



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordon Gosse

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HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MAY 8, 2012

Sixty-first General Assembly

Fourth Session

12:00 NOON

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordon Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we start the daily routine, the subject matter for late debate has been chosen and reads as follows:

Therefore be it resolved that the NDP Government's decision not to exempt Halifax Regional Municipality from full pension solvency forces the municipality into an unnecessarily expensive pension arrangement and is detrimental to HRM pensioners and taxpayers.

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

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Committee on Law Amendments, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 17 - Financial Measures (2012) Act.

Bill No. 65 - Consumer Protection Act.

and the committee recommends these bills to the favourable consideration of the House, with certain amendments.

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that these bills be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Committee on Law Amendments, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 71 - Assessment Act.

Bill No. 73 - Municipal Government Act.

Bill No. 74 - Patient Safety Act.

Bill No. 76 - Personal Health Information Act.

Bill No. 77 - Medical Society Act.

and the committee recommends these bills to the favourable consideration of the House, each without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that these bills be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table a report, *Executive Summary: Report to the Minister of Environment Regarding the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA)*.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 890

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

Whereas John Malcom, Chief Executive Officer for the Cape Breton District Health Authority, and Dr. Mamood Naqvi, Medical Director for the Cape Breton District Health Authority, prepare for a well-deserved retirement from a combined 80 years of experience in the health care system; and

Whereas for more than 30 years John Malcom has worked in health care organizations across our country, and for the last 15 years has shared his experience and knowledge here in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas Dr. Naqvi has a career that spans 50 years, contributing to the improvement of the quality of health care in our system for the citizens of Cape Breton;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in recognizing the experience and contributions of Dr. John Malcom and Dr. Mahmood Naqvi to the Cape Breton District Health Authority, and wish them both a happy and well-deserved 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 Minister of Environment.

RESOLUTION NO. 891

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

Whereas the Minister's Round Table on the Environment and Economic Prosperity offers the Minister of Environment advice representing the voice of many stakeholders; and

Whereas the round table was tasked with carrying out the first review of the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, or EGSPA; and

Whereas the volunteers on the round table gave many hours of their time to seek public input and prepare a detailed report reviewing the goals and direction of EGSPA;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House thank the volunteers on the Minister's Round Table on the Environment and Economic Prosperity for their time, energy, and thoughtful discussion of Nova Scotia's environmental and economic goals.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

RESOLUTION NO. 892

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

Whereas the Nova Scotian Institute of Science celebrates its 150th Anniversary in 2012 and has played an important role in supporting and promoting scientific activity in a wide variety of fields, such as geology, botany, oceanography, zoology, and meteorology; and

Whereas the Nova Scotian Institute of Science is one of the oldest such societies in Canada, created by an Act of the provincial Legislature in 1890, and provides a forum for debate, discussion, and a better understanding of the province's connection to science and research; and

Whereas science has played a significant role in the development of our province and remains vital to our future economic, social, and environmental progress, and is one of the keys to creating an innovative and successful Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate the Nova Scotian Institute of Science on its 150th Anniversary and wish them continued success in their efforts to promote the value of scientific achievement.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 84 - Entitled an Act Respecting the Merger of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College with Dalhousie University. (Hon. John MacDonell)

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be read a second time on a future day.

NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

RESOLUTION NO. 893

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

Whereas the communities of Beechville, Lakeside, and Timberlea have joined together to build the BLT Community Garden Association; and

Whereas this non-profit organization has pulled together volunteers of all ages to establish an herb and vegetable garden for the benefit of all those living in the community, by way of recreation and developing food security and a healthier lifestyle under the leadership of coordinator Debra Forsyth-Smith; and

Whereas the BLT Community Garden Association has been supported by the Halifax Regional Municipality, local councillor Reg Rankin, the Lakeside Recreation Centre, the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, MetroWorks, and the BLT Recreation committee;

Therefore be it resolved that the Nova Scotia Legislature congratulate and thank Debra Forsyth-Smith and all those involved with the BLT Community Garden Association for their efforts to improve the lives of their neighbours in our community.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Colchester North.

RESOLUTION NO. 894

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

Whereas Lisa Patton of North River, Colchester North, has been volunteering since she was a teenager; and

Whereas Patton was a 4-H member herself, became the dog leader for the North River 4H Club and now sits as the co-general leader of the club; and

Whereas Patton has been a big sister with the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization, has been part of the executive for the Truro's Boys and Girls Club, and presently helps out with a girls under-15 volleyball team;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Lisa Patton for being recognized by Colchester County as its Volunteer of the Year, and commend her for the many hours she has committed to improving the lives of others.

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. 895

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

Whereas Ryan Francis is an 18-year-old Auburn Drive High School student and a member of Acadia First Nation; and

Whereas Mr. Francis volunteers at Hillside Wesleyan Church, the local elementary school breakfast program and has been an avid Triple A hockey player for the past 11 years; and

Whereas Ryan Francis has been selected to play in the prestigious National Aboriginal Hockey Championship in Saskatoon;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Mr. Ryan Francis for his achievements, his dedication to the community and wish him luck as he attends Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia this Fall.

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 Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

RESOLUTION NO. 896

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

Whereas Junior Achievement in Nova Scotia helps mentor young high school students and prepare them for business and life; and

Whereas students from Sir John A. Macdonald High School: president Morgan Fraser, vice-president of marketing David Hoskins, vice-president of finance Matthew Madill, vice-president of human resources Yuming Nicoll, vice-president of production Will Bryden, and vice-president of IT Spencer Profitt recently won the Junior Achievement Company of the Year for the second consecutive year; and

Whereas the company, No Bull, joined with the Halifax Rainmen to raise awareness of bullying and donate \$1,500 to the Kids Help Phone;

Therefore be it resolved that the Nova Scotia Legislature congratulate president Morgan Fraser, vice-president of marketing David Hoskins, vice-president of finance Matthew Madill, vice-president of human resources Yuming Nicoll, vice-president of production Will Bryden, and vice-president of IT Spencer Profitt on their Junior Achievement Company of the Year Award and wish them well in their future endeavours.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 897

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

Whereas Charles P. Allen High School in Bedford presented the classic musical *Little Shop of Horrors*, April 26-28, 2012, at Alderney Landing Theatre in Dartmouth; and

Whereas this stellar production showcased the considerable talents of our artistic director Heather Michael, stage manager Shannon Clancy, costume director Emma Kay, and choreographers Breanne Hargreaves and Bethany Diamond; and

Whereas the members of the pit band, the stage crew, the technological crew, the set designers and the set painters all contributed mightily to make a truly enjoyable production;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate the entire band and crew on a thoroughly enjoyable production and wish them well in all their future endeavours.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton South on an introduction.

