



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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Fourth Session

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2012

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HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 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 today, the topic for late debate has been submitted. I will now read it:

Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Education immediately recognize the \$65 million in education cuts undertaken by her government over the past two years is more than a family disagreement, and that families from Neils Harbour through to Tusket will make a permanent decision on her government's future in the next election.

This was submitted by the honourable member for Hants West.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition, of which the operative clause is:

“I do not agree with cuts to the Nova Scotia education system. It is cut to the core. Please restore full funding to education and do not consider any future cuts. Our children’s education should not be sacrificed . . .”

This petition has been signed by 6,882 Nova Scotians, and I have affixed my signature.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition. It is addressed to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, with the operative clause being:

“We, the undersigned call upon the provincial government to pave the Orangedale Road.”

Mr. Speaker, there are 1,966 signatures on this petition, and I will table it now.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Premier on an introduction.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Just above the Press Gallery, I have the pleasure to introduce a young lady today who has the great burden of having Matt Hebb as her father, Mr. Speaker. Maddie Hebb is known far and wide throughout this province as a very young, beautiful, studious young girl but, again, she’s hampered by who her father is. I wish the House congratulate and recognize Maddie Hebb for showing up here today with that man. (Applause)

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

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, we live in a beautiful province and part of what makes Nova Scotia so special is our natural beauty, our coastlines, our lakes and our woods. The proposed new Community Easements Bill and the amendments to the Conservation Easements Act aim to protect and enhance access to our lands. These changes began as part of an election commitment that was made in 2009 - a commitment to those people across our province from foresters to conservationists who had put aside their sometimes different interests to come together to preserve 170,000 acres of forest land for sale in southwestern Nova Scotia.

As part of our commitment, the government allocated more than \$75 million to buy back parcels of land from large landowners and, today, we are proposing an additional tool. The Community Easements Bill will allow groups, municipalities, the Mi'kmaq, to pay landowners for the right to have a say in how the land is used. These groups will be able to conserve land without buying it. The landowner will also benefit by being financially compensated for agreeing to an easement. They can use an easement to protect things like agricultural land, community access to places of interest, scenic views, working forests, wetlands or woodlots. Lands with cultural importance can also be conserved in this way. An easement lays out specific conditions about land use and those conditions remain attached to the property even if the land is sold, preserving access to the land and reducing its exposure to development, now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, it's what Nova Scotians want, it's what we promised, and today it's what we delivered.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister and his staff for providing us with an advance copy of the statement. It's my pleasure to respond today to the minister's statement on the Community Easement Bill. I'm a bit surprised that the introduction of a bill requires a statement given the minister will have ample time to debate the bill in the House in the coming weeks.

Mr. Speaker, opportunities to preserve land for conservation purposes is obviously very important. It remains unclear, however, in discussing with a number of stakeholders, how this bill actually differs from what's possible in the province today. Frankly, this bill seems to be little more than amending and clarifying rules that are already in place. Today nothing stops organizations from having a legal agreement attached to a deed by way of financial compensation to direct use of forestry, farm or other lands.

This bill may change the name of what can be done but it's not new and it's not what the NDP promised, even though the minister would like to suggest it is. With this bill, any organizations which find themselves with additional options under this bill will still have to raise the money themselves to establish an easement – just like they do today. The burden of protecting land in Nova Scotia will continue to be downloaded to community groups that already struggle under the NDP cuts.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hopeful the government will one day make a serious effort that goes beyond the lukewarm efforts of the Third Party when they were in government, to assist community organizations in identifying and establishing the financial resources to protect land rather than looking for ways to suggest they have done much more than they have. This bill allows the government to say to organizations who seek government's help in protecting conservation of our agricultural land, it's not our problem anymore, it's your problem, and that isn't good enough. Without a dedicated means of funding support, it is one which continues the NDP tradition of downloading its responsibilities to others.

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

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the minister for providing us with a copy of his statement well in advance today. In general, our caucus believes that the Community Easements Bill is a good idea. We are pleased to see that its time has finally come here in Nova Scotia. Legislation of this kind has been used in other jurisdictions for years, and I may note, with success. We have a longstanding model of that success in Nova Scotia with the Conservation Easements Bill. Many parcels of land have been protected by such organizations as the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, and the Nature Conservancy. These lands are ecologically significant and they have been protected voluntarily by landowners who want to see the ecological value of their lands maintained forever. It has allowed Nova Scotians who are landowners to make sure that the tremendous value in their land that they know is well preserved.

Now that same principle can be applied to lands that are the integral part of Nova Scotia that we think of, so to preserve voluntarily agricultural and working forest lands, restored wetlands, open spaces, recreational and historically significant sites, will allow the brilliant colours of Nova Scotia tartan to remain vibrant forever.

The key to such legislation is the voluntary nature of it and we know how amazing it is to see Nova Scotians step up to the plate to protect their lands. Give Nova Scotia a chance to contribute to protect their heritage well into the future and Nova Scotians will rise to that challenge in great numbers. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle on an introduction.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I know there's a number of friends who are in the gallery, both sides today and I just want to welcome them. There's

one in particular who I want to single out and I just want to warn her that it's her husband who gave me a call earlier today. From my constituency there's Laurie MacKinnon and I wanted to wish her happy birthday today. So if all the folks in the House could wish her a happy birthday, please do that. Laurie is sitting up there, probably turning red right now. (Applause)

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

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 388

HON. DARRELL DEXTER (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas in recognition of the outstanding contributions Judge J. Elliott Hudson made to the University of King's College, to his profession as a Family Court Judge, and to his volunteer commitments, the University of King's College established an award in his name, presented annually to a King's alumnus who has made a significant contribution to the profession, community, charitable or volunteer work; and

Whereas this year the Judge J. Elliott Hudson Distinguished Alumnus Award will be presented to Russell MacLellan at the University of King's College annual alumni dinner early next month; and

Whereas Russell MacLellan proudly served his constituents of Cape Breton-The Sydneys, first as a Member of Parliament in the Canadian House of Commons and then as Leader of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party and Premier of Nova Scotia, returning to the practice of law in Halifax after leaving politics;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Russell MacLellan on this noteworthy distinction granted by the Alumni Association of the University of King's College.

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 Justice.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make an introduction.

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MR. LANDRY: I'd ask each individual I call out to stand up until I complete the list. Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the gallery in my right and I would like to welcome to the Chamber Yvonne Atwell, executive director of the Community Justice Society. With her today are her colleagues: Matthew Thomas, Kim Nash, Tasha Anderson, Selena Guildford, Denise Russell, Daniel Wandless, Melissa Blaikie, Shelly McNeil, Lisa Davis, Amy Burke, Kyle Carter, and Shazza Laframboise.

I would like to ask the Community Justice Society to take the warm welcome of this House. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Justice.

RESOLUTION NO. 389

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

Whereas when a crime occurs, it doesn't affect just one person but their family members too; and

Whereas National Victims of Crime Awareness Week offers an opportunity to the community to raise awareness about victims' issues and services in place to help the victims and their families; and

Whereas the Community Justice Society has partnered with the Atlantic Restorative Company to create a film on victims and restorative justice that will be shown on April 26th at the Bella Rose Arts Centre in Halifax at 6:00 p.m.;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize National Victims of Crime Awareness Week in the Province of Nova Scotia and applaud those organizations working to help victims of crime.

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.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw the attention of the House to both the east and the west gallery, where we have with us today the president of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, Alexis Allen, and the executive and local presidents across Nova Scotia who are here today to take in the proceedings and have meetings in Halifax.

I was honoured at the beginning of our session here today to table a petition with 6,882 names about "Kids not cuts". I ask the House to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 52 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2001. The Conservation Easements Act. (Hon. Charlie Parker)

Bill No. 53 - Entitled an Act Respecting Debt Settlement Agencies. (Ms. Kelly Regan)

Bill No. 54 - Entitled an Act Respecting the Review and Reduction of Power Rates. (Hon. Jamie Baillie)

Bill No. 55 - Entitled an Act Respecting Community Easements. (Hon. Charlie Parker)

Bill No. 56 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 380 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Public Utilities Act, Respecting Eliminating Bonuses in Power Rates. (Mr. Chuck Porter)

Bill No. 57 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 17 of the Acts of 2003. The Crosbie Memorial Trust Fund Act. (Mr. Jim Morton)

Bill No. 58 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 380 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Public Utilities Act, Respecting Transparency in Power Rates. (Mr. Chuck Porter)

Bill No. 59 - Entitled an Act to Establish the Fish Harvesters Registration and Certification Board. (Hon. Sterling Belliveau)

Bill No. 60 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 380 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Public Utilities Act, Respecting Ratepayer Fairness. (Mr. Chuck Porter)

Bill No. 61 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 1996. The Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act. (Hon. Sterling Belliveau)

Bill No. 62 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 340 of the Revised Statutes of 1989, and Chapter 41 of the Acts of 2011. The Pension Benefits Act. (Mr. Allan MacMaster)

Bill No. 63 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 23 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Assessment Act. (Mr. Allan MacMaster)

Bill No. 64 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 217 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Income Tax Act, Respecting Donations by Farmers to Food Banks. (Mr. Allan MacMaster)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

RESOLUTION NO. 390

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

Whereas teachers are the foundation of our education system and a good teacher can instill values of lifelong learning in a student; and

Whereas teachers and education partners in Nova Scotia's public education system are concerned about this government's cuts to public education; and

Whereas this NDP Government has not made education a priority and continues to gouge public education despite concerns of parents, teachers and students;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Cape Breton Centre stand up for education, and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to stop balancing the books on the backs of our students and restore funding to education.

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 Argyle.

RESOLUTION NO. 391

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 parents, students and teachers all over Nova Scotia are shocked by the magnitude of the NDP cuts to education; and

Whereas Nova Scotians feel that the \$65 million in cuts to the education system makes a mockery of the NDP promise to improve the quality of education in the province; and

Whereas NDP education cuts mean fewer teachers, larger class sizes and that Nova Scotia has the unenviable distinction of having the second lowest per-pupil funding in Canada;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly condemn the NDP for saying one thing and doing quite another when it comes to improving the quality of education in Nova Scotia.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, first, would I be allowed an introduction?

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Before I read my resolution I want to draw the attention of the members opposite and all Parties to the west gallery, the nor'west portion of our west gallery, and I would like to introduce the mayor of the Town of Shelburne, Al Delaney. Everybody give him a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 392

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

Whereas Shelburne resident Elizabeth Rhuland has been chosen as the 2012 Representative Volunteer for the Town of Shelburne; and

Whereas Elizabeth Rhuland, who firmly believes in paying back to the community, has been a dedicated volunteer for more than 30 years, contributing her time, knowledge, and expertise to numerous groups and organizations throughout Shelburne County; and

Whereas Elizabeth Rhuland has most recently been one of the driving forces behind the scenes helping the Black Loyalist Heritage Society achieve their dream of the establishment of the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, which is expected to open in 2013;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Elizabeth Rhuland, the 2012 Representative Volunteer of the Town of Shelburne, for her outstanding contributions to the 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 Halifax Clayton Park.

RESOLUTION NO. 393

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

Whereas prosperity starts in the classroom and Nova Scotia's future rests on the shoulders of our students; and

Whereas students are losing the very services and resources that will support them in reaching their full potential; and

Whereas the impact of this NDP Government's \$65 million in funding cuts to education are being felt in every classroom in the province;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island stand up for education, and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to invest in the future of Nova Scotia and restore funding to education now.

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 Inverness.

RESOLUTION NO. 394

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

Whereas this week marks the seventh annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week; and

Whereas this week is an opportunity to raise awareness about victim issues and about the programs, services, and laws in place to help the victims of crime and their families; and

Whereas the Government of Canada showed its commitment to supporting victims of crime today, with \$2 million in funding for programs and services;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly think of all those affected by crime and thank the countless people who work with victims of crime every day.

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 Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

RESOLUTION NO. 395

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

Whereas this government recognizes that small businesses are the backbone of the economy and vital to the success and identity of many Nova Scotia communities; and

Whereas David Chretien and Cara Kuhn are the new owner/operators of Coffee, Tea & Sea, which is a café by the sea at the renowned Fisherman's Cove in Eastern Passage; and

Whereas David and Cara celebrated their investment in a Nova Scotia small business by hosting a grand reopening under new management on April 6, 2012;

Therefore be it resolved that this Nova Scotia House of Assembly commend David Chretien and Cara Kuhn for their investment in a small business in Eastern Passage, and wish them many years of 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 Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 396

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

Whereas this NDP Government refuses to see how their cuts are affecting classrooms across Nova Scotia; and

Whereas despite the NSTU's Kids Not Cuts petition, Take Your MLA to School Day, and recent rallies at NDP MLA offices across the province, this government remains blind to the needs of students in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Nova Scotians deserve better and demand better for their children;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Hants East stand up for education, and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to make the students a priority and reinstate funding to education.

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 Victoria-The Lakes.

RESOLUTION NO. 397

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

Whereas on February 17th, 18th, and 19th, twelve teams participated in the Commercial Silver Dart Bonspiel at the Baddeck Curling Club; and

Whereas the bonspiel, sponsored by the business community, has proven to be very competitive and fun, with monies raised going towards the Baddeck Curling Club; and

Whereas Daniel Paturel, Jim DiFiore, Hank Donovan, and Sue DiFiore were first-place winners, with Evelyn Hebb, Eddie Mariner, Wendy Mariner, and Elaine Allison placing second;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly applaud and thank organizers John and Heather MacIntosh and Wendy Breyfogle for coordinating the 2012 Commercial Silver Dart Bonspiel, and congratulate all participants and this year's winners.

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 Antigonish.

