for a break, to take care of personal requirements and get some rest themselves.

We know that families of palliative care patients sometimes face financial challenges when it comes to prescription medications for their loved ones. That's why in February the government introduced the palliative care drug program that will reimburse palliative care patients living at home and in nursing homes.

In summary, I'm pleased to say that this government has put many measures in place to provide the best care to Nova Scotia seniors to enable and encourage them to remain in their own homes and communities as long as possible. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to speak tonight in late debate on the subject that has been put before us from the Progressive Conservative caucus tonight. It relates to home care and the delivery of home care in our province.

We've just heard from one of the members on the government side. It's an important issue to all of us and the stats have been mentioned but we are an aging population. Other than Prince Edward Island, we have the oldest population in Canada, the most number of seniors in proportion to our population and we also have 20 per cent of our population that identify themselves as having a disability. That's a very high percentage as well.

Many of these people, particularly as we get older, require some support in the home. We require some nursing care but we also require housekeeping services. In fact, my experience is that some of those really minimal services, like a little bit of housekeeping care or some meal preparation or a little help in the home, allows people to stay in their own home a lot longer.

They are much happier there, it's better for the community, it's better for the individual and their family, it keeps people in an area where they have friends and family

close by and it helps the government ultimately because they are, therefore, not going into nursing care or into any kind of institutional care which is going to cost more in the long run. With that little bit of help, they stay out of hospital as well. They can also manage their chronic conditions or their health issues more because they're not going to be put at risk by doing things that are beyond what they should do.

I think we've all known seniors or others who have had a disease who might say, it has just gotten too much to be in my own home and I have to move. That's really unfortunate, so we need these programs in place. The resolution is referring to really long waits to get the kind of home care services that people are asking for. In fact, it says up to four months of waiting time, which is certainly unacceptable.

Madam Speaker, as I was saying, it might be that you need continuing care assistance to help or it might be just having that other level of care that's needed. I should say that throughout the province, and I heard the previous member mention that - he said it twice - no wait list currently for any nursing services in the province. That's good news because in the past I've certainly had constituents who wanted to have services at home.

The case I think of right off the bat was one where somebody was needing palliative care and they didn't want to be in the hospital, they wanted to come home. Surveys have shown time and again that people would prefer to be at home when they are very sick. In that case they did not have enough nurses and they just couldn't provide the service and it was very difficult to have her come home to be with her family in her last days.

I had called, myself, to a number of the different offices to try and see what the problem was. The problem was a shortage of nurses for that service. So I'm glad to hear that there's no current waiting list but I also know that with a strike looming, there has been a lot of people sent home from hospitals, people who might be in other parts of the province are also affected because they may be here in the regional hospitals that we have for surgeries or recovery and they've been sent home if they're able to get by with home care and nursing care that would come in. I think some of the areas now are just about at capacity because the VON will tell you when they just can't take any more in a particular area.

It is putting the current disruption and the concern about a possible strike, all the preparations that are going on for that are actually putting pressure on the home care services, as far as nursing services are concerned because it is great to send people home to recover but we have to be able to promise that they will have the services they need.

I think that again, we can all say that we've been there trying to assist somebody who is fearful to leave the hospital because they are frightened that the services that have been alluded to won't materialize when they get home. If you're going home without somebody who knows a little bit about nursing or can take care of some of the issues you

might have, it's really frightening to go home. Some people are, in fact, going home alone and that's a real worry. I think it's important we look at that.

While I have just a few minutes to talk on the kind of services that people need to remain in their homes, I wanted to talk about the oxygen program and the respite program as well. I had a couple of comments. We actually include that in the home care services and I had a chance to just by chance have the home care income table and there is a sliding scale, depending on the size of your family, whether or not you qualify for home care and whether or not it's fully subsidized or whether you pay a little bit of it.

That is actually a chart that I asked a question of the minister in the Fall session of the Legislature because the income levels haven't been adjusted annually and every year we adjust the income levels in nursing homes and say what people will have to pay in nursing homes and what their subsidy is, but we don't alter the income levels here. It has been a number of years since that has been done. The minister said at the time that she would be doing that and I'm not sure if it has happened yet but it is important because I had a constituent, they were living on pensions, but their income had just gone up by small increments and it had put them over that top limit for a couple. They were quite concerned about that.