HON. MANNING MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring the members' attention to your gallery today - we have joining us in Halifax the students from Sydney Academy.

By the way, Sydney Academy is my old alma mater and I have a special place . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Where did they park the horse and wagon? (Laughter)

MR. MANNING MACDONALD: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I was very proud to have graduated from Sydney Academy in the first year the new school was opened - 52 years ago this Spring. None of those people were born at that time, but the students are accompanied today by Neeta Kumar-Britten and Mike MacNamara who are both teachers at Sydney Academy.

With regard to Neeta Kumar-Britten, Neeta Kumar-Britten is a tireless community worker in Sydney and also a very valuable member of the Cape Breton South Liberal organization. I might add that Neeta is seeking the nomination in Cape Breton South in a couple of weeks' time. So I would like to welcome them to Halifax today and ask them to stand and be recognized by the House and I would ask the House to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: We welcome all our guests to the gallery. I must say that the high school of Sydney Academy is in the beautiful riding of Cape Breton Nova, and the Speaker also graduated from Sydney Academy . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: What year?

MR. SPEAKER: In 1974. I welcome all our guests and I hope you enjoy today's proceedings.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

RESOLUTION NO. 898

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I was born in 1974, so there you go.

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

Whereas the Dartmouth Adult Service Centre started as the Dartmouth Activity Centre in 1966, operating out of the South Woodside Annex School, and served five adults with intellectual disabilities; and

Whereas the Dartmouth Adult Service Centre now serves over 167 clients and has a waiting list of more than 50 people seeking to participate in programs which help clients gain valuable work experience and independence; and

Whereas the Dartmouth Adult Service Centre broke ground April 28th on Dorey Avenue in Dartmouth for a 26,000-square-foot facility, which they plan to open this year to increase program offerings and support more Nova Scotians;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the volunteers, employees, participants, and supporters of the Dartmouth Adult Service Centre, and in particular the efforts of executive director Cathy Deagle Gammon, on the progress so far and wish them success in achieving an on-time and on-budget project serving Nova Scotians.

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

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

Is it agreed?

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. 899

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 risk their lives, have taken on the role of first responders, and deal with incidents of great emotional stress; and

Whereas firefighters seldom receive the accolades which they deserve, but most fire 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 Larry Kinsman of the Great Village and District Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving a 45-year Long Term Service 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 Glace Bay.

RESOLUTION NO. 900

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

Whereas Allen Nickerson's gifted athleticism was renowned and obvious even during his elementary school days as he excelled in track and field and soccer, and played on championship hockey teams at various levels; and

Whereas between 1978 and 1997, Allen Nickerson played in approximately 500 baseball games at various levels including the 1981 Canada Games, and was later a player/coach for the Yarmouth Red Knights and the Yarmouth Gateways, and was a great player in the Nova Scotia Senior Baseball League for many years; and

Whereas on May 5, 2012, Allen Nickerson, who passed away last August, was inducted into the Yarmouth Town and County Sports Heritage Association's Hall of Fame;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize the late Allen Nickerson for his many impressive athletic achievements, for his significant contribution to Yarmouth's rich sports landscape, and for his induction into the Yarmouth Town and County Sports Heritage Association's Hall of Fame.

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. 901

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

Whereas Saint Mary's University Huskies football team has added three new recruits; and

Whereas two of those new additions, linebacker MacKenzie Fox and running back Louis Stephen are from Charles P. Allen High School in Bedford, and the third is lineman Justin Vanderlaan from Holy Cross Crusaders in Worcester, Massachusetts; and

Whereas head coach Perry Marchese says all three of the young men were chosen because they have the attributes the team looks for: their energy, their athleticism and their love of the game;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly congratulate MacKenzie Fox, Louis Stephen and Justin Vanderlaan on their acceptance to the Saint Mary's Huskies football team and wish them success in helping to propel the team to future victories.

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

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

Is it agreed.

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to squeeze two into one here, if that's okay with you, sir. In the gallery opposite today we are joined by Mr. Richie Cotton, who is a former Warden of Richmond County and not a stranger to this

House, so I would just like to draw all members present to Mr. Cotton and welcome him to the House of Assembly.

Although they don't know each other, I thought I would also take this moment to introduce Page Black of Oxford, Nova Scotia, who members don't know but they're about to know because as a young student at Dalhousie University, she will be an actual Page in this House of Assembly in the Fall session, so I invite you to welcome both of them to the gallery today. (Applause)

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: The time now is 12:27 p.m., we will finish at 1:27 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: NSP RATE INCREASE - REQUEST DENY

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians already pay the highest power rates of any province in Canada. Today we learned that Nova Scotia Power is looking to increase in each of the upcoming two years. Nova Scotians are already struggling under the high cost of power and they can't afford to pay any more.

In 2008, the NDP appeared before the URB to ask that Nova Scotia Power's rate request be denied. My question for the Premier, will the NDP do the same thing now that they are in government?

HON. DARRELL DEXTER (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, the government will be there, of course, to protect the interests of ratepayers, to make sure that the requests are appropriate, but we don't stop there. What we did is something that the Leader of the Official Opposition campaigned against and voted against, which is we removed the tax off electricity.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia ratepayers will find cold comfort in the words of the Premier, sitting and watching as Nova Scotia Power continues to dig into the pockets of every single Nova Scotian. It's bad enough when the utility does that - when the Premier talks about taking the tax off electricity bills, at the same time he added a fee to every single ratepayer's bill in the Province of Nova Scotia.