RESOLUTION NO. 398

MR. MAURICE SMITH: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the honourable member for Halifax Chebucto, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Barbara Campbell, head librarian for the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, has retired after 29 year of service; and

Whereas Barbara Campbell is widely recognized within the province's legal community as a person possessed of high professional skill, of boundless energy, of cheerful spirit and even temper, and of an ever-helpful attitude, for all of which the legal community is profoundly grateful; and

Whereas the delight of having been able to practice her profession in one of the most beautiful libraries in the province, with its wonderful view of Halifax Harbour, perhaps did not enough to compensate for being obliged to work so long with lawyers;

Therefore be it resolved that this House acknowledge the forbearance of Barbara Campbell, note her high skills, thank her for her many years of dedicated work, and wish her much joy in her retirement.

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. 399

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

Whereas this NDP Government refuses to see how their cuts are affecting classrooms across Nova Scotia; and

Whereas despite the NSTU's Kids Not Cuts petition, Take Your MLA to School Day, and recent rallies at NDP offices across the province, this government remains blind to the needs of students in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Nova Scotians deserve better and demand better for their children;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Cumberland North stand for education and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to make the students a priority and reinstate funding to education.

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 North.

RESOLUTION NO. 400

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

Whereas 16-year-old Camden MacDonald, a special needs student from Dr. T.L. Sullivan Junior High, and the ultimate Bruins fan, travelled to Boston with his school's travel group in March; and

Whereas staff of the school contacted the foundation run by the Boston Bruins and managed by former Bruin Bob Sweeney, who was able to put Camden and his father in the Bruins alumni suite for the Buffalo game and arranged a visit by Cam Neely, Camden's hockey idol; and

Whereas after the game Camden and his father met Patrice Bergeron, Milan Lucic, Shawn Thornton, and Brad Marchand;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank those involved in making Camden's dream come true.

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 North.

RESOLUTION NO. 401

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

Whereas Aiden Hainstock, Gabriel Scaling, Noah Archibald, David Archibald, and Gabriel Baker, otherwise known as the LEGO Lords from Kings County Academy in Kentville, Nova Scotia have earned the trophy for the robotics competition at the annual Robot Programming Competition at Acadia University in Wolfville on February 4, 2012; and

Whereas the LEGO Lords spent several hours each week, beginning in early September 2011, preparing for this competition; and

Whereas the LEGO Lords were innovative in their presentation at Acadia where they dressed as LEGO figurines to promote awareness of food safety and the tapeworm;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly celebrate the creativity and the achievements of the LEGO Lords at the 2012 annual Robot Programming Competition at Acadia University and wish the members of the team many future successes.

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. 402

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

Whereas hockey is Canada's official national winter sport, with thousands of Canadians participating each year in this great pastime; and

Whereas Nova Scotians have a deep love for hockey and a great connection to this sport, as the game we know and how it is played today had its origins in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the NHL playoffs are the most exciting time of year for professional hockey, a time when many Nova Scotians watch games with loved ones and friends;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly congratulate the Washington Capitals on their great and historic win last night against the Boston Bruins and ask the member for Timberlea-Prospect to join the members of the Bruins on the golf course this weekend.

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. 403

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

Attendu que le 30 décembre 2011, Paul d'Entremont de Pubnico-Ouest a pris sa retraite comme directeur général du Réseau Santé de la Nouvelle-Écosse; et

Attendu que M. d'Entremont a consacré une grande partie des dix dernières années à améliorer l'accès aux services de santé en français; et

Attendu que M. d'Entremont a l'intention de rester actif en travaillant sur des petits projets et à participer comme bénévole dans la région;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de cette Assemblée félicitent Paul d'Entremont sur sa retraite, lui souhaitent bonne santé et beaucoup de succès dans le prochain chapitre de sa vie.

M. 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 on December 30, 2011, West Pubnico native Paul d'Entremont retired as general director of the French Health Network of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Mr. d'Entremont dedicated 10 years to improving access to health services to ensure they are offered in French; and

Whereas Mr. d'Entremont intends to remain active by working on small projects and expects to participate in volunteer work throughout the community;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Paul d'Entremont on his retirement and wish him continued good health and success in the next chapter of his 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 Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 404

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

Whereas prosperity starts in the classroom and Nova Scotia's future rests on the shoulders of our students; and

Whereas students are losing the very services and resources that will support them in reaching their full potential; and

Whereas the impact of this NDP Government's \$65 million in funding cuts to education are being felt in every classroom in the province;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Halifax Fairview stand up for education and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to invest in the future of Nova Scotia and restore funding to education now.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

RESOLUTION NO. 405

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

Whereas the right to vote is a fundamental element of our democracy; and

Whereas today marks the 94th Anniversary of the day that the women of Nova Scotia received the right to vote, with the passage of the Nova Scotia Franchise Act; and

Whereas a fully enfranchised population of men and women is an absolute necessity for a properly functioning and participatory democracy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize this anniversary as an important moment in the history of our province and that women continue to fully participate in our system, not only as voters but also as candidates.

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. 406

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

Whereas this NDP Government refuses to see how their cuts are affecting classrooms in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas despite the NSTU's Kids Not Cuts petition, Take Your MLA to School Day and recent rallies at the NDP MLA offices across the province, this government remains blind to the needs of the students in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Nova Scotians deserves better and demands better for their children;

Therefore be it resolved that the NDP member for Truro-Bible Hill stand up for education and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to make the students a priority and reinstate funding to education.

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 Victoria-The Lakes.

RESOLUTION NO. 407

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

Whereas Ski Cape Smokey features the highest vertical ski descent in the Maritimes and a breathtaking view overlooking Ingonish and the Atlantic Ocean; and

Whereas due to a lack of snowstorms this winter, the Ski Cape Smokey season endured a delayed start of February 24th but with the co-operation of Mother Nature and the tireless efforts of volunteers, Ski Cape Smokey has once again provided the opportunity for ski lovers to “take to the hill”;

Whereas Ski Cape Smokey ended their season with success as 270 skiers enjoyed superb ski conditions over the March break weekend; and

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize the dedication and tenacity of society chair Larry Dauphinee, and the many volunteers who have ensured that Ski Cape Smokey remains a viable recreational facility in Ingonish and surrounding area.

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. 408

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

Whereas teachers are the foundation of our education system and a good teacher can instill values of lifelong learning in a student; and

Whereas teachers and education partners in Nova Scotia's public education system are concerned about this government's cuts to public education; and

Whereas this NDP Government has not made education a priority and continues to gouge public education despite concerns of parents, teachers and students;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville stand up for education and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to stop balancing the books on the backs of our students in the classrooms and restore funding to education.

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 North.

RESOLUTION NO. 409

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

Whereas members of the North Sydney Rotary Club will celebrate 74 years of service to North Sydney and the surrounding area this year; and

Whereas club president Norm Connors says the Northside Rotarians have pooled their resources and talents to make a \$41,000 investment in communities locally and internationally; and

Whereas this support by the local business community and community-minded volunteers ensures the North Sydney Rotary Club can live up to its goal of serving the local and international communities while fostering understanding, goodwill and peace;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Rotary Club and its members for their dedication and service to the local and international communities.

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 Glace Bay.

RESOLUTION NO. 410

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

Whereas this government refuses to see how their cuts are affecting classrooms across Nova Scotia; and

Whereas despite the NSTU's Kids Not Cuts petition, Take Your MLA to School Day and recent gatherings at NDP MLA offices across this province, the government continues to ignore the needs of students in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Nova Scotians deserve better and demand better for their children, their economy and the future of their province;

Therefore be it resolved that all government MLAs stand up for education, and call on the Premier and the Education Minister to make the students a priority and reinstate funding to our education system because our future depends on it.

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 Digby-Annapolis.

RESOLUTION NO. 411

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

Whereas teachers are the foundation of our education system and a good teacher can instill values of lifelong learning in the student; and

Whereas teachers and education partners in Nova Scotia's public education system are concerned about this government's cuts to public education; and

Whereas this NDP Government has not made education a priority and continues to gouge public education despite concerns of parents, students, and teachers;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Eastern Shore stand up for education, and call on the NDP Premier and NDP Education Minister to stop balancing the books on the backs of our students and restore funding to education.

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 Richmond.

RESOLUTION NO. 412

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

Whereas teachers are the foundation of our education system and a good teacher can instill values of lifelong learning in a student; and

Whereas teachers and education partners in Nova Scotia's public education system are concerned about this government's cuts to public education; and

Whereas this NDP Government has not made education a priority and continues to gouge public education despite concerns of parents, teachers, and students;

Therefore be it resolved that the member for Antigonish stand up for education, and call on the NDP Premier and the NDP Education Minister to stop balancing the books on the backs of our students and restore funding to education.

MR. SPEAKER: The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

RESOLUTION NO. 413

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

Whereas technology has transformed our society and has dramatically changed the way people communicate with each other and, in response, progressive Parliaments and Legislatures, including the British Parliament, have recognized the new reality and now accept on-line petitions; and

Whereas our government has been actively adopting on-line services for citizens, but our Legislature has chosen to ignore the prevalence of on-line petitions and continues to disallow this important avenue for hearing from engaged citizens; and

Whereas all members of the Legislature lament the level of political apathy, particularly among young adults, and yet successive governments have continued to overlook the need to accept on-line petitions;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House urge the government to rise to this challenge and finally order a meeting of the essentially defunct Assembly Matters Committee, with instructions to ensure that on-line petitions can be accepted in the Nova Scotia Legislature.

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. 414

HON. WAYNE GAUDET: M. le Président, par la présente, j'avise que je proposerai à une date ultérieure, l'adoption de la résolution suivante:

Attendu que le 15 avril dernier le gala des prix de la musique de la Côte Est 2012 a présenté des prix à de nombreux individus et groupes méritants; et

Attendu que le groupe Blou de Clare a remporté le prix dans la catégorie Artiste de l'Année 2012 (choix du public); et

Attendu que c'est la première fois en 24 ans que ce prix est remis à un francophone;

Qu'il soit résolu que les membres de cette assemblée se joignent à moi pour féliciter Blou pour avoir remporté ce prix et leur souhait plein succès dans le futur.

M. le Président, je propose l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débats.

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

Whereas on April 15th the East Coast Music Awards were presented to many deserving and talented individuals and groups; and

Whereas the Clare musical group Blou was named the Fan's Choice Entertainer of the Year; and

Whereas Blou is the first francophone in 24 years to receive the East Coast Music Award;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature congratulate the Acadian group Blou for winning the Fan's Choice Entertainer of the Year Award.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

RESOLUTION NO. 415

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

Whereas Symphony Nova Scotia, now in its official 30th season, can trace its origins back to the Halifax Symphony formed in 1897; and

Whereas the Canadian Council for the Arts created the John Hobday Awards in Arts Management from a \$1 million endowment from the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, of which two prizes are awarded annually; and

Whereas Erika Beatty, CEO of Symphony Nova Scotia, was one of the recipients of this coveted award, which will allow her to be mentored by Pierre Lamoureux in Cinemusica/FogoLabs for four months;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing Ms. Erika Beatty for her dedication in keeping Symphony Nova Scotia financially viable, and congratulate her for winning this well-deserved prize.

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. 416

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

Whereas Bedford swimmer Danial Murphy was selected as the Sport Chek Male Individual Athlete of the Month for December, after competing at the Para Can-Am Championships in La Mirada, California, recently; and

Whereas the then 21-year-old brought home four gold medals - in the 100-metre backstroke, the 200-metre freestyle, the 100-metre freestyle, and the 50-metre fly - one silver medal in the 50-metre backstroke, and one bronze medal in the 50-metre freestyle; and

Whereas during competition Danial set two Canadian para-records in the 50- and 100-metre freestyles, thereby earning two qualifying standards for the 2012 Paralympics, and then set a Canadian record at Paralympics trials in Montreal in March with a time of 3:09:87 in the S5 category;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate Danial Murphy on his awards and on his determination and athleticism, and wish him continued success in all of his athletic pursuits.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

RESOLUTION NO. 417

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

Whereas Nova Scotia's fire brigades are made up of individuals who are dedicated to serving others; and

Whereas firefighters contribute hard work, skills and time, often risking their lives, and have taken on the role of first-responders and deal with incidents of great emotional stress; and

Whereas firefighters seldom receive the accolades they deserve, but most fire departments hold a banquet each year to thank all of their members and to present honours;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Chief David Lundie of the Great Village and District Fire Brigade in Colchester North for receiving a long-term service award for 55 years of 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 Preston.

RESOLUTION NO. 418

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 North Preston Seniors Club was formed about 50 years ago with approximately 30 to 40 members in attendance at the original meeting in the North Preston School; and

Whereas the club still boasts some 30 members who raise funds for various events and projects by making four quilts every year that they sell tickets on; and

Whereas the group frequently holds dinners, takes trips out of town and attends zone meetings in addition to holding sewing, knitting and cooking classes for youth aged 10 to 15, as well as four times annually holding a dinner for the daycare children and making and delivering to shut-ins knitted slippers, Mother's and Father's Day dinners, and 28 Christmas cakes;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House recognize the many positive projects that the North Preston Seniors Club are involved in with youth and shut-ins in 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 Bedford-Birch Cove on an introduction.

MS. KELLY REGAN: I am delighted today to see the 1st Bedford Scouts filing in just in time for Question Period. I wanted to introduce to you Aiden Deveau, Alex Gallant, Alex Poulton, Blake Roache, David Havill, Matthew McKee, Matthew Verstege, Nicholas Yuill, and Noah Fennell - hi, Noah - and Alan Havill, Doug Gallant, and Terry Yuill, who are the leaders. We're pleased to have them here today in the House, and also Sally Shaw, who is one of the mothers. Would you young folks please stand up and receive the warm welcome of the House? (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

RESOLUTION NO. 419

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

Whereas the Great Places in Canada contest recently announced its winners; and

Whereas 90 locations competed in the Great Places in Canada contest and Yarmouth's breathtaking Cape Forchu Lighthouse was a finalist in the Public Space category; and

Whereas after 200,000 e-votes were cast from all over the country, Yarmouth's Cape Forchu Lighthouse won the Great Public Space title;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly recognize and congratulate Cape Forchu Lighthouse on this impressive and prestigious honour and encourage all Nova Scotians to visit this remarkable landmark.