I think I have only a couple of minutes so I wanted to remind members of the House about the issue that arose around the oxygen program which is provided at home. In the Valley in particular there were people that suffered a lot of disruption because of the way the government handled the contract for home oxygen. In fact, I think some of you may remember the questions we had asked, that the government had a chance to go to the providers of home oxygen and say, this is the maximum we're going to pay. This is what we're prepared to pay, can you meet it?

To go to the Nova Scotia companies that were currently here doing business, go there first and say, it's too expensive, we have to cut down, can you meet this price? These are the companies that were here now that had employees that also had relationships with all of their home care clients. You can imagine if you're getting home oxygen, you have a very close relationship, you're seeing those people every day.

In the Valley, 97 per cent of the oxygen clients had a local company that was serving their needs. But because the government did not go out first to ask them if they could meet a new price, they went first to tender. That meant it was open to companies from all over and, as is the case in this particular instance, the local company was unsuccessful so then you have people losing jobs, companies losing their ability to have a staff and have the office. They would have to retrench, their profit was definitely impinged and they were very hurt. Not only the companies, but 97 per cent of the home oxygen patients or clients were disrupted. They were loud and supportive of the company they had in place. I thought it was just really wrong-headed.

I really appreciate - I've just come from estimates with the Finance Minister - that we're looking for savings and we want the best value for the dollars we have to spend. That's exactly what we've been talking about in the Red Room in Finance with the minister. However, I just think if you have successful companies in Nova Scotia, you should begin by asking them - if you already have a contractual relationship - first, can we negotiate a better price? Start there before you go somewhere else and disrupt all of your employees and all the clients and have to create a whole new relationship with a different set of vendors. I just didn't think that was the way to go at all. It was really wrong-headed and so the government could have done a lot better on that job.

On the respite care, I think we all know that any caregiver needs some chance to just look after themselves. An awful lot has been said about care for the caregivers because very often caregivers live under such a lot of stress that they themselves have their health break down or may not be able to continue doing that. So respite care is really important and this government has actually cut respite care in Nova Scotia. I think that's really a shame, it's a completely wrong way to go.

In the southwest Nova Scotia area, in particular, they have been cut badly. I wanted to get the number: the number of beds for respite were cut from 77 to just 44. So, you know, that's essentially a third of the beds were cut, and in some regions of the province, southwest Nova Scotia in particular, 70 per cent of the respite beds were removed from the district. And there has been an outcry for that - the government may not be listening or they may not be aware of it, but people on the ground are very unhappy about that kind of a cut because these are very vulnerable people. These are the family home care support people, the people who are looking after their loved ones and trying to support them in the home, and what they need is a respite in case they have any health issues, in case they need to take some time for important issues - just a little respite, and those beds were cut, as I say, in the province from 77 to 44.

That makes a big difference - and I should mention that it was the July 1st long weekend when these cuts were announced. So whenever they come in on - has my time elapsed, Madam Speaker? Well, I was just mentioning it was the wrong weekend to announce that, it's sort of a stealth cut.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to take my seat.

MADAM SPEAKER: The time allotted for late debate has expired. I would like to thank all participants for their good debate this evening.

The honourable Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Madam Speaker, I move that you do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Supply unto Her Majesty.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[6:33 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

[7:25 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 considerable progress and begs leave to sit again.

MADAM SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Madam Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 13.

Bill No. 13 - Education Act.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Education.

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Madam Speaker, I move that Bill No. 13 be read a second time. I am pleased to rise in my place to speak to this bill, an amendment to the Education Act. This bill will require school boards to have at least five elected members; this is a reduction from the present minimum of eight.

Madam Speaker, we are continually taking steps to put kids and learning first. In February we released our plan to help every student succeed. One of the plan's objectives is to ensure our resources go where they are needed the most - to student learning first. One of the actions we identified to help us get there is to support school boards in their efforts to improve efficiencies and focus on good governance.