The tax he talks about, Mr. Speaker, took \$30 million off those bills, the fee that he added has increased those bills by over \$40 million. By anyone's math, that means that government and that Premier have taken \$10 million out of the pockets of Nova Scotians.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, will the Premier support the position that he held in May 2009 and force Nova Scotia Power's shareholders to pay his NDP electricity tax, instead of Nova Scotian ratepayers?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we took the tax off home energy, something that member voted against and campaigned against but, worse than that, he now wants to do away with the conservation charges which saved \$100 million in electricity charges that came off the bills of ordinary Nova Scotians.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, every member of this House believes in the efficiency charge. The difference between this Party and that government is who pays. They believe every Nova Scotia ratepayer should pay. We believe the shareholders of Nova Scotia Power should pay. While he stands on the side of the shareholders of Nova Scotia Power, we'll stand with Nova Scotia ratepayers.

Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of Progressive Conservative and NDP Governments, we're paying the highest rates of any province. The Liberals asked for the executive bonuses to be permanently paid for by shareholders, not ratepayers, and the NDP Government refused. We've asked for a performance audit every two years of Nova Scotia Power and the NDP Government refused. We want to force Nova Scotia Power to hold public meetings with each and every rate request, and the NDP Government refused. We asked that the regulatory cost be paid for by the shareholders and not the ratepayers, and the NDP Government has refused.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, we are trying to force tougher regulations and more competition on Nova Scotia Power, why are you standing in the way?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, if anyone is standing with the ratepayers it is the members of this government here. We're the ones that took the HST off of home energy. We're the ones that made sure that conservation plans were in place that allowed ratepayers to save money. The Leader of the Opposition knows full well that the Utility and Review Board hearings are open. The members of the public are able to attend. In fact, if they want to intervene, they could make an application to do that. He's the one - although he doesn't say this - he knows that the executive bonuses, in fact, are paid by the shareholders and not by the ratepayers. He knows that that happened last time. He knows it happened on this rate application, he knows that, but he chooses to mislead Nova Scotians.

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

PREM. - ELECTRICITY PLAN: FAILURE - ADMIT

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, earlier today Nova Scotia Power applied for yet another 3 per cent increase in our power rates in 2013 and another 3 per cent again in the year after that - two increases that will cost Nova Scotia families an average of \$100 more on their power bill by the end of next year. The compounding effect of all these power rate increases is causing real hardship for Nova Scotia families and Nova Scotia businesses. Ironically, this is coming at a time when the disposable income of Nova Scotians has actually dropped by 1.8 per cent.

In light of all this evidence, my question to the Premier is, will he now admit that his own “bite the bullet” electricity plan is broken, it is not working, and go back to the drawing board and come up with a plan that puts affordability of Nova Scotia families first when setting power rates?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the situation that the Nova Scotia ratepayers find themselves in today is a product of the decisions that were made in the past. The past dictates the future. The problem is that we had a Progressive Conservative Government and before that a Liberal Government that chained the electricity grid in this province to fossil fuel markets internationally. That means that when coal goes up 75 per cent, the cost of electricity goes up as well.

Mr. Speaker, we are getting off of fossil fuels. We have an electricity plan that means that Nova Scotians will have long-term stable rates, that businesses will have a competitive economic advantage over other jurisdictions. That is the Nova Scotia electricity plan; that one is working, theirs didn't.

MR. BAILLIE: Here are two things I know about the past, Mr. Speaker, one is we did not have the highest power prices in the country in the past but we do now under this Premier, and the other is that in the past, when he was the Opposition Leader, he went around and told Nova Scotians he could drop power prices by 15 per cent and got 32,000 of them to sign a petition to that effect. That's what he said in the past. Now he defends the skyrocketing price of power when he's actually in a position to do something about it and I will table the actions of the Premier when he was in Opposition. That is the record of the past. The record of today is that we have the highest power prices in all of Canada under that Premier.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is, why has he broken his commitment that he made in the past before the last election to the people of Nova Scotia to make power affordable and, in fact, done the opposite and made it the most unaffordable in all of Canada?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it's quite the opposite. We took the HST off home energy, something that member voted against. If we were standing here today, the price of electricity would be another 8 per cent higher if they had their way - that is a fact.

The reality is that we have today an electricity generation system that was based on decisions to build coal-fired plants over many years, made by the Progressive Conservative and Liberal Governments. They decided they were going to privatize the system, put profit and competition into the system. Those were decisions they made and we, unfortunately, have to live with those decisions. We are encouraging and we are putting in place legislation which will take us off fossil fuels, that will put in place renewables. The provinces with the lowest power rates in the country - why are they there, Mr. Speaker? It's because they have renewables.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the only thing the Premier has to live with is his own words, which he spoke in Opposition when he told Nova Scotians that he would do something about the price of power. The only thing the Premier has to live with today is the fact that under his watch, we have the highest power prices in all of Canada. That is what the Premier has to live with and nothing else. Except one more thing - that the actual effects of high power prices, as hard as it is on families, are also costing Nova Scotians their jobs because one of the drivers behind this most recent increase is the fact that we don't have a NewPage, we don't have a Bowater, at the same number of jobs, because of the high price of power under his watch.

Now how ironic that today Nova Scotia Power says they have to raise the price of power to solve the problem that the high cost of power in the last two years caused in the first place. So if we're truly interested in creating new jobs and opportunity in this province, will the Premier at least admit the obvious today, that high taxes and high power rates are killing jobs in Nova Scotia and his economic development policy is behind it all and it's failing Nova Scotians and he needs to rewrite it before it's too late?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we are very much on track with the electricity plan. I would point out to the member opposite that one of the reasons why this particular increase is being driven higher is because the capital contribution by those mills did not take place. That was a problem with the structure of the industrial grid.

Mr. Speaker, the member of the Progressive Conservative Party just tabled this. He obviously didn't read it because what I actually said is that two things have to happen: first, Nova Scotia Power must move quickly to use more renewables like energy, like wind and tidal power; and secondly, to help consumers with the one thing they can't control, which is the amount of power they use - which is exactly what this government is doing. (Applause)

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

**HEALTH & WELLNESS - FORENSIC HOSP.:
UNESCORTED PASSES - REVIEW DETAILS**

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Nova Scotians heard that yet another patient from the forensic centre did not return. To date, we are not sure where this patient is, whether she is a threat to the public or, equally problematic, a threat to herself.