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. 420

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

Whereas after overseeing at least 100,000 safe street crossings, Robert Parker - also known as Chum - is retiring as Digby's crossing guard; and

Whereas for 23 years Robert could be found at the Victoria Street crosswalk, ensuring the safety of children at the nearby elementary school; and

Whereas in recent years Mr. Parker has been bothered by arthritis, forcing him to retire from his much-loved job;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate Robert Parker on his 23rd successful year of providing a safe crosswalk and his dedication to the children of Digby.

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. 421

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 Hectanooga volunteer fire department started in 1972 to provide fire protection and promote fire safety within their fire district area; and

Whereas Freddy Muise has been the fire chief with the Hectanooga volunteer fire department for 32 years this past February; and

Whereas Fire Chief Freddy Muise was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy 28 years ago and has been in a wheelchair for the last six years, possibly the only fire chief with this situation in Canada;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank and commend Fire Chief Freddy Muise for his years of service to the Hectanooga volunteer fire department, and wish him continued good health and best wishes in the future.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 422

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

Whereas Saturday, April 28, 2012, marks the five-year Anniversary of Stephen McNeil's leadership of the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the Liberal caucus has welcomed five new members to their team and elevated their role to Official Opposition under Stephen's leadership; and

Whereas Stephen has led the Party with honesty and integrity, never compromising his values, and always putting the needs of Nova Scotians first;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House of Assembly acknowledge Stephen's friendship, leadership, and record of achievement and congratulate him for his work on behalf of his constituents, his Party, and his province.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried. (Applause)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: The time now is 1:11 p.m. We will finish at 2:11 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: FIN./EDUC. - RELATIVE FUNDING

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years government has slashed public education by \$65 million. However, in the same time period, the Department of Education has grown by 59 positions.

My question to the Premier is, why does the Premier gut public education while increasing staffing in the Department of Finance?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition, of course, is incorrect. He knows that, though. He knows that the positions in the Department of Finance were consolidation coming out of other departments, and that overall the number of FTEs in the Public Service has declined over that period of time.

So the fact of the matter is that we are appropriately funding all the departments. That includes Education and it includes the school boards for the work they do.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the Premier that he is appropriately staffing and funding the departments, meaning where the ministers sit, but he's not appropriately staffing the classrooms across this province.

The Department of Finance may have taken on more responsibility, so perhaps they do deserve more money, more allocation of the budget. But teachers across this province have been asked to take up more responsibilities over the last two years, while at the same time we're cutting \$65 million of support for classroom teachers across this province.

My question to the Premier is, if the Minister of Finance gets extra support when he takes on extra duties, why the double standard for teachers?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition would know that just yesterday the House was presented with a review of the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board. That document included statistics which demonstrated that between 2006-07 and 2011-12 there was an increase of resources in the classroom for students.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, that report would also say that the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board did due diligence when they presented their budget to the people of the Chignecto region - the very board that this Premier stood in this House and chastised for playing politics. His own staff member went down there and verified the fact that they were not playing politics, that they were doing what was in the best interests of their community.

That same report that he is talking about identifies that this government does not fund special needs education in this province to the tune which we invest in it, because school board members across this province recognize that they need to put resources in classrooms to support teachers, unlike this government.

The Department of Finance has grown by 59 positions, the Department of Economic and Rural Development is up 65, the Department of Energy is up 12, the Department of Justice is up 49 - and I think the members want me to start over again, Mr. Speaker. They are not keeping track.

Let me add it up, Mr. Speaker. The government has added 675 positions since taking office, so my question is, why is the Premier asking schools to do more with less when he is giving his ministers more to do the same?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, no amount of trying to manipulate numbers will make what the Leader of the Official Opposition says true. The fact of the matter is that there are fewer members of the Public Service now than there were when we came to office. I will table for the member opposite the review of the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, which says that between 2006-07 and 2011-12, the number of students in

that school board has gone down by 2,250, but the number of hours for EAs have gone up by 146. That's more resources in the classroom.

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

PREM. - HEALTH CARE WORKERS: AGREEMENT - COST

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, as all Nova Scotians now know, last night at the eleventh hour - after 172 beds had been closed at Capital Health, 430 surgeries cancelled, 2,000 outpatient appointments wiped out, 530 diagnostic tests put on hold - the government and the workers of Capital Health reached a tentative agreement. Nova Scotians were disappointed that for weeks the Premier allowed all of this to go on, and now they deserve to know how much this agreement is going to cost them.

So my question to the Premier is, will he commit to sharing with this House, and all Nova Scotians, the full cost of the agreement that was reached last night, including salary, benefits, other concessions, including any pension effects, by the time that agreement is ratified?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, of course, as the member opposite has indicated, there is a tentative agreement - that means that it will have to go to a vote for the union, so at this point, you know, any discussion with respect to the financial impact for the province or, for that matter, the benefits which might accrue to the workers is purely speculation. So there's no need to engage in that at this point.

MR. BAILLIE: The Premier was elected to represent all Nova Scotians, not just some Nova Scotians, and what he has just told this House is that the people he represents, the people of Nova Scotia, will be the last to know how much that agreement is going to cost them, even though they're the ones footing the bill.

Mr. Speaker, Capital Health has budgeted for a 1 per cent increase under the direction of the government, as all health authorities have. We now know that the CEO of Capital Health, Ms. Chris Power, has said that she is expecting the NDP Government to fund any increase above 1 per cent. We know the result is going to be much more than 1 per cent, so my question to the Premier is will he tell Nova Scotians is he planning to provide the extra funding to Capital Health to fund this agreement or, in the alternative, what does he expect them to cut in programs to pay for this agreement?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out, there is no agreement - there is a tentative agreement. We are, of course, very hopeful that the membership of the Capital District Local will adopt the recommendation of their union executive and ratify the agreement, but until that time any discussions with respect to these things is purely speculative. Furthermore, if they accept the agreement, there will be an arbitrator put in place, and the arbitrator would then have to make a decision before the government would

be fully apprised of what those costs would be. So there is an appropriate time for the release of information and there is an inappropriate time to do that - we will wait until the appropriate time.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, there is an agreement, tentative as it may be, with all kinds of provisions in it, including the arbitration boundaries for salary. Either the Premier knows what it's going to cost taxpayers and won't tell them or he doesn't know, which is actually equally bad since he's the one who's supposed to keep track of these things.

Mr. Speaker, before agreeing to an arbitration, the Premier should have ensured that the arbitrator was instructed to make sure that he or she took into account the ability of the taxpayers of the province to pay for the agreement, but we know today he didn't - and my question to the Premier is why not?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, what we did do was set out the parameters for an arbitration so that we knew both what the floor and the ceiling of that agreement would be. It's now up to the arbitrator to do an analysis of that.

Mr. Speaker, I would just remind the member opposite that when the Progressive Conservative Government was in power and after Bill No. 68, something that was ultimately never brought into law, the government decided to go ahead with an arbitration that ended up with a 17 per cent increase for the RNs. They didn't have the foresight that we had, to set parameters around an arbitration, so we think this is a better model. Maybe they disagree.

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

PREM. - SCH. LUNCH BAGS: COST - JUSTIFICATION

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the effects of this government's cuts are being felt in classrooms. Students are getting fewer supports and still it is the students who need the most supports who are being left behind. So my question to the Premier is, how can the Premier justify spending \$0.5 million on orange lunch bags?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the Leader of the Official Opposition didn't read the material that I just gave him. It points out that despite the fact - for example, in the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board - the number of students went down by some 2,250 - the actual supports in the classrooms through EAs actually increased by 146 hours. Those aren't our figures; those are the figures of the school board.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, actually I was listening to the Premier, but like in most cases, he got it wrong. If you look at EAs from 2009 to 2010 in the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, 2,091 hours; if you look at it presently, now it's 1,996 - by most people that's a decrease. If you look at library full-time equivalents, when he took office

they were 39.6, they're at 38.1 - by most people's math, that's a decrease. If you look at the full-time IT support equivalents, when he took power they were 22, now they're at 20 - that's a decrease by anyone's math. I think he's trying to take credit for the former Tory Government.

This government has spent \$90,000 on education advertising, \$0.5 million on lunch bags and they've increased the budget for department senior staff by 17.6 per cent. That \$0.5 million for those orange lunch bags would have given us eight teachers, or 16 educational assistants, or 20 librarian techs. My question to the Premier is, why is the government more interested in self-promotion or departmental administration than in the quality of public education in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we've set out for the Leader of the Official Opposition the facts with respect to enrolment in this province. He understands, I'm sure, that with the large decrease in the population of students in the province that, in fact, we have a system where demand is decreasing. I pointed out to him, and he can try to cherry-pick the last three years, but you cannot deny the inevitability of 2,250 fewer students in a regional school board and an increase of 146 additional EA hours. How, by anybody's math, is that not more?

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, there is no one denying the fact that our student population has decreased, but what's insulting to teachers, parents and all Nova Scotians is that this government and this Premier have boiled the debate down to fewer students mean we need fewer teachers, it does not take into account that the complexity of the classroom has changed not only over the last decade but substantially over the last number of years. We're asking teachers, we're asking the system, to do more with less. It simply doesn't add up.

People across this province are more than willing to engage in a debate about public education, but you cannot boil it down to a false debate about how many children we have and how many teachers we've kept. We should be talking about what it is we expect from our system, what it is that we want for our students in the years to come, but not falling down this trap of saying, there are fewer students when, in fact, we are not talking about the needs of our students and our children. My question to the Premier is, will the Premier do the right thing and put students first and reverse these cuts to public education?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, increasing the number of EA hours does put more supports in the classroom, that's exactly what it does. Given, even, that there are 2,250 less students, there are only 10 less teachers, meaning that there is more time for the teachers to give individual attention to the students - that is increasing supports. What the statistics also show is that the student/teacher ratio has actually dropped since 2006-07 by 1.4 students per teacher.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

EDUC. - KIDS NOT CUTS PETITION - MIN.: SIGNATORY CONFIRM

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, on April 12th in this House I asked the Minister of Education if she had signed the Nova Scotia Teachers Union petition, Kids Not Cuts, along with the 20,000-plus Nova Scotians who had signed it. She answered a firm, no. My question to the minister is, can it be true that as Minister of Education she did not sign that petition?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, that can be true. I did not sign the petition.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, on the same day I asked the Minister of Education a question that she refused to answer so I'll ask it again. How many MLAs in the NDP caucus signed the Kids Not Cuts petition?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would not know the number. Each person would have to be asked individually. Thank you.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that this minister has no interest in supporting students and teachers in their fight for education in this province. She failed to show leadership when she did not sign the petition herself. She refuses to answer a question about how many other members of her caucus signed it. If the NDP caucus members had signed that petition, one would think that the minister would be proud to stand in her place and to tell everyone in this House that her colleagues did sign it. My question to the minister is, is the minister proud of the fact that her NDP caucus colleagues did not sign the petition to support kids in this province?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to stand here in my place and say that I am very proud that we have a plan for our children in this province - Kids and Learning First.

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

COM. SERV.: TALBOT HOUSE REVIEW - PUBLICATION

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Community Services has told this House that she published the Talbot House report on the department's Web site in response to a Freedom of Information request. The minister said, "... we were requested through a FOIPOP which gives us an obligation ..."

I'll table that, Mr. Speaker. My question through you to the Minister of Community Services is, did the FOIPOP officer in her department review the Freedom of Information request and recommend the publication be displayed on their Web site?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, we did an organizational review and in the past we've done organizational reviews and we have published them. I did explain to him that we had a request and that we discussed the matter and we felt, because it was a public document and there was a request to see it, it would have been made public anyway, so we decided that we would put it on the Web site.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Speaker, the minister is confused about FOIPOP. Her statement that her department had an obligation is not true for two reasons. First, the department didn't have to include the personal smears in the report in the first place and they absolutely did not have to splash them on the Internet. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Secondly, the Freedom of Information Act prohibits disclosing such information for at least two reasons. One, it unfairly damages the reputation of Father Abbass and two, it was known to be inaccurate at the time of disclosure. I'll table that section of the Act. My question through you to the minister is, in light of the fact that the minister broke the law by smearing Father Abbass, will she finally, finally admit that she's not up to the job?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, as we said before, the FOIPOP request was through the media so it was going to be out in the public anyway, and number two, that review was an organizational review. As I've said in this House many times over, it is a shame that they have to fabricate that it is more than that. Anyone can go online and read it and they will see that review is an organizational review.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Speaker, this minister refuses to apologize to Father Abbass. She refuses to admit that publishing the report was wrong. She refuses to admit that publishing the report containing allegations shown to be unfounded was illegal and she refuses to remove this report from the Web site.

Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the minister: For all her errors in judgement and breaking the law, will she resign?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, for doing a job for the people of Nova Scotia, my answer is no.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable for Colchester North.

EDUC.: SPECIAL NEEDS FUNDING - CALCULATION

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, when asked earlier, to the Minister of Education, how many students in our public school system had identified special needs, the minister was unable to provide the answer. Yet the minister talks about funding to support students with special needs.

My question to the minister is, how can you calculate appropriate funding to support students with special needs when the minister does not even know how many students have special needs?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, the department met with each and every one of the school boards over a number of months - there were 24 different meetings that the department had and the budget was based on the facts and figures that were provided from the school board.

I would like to add that it is very important that we do have data so, with our program iNSchool, we will be able to collect that data appropriately instead of having to wait for each school board to tabulate that. It has been a little bit of an onerous task. We are moving forward and taking care of that situation.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, according to the Learning Disabilities Association of Nova Scotia, one in ten have some form of learning disability. According to Autism Nova Scotia, the diagnosis for autism spectrum disorder grew in the past 20 years from one in 1,000 to one in 110. Still the minister has not taken the time to learn how many students in our public school system have identified special needs.