Madam Speaker, this bill gives school boards more flexibility to find efficiencies in all aspects of their work. The Education Act currently states that school boards must have at least eight members, along with two at-large members representing African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq communities. School boards submit applications for changes to their electoral districts and boundaries to the Utility and Review Board on a regular cycle; the Utility and Review Board then sets the electoral boundaries along with the number of elected members.

Madam Speaker, the amendment we are debating today will give the Utility and Review Board more flexibility in making those decisions. In several cases around the province municipal electoral boundaries have changed in recent months. This amendment will allow the Utility and Review Board and school boards to keep pace with other changes in their communities.

Madam Speaker, I want to clarify what this bill will not do. It will not force school boards to reduce their members. It simply provides them a broader set of options to work with when they submit their applications to the Utility and Review Board, and it provides the Utility and Review Board a broader framework to consider those applications and make rulings. It will also not affect African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq representation on our school boards.

Madam Speaker, we continue to put kids and learning first and we know that supporting Nova Scotia's unique founding cultures in our classrooms and on our boards is of great benefit to all of our students. What this amendment will do is allow school boards to take a broader look at their current structure; it will let them consider a wider range of options that may save money, increase efficiency, and support effective governance.

Madam Speaker, we believe in the importance of elected community voices at the table. We expect school boards to make decisions based on the best interests of students. As a province, we continue to support boards in their efforts to become more efficient, and focus on providing resources where they are needed most - in the classroom. I think this is an important amendment and I look forward to the discussion here in this Legislature.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill No. 13, an Act to amend the Education Act of 1995-96, and, to be specific, it speaks to the minimum number of school board members on a school board. In fact, it's amended to strike out "less than eight" and replace that with "fewer than five." So although the bill is speaking specifically to a reduction in the minimum number from eight to five, it does send a very strong message to the elected school boards and, more importantly, to the communities of parents and teachers who have their voice around the school board table through their elected members.

The minister talks about this providing more flexibility. Initially she said it would provide more flexibility to the school boards, and one would have to question how fewer people could provide more flexibility, but then in the next statement she said the flexibility was provided to the Utility and Review Board. You have to question if this is a bill designed to give more voice to our school communities or to facilitate the work of the Utility and Review Board.

It is also a bit ironic that the minister says this will not force boards to look at the number of elected members, yet we know before the bill was even introduced that there was an application from the South Shore Regional School Board to have their numbers reduced. Obviously that was in violation of the Act and could not be considered by the Utility and Review Board.

It looks like there was an attempt, an interest, a decision, perhaps, that the South Shore Regional School Board would have their minimum numbers reduced from eight to five, forgot that it might violate the Act, put the request in, and along comes a piece of legislation.

The other interesting thing with that particular request is that the Utility and Review Board answered back to the board in correspondence on March 30th saying the request was in violation of the Education Act, then within a matter of five days another letter back to the school board saying that the Utility and Review Board had learned that there would be legislation introduced and, therefore, they were holding the application in abeyance.

If we are trying to really talk about giving boards flexibility, if we're trying to talk about the real goal of elected school board members and the voice that they have, I think this is a complete disservice and shows a lack of respect for what they have been asked to do. As we know, school boards have been in existence, that's the governance model that we've had in this province back earlier in the days of school board trustees. With the school board trustees, as we learned from the past, those boards of trustees focused very much on local issues. This was before the days of consolidation or amalgamation. There would be a small group of trustees in a small community and probably had one, maybe two, schools within their jurisdiction.

So it was very small, very personal, and very localized. The intent at that time was still the same intent: someone is elected from the community to serve on the board - either trustees or now-called school board members - to represent the people in their community. In the days of trustees, it was very obvious that those people knew exactly what was going on in the community. They knew the families, the school, the teachers; they knew everything that was happening in that school. They were seen as the respected members of the community who were standing up for what was in the best interests of the children in their community.

Of course, as time moved on the whole governance model changed from trustees to school boards, which followed the consolidation of schools back in the 1970s. Again, with consolidation, the members who were elected to sit on the school board represented a larger geography, perhaps had eight or 10 schools within their jurisdiction, but were very close to what was going on in the community and in the school, were in the schools a lot, and were very familiar with how programs were being delivered.