Last week I asked the Premier to have an outside expert review what happened in the Denny case and we learned here in Question Period that that is underway. My question to the Premier is, can the Premier tell Nova Scotians who will be reviewing the process and procedures at the East Coast Forensic Hospital, especially with reference to protocols around unescorted passes?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'll refer that to the Minister of Health and Wellness for an answer.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do thank the honourable member for the question. Obviously we are all very concerned when a patient from our East Coast Forensic Hospital is away without permission from that hospital, on a leave.

The procedures, indeed, are being reviewed. They will be reviewed by external psychiatrists and what have you, with experience and expertise in forensic medicine and the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, as well as the Deputy Minister of Justice, has been in conversations with the physician Dr. Goldbloom, a psychiatrist who now leads the Mental Health Commission of Canada with respect to recommendations he might make on who would be appropriate to lead those reviews.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, when the Departments of Health and Wellness and Justice were reviewing themselves, it was going to take 30 days in this House and today is day 20. Now that we have reached out for an external support, an external person outside of our province to review the protocols and procedures that are in place around the forensic hospital, my question to the Premier is, how much longer will Nova Scotians have to wait to get some answers around that review?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, I'll forward that on to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we have already in the process begun to identify people who have expertise in this field, who can do an independent review from outside the Province of Nova Scotia. I believe some names have been forthcoming and that process is well underway. As the Minister of Justice, the Premier and I committed in this House, we will have a preliminary report within 30 days of our announcement, so in about two weeks' time or slightly less we will be able to provide more information to the member.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, for just some clarification for the House, last week in this House it was stated that they've already stepped outside of our province and looked for support and looked for someone to lead an external investigation. I want clarification from government whether they've actually already got someone to look, from an external point of view, or are the Deputy Ministers of Health and Wellness and Justice just looking for some suggestions outside of our province, and are they still going to lead that or are we seriously going to ask someone from outside to do an independent review so that Nova Scotians can have confidence in what is found?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, I will ask the Minister of Health and Wellness to respond.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**JUSTICE - FORENSIC HOSP. PATIENT:
UNESCORTED PASS (05/04/12) - NON-RETURN DETAILS**

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, thank God the Premier stayed for Question Period with the answers we're getting from him today.

We learned this morning that a patient from the East Coast Forensic Hospital was released on an unescorted pass Friday morning and has yet to return. This is at least the second time in the past two weeks that a person who has been remanded to the hospital, after being found not criminally responsible for an offence, has gone missing for an extended period of time. This is now day four and we don't know the whereabouts of this individual nor do we have a good idea as to whether she is a danger to the public or to herself. My question to the Minister of Justice is, in the two weeks that have elapsed since the Denny incident and this most recent one, what specific measures has the minister taken to ensure the safety of Nova Scotians?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, the safety of all Nova Scotians is of paramount concern to me, personally, and this government takes that seriously. We have continued to ensure that our policies are monitored and reviewed and I'm very confident in the staff, the quality of the staff and the people we have here, unlike the member for the Opposition and the Opposition Party, they aren't really concerned at all about the employees there and the quality of work they do. I want to acknowledge in this House on this floor that I have the greatest confidence in that staff and that there are good policies in place, but we're dealing with human elements and that the issues around mental health are not black and white. They are people who have needs that need to be addressed.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, once again, rather than being proactive this minister is more than happy to sit back and allow incidents to happen and then try to offer us these weak excuses as to why they're taking place. After the Denny incident the minister had the opportunity to immediately put in protocols to ensure the safety of the patients, the staff, and all Nova Scotians. Today what we're hearing is more excuses and being told, wait until the review has been undertaken. While that has been taking place, we now know that another individual has not returned from one of these passes. The minister clearly had the option to take immediate action to put in some protocols to try to ensure the safety of both the patients and Nova Scotians in light of the Denny incident. My question to him is very simple, why, once again, have you failed to take proactive action and ensure the safety of Nova Scotians?

MR. LANDRY: Mr. Speaker, I'm responsible for the criminal justice system; health care and the patients that are in our hospitals come under the area of the Minister of Health and Wellness. What I will do is turn this question over to her.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. The individuals who are at East Coast Forensic Hospital are patients. They've been convicted of no criminal offence. They have been reviewed by a Criminal Review Board in terms of what risks they pose to the community. Based on that, they are kept in the facility and gradually reintroduced into the community through a treatment plan that is developed by the nurses and doctors who work in that facility. Part of the treatment plan includes leaves into the community. We have protocols in place if someone goes on a leave and does not return. Those protocols are now part of a review that is underway where we will have some preliminary information within 30 days for members of this House.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the government has two options here: to show leadership when an incident takes place and show that they take it seriously, or to sit back and wait for something else to happen and make excuses. Yes, there's a review underway, but that review is going to take some time and implementing whatever the recommendations are will take some time. After the most unfortunate incident where a Nova Scotian lost his life because of what took place at that facility, the government had the option to implement immediate short-term protocols to try to ensure this would not happen again.

What we're being told today - and the Premier's saying, like what? Well, if you don't know, sir, we can find someone to replace you who will come up with those answers. You asked to be the government. You had all the answers when you sat . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians expect that their elected officials are going to do everything possible to ensure their safety and that safety is in place. We do have professionals who are available to us to work with us to find exactly what short-term

protocols can be put in place, knowing these passes failed once. They have now failed twice. Again, my question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is, why were short-term protocols not put in to ensure this wasn't going to happen again?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, it's a fair question. On a daily basis there are probably between 10 and 15 people from East Coast Forensic Hospital who have passes into the community. In the vast majority of those cases, people conform to the requirements of those passes. They go on pass and they return without any difficulty. So until the review of the protocols is done, we will continue to operate, because the vast majority of patients at East Coast go on their passes and return every day without a problem.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

PREM. - ELECTRICITY PLAN: FAMILIES/BUSINESSES - CONSIDER

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, we've recently learned that Nova Scotia Power has filed a 6 per cent cumulative rate increase over two years. The Premier was quick to table petitions while in Opposition, but as soon as he got elected, he quickly broke that promise to families. Disposable income dropped 1.8 per cent last year and people are struggling to pay their bills. This government is taking us backward into a recession.