School boards know how many students have special needs; they provide that information to the minister every year. So will the minister go back to the department, do the math and report back to this House how many students in our public schools have been identified as having a special need?

MS. JENNEX: As I said, we are collecting the data now in a way that we would have consistent information at the department. I would like to say that we recognize that there are increased costs with special education and we took that into consideration and we increased our funding for special education. That funding is restricted funding going to our school boards.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I don't think we need any sophisticated system in order to add up eight sets of numbers and bring the total into this House.

Within the funding allocation to school boards, there is targeted money to support students with special needs, and during the last two years this targeted funding has fallen short of the dollars that school boards needed to meet the needs of their special needs students. In fact, school boards are topping this up with dollars where they have flexibility.

Given that there is no mention of special needs in the Speech from the Throne and that education is not one of the pillars around which priorities are set, we should not be surprised. So my question to the minister is, when will the minister acknowledge that the funding to support our students with special needs is completely inadequate?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, the funding that we have provided to the school boards is the appropriate amount for them to do the work they are doing. I would like to add that the teachers of this province are doing a very good job meeting all of the children in our schools who have special needs.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

COM. SERV.: MIN. - RESIGN

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, you know, the Minister of Community Services has frightened both parents and private daycare owners in the province by giving inconsistent statements to the media, and doing nothing to quell their suspicions that they may lose funding and put their businesses and good care for nearly 9,000 Nova Scotian children in jeopardy. She simply told them, they'll have to wait and see.

My question is, will the minister admit that she's not up to the job and resign?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, absolutely not.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The minister won't take for responsibility for failing to call the daycare in East Preston to warn parents of the danger she was leaving their children in. She drove at least two families to yank their child from the daycare and scramble to find alternative arrangements because she let a disastrous situation go on for months. She won't take responsibility for failing to recognize that the law had shortcomings and for leaving the strong impression through non-responsive and evasive answers that her inaction was related to protecting the government in a lawsuit.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister admit that she's not up to the job and resign?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker . . . (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of Community Services has the floor.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as you know, I've relayed it over and over, the process that we followed was the process within our authority. We have explained to the members opposite the situation with the daycare was one in which we had the authority to investigate a current issue that is under legislation that was developed in 1996, which was under their government also. There is a protocol listing there that we have already given them. Because of the fact that there was absolutely no evidence at that time, we could not go forward on that; that has been explained to them. They were past historical allegations that went to the RCMP.

We did everything appropriately in that case. We did everything appropriately with Talbot House. So the answer to the member opposite is no.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, the minister won't take responsibility. It's everybody else's fault for smearing a man by spraying false allegations on a public Web site and breaking the law in doing so; for severe disrespect of accomplished Nova Scotians who have run a publically-spirited and much-needed service for years; for playing PR games with these highly credible people; and for allowing her department, safe in the ivory silo here in Halifax, to force - yes, force - an addictions treatment centre to close displacing 13 young men.

My question to the minister - at least three children and 13 men were displaced by her decisions. On top of that, she's made hundreds of daycare centres and families nervous. Will the minister admit, finally once and for all, that she's not up to the job and resign?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, it's a very sad day in Nova Scotia when people like that can mislead the public. We followed every process and procedure that was within our authority. There was no smearing in that review; anybody is welcome to read it, it was an organizational review. What is so sad is that they like to twist the facts so much to create the fear. They are the ones who have been mentioning the Father's name over and over. They're the ones who have been talking about the poor daycare and ruining their reputation, it goes on and on. What is really sad, they're the sad ones.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

EDUC. - STRAIT AREA CUTS: QUALITY - EFFECTS

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the Strait Regional School Board has been forced by this NDP Government to cut 30 school-based teaching positions, as well as 18.5 full-time support positions for the next coming school year. This has become a yearly occurrence under this NDP Government. On top of this, the Strait Board was forced to close three community schools due to NDP budget cuts.

My question is, will the Minister of Education explain to parents in the Strait area exactly how taking 30 teachers out of the classroom and laying off 18.5 support staff is not going to diminish the quality of education in our classrooms?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, the people in this province are expecting their school boards to make the appropriate decisions to make sure that the quality of education in the classroom is protected. I am very sure that the Strait Regional School Board has done just that.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, this is a Minister of Education who has no problem spending money, it's just that she would rather spend it on marketing and gimmicks than

on classroom education. As I raised before, this is the minister who thought it was wise to spend \$0.5 million of taxpayers' money on orange lunch bags for pre-Primary students while cutting teachers from the classroom, as well as spending \$90,000 on political ads all the while cutting \$65 million out of classroom education in the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, there are three schools that the Strait Regional School Board has voted to close and now parents are being told there will be 30 fewer teachers in the classrooms next year. Nova Scotia has the second lowest funding of education in the country and the NDP has cut an additional \$65 million in the last two years. My question to the minister is, why is the minister more concerned about public relations than she is with public education?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, we are investing in our children and we have increased our funds per child in this province. I would like to add that the \$0.5 million for the resources Play-Talk-Learn are reaching out to every pre-Primary student in this province with resources on reading and literacy. It is a \$35 investment per child over the next three years.

MR. SAMSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, who needs teachers in the classrooms, or up in the gallery, when they can have a Hacky Sack, a glue stick and a pair of scissors to help with their literacy skills? That is the message that we are getting from this government. Parents and teachers in the Strait Regional School Board are tired of seeing school closures, of teachers being cut, of staff being cut, of government cutting money from the budget, \$65 million over the last two years, and in return we get orange lunch bags sent home as a mockery from this government.

Mr. Speaker, it's ironic that the minister will spend thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money to run ads saying that schools are the heart of our community at the same time as she sits idly by and watches three community schools being closed in the Strait Regional School Board. My question to the minister is, when will she stop spending hundreds of thousands on marketing gimmicks while classroom teachers and support staff are being cut?

MS. JENNEX: I stand by making sure that we are investing in our students and we're making sure that every pre-Primary student in this province gets resources before they come to school, unlike the last government's Education Minister who only gave out resources to some of the children in the province - some - not all. We are investing in every child over the next three years.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle. (Interruptions)

PREM. - N.B. JUSTICE MIN.: RESIGNATION - APPROVAL CONFIRM

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I can wait.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Thank you.

The honourable member for Argyle has the floor.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When ministers make mistakes, the citizens they serve expect them to step up and do the right thing. One of the greatest offences a minister can commit is the revelation of private or personal details surrounding an individual. In neighbouring New Brunswick, Justice Minister Bernard LeBlanc, (Interruption) apparently the Minister of Agriculture doesn't want to even listen here, but in neighbouring New Brunswick, Justice Minister Bernard LeBlanc resigned from Cabinet in February 2010 over the improper release of a name in an e-mail. At the time of the resignation Mr. LeBlanc stated, "I want to offer my sincerest apologies to the individual . . . without reservation . . . to the individual and her family for this error."

Mr. Speaker, my question through you is for the Premier. Does the Premier agree that Mr. LeBlanc did the right thing in offering his resignation after revealing such personal information?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it's not hard to see where the question is going and I have no idea whether or not the person in that province did the right thing, I don't know the details of the situation. What I do know is this, that the Minister of Community Services did exactly the right thing. The allegations made by the Progressive Conservative Party are wrong. There was no mention of anybody in that report and the only people who should resign, if that's their test, are them because they are the only ones that brought forward a name publicly.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: The precedent for a minister offering their resignation after sharing private or privileged information is one that has been established all over Canada. In B.C., the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, Harry Bloy, resigned in March 2012 after admitting he shared information, that he obtained in his role as a member of Cabinet, with a third party. (Interruptions)

I wonder if the Deputy Premier wants to speak, because he seems to be chattering an awful lot in this House of Assembly.

At the time of his resigning Mr. Bloy stated: "I felt it important to accept responsibility for my actions in regard to sharing an email with a third party. It was my decision and I accept that."

AN HON. MEMBER: Is there a question in there?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I'll get to it, really.

In Ontario, the Health Minister, Evelyn Gigantes, offered her resignation after violating a cocaine addict's privacy in April 1991. At the time of her resigning Ms. Gigantes said: "I very much regret the mistake I made."

Does the Premier agree that these individuals also did the right thing by resigning from Cabinet after sharing private information?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again I will reiterate, the only people to release private information in this House are members of the Progressive Conservative caucus. They are the ones, not the Minister of Community Services, who have released any information. There was an operational review. It is the Progressive Conservatives who have been trying to drag somebody through the mud.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: In October 2005, New Brunswick's Family and Community Services Minister, Tony Huntjens, resigned from Cabinet after violating the province's privacy laws. After resigning Mr. Huntjens said - and I'll table that one as well and the Premier can read it if he wants - "I deeply regret this situation." And he added that his resignation was "the best course of action at this time."

Mr. Huntjens did the right thing - does the Premier agree that Mr. Huntjens did the right thing and that his Minister of Community Services should resign right away?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether that person did the right thing or not. I do know that in the past in this House there was a Progressive Conservative Minister - in fact I think it was in the Community Services portfolio - who released information from a person's file, never resigned. In this case the only persons who have slurred anyone have been the members of the Progressive Conservative Party who have been dragging somebody's name through the mud, not the Minister of Community Services.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

EDUC.: CUTS - CLASSROOM EFFECTS

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, on April 19th, the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board announced that they had to cut \$3 million from its budget thanks to the NDP Government - this translates to a reduction of 23 full-time teaching positions, 14 school library technicians, and 7 full-time teaching assistant positions. Board Chairman Lavinia Parrish-Zwicker has stated, and I'll table: "Schools will feel the direct impact of the reductions. The minister herself was a teacher and she knows full well the critical role teachers, education assistants, and access to library services play in a student's success."

My question for the minister is, is the chairman of the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board wrong in saying that the minister's cuts will have an impact on the classroom?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: As I have stated, school boards make the decisions to make sure that the child in the classroom and their quality education is protected.

MR. GLAVINE: There is proof enough that the minister is out of touch with Nova Scotia classrooms and the diverse needs of our students. Perhaps if the minister took the opportunity to participate in the NSTU's Take Your MLA to School Day, or faced protestors outside her constituency office last Friday, she would have a better understanding of the real impact her cuts will have on the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, parents are worried about their children's education; boards are worried about being able to meet the needs of students while meeting cruel budget targets. Will the minister tell members of this House why she is buying \$0.5 million of lunch bags when students are losing support and schools are being cut to the core?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would have very gladly met the people outside my office last Friday, but I was in the department working with the Canadian Space Agency around their program, and I made that very clear.

MR. SPEAKER: Order.

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that we have an MOU with the Canadian Space Agency with our science programs and I had a teleconference call at 3:30 p.m. I made people very aware of that. Also, my office closes at 3:00 p.m., and it has historically for the last three years. I welcome meeting with any teachers to have a discussion. I would like to say, though, that we are facing extremely challenging times. We have lost 30,000 students out of our system over the last 10 years and we have 361 more teachers in the system today. These are challenging times and we are meeting those challenges.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to space, I'd like to see this minister and this government launch a recommitment to public education in Nova Scotia. Students in the Annapolis Valley and across this province are counting on the minister to take a stand for education and fight for the needs of students at the Cabinet Table. Instead, it would seem - and is confirmed by teachers - that this minister is a lame duck when it comes to standing up for students.

Will the minister stand up for the students of the Annapolis Valley and tell her Cabinet colleagues to restore funding to public education?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I am standing up for students. We are making sure that we are providing skills trades in double the sites across this province. We are adding in SchoolsPlus sites. We are investing in our students and making sure they have the quality education they need to succeed in this world.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay.

**EDUC. - C.B.-VICTORIA REG. SCH. BD. EDUC. ASSISTANTS:
LOSS - NUMBERS**

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, access to supports and services can mean all the difference in a student's success in school and in life, as education is the key that unlocks the door to so many opportunities for our kids. Last year alone 75 education assistants were cut from Nova Scotia schools.

Will the Minister of Education tell members of this House how many education assistants the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board lost last year because of the minister's damaging cuts to the education system?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that Cape Breton is an area in this province that is experiencing extreme decline in its student enrolment. I think it's 7 per cent. It's a sad situation that we're seeing. Our population is decreasing in our schools.

I will add that we are making sure that the appropriate resources are in each of our school boards. The Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board did their own review around student assistants in the schools, and they were well below our average. We are still funding appropriately to meet the needs of our students. Unfortunately, many of the students are not there.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly aware of the declining population in Cape Breton and the fact that we're disappearing in rural Nova Scotia. The reality is that these cuts will do nothing to keep families or kids or students in this province; absolutely nothing.

The Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board lost 28 teaching assistant positions because this government sees more value in ordering \$500,000 in lunch bags than providing necessary supports for the most vulnerable of our students.

In an April 19th article on the Halifax Media Co-op, Kyle Hunter, who is an EA at my old elementary school of John Bernard Croak, says that his success in education was due to the education assistant he had when he was a student. Kyle says, "I would have been lost in the system; I could have been one of those people that quit school" and "If I didn't

have the support that I had with teaching assistants, I never would have passed.” I’ll table that article for the House to read. It’s called “Education . . . for Some?”

Will the Minister of Education stand in the House today and admit to those students who have lost their education assistants because of her cuts that instead of guaranteeing the supports those students need to succeed, she spent \$90,000 on promotions and \$500,000 on orange lunch bags?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, the most important person in the classroom working with our students is the teacher. The teacher makes sure that the children are receiving the supports they need through the IPP program. Thank you.

MR. MACLELLAN: I'm certainly well aware of the role that the teachers and the support services and the support staff have for the students in the classroom but with these cuts and with what is happening with this program, they are also going to be affected because of these education cuts. Maybe the government should consider producing orange backpacks with work boots and a work hat, so that the people who go to Fort McMurray will be ready for their next job because they are not going to have jobs in this education system.

Students who need education assistants are getting a raw deal from this government. Boards are being forced to eliminate services essential to students' success. Will the minister stand and tell those students who lost their assistants that she will stand up for them, reverse her government's detrimental cuts to education and support every student in reaching their fullest potential in this great Province of Nova Scotia.