Some of us can remember when those consolidations took place. At that time it was always the question of, is this going to be a better model? Is this going to improve, or at least maintain, the quality of program delivery in the schools? What we found was that school board members who were part of those consolidated communities did have a larger audience, a larger number of families that they represented, so the scope of their work broadened.

After a number of years with the consolidation, this province moved to amalgamation in 1995-96. At that time, again, the areas increased the number of schools that board members would have responsibility for, increased the number of students. The number of families that would be having their voice at the table through an elected board member increased.

In 1995-96, when we went to seven anglophone boards and one francophone board, we saw huge boards in the initial part of that amalgamation. For example - and I will use the one in which I was a teacher - we had brought together all of the schools in Cumberland County, Pictou County, Colchester County, and East Hants. With that amalgamation initially came all of the board members who had been in Cumberland County, Pictou County, Colchester County, and East Hants.

The first board meetings after amalgamation in that particular board had 33 board members sitting around the table. That was a huge number and it was a difficult number to manage, but in the initial stages of amalgamation, that's what happened. Those 33 members stayed around the board until the next school board elections. At that time, with the boundary changes, with amalgamation, the numbers of members was reduced, and so you ended up in that particular board with a board of about 15 board members.

However, it's important to note that even though you had fewer numbers of board members, you had a much larger geography. You had a lot more schools that each board member had in their jurisdiction, and you had a lot more families and students - in particular, families - who were looking to their elected board member to be their voice.

One of the things that the school boards did after amalgamation was to come together to form an association, the Nova Scotia School Boards Association. That was to allow for the sharing of best practices, the sharing of information, and the sharing of decisions around the province, because school boards understood that they could and they should learn from each other. For example, again, if you had a board that had a program

that they had been able to implement, had tested and proven that the results were good, then they shared that. So as a result of that, maybe a program or an initiative that existed in Pictou County - and I know we have some members here who did serve on school boards, and who would be familiar with this - it was a program that they had been able to develop. They had tested it. They had proven it and so they shared that with all of the board members who were there together on the amalgamated board - the ones from Colchester, from East Hants, from Cumberland - who had not had that particular program in their board.

The opportunities of students were enriched because of the amalgamation, because those board members brought new ideas to the table and it translated into a better course selection, a better series of options and better programs so that all of the students who were in a particular board had an opportunity to learn and benefit from that. I'm using Chignecto-Central as an example, but that happened in the eight other boards around the province. Each one of those boards became richer because they learned from the board members in the others that came together in amalgamation.

You know, Madam Speaker, there are some roles and responsibilities that the board members have and that they take seriously. They pride themselves in doing what they believe is in the best interest of the students in their area. If we're looking at reducing the number of board members around a board table, we can't do that without increasing their scope of responsibility and the area, the geography that they have to represent.

We hear a lot about declining enrolment but we fail to hear anything about the fact that our province has not changed in its size and geography. Board members still have to travel the same areas of the province to represent the people who live in their elected area. Whether you're the voice for 100 people or whether you're the voice for 500 people, you still have a responsibility and an obligation to touch base with all of those people and to make sure that you hear their concerns and that you bring them to the board table. If you're starting to reduce the number, you have to be cautious that you don't reduce it to the point where it's ineffective.

I go back to my earlier comment, a comment that was made by the minister, that this was designed to give boards more flexibility. I really think everyone is interested in hearing how that could happen because it does not appear that fewer people covering larger geography, representing more schools, is going to give flexibility.

But I do want, Madam Speaker, to talk about something that's important. When you go to the Nova Scotia School Boards Association Web site, I think the first statement is very telling because it talks about - school boards keep the "public" in public education and their mandate is to be the voice of the public and they have that as a responsibility. We would expect that all board members take that responsibility seriously and we would expect that board members know that if someone comes to them with a concern - whether it's a bus stop, whether it's a program, whether it's an EA, or whether it's a policy within

the board - that they have the responsibility to the public to make sure that that concern gets to the elected school board as a body. Individual members are expected to do that and they take that role very seriously.