My question to the Minister of Energy is, why does he refuse to take into account families' and businesses' ability to pay for his expensive "bite the bullet" electricity plan?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: I thank the honourable member for the question. We're all concerned about the cost of electricity, the burden that it places on families, on small businesses and on large industry. This government has a plan to deal with that, unlike past governments that have relied simply on coal. We've done a number of good initiatives, the Renewable Electricity Plan and we're going to continue to work our plan, and we have a vision to deal with this issue.

MR. PORTER: The NDP says they have to force a quicker-than-agreed - by wide consensus - conversion to green power at great expense. It's ironic that the NDP drives up power rates to solve a problem they say is caused by power rates. It is hardly a real solution that is going to help families and businesses pay their power bills. Mr. Speaker, my question, through you to the minister, will the minister commit to going back to the drawing board on this "bite the bullet" electricity plan and develop a real plan that takes into account affordability?

MR. PARKER: Past governments have relied on coal, such as the Progressive Conservative Party who had a policy of living in the past, of working on coal. Coal has gone up 75 per cent in the last six years and we on the other hand have a portfolio of initiatives that will reduce the cost of electricity, renewables. About 1 to 2 per cent is the

cost of renewables on our electricity bill. That's reasonable, it's an investment in our future. We've taken a number of initiatives around tidal power, around wind, around biofuels, around natural gas, hydroelectricity is a renewable source, and I could go on. Efficiency Nova Scotia, LED lights, HST off of electricity, there are many good initiatives that this government has undertaken.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, a lot has changed since this government came into power and, unfortunately, not for the better. Rural Nova Scotia has been driven into a recession by the NDP, the NDP have taken \$1,000 more per family in higher HST rates, they have run jobs out of rural Nova Scotia and they refuse to admit they are to blame. My question is, why does he refuse to look at the socio-economics of our province today and how much people can afford to pay for electricity?

MR. PARKER: As I mentioned, we did take the HST off of home electricity and other home fuel prices. Really, Mr. Speaker, we have to stop living in the past, we have to get off of fossil fuels. For way too long past governments have lived on the fossils fuels, we can no longer live in the past, we have to stop being a fossil.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ENERGY: HST REMOVAL/NEW TAX ADDITION - EXPLAIN

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: My question is also for the Minister of Energy. We heard the Premier earlier talk about the removal of HST from electricity, which as he well knows did more to help the top 1 per cent in the province than the bottom 99 per cent. The fact is there was a little asterisk, there was a tiny little asterisk in that, where they saved Nova Scotians - by their own documents, which I will table - \$30 million but then they have charged Nova Scotians \$43 million by adding a new tax. What the Liberals would have proposed during the election would have saved ratepayers \$10 million whereas what the NDP proposed, with their little asterisk they forgot to tell people about, cost ratepayers \$10 million. Would the Minister of Energy explain why the NDP removed the HST, saving \$28 million, and at the same time added a new tax to power bills so the end result was actually more than the savings from the HST?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: You can play with numbers all you want but the reality is that we have saved Nova Scotians \$100 million on the DSM Energy Efficiency program and that's \$100 million, real money, real savings for low income, for renters, for small businesses, for ice rinks, it's a real benefit to Nova Scotians.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I'm not playing with numbers, they are the minister's own numbers. So if the numbers are wrong then the minister's own department is wrong. This minister is out of touch. In 2009 Nova Scotia Power had a profit of \$109 million; in 2010 it was \$121 million, all earned off the backs of ratepayers. Now when the Tories proposed this new tax for energy efficiency on power bills the NDP said it was

wrong, they said Nova Scotia Power should pay the costs, but then the NDP introduced the legislation to charge ratepayers, after being elected.

Mr. Speaker, if they're worried about profits for Nova Scotia Power, if they charged Nova Scotia Power shareholders this fee, Nova Scotia Power would do just fine; they would still have \$80 million in profits after paying the \$43 million.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister amend the legislation the NDP enacted so that Nova Scotia Power shareholders pay for the efficiency programs from their obscene profits, rather than Nova Scotians who are struggling to pay for their bills?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, you know Nova Scotians are telling us these programs are great, they are working, they are saving money. I just want to tell you about one Nova Scotia family here, a small business operator in the Annapolis Valley who runs six Napa Auto Parts outlets. His company is located in Windsor, Digby, Middleton, Kentville, New Minas and Berwick; Peter Dupuis of Middleton is the owner. He says he replaced all of the ballasts, all the tubes in the whole store. He arranged for an initial assessment. I'm going to table this, Mr. Speaker, but he's more than happy with the energy efficiency program that we have here in Nova Scotia.

MR. YOUNGER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure he would be even happier if he wasn't paying to foot that bill and the shareholders of Nova Scotia Power were paying it, like we suggested.

The best answer this minister can come up with is to say well, the programs are working. Our argument is who should pay for it? In the election the NDP believed the shareholders should pay for it too, not ratepayers.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP said they were going to take the HST off of electricity, they never told Nova Scotians that they planned to tax them in another way. They've taken \$43 million from the pockets of businesses and citizens this year.

Mr. Speaker, this is a real simple question, why didn't the NDP tell Nova Scotians during the election that they planned to introduce a new tax on electricity bills that would cost ratepayers \$12 million more than any savings from the HST cut?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, now this energy efficiency program is really an investment for Nova Scotians, for small income earners, for low-income people, for renters, for small businesses, large businesses. Really the best dollar we can put in towards energy efficiency is the dollar we save, that we don't have to spend on infrastructure investment. It saved building a new power plant, a new coal plant, so it's a program that is beneficial to all Nova Scotians and we're going to stick to our plan.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

**JUSTICE - FORENSIC HOSP. PATIENT:
UNESCORTED PASS (05/04/12) - PUBLIC NOTIFICATION**

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice, as it relates to public safety. Yesterday we learned that the police are looking for another patient from the East Coast Forensic Hospital who failed to return from an unescorted pass, an individual who was remanded to the hospital after being found not criminally responsible for an offence. The individual has been at large since Friday, 9:30 p.m., and officials consider this person to be a risk to herself and possibly to others.