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, we are providing the appropriate funding to the school board, to make sure that the students' needs are met in the classroom. Thank you.

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

PREM.: COM. SERV. MIN. - REPLACE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Let's start by cutting through all the double-talk. The Talbot House report contains seven specific references to the executive director of Talbot House, of which there is only one and everyone in Cape Breton knows who that one executive director is. Yet the Minister of Community Services chose to spray that report all over the public Internet. She then defends that action, pointing to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which actually is designed to prevent her from smearing someone in this way with seven specific mentions. I will table those seven references for the benefit of the Premier and for this House.

The fact of the matter is that this is a pattern of behaviour. She could have warned the daycare parents at East Preston and chose not to. She could have protected the reputation of the executive director of Talbot House and not only chose not to, but chose to spray it for the whole world to see - all over the public Internet. She could have used the FOIPOP Act the way it is supposed to be, but chose not to.

Mr. Speaker, that minister is responsible for her actions and the actions of her department, yet she won't take that responsibility so I'm going to ask the Premier if he will fulfill his responsibility and replace that minister?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, on the very day that the department received the report that he refers to, the minister went to the RCMP, which was the appropriate protocol, fulfilling her responsibility, in, I might add, an excellent fashion. Secondly, the mentions of the executive director in that report refer to an operational review. It is that member and members of his caucus - if anyone is smearing anyone, it is them.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Premier should read the Talbot House report before he gets up and gives an answer like that. He is implying that he thinks it is okay to knowingly smear the executive director of Talbot House by releasing a report that contained information that was knowingly wrong at the time.

Mr. Speaker, this is the House where Joseph Howe defended the concept of ministerial responsibility. That Premier is the successor to Mr. Howe and the one who is supposed to defend the concept of ministerial responsibility.

He has a minister who could have told the parents of East Preston Day Care that their kids were at risk and chose not to. She is responsible for that decision. He has a minister that could have protected the reputation of the executive director of Talbot House and chose not to. She is responsible for that decision. He has a minister who pointed to the FOIPOP Act when, in fact, it's the FOIPOP Act itself that says she's not supposed to release information that could cause personal harm to someone like the executive director of Talbot House.

She won't take up her responsibility and do the right thing. It's time the Premier showed all of his ministers that he still believes that they are responsible for their actions and replaces that minister.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree and I want to congratulate the Minister of Community Services for doing an excellent job.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of parents who send their kids to daycare at the East Preston Day Care who for eight months went without knowledge that they could be at risk because the Minister of Community Services wouldn't tell them. There are 13 men and several staff of Talbot House in Cape Breton who could be getting

the services they need today, but aren't because of decisions of that minister. There is a person, there is a Nova Scotian, who has been found innocent and was found innocent before that report was published, who has had his reputation smeared because of decisions of that minister.

Now we have a Premier that says he thinks she's a doing an excellent job. I'll give him one more chance to separate himself and his government from that record. Do the right thing, replace the minister.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I've said before. The actions taken by the Minister of Community Services were absolutely correct. They followed exactly the right protocol and they were done in exactly the right order. I am very proud of the Minister of Community Services.

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

EDUC. - NSTU RALLY: NDP CAUCUS MEMBERS - ATTENDANCE

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, last Friday members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union rallied outside the government members' constituency offices to protest \$65 million in cuts to education. Can the Minister of Finance tell members of this House and the provincial executive members of the NSTU in the gallery today how many of his caucus colleagues . . .

AN. HON. MEMBER: We're not allowed to talk to them.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. It's absolutely right that you cannot speak to members in the gallery who are attending today, so I'd ask you to rephrase that question.

MS. WHALEN: Can the Minister of Finance tell all members of the House today how many of his caucus colleagues addressed teachers and concerned community members at these rallies? (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: It's not within the minister's portfolio. Do you want the question redirected to the Minister of Education?

MS. WHALEN: I'll carry on. I'll redirect. We'll call that the preamble, then. I'd like to table, if I could, some photos that came from those rallies held across the province from the Teachers Union and, at the same time, an e-mail that came from the Minister of Finance directly to people from his community who had written him about coming to his office. He says, ". . . my constituency office is intended for constituency matters." and this is to people who live in his community and represent schools and concerns about education in his community. He goes on to suggest that trying to speak to your MLA is somehow a backdoor to government. Mr. Speaker, it's an insult to everybody.

Teachers are in the Legislature this afternoon (Interruptions) Will the minister address this House and explain why he was not present at his office last Friday, along with so many of his colleagues?

MR. SPEAKER: Again, it's not a question of the minister's portfolio. It is not a Finance question. Those are the rules in the House of Assembly and we will follow the rules, so I will ask you to ask another question or redirect the question. Thank you.

MS. WHALEN: I do understand. I appreciate that, it's hard to find out who's responsible for the offices closing last Friday, that's for sure.

MR. SPEAKER: Well, read the rules and you will.

MS. WHALEN: The Minister of Finance did not sign the NSTU's petition calling on the government to restore funding, he didn't attend the offer to Take Your MLA to School Day and he mysteriously closed his constituency office. My question to the minister is, when will he stop burying his head in the sand and see that cuts to education, which may fall under his banner, are bad for schools and bad for this province? It's dollars and cents.

HON. GRAHAM STEELE: Mr. Speaker, I refer that to the Minister of Education.

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind everybody the Nova Scotia Teachers Union has every right to protest and to have petitions. They are there to make sure that their members are supported. The NSTU is for their members. This government is for the children. Thank you. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

PREM. - HOME CARE: HOURS - REDUCTION

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I was very surprised to learn recently that home care hours have been decreased over the past few months. Caregivers feel buried in paperwork and are given only a half hour to help our seniors. Less time means seniors get less care.

My question to the Premier is, when was the last time the Premier bathed twice per week and ate three-day-old macaroni?

MR. SPEAKER: That is a personal question, not a question around the Premier's portfolio or his office. It's a personal question, which is out of order. I'll ask you to rephrase the question, please.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the point I'm making is that those are things that we in this Legislature take for granted. Caregivers are not allowed enough time to make a hot meal or thoroughly clean the bathroom. Those are things that aren't stupid. Those are things that mean something to the people who receive those services.

What does the Premier say to caregivers who are now being thought poorly of by some seniors, who cannot understand why their caregivers no longer have time for them?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to individual situations. What I can tell the member opposite is we are putting \$20 million of new money into expanding home care so that more people will receive service.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious that the government is taking money out of home care, because the time allotted for care has been reduced from an hour and a half to 30 minutes. We see this government has lots of money from increased HST tax revenue to spend on new, bigger government in Halifax. We see that with the increase in the FTE counts.

Will our Premier and this government act today to get their priorities straight and start showing respect for our seniors in home care so they can enjoy warm showers instead of the cold NDP sponge baths that they're now receiving?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, I have no idea what the member opposite is talking about. As I've said, we've put more money into home care. We're expanding it. We're creating better services for seniors so that they have better access to exactly the kind of support that he is talking about.

Of course, there was a time in this province where those seniors wouldn't be able to stay in their home. They would not have had the supports that they needed in order to be able to stay there. They would have gone to long-term care facilities where they would have had practically everything they owned taken from them in order to pay the costs of it. That time was when the Progressive Conservatives were in power.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, it's an interesting way to deflect things, but I'm going to table a document here. This is from the Cape Breton Post. It's dated March 27th, and the headline reads, "Home-care policies changed without warning." It says, "New policies were implemented . . . in October after guidelines were finalized by the Department of Health in June."

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll ask one more time, why doesn't the Premier get our priorities straight and look after our seniors by restoring the home care services they so rightly deserve?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen the news report, but I'll be happy to have a look at it. What I can reiterate for the member opposite is that this is a government that's putting more money into home care, that is expanding that program, and that is recognizing that because there is an expanding and aging population, that is the necessary focus of government's attention.

The Minister of Health and Wellness has done everything that she can within a restrained budget to be able to expand those kinds of supports. Is it everything that we would like to be able to do, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the seniors in the province? No, it isn't. We would like to be able to do more, but we are doing what we can with the budget that we have.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

EDUC. - CUTS: TEACHERS - APOLOGY OFFER

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, for the Minister of Education to stand in this House and say that teachers don't care about our kids is absolutely shameful. There is no one who cares more about our children than our teachers, and it's because of this - do you know what? I'm not surprised that this minister shows such disdain for our teachers, because her cuts are taking them out of our classroom and that's also shameful. It's unbelievable how this government, who championed education in Opposition, has so changed their tune now that they're in government - \$65 million out of our classrooms and we say we're putting kids and learning first? That's a joke. I'm just so ashamed to sit here in this House and hear a minister attack our teaching professionals like she has today. I think teachers deserve an apology and I expect to hear one right now. Thank you.

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, this government has worked very clearly and very hard with the population of Nova Scotia around our Kids and Learning First plan. We have a plan.

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

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Earlier in the day (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Hold on, I can't hear the member.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East has the floor.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Earlier the member for Halifax Clayton Park had directed a question to the Minister of Finance on the area of education. Traditionally, it is my understanding that the Minister of Finance, because his department

sets the estimates for all other departments, questions can be asked because it falls under his portfolio.

MR. SPEAKER: I think I will take that under advisement and get back to the member at my earliest convenience.

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 Bedford-Birch Cove.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all members of the House for the warm welcome they gave to the Scouts when they arrived in here earlier. I had a nice little chat with them out there and they thought it was a pretty neat process, Question Period, and I assured them it's more fun when I ask a question, but it was one of those days that I didn't get to.

What I wanted to talk about today was about a concern I had last summer when radio ads were being played by debt poolers here in Nova Scotia. These companies were not actually registered in Nova Scotia, the ads were probably played in error, but nonetheless, these particular organizations are not allowed to be operating in our area and they are.

At the time I said that they were preying on people who were not sophisticated about credit, and shortly after that I met with the Nova Scotia Credit Counselling Services' Jennifer Cleator and she talked to me about their concerns around this type of activity. What she told me was that these organizations typically come from the United States and have been moving east. What they are doing is, in fact, they are engaging with consumers and saying, come to us, give us X amount of money a month and we will deal with your creditors. For example, give us \$500 a month and we'll deal with your creditors.

The problem is, of course, what they don't tell people is that they won't do it for about a year, times can vary, but it can be up to a year before they actually engage with these creditors. These poor people think they've actually engaged somebody to deal with their creditors and to talk to them and they're sending them huge chunks of money, so when their creditors call they say, no, no, I've talked with X person at such and such an agency and they're dealing with you. It can go on for quite awhile before they realize that these companies are actually taking their money and not doing any work for long periods of time. What they are doing, in my view, is taking advantage of the poor, taking advantage of people who are desperate and I believe we need more muscular protection for consumers.

What Jennifer explained to me was that in a lot of cases people who have signed up for these services, once they realize what's going on, they're really quite embarrassed, because not only did they get into debt in the first place, but now they've been hoodwinked by this unscrupulous company. They are reluctant to come forward or to let their names be known publicly because they really are embarrassed.

After that I began watching television a little more closely to see what I would see there. I do think that what I saw - because now with the expanded television universe, you can see channels from Ontario and points west, et cetera, depending on your satellite package or whatever. I began to see ads for these companies. I realized that people here in Nova Scotia may be calling those numbers because they see them come up on their television. They don't realize that these companies are not licensed in Nova Scotia, and to operate here, they are supposed to be licensed here in Nova Scotia.

Last week there was an article in the business section of The Halifax ChronicleHerald, and once again the Credit Counselling Services warned consumers about using debt settlement services, often called "debt relief" or "debt reduction" in sales pitches. What the head of the association indicated was that these services can leave unsuspecting consumers with more debt, less money, and a bad credit rating.

The article went on to note that there had been a bill that was introduced last Fall - and I was the person who introduced that bill - that had died on the order paper. One of the big concerns of the credit counselling agency is the charging of up-front fees. They are charging fees up front, and people aren't aware that the money they are paying in for the first few months - it could be up to six months - is in fact the fee, and they don't begin even acting for them until quite a long period has elapsed, and their credit rating during that time takes a beating.

Madam Speaker, I'm hoping today that other members of this House will join with me in their concern for our consumers here in this province. I'm looking at a number of different articles that have come out recently, and we're seeing that people are asking, what are lawmakers doing to protect people? We need to act. One of the things lawmakers do is make laws to protect people. My concern is that that isn't happening here in this province,

because the government chose not to act on that particular bill last Fall and has not introduced anything here to this point.

Other provinces have acted. I note Manitoba says that debt settlement agencies now have to be licensed, and that was - I have a news release here from Manitoba from February 2012. The Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs Minister, Jim Rondeau, said, "We want to be sure that people already struggling with debt don't find themselves paying large fees upfront with no guarantee the service will actually reduce their debt. Some consumers have found themselves worse off than before signing up for debt settlement." So I'm sure that the members on the opposite side of the House would be concerned about their constituents being involved in a scheme of this kind. I'm sure they would not want to see anyone in their ridings be affected by it.

One thing that was not in the bill that I introduced, which was left on the order paper, was a plan to teach kids more about financial literacy. That's so crucial, because I think kids today aren't familiar with how to budget. Earlier this year I actually held a public meeting with Credit Counselling Services Atlantic in my riding, and basically said, anybody who wants to come out and learn how to make a budget, you can do that.

It was a very informative meeting. I learned a few things about budgeting, which probably wouldn't surprise my husband. For example, the credit counselling agency said, if you know you have, say, a big heating bill coming up, with electronic payments now, you could pay something towards that in the month that you don't get your bill, so when the big bill comes the following month you've already paid off half that bill and it won't be so painful. I thought that was a good suggestion, particularly with our power bills because I can tell you when we got our power bill in January, it was a doozy, and it was the biggest one we've ever seen, so I thought in the future that would be most helpful too.

Madam Speaker, how much longer do I have there?