It allows the community, the parents and the others in the community, to be a part of shaping what's happening in public education. School boards do work with their communities but they also have to work with the Department of Education because if there is a concern that's raised or a need that's identified, it comes to the board, is discussed at the board and collectively the board determines that it's something that needs further attention, they need to have support for it, they're going to ask for funding for it. Whatever the request of the board is, that has to come to the Department of Education.

The links that bring all of the concerns from our public, from our students, to the minister's office, the vehicle for that to happen is through our elected school boards. You know, if you don't have that avenue for that two-way communication, we perhaps are not doing justice to the students whose responsibility we have to make sure we provide them with the best programming possible.

School board members are accountable to the public and they are accountable to the students they serve. As I said, they are - and this is on the Web site for the Nova Scotia School Boards Association so it's not anything that people here don't have access to, but I think it's important that they recognize that school boards are a direct link between the community and the government.

If someone, Madam Speaker, has a concern about a bus stop in Richmond, they don't go to the Minister of Education to talk about their concern with a bus stop in Richmond. There's a mechanism in place, there's a structure in place, there's a model in place for the concern of those parents, for that concern to get heard and to get attention and to get resolution.

If, in fact, there's no success as you're moving up through the channels, then eventually that lands on the minister's desk, but the minister relies on school boards, elected school boards, to be the response when those kinds of local concerns are raised. So it's important to know and to understand that that link is there and it's also important to know that those school board members are responding to the communities' concerns.

I go back to the comment about amalgamation and how the programs that were delivered in our schools after amalgamation were broader, were better and provided more opportunities for students because of those kinds of bringing together of best practices. That happened, Madam Speaker, through school board members.

Going back to the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, we talk about the role of a school board member being the link between the community and being the voice of the community around a board table, but there's also a lot of provincial work that is done.

School board members work on provincial committees and again, they work directly with staff from the Department of Education because there has to be oversight with what they do. So board members not only give their commitment to their constituents but they give their commitment to the whole province.

One of the studies that has just been completed, I believe - I know it has been ongoing for a bit - is on gender in education and how boys learn, how girls learn, do boys learn differently than girls? There's a whole body of research there. There has been a provincial committee, through the Nova Scotia School Boards Association and the Department of Education, that has been doing that work.

Now many, many hours, many, many months and I think over more than a couple of years, those committee members have come together and they've done that research and they've come up with the evidence of the research. That will be presented to the department - perhaps it has been - but the intent is for that committee work to go to the department so the minister and staff can review that and it may make a difference in some of the department's policy or it may not, but that's for the minister and the staff at the department to decide.

My point, Madam Speaker, is that the mechanism is there, and it's there because we have enough board members to serve on those provincial committees. All board members serve on a committee locally, whether it's Human Resources, whether it's Operations, whether it's Finance, or whether it's Programs. Those are the four main departments within a school board, and every board member sits on one of those committees. They do their committee work and then they take that to the full board. Some of those board members do work on the committees at the provincial level.

So I think what we're doing with this piece of legislation is we're limiting the number of bodies that we have to do that kind of work. Now, I guess you'll have to question, do you value that work? Is the work that is being done by a committee of school board members and Department of Education staff valued? Many good reports have been done. Many policies at the department level have been developed because of some of that committee work. So if we value that, I think we need to be cautious that we don't put in place a piece of legislation that will limit the number of people to do that.

I know the minister has said this doesn't force boards to reduce the number, that it gives the minimum number, but I go back to my earlier comments; it's quite ironic that the request to reduce the number of members on a board came in before the legislation. So someone, somewhere, is believing that the number of members needs to be reduced. That's really a concern.

The other thing that I think we need to talk about is how board members do the work for the department and for the minister. They are the front line; they are the voice. If we talk about budget, they are given the envelope of money. They are advised how much of

that money is targeted. They know how much of that money has to go for staffing, and it's my understanding that that is about 85 per cent of the budget that goes for staffing. We also know that the board makes the decisions with the little bit of money, where they have flexibility. They make those tough decisions, and they make those decisions because, as the minister has said, boards are closest to the communities they serve and they know best the needs of those communities.