My question to the minister, the public was not alerted to this woman's absence for 72 hours, as per the hospital's protocol, but does the minister believe this protocol is sufficient to protect public safety and will he be revisiting that, in light of recent developments?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: Thank you for the question and since it deals with a hospital and not a jail, I will turn that over to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the honourable member, through you, for the question. Of course we are very concerned when a patient from the forensic hospital is away from the hospital without their treatment and the implications for that patient or for the public.

The Capital District Health Authority has protocols in place. To the best of my knowledge, they have followed those protocols. We have a review underway with respect to the way decisions are made in terms of assessing risk and we will have an independent review of those procedures and a preliminary report will be done within 30 days.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice also has a policy regarding people who are in the care of the province. This policy doesn't specify how long a person who is deemed to be a danger to public safety has to be away from a provincial facility before the department issues a press release.

My question - and Mr. Speaker, if it is going to be the Minister of Health and Wellness who answers it because the minister chooses to just pass it, I might as well just ask it to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What criteria does this minister use to decide when the public should be alerted to a threat to the health and safety of Nova Scotians when it comes to people who are in the care of the province?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, patients from the East Coast Forensic Hospital are not criminals, they have not been convicted of any crime. They're patients, people who have been found to have a mental health disorder, and patients who need to be in treatment. The risk associated with releasing patients into the community is a risk that is assessed by trained forensic specialists, psychiatrists,

psychologists, and nurses. This is reviewed by the Criminal Review Board, and decisions are made based on the professional expertise. If a patient is AWOL from the forensic unit, there are protocols. Within 15 minutes of their failing to return in the time frame, the police are notified.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the staff at the East Coast Forensic Hospital, in consultation with the police, make a decision with respect to notifying the public based on their assessment of risk at that time, on a case-by-case basis.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Justice should take more interest in this matter. While we agree with the Minister of Health and Wellness that these people are not criminals, within a 72-hour span they can certainly commit criminal acts, whether they be considered responsible for them or not. We saw that, unfortunately, two weeks ago when we were last discussing in this Chamber a person who had not returned from the hospital. We learned that there were other patients at large on the same day as the man who is now accused of murder.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Justice is, can the minister inform the House today how many patients have yet to be located who were missing at that time, and of those, how many are considered to be a threat to public safety?

HON. ROSS LANDRY: I will turn this over to the Minister of Health and Wellness. (Interruptions) It's a hospital.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the Opposition seems to be somewhat confused about the difference between a patient in a hospital and a criminal who has been convicted of a crime in a correctional facility. I have no idea how many criminals there are in the correctional facilities of the province, just as the Minister of Justice would have no idea how many patients there are in mental health facilities around the province.

So let me say this: I have said earlier in Question Period here that on any given day there can be as many as maybe 10 to 15 patients given passes of some form from the East Coast Forensic Hospital as part of their treatment plan, following the assessment of risk that is done by the trained professionals in those facilities - nurses and doctors.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ENERGY - ELECTRICITY TAX: FUNDS - USAGE

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. A few weeks ago, we learned that the tax added to electricity bills by the NDP is being used to subsidize government departments. At the time, the minister didn't have any idea what percentage of those funds were being used.

Since he has had some time now, could the minister please tell the House what percentage of the millions taken from the pockets of Nova Scotians as a result of the NDP's tax on power bills, is being used to subsidize government departments?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, I don't have those particular figures but I do know that those who pay into the program benefit from the program. It's like an insurance policy in some ways, if you pay a premium you should be able to benefit from it when required. So small businesses, large businesses, government departments, householders, renters, they all pay into it, they all benefit.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I'm a bit surprised. The minister has had a few weeks and still doesn't have an answer to that question. It should be fairly straightforward.

This is an issue of competitiveness and access to these programs, and in the application to the Utility and Review Board, this tax is proposed to increase by 249 per cent for industrial users; that's just one of the classes. This is on top of the rate increases that have already been deferred, the ones announced today, the fuel adjustments, the deferred charges in the pipeline and for many business owners and residents, it's starting to feel like, it's a new week, what will this week's power increase be?

Will the minister please explain why he thinks it's okay for the efficiency tax the NDP added to increase this year and next year, while at the same time Nova Scotia Power has announced they will be increasing bills again this year and next year?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, studies have shown that the best way to save energy is an investment in conservation and demand-side management. It's a small investment on each power bill but year after year it pays off and it's just not for the year that's done but really for the rest of the lifetime of that building, whoever owns it. It's savings. It's about a \$40 million investment overall but it's producing over \$100 million in savings in energy costs for Nova Scotians.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, he would have gotten the same \$100 million in savings by having shareholders of Nova Scotia Power pay that bill instead of ratepayers and at the same time would have saved ratepayers in this province \$12 million. It would have made rates cheaper in this province over what they are today. It's really quite simple and that's something the NDP believed during the last election. For them now to say that they don't believe it is a bit strange since just three years ago (Interruption)

The minister can talk all he wants about if the NDP were in power, we would be off coal. I'm sorry, but just four and five years ago the member for Cape Breton Centre was talking about the importance of the Cape Breton coal mine and the use of those coal mines in Nova Scotia Power. He was advocating for those coal mines. We have the Tories who are sitting here complaining that we should be on coal when, in fact, the rates for renewable

energy at the moment are still the ones they implemented under Minister Parent when they were in power. We haven't even hit the targets yet for Nova Scotia Power.

Mr. Speaker, the question for the minister is, how much is too much? (Interruptions) How much of an increase in bills will it take for the NDP to finally say enough is enough and say no to increases in the electricity tax and power bills?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, the conservation investments that we're initiating here in the province are saving a tremendous amount of money. In fact, through 2012, the Efficiency Nova Scotia programs will have saved us 460 gigawatts of energy. That's enough to power 40,000 homes in this province. If we continue with that program through 2015, we'll save enough energy that we'll not have to build a new coal plant. It's saving Nova Scotians a whole lot of money and it's creating a lot of jobs in our province at the same time.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

**LBR./ADVANCED EDUC. - NSNU BARGAINING:
PROCEDURES/SURGERIES - CANCELLATIONS PREVENT**

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks we've seen Nova Scotian health care patients brought to the brink. Intense labour negotiations resulted in 500 cancelled surgeries and thousands more procedures were postponed last month. Simply put, Nova Scotians in need of important medical care had to put their health on hold while the NDP twiddled their thumbs.