MADAM SPEAKER: You have until 2:27 p.m., so that will be this side of seven minutes.

MS. REGAN: Okay, about six more minutes. I do think that - and it's funny because the member for Halifax Clayton Park actually saw the article in the paper last week and she said, we should do a bill on that and I said, we did, but in the rush of the Fall session she didn't realize we had actually moved on that but such is the member's intelligence that she looked at that article and said, this is important, this is something we need to do and she actually started doing some research on it and gave me some more ammunition, which I really do appreciate.

The Federal Trade Commission in the States is dealing with this and they have amendments to telemarketing sales rules that prohibit debt-relief companies from collecting advanced fees, and that took place back in October 2010. South of the border

they have acted on this. Now it is true that this is sort of a trend that has moved up to Canada from the States. When I was reading about other provinces that have taken some action along that, my bill was modelled on what was going on in British Columbia. What we did here is that for provinces that - well, I guess most of the provinces do, but we did see a movement up from the States and then they started moving west.

I do think it is important that we move on this particular concern. The Province of Alberta has actually introduced the Collection and Debt Repayment Practices Regulation, it's in their Fair Trading Act, and so they have acted on this. British Columbia has acted on this, Manitoba has acted on this, and I do urge the government to act upon this.

Earlier today I tabled a bill that would, in fact, give some care and control over this particular issue. The bill I introduced last session is Bill No. 127, the Debt Settlement Protection Act, and it would, first of all, force companies to register. We actually have companies that were acting here in the province and weren't actually registered here, and it would also ban them from collecting fees up front without doing any work. I think that when people end up in debt they can be desperate. Certainly we have seen people who have gambled and have become desperate and done desperate things. I probably will never forget the case in Kingswood where a gentleman set himself on fire in his car because he couldn't deal with the debt that he had run up gambling, and I don't think I will ever forget it.

When people get into debt they can be very desperate. To have these companies come in - and certainly you want to differentiate between legitimate companies like Credit Counselling Atlantic or organizations like that group, that come in and actually work with consumers and actually help them get their finances under control, versus a company that comes in and takes advantage of people who are in desperate straits and, in fact, make the whole problem worse, I think, is pretty sad. What we need around this area is clarity. If people are paying for a service, they need to know what that costs and what services are going to be provided in return.

One of the things that the bill I introduced last Fall did force the company to do was keep books here in the province. They had to be ready, willing, and able to show those books should one of their clients actually want to see how much they had paid to them and who they had paid the money out to. You absolutely need that ability. It's like us sending money to the bank - you want to be able to check your bank records. This is the same kind of thing. They have to be able to actually see what it is that they are sending money for and where that money is going.

We want to have more financially literate citizens. I think education in high school or even before high school would be a great thing. It's pretty tough to do in high school when people have their course selections all mapped out to get into whatever school to do whatever, but I think that being able to have more financially literate citizens and being able to protect those who are not financially literate is a good and worthy goal of a

government. I would hope the members on all sides of the House would support the bill that I introduced earlier today, the Debt Settlement Protection Bill. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure to speak again going into Supply today. The subject I wanted to talk about today relates to an issue that I know is close to the mind of the Justice Minister, as there was a press release today around Victim Services. The Justice Minister knows that I have been following that issue for a number of years - in fact, before the last election. I've been pleased over the years with seeing some changes in the way we are applying Victim Services - some improvements, I would say, since this issue first came to my attention.

I know that it's a terrible thing to have to learn about the deficiencies that we had in Victim Services when somebody in your riding, somebody that you might represent, comes to you in the wake of a tragedy, when they've been the victim of a crime - sometimes violent crime or loss of life - and you find out that Victim Services is not there to help people, to actually offer some support and help and walk them through what's required in the initial time of tragedy, and to learn there's a bureaucracy there that requires going through forms and doing a lot of work on your own.

That was the situation that existed just a few years ago, in 2007-08. If you were a victim of crime, you didn't get any help until you showed that there had actually been somebody charged and that there was going to be a criminal investigation or somebody was going to stand trial. Then you got some help. You needed the police to verify that you were a victim and so on.

In the case in my riding, it was such a horrendous crime. It was a terrible murder, and when I phoned the police they said, that won't be necessary. We will let Victim Services know right away that this family needs support and should be considered right away for counselling and other help. But if we followed the actual process that was in place, we would have had to wait some period of time for all of that bureaucracy to take place. It was beyond a tragedy to put the family through that.

At that time, there was really no personal contact with the Victim Services staff. They said, if you want help, they'll mail something out; if you want help, fill in these forms and we'll respond. I have spoken to a number of people in Victim Services and spoken here in the House. I think the message has been heard that people are often in a great state of shock, grief, and mourning, and they're not able to work their way through a bunch of forms. The effort that takes is just too much. They don't even know how to get through the day, let alone sit down with a bunch of paperwork.

Therefore they needed more help. They needed a system that would actually recognize their trauma, understand that this isn't just business as usual and just another

department like getting a driver's licence or getting your car registration renewed. This is something that is a service that we offer to people in a time of great need. So I had pressed that we needed to do more, and I pointed out some of the limitations that the caps that we have on the only help we offer, which is counselling, that those caps really prevented people from even applying for help because they often knew that if they applied early they would use up the available amount of counselling. Then, when the trial began or later down the road, they wouldn't have any way to get any help if they couldn't afford, or didn't have health plans that would cover their counselling themselves.

They were actually victims of crime and some very prominent advocates for better services. I know the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is aware of one case where the family, from his riding, very much advocated so strongly that something be done.

To be fair, the government has increased the amount of counselling available to victims who have lost a loved one in a murder. That amount has been increased and that's a good thing and there has been no deadline. It used to be that if you began the counselling, you had to use up your amount within two years. That deadline has been taken off now. If there hasn't been a conviction, you're allowed to have within two years, I believe, or within a period, a month - a year after the conviction is given, so recognizing that there are different stages of counselling needed and different stages of grief. So I'm pleased that by raising this issue here and writing about it and talking to others, we have seen some change and that the government has responded.

The point I have today is that there is still a lot more we need to do. Madam Speaker, I had introduced a bill a number of times, and I've introduced it again this session - it's an Act to Amend Chapter 14 of the Acts of 1989, the Victims Rights and Services Act. The important part of that bill - as I say, it's had a number of different numbers, I'm not sure what number it has this time but I have introduced it again in this session - the point of it is twofold. One was to take the hourly cap off the amount available for counselling, recognizing that the only help, directly financial help, we give to victims of crime is that we help them with the cost of counselling. And remember, so many people who are victims of crime don't have any financial resources or the wherewithal to pay for counselling. Most counsellors cost in the realm of \$160 an hour; that's out of the realm of many people.

Really, it's a very expensive service, and to suggest that people have to pay for that themselves is absolutely impossible for so many people. So we need help, and if you need help and you need it now and it's going to help the children in a family and help the members of that family get through the most difficult time that they could ever imagine - or in fact, they could not imagine such a terrible time - it might help them to get back to their life, at least be able to work, allow their children and others in the family who have been affected to continue to perhaps not be as badly injured by the events that have taken place - and what else do we have but counselling to do that?

People in their time of need someone who can talk to them, understand what they're going through, provide some advice, hold their hand and allow them to work through their anger and their frustration and their sadness and their grief, and we need to be there. Putting a cap on the hourly amount, which I think is now \$80 an hour, is still only half of what some of the counsellors that I know of are charging. So we still are asking people to dig into their pockets, unless they can find a counsellor on the very low end of that scale.

I know that the minister said the dollar amount is the same for counselling through Community Services as it is through Victim Services, so the rationale is that it's the same across government, whenever government is picking up or helping with the cost.

But Victim Services is something that if we invest and we can help people resume their lives at least, never to the same way, but at least try and rebuild and get back to work and back to being a family and going forward because in times - and I'm speaking particularly really of almost all crimes, if it's a sexual assault, if it's any physical crime, but certainly losing a loved one is the absolute worst.

That is the case that occurred in my riding; in fact, in my riding, I know three families who have gone through and are coping with a loss of a loved one to murder. I think that is a terrible thing to be said and I know when we look at the murder rate in HRM or in the province, there will be many people affected. Every time we read about a crime in the paper, there are many other people who suffer and have to try and recover in some way. It's very important.

Now, today, the minister did announce that he has got a federal-provincial agreement that has come into play and \$2 million more is going to be available - he says "more". I've got the press release that came out today from the government and, you know, I am in favour of anything that will improve Victim Services, I want that to be clear. So any announcement, any time we talk about Victim Services and put some attention to it, it is a positive thing but I do feel this province in particular - I would say others as well but this one in particular - we have not gone far enough to help families recover.

My bill called for the cap to be removed on the hourly maximum amount so that people who don't have another plan and can't rely on their own resources will be able to get the counselling they need from the counsellors who have the ability and the expertise to help. The second clause says that an applicant who's dissatisfied with the decision of the registrar has more time to appeal because that also wasn't in there. Often if you're not a direct relative, for example in the immediate family, you're not eligible for support and the support again being only in the way of counselling but there can be very close families where a cousin, or an aunt, or an uncle, are just as close as brothers and sisters. It's so close that the impact on them is just as devastating.

We need to be able to look at that case by case and say when we need to provide more support because the purpose of this is to make sure as far as we can that, as a society,

we meet the needs of people who have been negatively impacted and have had their lives just completely torn asunder by a crime. Again, I think it's important that we put money into it. One of my concerns is that the announcement today says that some of it seems to be continuing programs. It said "The agreement extends funding already in place for 10 ongoing programs . . ." So maintaining programs is good but if it's just maintaining what we've got, it's not an extension of our services then. We're not really upping the amount of help we're going to give to people who have been victims of crime. So I'm a little worried about that.

One of the amounts says it's going to be for e-learning, so on-line training for Victim Services' workers, and I can tell you from my experience when I called the Victim Services office in 2008, the very beginning of 2008, I was really stunned by the lack of understanding of the people that I spoke to. They were treating the selection of a counsellor the same as you would buying paper, or picking a road contract. They said, we can't tell you which counsellor is best because they're all equal and we can't interfere with the tendering process. A person gets to choose their own counsellor. My question was, who among this great big list in HRM, who can help a person who's the victim of a crime where you've lost a loved one, where a loved one has been murdered?

Most of those counsellors were saying no to my constituent. When they would call, they would say we can't do that, we do domestic violence, we do sexual assault, I do children's counselling. There are very few who have the expertise that could sit down with a family in that level of trauma in such a tragedy. I just wanted a little help and the people said, no, we can't tell you who's best because that's up to the individual to find out. Now, how much help is that? That's no help at all. Victim Services is unique and should be a specialized area for the civil servants who work there. I think the idea of e-learning and training for Victim Services' people, staff, is very important and I support that.

So although it's not a direct help to the people in the sense of programs or dollars going to the victims, I think if the staff are better trained, Madam Speaker, better able to respond, that will help.

It also says that some of the technology will free up human resources for more personalized services to clients. That does address exactly the issue that I have raised. Other members of the House have heard me, and people at home I hope have heard as well, that this is an important area and that we do need to do more. So training and freeing up more of the case managers or the Victim Services' staff time is important. I found that they were not attentive to detail.

Some of the help offered, I said we only help on the financial side for counselling, that is true. You know, I have so much in my file but I notice New Brunswick, for example, will help pay for funeral services. Now, again, that is a tremendous cost at a time of complete devastation and to have some help with funeral services would be a very important help to people. We don't offer that here in Nova Scotia, it is offered in some

other provinces but we do offer a little bit of help around things like parking and meals when you come to the court.

I've said this story before but I think it is really an example of total incompetence, and that is in the case of the constituent in my riding. They were not even told that their meals or their parking were covered on the day that they had to go and read their victim impact statements at the court - the most traumatic day of the entire hearing for them. They had parked their car, they had gone out to lunch and so on and they didn't keep their receipts because nobody told them that they were able to. They got that information at the end of the day when there were no receipts and it was all done. That is so pathetic and so I want to see more training.

Another point, Madam Speaker - I have just one minute left. I would like to see the Victims Assistance Fund which is paid for by people who pay fines in Nova Scotia, I would like to see that money directed not to running the Victim Services offices across the province and paying civil servants across the province, I want to see that money directed to programs and services that are really going to be in the hands of those victims and help them. Take the cap off counselling and help those people with direct financial support. I'd be happy to table this because I have been referring to it - it's March 31, 2011, and there was almost over \$1 million collected in surcharge fines. Thank you very much.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for her insightful comments. It's always a pleasure to stand in my place and discuss issues that, I hope, are important to the House and which I know are important to Nova Scotians and members of my constituency in particular.

I wanted to talk about the Throne Speech for a bit. I've been wanting to talk about that for a while. As someone who has witnessed a few Throne Speeches provincially and federally, I was a bit shocked at the level of partisan rhetoric in that speech. There was a very clear and blatant attack on previous governments, there were attacks on stakeholders who have been critical of this government, there were attacks on the Opposition Parties. I have never witnessed such a hyper-partisan document in my life that was given to the Lieutenant Governor of the province to read who is not a political leader; she is a representative of the Queen and a non-partisan. I think members of the government know what the intention of the document was and I think it was an abuse of power, I'll be honest about that. People say that Stephen Harper is a hyper-partisan - I've never seen a Throne Speech come from him which was so blatantly hyper-partisan.

There were a lot of interesting things in the Throne Speech as well that I'd be happy to talk about. It was full of language of optimism and hope, and lighting a candle in the darkness. The ironic thing about that, while the Lieutenant Governor was reading that document which was telling everybody how happy the Province of Nova Scotia and its

citizens are with this government, there was protest going on outside as a result of this government's deep cuts to education, health care and other sectors. That was a bit of irony that definitely wasn't lost on the members of the Opposition.