The minister can't be in every school community. The minister relies on the elected board members to know their community and to raise the concerns with her department. If we take away that democratic right for people to be elected to serve on boards and the communities make the choice of who they want to have as their elected member - and the model, when it works, works well - the concern that we have is that if we start to reduce the number, we will reduce the opportunities and the representations and we will be limiting the voice of the people that we're supposed to be serving, that being the students in our communities and in our schools.

We have a fair number of responsibilities that school board members have, and in particular, the making of policy. We know, Madam Speaker, that there are provincial policies, but we also know that there are local policies and those policies - part of the mandate of the school board is to focus on policy rather than administration. When boards fully understand the difference between administration and their elected responsibilities, then that's when the model will work.

We have provincial policy and we have local policy. We also recognize - and again, this is where the Education Act is really what determines and drives and sets the parameters for what happens - there is a responsibility for school boards to comply with the legislation. They have a lot of major responsibilities that they take very seriously. All have to be within the legislation, all have to be within the provincial policies, but they are specific to their own area. It is a responsibility, as we know, for boards to plan and approve a budget and they must have a balanced budget.

We've seen this. We see it often that boards have a responsibility to lobby government. If they believe that the funding is not adequate to deliver the programs that they believe should be delivered, then they have a responsibility to lobby in a constructive and positive way to make sure that the students who are in their board are given the best possible opportunity and in some cases that means asking for the department to work with them to increase the amount of funding that comes to that board.

The bottom line is that boards and board members are advocates for our students. They are the voice of the parents; they are the link between the schools and the parents, the schools and the minister and the minister's office, and they know best the local concerns; they know best the needs of their community and they take that responsibility seriously.

Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 13. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Thank you and thank the member for Yarmouth, he's such a warm and cuddly person. That concludes the government business for today.

I move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow from the hours of 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. I call upon the House Leader of the Official Opposition to announce business for tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Opposition House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker, I was hoping he'd let me call the hours, I was going to try 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. just to see if he was paying attention, but we'll go with 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for tomorrow. Following Question Period, the order of business will be Bill No. 45, the Ratepayer Protection Act and Bill No. 42, Rural Nova Scotia Physicians Act. With that, I move that we now rise.

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

We are adjourned.

[The House rose at 7:59 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 356**

By: Mr. Chuck Porter (Hants West)

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

Whereas the Duke of Edinburgh's Award was founded in 1956 by His Royal Highness, Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, and the award came to Canada in 1963; and

Whereas Christian Lakes, of Windsor, was recently recognized as a Silver Award Achiever after completing the required activities for the silver level; and

Whereas the goal of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is to encourage young people to be active, to participate in new activities and to pursue current interests in the areas of community service, personal skill development, physical recreation and an advantageous journey;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this house of Assembly congratulate Christian Lakes on being a Silver Award Achiever of the Duke of Edinburgh Award and wish him all the best.

RESOLUTION NO. 357

By: Mr. Chuck Porter (Hants West)

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

Whereas the Duke of Edinburgh's Award was founded in 1956 by His Royal Highness, Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, and the award came to Canada in 1963; and

Whereas Emily Koller, of Windsor, was recently recognized as a Gold Award Achiever after completing the required activities for the gold level; and

Whereas the goal of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is to encourage young people to be active, to participate in new activities and to pursue current interests in the areas of community service, personal skill development, physical recreation and an advantageous journey;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this house of Assembly congratulate Emily Koller on being a Gold Award Achiever of the Duke of Edinburgh Award and wish her all the best.

RESOLUTION NO. 358

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

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

Whereas Emily Davis, co-captain of the Oxford Senior Lady Golden Bears basketball team, not only helped lead her team to a championship, she also reached a personal milestone as she scored her 1,000th career point; and

Whereas the Oxford Golden Bears Senior Girls are regional basketball champions securing the regional banner in February as they hosted the 2011-12 Northumberland Region Championship Tournament; and

Whereas Oxford's first game matched them up with the Lady Warriors from Parrsboro where Oxford scored often and took the game by a wide margin which lead them to play the defending Northumberland region champions, the Pugwash Panthers, in a game that was won by Oxford by a score of 86 - 44;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Emily Davis on this outstanding achievement and wish her continued success in all future endeavours.