Later this month the Nova Scotia Nurses Union, which bargains for 6,000 registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and nurse practitioners, will be at the bargaining table and, based on the NDP's performance during the negotiation of NSGEU Local No. 42, Nova Scotians are rightly worried. My question is for the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, when will the minister and her colleagues quit twiddling their thumbs as they did last time, get to work and provide Nova Scotians with a guarantee that there will be no cancelled procedures or surgeries during the next round of bargaining?

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that most negotiations in this province are able to be settled through the regular collective bargaining process. Certainly, through my department, we're able to provide supports in that process. We have conciliation services, mediation services, and to a large extent these are all that are necessary to allow both sides to sit down, go through the process, and come to a reasonable agreement.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, the last time that this government engaged in health care labour negotiations, it took days to even give Nova Scotian taxpayers a hint at what they might be on the hook for. Since the government seems to be getting off on the

same foot with the Nurses' Union, Nova Scotians would be right to expect some of the same poor treatment this time around.

Will the minister commit to correcting the mistakes from the last round of bargaining and make every effort to keep the taxpayers informed - will they tell Nova Scotians who will foot the bill for the NDP deals?

MS. MORE: Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind members of this House that the Department of Labour and Advanced Education is in charge of the collective bargaining process, in terms of ensuring its neutrality and that the proper steps are taken. We do not get involved with actual negotiations.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, a pattern is starting to emerge - patients lose, taxpayers lose, and now workers may lose too. Everybody loses when this government makes deals. The NDP still haven't figured out how they're going to pay for their concessions during the NSGEU negotiations. Some of the biggest losers may be health care workers who may end up losing their jobs to cover the cost of the NDP deal.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: This time, will the minister assure Nova Scotia nurses that not a single one of them will lose their job as a result of the NDP's bad deal making?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I remind that member, and all members of this Chamber, that this is the government that has already saved the taxpayers of Nova Scotia literally hundreds of millions of dollars with the wage settlements that we have made in the health care and in the public sector in Nova Scotia. Nurses are a very, very valuable part of our health care system and we will work with nurses and treat them with respect, unlike the experience that nurses had when that member was in government.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay.

ERDT - POWER RATES: BUS./ECONOMY - EFFECTS

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia has the highest power rates of all provinces in this great country. This applies to consumers and businesses, and the effect is a double hit to our economy. Nova Scotians have less money to spend and businesses have to deal with increasing cost pressures, which is an important input cost for any manufacturer or any business to ultimately make money and provide a product or service to Nova Scotians. Yet this government has been ignoring this problem for far too long and has been inactive in their three years as the Government of Nova Scotia.

My question to the Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism is, when will the minister realize that having the highest power rates in the country is bad for business, bad for our economy, and bad for the Province of Nova Scotia?

HON. PERCY PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I will say that there may be some companies that consider power rates to be a factor, but I can tell you this - what attracts businesses to Nova Scotia is the people of Nova Scotia, is that the work ethic is combined with a good, educated population, the low cost of doing business. I would say that the time zone we live in also contributes to Nova Scotia being attractive for future businesses and it wouldn't work the other way. So we're very proud of those things that we do to attract business to Nova Scotia and we will continue to do those things that attract good business and good, sustainable jobs in the province.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would disagree. Every single business in this province is sensitive to the cost of power and the rising power rates. Unless you are a candle maker and you work outside and don't use any power, then I think you are affected. It's an input for business and certainly every single business is affected by power rates, so let's not even suggest that that's not the case.

The minister also talks about the business environment - 0.3 per cent GDP growth, the second worst in the entire country, Mr. Speaker. That's a direct measure for the member opposite who doesn't participate in Question Period. That's a direct measure of our economic growth and our performance.

Power rates are a factor, taxes are a factor. This is about the business environment. We have an uncompetitive business environment, Mr. Speaker, that's why our economy isn't growing. That's why we're losing jobs and workforce participation is down and we're losing our families. That's what is happening in this province. The pressures that businesses face due to the fact that we have the highest power rates, not only makes us uncompetitive but it puts their very businesses at risk. The out-of-control power costs are the number-one concern for businesses, the number-one concern.

My question to the minister is, when will the minister accept that power is one of the largest concerns for businesses and take steps necessary to address this costly pressure on businesses in Nova Scotia?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate that the cost of power may be an issue for some businesses but I will say that there are things that we are doing in the Province of Nova Scotia to attract businesses, such as \$25 million in the PIP initiative. I can also talk about the \$10 million investment that we have made in the aerospace industry. I can talk about the \$5 million to increase the credit union business loan program. Those are the kinds of things that we do to attract business.

Three years in a row we reduced the Small Business Tax Credit. Those are the things that attract businesses, along with an educated workforce, along with a strong work ethic. We attract companies to Nova Scotia. It's a plan that's working, we are staying the course.

MR. MACLELLAN: I will reiterate to the minister and to this House, power rates and the cost of power affect every single business in Nova Scotia, every single one. And I'm certainly aware, the minister stands there and he talks about the investments, we're all aware that the minister will write those cheques and the minister will take those pictures and they'll stand in front of businesses and talk about the investments they made - 0.3 per cent growth is the true measure of what we're doing as an economy and as a department, and we're failing Nova Scotians and we're not creating jobs for today's families. That's a fact, Mr. Speaker.

The highest power rates cannot expect to grow and last year we posted 0.3 per cent GDP. This is down from 1.9 per cent in 2010 and is one-quarter of what was forecast by this government and this minister. By failing to accept solutions that our caucus has presented to address skyrocketing power rates, this minister and this government are ensuring that the cost of doing business in Nova Scotia continues to get more expensive and will increase by 6 per cent in the next two years.

My question to the minister is, will the minister take the solutions presented by our caucus and make power more affordable and strengthen our economy, not continue to harm it?

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, when I hear that member go on, it seems to me that that member is against the investment we made in Billdidit, in Cape Breton. It reminds me that that member is against the investment we made in Cape Breton Rail. That member is also against the investment we made in Sydney Harbour, the Sydney Harbour dredging. (Interruptions)

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

MR. PARIS: Mr. Speaker, that member is also probably against the investment that we made in the Rodd Inn, in Yarmouth. All those investments that we make in Nova Scotia, which we will continue to do because they are the right things to do.