I know in that document it mentioned the palpable optimism felt from Yarmouth to Cape Breton as a result of this government's actions. To be frank, that was a misrepresentation of how I know people have been feeling in Yarmouth, in particular, and I know other parts of the province as well. My area suffered one of the largest economic blows as a direct result of the decision of this government - cutting the ferry service in 2009 without looking into the issue at all and analyzing the data. The economic impacts of that decision are still being felt today. We've lost a hotel, we've lost restaurants, we've lost some small businesses - I'll tell you right now the small business sector in Yarmouth is not feeling optimistic about the economic future of the area, unfortunately.

Everybody wants to be optimistic, everybody wants to be hopeful for the future. But when you have a government that's making decisions that impact our economic future in a negative way, how do you expect people to feel that level of optimism that is supposedly felt by members of the government? I don't understand it and a lot of people at home didn't understand that language, especially to use Yarmouth in particular, which everybody in the province knows has been dealt a seriously major blow by this government.

In the Speech from the Throne we talked a lot about how Nova Scotia is entering, I think for the first time in generations, a period of economic growth and prosperity because we have an NDP Government. Full-time employment growth in this province is still flat. It hasn't improved one bit since this government has taken office. It has been the same. It's stagnant. It has been stagnant under previous governments as well. There's something that all of us have been making a mistake on and we're continuing to make those mistakes. Perhaps we're not thinking outside the box, as governments, and how we need to bring this province forward.

For members of this government to say in the Speech from the Throne that we are entering this great, prosperous period where ex-pats from Nova Scotia are going to come home and work and build their families here at a time when full-time employment growth is stagnant, that's a bit shocking. If that's considered success, that worries me as a member of this House of Assembly. If this government feels that its actions are so great and are impacting the economy so much, how come our full-time employment growth hasn't increased one bit? How come it has been at zero since this government has taken office?

Is that success when it comes to economic stewardship in this province? I don't know how that can be seen as success. We look at the unemployment numbers - I know members of the government bring up unemployment a lot - everybody knows those numbers are fairly cyclical, for the most part. They go up, they go down, they have done that under previous governments and yes, in certain parts of the province, unemployment

levels have dropped, marginally. In other parts of the province, including my own, they've gone up.

During estimates the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism actually said that unemployment was down in my part of the province, which is southwestern Nova Scotia. That's not true. I have the numbers right here. From when this government took office to now, our labour force has decreased by 4,000 people. Full-time employment has dropped 3,400 and employment has dropped 2,300. Those are pretty significant indicators that the economy of southwestern Nova Scotia isn't at a place where it should be. To stand in the House as the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism and say southwestern Nova Scotia's unemployment is down, that's not true. I'll table these here.

These are numbers - these aren't from when the government took office, this is from 2009 after the decision to cut the ferry happened. So, after the ferry was cut in southwestern Nova Scotia 4,000 people left the workforce between then and now - 3,400 less full-time jobs and employment is down by 2,300 - since the ferry was cut. I'll table those for the members of the House to take a look at.

To somehow suggest in the Speech from the Throne or in dialogue in this House that the economy of southwestern Nova Scotia is doing excellently because of this government is a complete misrepresentation and misunderstanding of what's actually going on. I know the government's very proud of the Bowater deal. None of us in this House want to see individuals in this province lose jobs. We don't want to see them lose their jobs. No one wants to do that. But when you're looking at investing upwards of \$90 million of taxpayers' money, you'd best be darn sure that what you're investing in is going to work and going to keep those jobs here.

We have no guarantees - even though there's \$90 million going into that Bowater deal - that those jobs are going to stay here. Bowater is shut down now for the next month. They've shut down before. Three times Bowater has shut down since they received that money. The government members keep getting up and saying, they're going to improve efficiencies but the problem here, and it's a very real problem that we need to recognize, they're making a product that people aren't buying anymore. They're making paper for newspapers.

We can make that plant as efficient as possible, but unless they diversify their product lines, they are still going to be making a product that isn't in high demand across the world. We haven't done anything with that \$90 million to address that.

My real fear about Bowater - and my heart goes out to every single employee affected, the ones who have already been laid off and the ones who I fear might be laid off later on - my sincere fear is that that company is going to take that \$90 million and the land that was given to them by this province, pay their debt down in Quebec, and leave. That's a

fear I have. No one on the side opposite has said anything to make me believe otherwise, unfortunately. I want to believe otherwise, but we're in a place right now where we can't.

I think the fact that they've shut down for the third time in the last number of months is a clear indication that the issues that that plant is facing aren't necessarily around efficiencies. It's around the industry; it's around the product they are creating. So for the government to stand up and say, we are looking toward the future, we're growing jobs, people are optimistic - when you look at some of the things that have happened, cutting the Yarmouth ferry, forcing the unemployment rate to go up in southwestern Nova Scotia and forcing 4,000 people out of the workforce, and you look at what is happening with Bowater, investing up to \$90 million in an industry that I believe is sunsetting, unfortunately.

As a province, I think what we need to do a better job of is identifying industries of the future, identifying where we can go next. Right now we haven't been doing that, and it's not just this government. I know previous governments have done that as well. All governments have given significant funds to companies that weren't performing to where they needed to be to form profits. We're all responsible for doing that.

What I'm saying as a new member in this House, a young person who believes in the potential of this province, is that we can't do that anymore. We need to identify the industries of the future and go after them. When the time comes, when an industry is going to leave because of the marketplace, perhaps we need to instead invest in keeping that around for a few more years, helping those employees get trained for the industries of tomorrow, and actually bringing in the industries of tomorrow. To date, that hasn't happened.

I feel there's been a real lack of vision by this government, but I will be honest, I feel that has been a problem with previous governments as well. I have no problem saying that.

I think when you look at innovation and research and development, we're cutting in a sector that will actually help us do that: post-secondary education. We've had \$75 million cut out of our post-secondary education system. We have 11 excellent, world-class post-secondary institutions in this province, and instead of talking about those as an asset to all of us, we keep talking about, well, do we have too many? Should we amalgamate? Should we get rid of some? Anywhere else in the world that had 11 universities - or 11 post-secondary institutions - they would say, that is an invaluable asset to us, that can produce dividends in the future for the province.

We're not having that conversation. Instead we're looking at closing down a fine arts institution, the only one we have in the province that actually brings students in from outside the province - and a lot of them actually stay here and work and contribute to the

creative economy. Instead of looking at CBU, Saint Mary's, Dalhousie, St. Ann's as areas of potential innovation . . .

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. The member well knows that this government supports NSCAD and its future.

MADAM SPEAKER: That's not a point of order.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. CHURCHILL: Thank you very much. I would suggest to the member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville that if this government does support NSCAD, then look at the funding formula which is gypping them off right now - right? Maybe the government can actually get up and be clear to everybody, including the folks at NSCAD who are worried about this, who have asked all of us about this, and say, are you going to? Are you committed to keeping this independent fine arts institution? Answer that question. Stand up and answer it. No one has answered it yet, and when you do answer it and you say, we support an independent, strong NSCAD, I will thank you for it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. I just want to remind the member that his comments should be directed through the Speaker and the use of "you" in dialogue across the Chamber is not acceptable.

MR. CHURCHILL: My apologies, Madam Speaker, and thank you for reminding me of that.

Madam Speaker, looking at our post-secondary institutions as potential centres for innovation and growth, as economic drivers in our province, this government had decided to not do that and actually eliminate \$75 million in funding to those post-secondary institutions. As a result of that, not only are we missing economic opportunities at those institutions to be centres of research, development and innovation, the costs of attending those institutions are increasing.

So at a time when we need our young people to have higher levels of education than ever before - over 75 per cent or 80 per cent of the jobs we're creating now require a post-secondary credential - we are now making education less affordable in the Province of Nova Scotia. At a time when we need innovative, creative thinkers to come up with the ideas of tomorrow, to be innovative entrepreneurs, to be leaders in the business world, we are making the means for them to become those things less attainable financially. I think that is a disservice to the students of this province and to students outside of this province who want to come and actually be educated here because I believe Nova Scotia can be the capital for education in the province, with all the great institutions that we have and we have failed to actually treat ourselves as such. We have failed to treat ourselves as such.

We're still asking the same questions around amalgamation and other things that governments have been asking for the past 30 years. Let's get over it. Let's say, do you know what, our post-secondary educations matter, our students matter. These are invaluable assets to our province and let's invest in them. Let's embrace them, you know, let's embrace this. Let's look at it for what it is – an invaluable asset – and we haven't done that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. The time allotted for debate going into Committee of the Whole House on Supply has elapsed.

The motion is carried.

[2:57 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Mr. Leo Glavine in the Chair.]

[5:59 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

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

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

MADAM SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The adjournment motion was submitted by the honourable member for Hants West:

“Therefore be it resolved that the Minister of Education immediately recognize the \$65 million in education cuts undertaken by her government over the past two years is more than a family disagreement, and that families from Neils Harbour through to Tusket will make a permanent decision on her government's future in the next election.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton North.

EDUC: - MIN./NSTU - DISAGREEMENT

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to this resolution “. . . that the Minister of Education immediately recognize the \$65 million in education cuts undertaken by her government over the past two years is more than a family disagreement, and that families from Neils Harbour through to Tusket will make a permanent decision on her government’s future in the next election.”

Madam Speaker, over the last year we’ve seen 128 teacher cuts and 425 maintenance, consultant, and support staff cuts while the government has increased their full-time equivalents by 553 people. These over 500 people who have been cut have spouses, family members, and children who are of voting age. When these people lose their jobs, it usually shows up in the following election, especially if they are not able to find other positions anywhere else.

This year we’re hearing of cuts again - this time TAs, library, IT staff, property, transportation, and office staff. Add them all up again, and their families and spouses, and we’re talking a large number of people. Not only that, we have adult schools that are being affected by the cuts to the education system, and they are all of voting age.

Madam Speaker, as we’ve seen here today, there were a number of teachers from all over the province who are concerned about our education cuts - cuts that will affect the education of our children - and we’ve heard a lot from families that are really concerned about the education cuts and their children being affected.

We know that investment in knowledge always pays us the best dividends. Investing in our children’s education is a way to move our province forward. We’re hearing numbers in the House of increases of up to \$10,300 in funding for each student and a decrease in student numbers. If these numbers are declining in enrolment and the funding is not being changed, of course it’s going to look like the funding per student has gone up. If the number of students is down and the funding remains the same, it has to.

Madam Speaker, the cuts are devastating. We see kids, teachers, and parents protesting. We’re hearing people come to the Legislature. All Nova Scotians are appalled by the actions of this government in recent days, with the possibility of the health care strike, the education problems - something has to change. We’re hearing from the people of the province that the thing that might change might be this government.

If we look back through the funding and remove public school funding from the estimates of the Department of Education, we see that there’s actually a 3.9 per cent increase in the Education Department’s funding. How can they cut the education funding to schools but increase funding to their own department?

Our children's classrooms are being affected, and are being heavily affected. Madam Speaker, I spoke with one gentleman who has a child with a special need in my constituency, who last year spoke of his child having a full-time TA. This gentleman has a child who is what he calls a runner, who is a flight risk. He could at any time get up and just run out of the classroom; hence the idea for the full-time TA.

In about October of last year he found out that the school board had cut the TA in half, and in trying to deal with that, he was told the funding was the problem. So he comes to my office and he asks me about it. He's pretty upset because the school his child goes to is right on a major roadway. If he was to get up and get out of the classroom and is a runner, he will be into the traffic and be concerned about that.

He tried to explain to me that the TA that he had was 100 per cent funded, but when they cut it in half, that his child didn't have a learning disability or a disability half the time, that he needed the TA full time. We're also hearing about maximum numbers of elementary school classes going from 27 to 29. That would give us one of the highest caps in the country on education in the lower grades, and if we're hearing about the decrease of students and increase in the number of teachers, why do we have to raise that cap system?

Madam Speaker, the education system is arguably the most important part of our economy, and let's be clear that our children are our most valuable resource. We talk in the Legislature here about wind power, resources - gold, mining, forestry - we talk of these resources and we're trying to develop them as best we can, valued resources that will bring wealth to our province, but we have children out there who, I argue, are probably our most valuable resource. We're cutting money to the education system. But we'll put money into developing mineral resources and take money from the education system.

Madam Speaker, I think there's a problem with that, because I know that our children with a good education are the future of our province, and without them growing up with a proper education, a useful and meaningful education, our future will be lost. The shipbuilding contracts that we look at in the future may go because of that. We need an education system that prepares our children to be whatever they strive to be, to allow them to fly as high as their ambitions will take them. I feel like a decrease to the education funding will prevent some of our children from flying into this future.

As we know, knowledge is an investment that will pay us dividends down the road, a shipbuilding contract, any new major industries that may come to the province, and we know that an education provides such benefits as decreased reliance on the health care system, a decrease in crime, better employment, and better interpersonal skills. We need to allow our students to achieve whatever goals they want, be it a skilled trade, which we talk a lot about in the House - and we are putting some money into the skills trade program but at what cost, at what cost to the regular education system? We also need to take advantage of the shipbuilding contract, but we need to prepare these people for university education

because we know that we're going to need managers, engineers, supervisors, as well as the skilled tradespeople.

As we've been seeing, cuts to the education budget have put a pretty good strain on our school boards, on our families, and it's putting people in an awkward situation. We know in 2011 that we saw cuts of 2.4 per cent to four of our school boards and now, in 2012, we're seeing 2.1 per cent more to three or four of these boards. They're being forced to make cuts that may affect our children, cuts to teachers, support staff, TAs, and it will affect our education in one form or another.

Madam Speaker, we don't want to balance this budget on the backs of our children. The school boards are making difficult cuts and if we're taking TAs and other valuable education assistants out of the classroom, we're taking away our children's education. The safety and education of our children has to be preserved. Over the last two years we've had cuts to the tune of \$65 million. We know that due to the decreased enrolment there needs to be some cuts, but do we need to go beyond that? To balance on the backs of our children and our education system is just wrong.

Madam Speaker, we know the people throughout the province who put us here can very easily vote to take us out of here. We need to protect the system in this province that our children rely on and for a good quality education they deserve. The people will get out to voice their concerns and opinions on the decisions of the government, we'll see it will happen during the next election.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Education.

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Madam Speaker, may I have permission to make an introduction, please?

MADAM SPEAKER: You certainly may.

MS. JENNEX: I would like to draw everyone's attention to the gallery opposite here to welcome Gordon Gosse, Jr., who's sitting with his father, the fine Speaker of our House. I wish everyone here to give him a warm welcome. (Applause)

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, I appreciate that.

I'm pleased to rise in my place to speak to this motion, but I want to begin by setting the record straight on an incorrect number that both Parties opposite seem to be wanting to repeat, over again. The Department of Education has not cut \$65 million over the past two years. Last year we reduced funding to school boards by \$17.6 million, and this year we are reducing by \$13.4 million. I would also like to add that the Department of Education has made reductions. They have not increased any of the funding at the department. We're doing exactly the same as we're asking boards to do.

I want every member to be clear on the math. It is well under \$65 million, less than half, in fact. The average reduction this year was 1.6 per cent, which is below the provincial enrolment decline of 1.7 per cent. On the subject of math, I want to remind members opposite of some numbers that are accurate. Even as we make reductions to reflect the reality of our student population, we have maintained the lowest class sizes in a generation and raised the per-student funding to its highest level ever.

There are 30,000 fewer students in our system than there were 10 years ago; at the same time, there are now 300 more teachers in our schools. During the past decade, there was a trend and I want everyone to be clear on this, there was a trend - for every 100 fewer students, one teacher was hired. Past governments have had no problems with the trend. In fact, they increased spending by 42 per cent even as enrolments continued to drop.

I think it's obvious to most Nova Scotians that it would be irresponsible for us to keep this up. In fact, the Truro Daily News wrote the following in an editorial today: "School boards budgets have continued to climb in recent years despite declining enrolment and it makes perfect sense to us when the government, regardless of its affiliation, says this can't continue." I will table that article.

It makes perfect sense to many Nova Scotians that we cannot continue on the same path. Not only is it not sustainable, it's not working. Assessments show that our students are not making significant improvements in math and literacy. In some cases, they are actually losing ground. In other words, previous governments spent more money on fewer students who got mediocre results in return. I don't think any parent in this province is satisfied with that equation.

That is why this government is showing the courage to face the facts head on and make hard decisions. Through our Kids and Learning First plan, we are providing a vision to do things differently. We are taking a balanced, coordinated approach to address the changes that must happen in our education system. We are ensuring that resources are directed to students first and we are working to support effective teaching in every classroom.

This week we invited the Nova Scotia Teachers Union to work with us on a partners group that will make sure that teachers are teaching to their strengths and are not assigned to courses where they don't have the background or experience that they would like. This group will also look at professional development to ensure we are giving teachers the support they need to help students achieve better results. I look forward to working with our partners for the benefit of students and teachers alike.

We are expanding our virtual school to make sure students have access to courses they might not be able to have in their schools, particularly in our rural areas. We are doubling the number of high schools offering skilled trades programs so our students can gain hands-on experience that will prepare them for good jobs and grow the economy. I'm

disappointed in the members opposite in not agreeing that this is a good way to invest in our students by providing them the resources that they need to be successful in our 21st Century economy.

We are working with other departments to make sure children with autism spectrum disorder have the support that they need before they start school in classrooms and in their communities.

This brings me, talking about preschoolers, to the Play-Talk-Learn resource, which members have mocked, which I find disappointing. This is a resource that we're providing to all of our children as they are coming to school for the very first time. It has books with print, without print, there are actually three very high-quality books, a CD and activities for parents to engage with their students to play, talk and learn.

Teachers have reported that children are coming to Primary school with the inability to have a conversation. They understand language but their responses are yes and no and maybe a nod of the head. Involving children with rich literacy experiences before they come to school, we're investing \$35 per student, our preschoolers, with that resource. The past government did a similar program called Welcome to School with different resources in them to the tune of \$32 that only went out to four school boards.

We're making sure that every student as they enter school will get this resource, it is passed over to the parent, and the teacher and the parent have time together to talk about how to use the resources. Every child for the next three years, it has been budgeted for three years, receives this resource that is packaged in a bag that can be reused by the student, not the tote that had been purchased by a private company in the past. This is done in-house with the support of the literacy teachers that talked about what children need and different activities that they can engage with their literacy development.

Madam Speaker, these are targeted, focused actions to help our students succeed in a rapidly changing world. We are making sure that we are reflecting the realities that we are facing as a province, demographically, economically, technologically and socially.

Previous governments tried to spend their way out of a solution and I hear yes they did put a lot of money in but we are not seeing the results. We are making sure that we are investing in students and it is strategic, it's targeted. Madam Speaker, we are going to make sure that our results for our students are very clearly going to be improving. The past governments chose an easy road; we're not. We are not taking an easy road and we are making difficult decisions but we are putting our students first.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to talk this evening, to talk about what is most important in Nova Scotia, our children and the investment that we are making in their future.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and perhaps you can tell me how much time I have before we close debate.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ten minutes.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Ten minutes?

MADAM SPEAKER: Each speaker is allotted 10 minutes.

MS. CASEY: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and speak to the issue of funding for public schools and for the disappointment, dissatisfaction, anger, disrespect - whatever you could call it - that people are feeling from this minister and this government. We saw it demonstrated here in the House today. We had members of the minister's own profession, my profession, teachers who were here, who were here on behalf of the students in their classrooms.

Madam Speaker, they had asked the minister, and all members of caucus, to sign the petition, "Kids not cuts". It was quite a slap in the face to those teachers to know that the minister, who is supposed to be representing them, who is a member of their profession, chose not to sign that petition. Secondly, this is the same group of teachers who had invited all MLAs to participate in a Take Your MLA To School Day and, again, another slap in the face when the minister, the Premier and others in Cabinet, and others in the caucus, had made a decision not to support that initiative.

So it's not surprising, Madam Speaker, that today, when the minister came out with her comment that teachers support teachers but she supports students, they stood up en masse and they walked out. They walked out of this gallery because they are so discouraged, disappointed, angry, and reeling from the lack of respect that they are getting from this minister. If we're talking about what's going to happen in the future, the minister is doing a great job of alienating people who should be her allies. They are members of her own profession and they have walked out of this House today basically saying, the line has been drawn in the sand. We were here to support, we were here to work for kids, we're here to speak on behalf of kids, and this is the reaction and the response and the support, or lack of it, that we get from the minister.

When the minister is trying to explain the \$65 million, she only goes partway. She talks about \$17 million last year, \$13 million this year. We can all add: that's \$30 million. What the minister has failed to do is to articulate to the public the other costs that school boards have to incur in order to deliver the programs they have been asked to deliver - the inflationary costs, the increase in wages to teachers, all of those costs add up. The minister would know this if she would listen to boards. They are telling her, we have additional costs of about \$35 million provincially, so you add \$30 million and \$35 million, it's not

hard to get \$65 million. I think it's important that people understand where the \$65 million comes from. It's not an imaginary number. It's a real number.

I met with some school board members. I meet with them often. One of the board members said, you know, we have no relationship with this minister. She doesn't talk to us, she doesn't consult with us, and if that would happen, the minister would know the extra burden on school boards in order to meet the budget or live within the budget that they've been given. She would well know that a 1.7 per cent or a 2 per cent decrease in funding, plus inflationary costs, in many boards is coming between 4 per cent and 5 per cent fewer dollars that they have to deliver the program they are required to deliver. So I think it's important that we get both sides of that story.

The minister talks about how she has extended an invitation to members of the teachers union to work with her and with her department. I would suggest, Madam Speaker, she might have been wise to extend that invitation and to get a response before her response to them today. They left this gallery, this building, feeling very discouraged, very angry, and really disrespected by the minister.

I want to speak a little bit about the costs to deliver programs in the public schools. I'm proud to say that when you recognize the diversity within the classroom and when you recognize the importance of programming designed to meet the needs of that diverse population, you have to put more money into the programs so they can be delivered.

You have to look at - and you do look, if you understand education - that many of those students' needs are met through a program that may be a one-on-one intervention. We know, and the minister should know, that many of these students who can be captured and supported and assisted during the early years of their schooling will be able to pick up the skills they need to become fluent readers and to move on, but those are costly programs. The cost of not doing them, Madam Speaker, is exactly what this resolution speaks to. It is families whose children will lose the opportunity to be successful. They will lose the opportunity to maximize to their full potential.

We know that if students have not been able to acquire the literacy skills they need by the time they reach the end of Grade 3, they will struggle and in many cases be unsuccessful both in their academic program through schooling and when it comes to employment after schooling. It is important and I would be very proud of any government that would recognize that and would put the money where it should be and that is in the early years of schooling so those students don't fall behind, so they get the skills they need and those are costly programs.

This whole business of making a mockery out of declining enrolment says to me, and it says to everyone in Nova Scotia, this government and this minister fail to recognize that the importance of delivering programs to students should be based on programs that would meet their needs. It's not a mathematical model, it's not a business model - it's a

model based on student needs and funding the programs that are required in order to meet those student needs.

The whole business of talking about declining enrolment, maybe they believe that people will buy that, but most people who understand how students learn, who understand the importance of education in the early years, will recognize that declining enrolment should not be what determines the funding for schools. What should determine the funding for schools is the program that is needed in order to help students learn.

If we can't, as 52 members of government, come together to agree that the most important resource we have in this province is our kids - all of the economists that you read will tell you that the one place you should not cut, when you're looking at your budgets, is education. For our students as they graduate from high school, as they go on to become employees in our province, as they contribute to the tax base - if we don't have students who are well educated, who can contribute to the economy of the province then we will not only have failed the students, but we will have failed our province because we will not be able to move forward into a positive economic climate if we don't have the benefit of a highly-trained, highly-educated and employable workforce.

What this government is doing is saying to those people, well if you happen to be in Grade 2 and you don't happen to have the supports you need, tough. This member and most members in this House would not accept the fact that we can say to our students, too bad. We have a responsibility and we take that responsibility seriously. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The time allotted for late debate has elapsed. I want to thank all members for participating in this debate.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Acting Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Madam Speaker, I ask that you now leave the Chair and resolve the House into the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

[6:28 p.m. The House resolved itself into CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

[7:46 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. 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 very considerable progress, and begs leave to sit again. (Interruptions)

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: It's hard to follow a line like that, Madam Speaker, but I think the government will call it a night.

Madam Speaker, that ends the government's business for today. I move that the House do now rise, to meet tomorrow from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. After the daily routine we will do Supply and after Supply we will maybe have some joyous bell-ringing and after that we will go into Public Bills for Second Reading: Bill Nos. 5, 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 22, 24, 30, 32, 34, 37, 39, 41, 52, 55, 59 and 61.

Madam Speaker, I move that the House do now rise.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do now rise, to meet again tomorrow, April 27th, between 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.

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

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 7:48 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTON NO. 423**

By: Hon. Karen Casey, Colchester North

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

Whereas rural Nova Scotians, for many years, have depended on the members of volunteer fire brigades to keep their families and properties safe from fire; and

Whereas training, fundraising, first aid, recruitment and public relations are only a few of the many additional responsibilities of the members of a fire brigade; and

Whereas firefighters seldom receive the accolades which they deserve, most brigades hold a banquet each year to thank all their members and to present special honours;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Charter Member Royce Totten of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving his 40-Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 424

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 aptly named "The Birthplace of Hockey", Hants West likes to show off their hockey talents at a young age; and

Whereas the West Hants Warriors Atom B hockey team is comprised of players Josh Maynard, Ryan Peach, Zack Eldridge, Lily Beamish, Cole Warren, Cary Reynolds, Eldon Verge, Dimitri Church, Gregory Francis, Sam Miller, MacKenzie Miller, Jarrett Hennigar, Cole Monaghan, Nathan Henley, Jacob Young, Ty Taylor and Braydon Sanford, along with coaches Jeff Warren, Jim Maynard, Steve Miller, Peter Francis, Greg Taylor and Glen Peach; and

Whereas the West Hants Warriors Atom B hockey team defeated the Middleton Mustangs February 19th in Middleton to capture the gold medal in the Atom B tournament;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the West Hants Warriors Atom B team on continuing Hants West's great hockey tradition and wish them continued success.

RESOLUTION NO. 425

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 Kevin Grant was a long-time 4-H member and public servant whose legacy lives on through a conference and tour that bears his name and presents 4-H'ers between the ages of 15-17 with a broader view of what Nova Scotia has to offer; and

Whereas the 4th Annual Kevin Grant Rural Youth Leadership Tour took place in March, 2012, with 4-H members and visited several farms, businesses and historic sites in Lunenburg County; and

Whereas Gillian Davidson, from Newport Station, was chosen as one of the 10 Nova Scotia 4-H youth members to attend this three-day event which aims to help young people from rural Nova Scotia appreciate the richness and diversity of our province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Gillian Davidson on being chosen to attend the Kevin Grant Rural Youth Leadership Tour and wish her all the best as she continues with her 4-H endeavours.

RESOLUTION NO. 426

By: Hon. Jamie Baillie, Cumberland South

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

Whereas the Springhill High School Golden Eagles girls won the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation 2011-12 Northumberland Region, Division 3 title in a tournament held in February; and

Whereas Springhill won the title with a 55-40 win over the Musquodoboit High School Mustangs; and

Whereas team members of these regional champions are; Sydnee Balsler, Steph McCormick, Trisha Thompson, Brenna Case, Julie Alick, Britany Arsenault, Mallory

Thompson, Chynna Williams, Jordan Tabor, with coaches Scott Balser, Kerry Cullihall, Murray Thompson, Charlie Chambers and Patti Gilroy;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Springhill High School Golden Eagles girls basketball team on winning the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation 2011-12 Northumberland Region, Division 3 title and wish them continued success in the future.