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

ENERGY - NSP: SAVINGS AUDIT - MIN. DIRECT

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians are paying the highest power rates among all the provinces in Canada. At the same time, Nova Scotia Power is guaranteed a 9.3 per cent rate of return - guaranteed. Our caucus has been pushing this government to finally act to reduce power rates that Nova Scotians are paying but the NDP Government has done nothing.

One proposal we put forward, Mr. Speaker, has been consistently that we believe Nova Scotia Power should be audited for savings and that that should be done on a regular basis so that before any more power rates are approved, an audit is done. My question for the Minister of Energy is, when will you direct that Nova Scotia Power be audited for internal savings?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, certainly we're all concerned about the cost of electricity for families, for small businesses, for industry, and the URB certainly has a responsibility to ensure that the rates are as fair and as reasonable as possible. They have the expertise to bring in whoever they want when there are hearings on public rates and, of course, our Party, your Party, all Nova Scotians have the opportunity to intervene in those hearings and if there's something wrong, to tell the board all about it.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, we have been intervening in those discussions but the NDP have been sitting on the sidelines. Nova Scotians are suffering because of this NDP Government's lack of action in addressing skyrocketing power rates. Again and again Nova Scotians are being asked to pay more to Nova Scotia Power. It is affecting businesses and families alike.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is, why won't the minister stand up to Nova Scotia Power and demand that they look internally for savings before allowing them to take any more out of the pockets of Nova Scotians?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, certainly the URB has a full responsibility to investigate all proposed costs that come before it and this government has been doing something about high power rates. Unlike past governments that relied on fossil fuels, we've invested in renewables, in natural gas alternatives, in efficiency programs, in LED lights. We've taken the HST off electricity. We've helped low-income Nova Scotians, we've helped small businesses, we've helped large businesses, and we're going to continue to work that plan.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, you know, Nova Scotia Power is a regulated industry. The government can step in and actually use its power here. I'm kind of tired of hearing that it's all in the hands of the URB.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is Nova Scotians are angered by the 9.3 per cent guaranteed rate of return that Nova Scotia Power is getting and at the same time knowing that the consumers are being squeezed for every penny, year after year. The rates have gone up a full 40 per cent since 2001 and today we learned that Nova Scotia Power is again applying for further rate increases in the next two years.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, of all the provinces, as I said, we have the highest power rates already. So my question to the minister is, will the minister make a commitment to Nova

Scotians that there will be no further power rate hikes until a comprehensive audit has taken place at Nova Scotia Power?

MR. PARKER: Well, one way that we can use less energy is certainly not by duplicating services that are already available here in our province. The URB has the full authority to audit every bit of information that comes to it and, in fact, they hire expertise that when they don't have all the knowledge, all the information they need, they come in and give them a professional opinion. Of course, there is the consumer advocate, the small business advocate, political Parties, Nova Scotians, they all come and hold the URB accountable, and in the end they'll provide the best possible rates for Nova Scotians.

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

COM. SERV. - TALBOT HOUSE BD. OF DIRECTORS: RFPS - DETAILS

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, over two months has passed since Talbot House announced they would be closing their doors. (Interruption) Everybody can groan, but the closure of Talbot House was prompted by a string of poorly judged decisions made by the Minister of Community Services. Mistakes aside, the people of this province need the services that Talbot House provided; its closure has come at a great cost to young men in this province suffering from addictions.

On April 17th the minister told reporters that the province will be issuing a request for proposals and that Talbot House board of directors was welcome to apply. My question to the minister is, the minister has already gravely tarnished the reputation of this long-established facility, does she honestly plan to strip them of their dignity even more by tossing Talbot House into the mix with RFPs?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, I have provided this House over and over with clear information, and I have provided documentation and tabled documentation in this House that supported all that information. At this point, I have provided plenty of information to the Opposition Parties.

MR. BAIN: Mr. Speaker, the minister refuses to acknowledge her role in the closure of Talbot House, but members of the House know that a string of bad decisions made in her department not only set in motion the inevitable closure of the facility, but also continued to damage the reputation of Talbot House. Her department is responsible for \$420,000 in funding and she says it's up to Talbot House if they decide they want to open up service again. My question is, does the minister really stand by that statement - does she really believe the board of directors of Talbot House are standing in their own . . .

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, in Question Period last week the member for Clare asked me some questions on diversity, and I told him I would provide him and table those answers as soon as I got them. I apologize it took a little longer than I had anticipated, but here they are for the edification of the House and that member.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that prior to doing that, if the Government House Leader could indicate which specific bills he is planning on dealing with in Committee of the Whole House on Bills before giving consent.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: All bills contained in the report back with the exception of Bill No. 17, which is the Financial Measures (2012) Act, and Bill No. 65, the Consumer Protection Act.

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

The motion is carried.

[1:28 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Mr. Alfie MacLeod in the Chair.]

[1:39 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Gordon Gosse, resumed the Chair.]

MR. SPEAKER: The Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports:

THE CLERK: That the committee has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 71 - Assessment Act.

Bill No. 73 - Municipal Government Act.

Bill No. 74 - Patient Safety Act.

Bill No. 76 - Personal Health Information Act.

Bill No. 77 - Medical Society Act.

without amendments, and the chairman has been instructed to recommend these bills to the favourable consideration of the House.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, with the consent of the House, I ask to go to third reading of the bills that were just reported back.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 71.

Bill No. 71 - Assessment Act.

Bill No. 73 - Municipal Government Act.

Bill No. 74 - Patient Safety Act.

Bill No. 76 - Personal Health Information Act.

Bill No. 77 - Medical Society Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The motions are carried.

Ordered that these bills do pass. Ordered that the titles be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bills be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 81.

Bill No. 81 - Gaming Control Act.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I now move that Bill No. 81, the Gaming Control Act be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to be here today to introduce the next step in Nova Scotia's Responsible Gaming Strategy. When the province released the strategy in March 2011, our intent was to act on what we heard from Nova Scotians during the consultation that led to its development. Namely, provide an accountable and socially responsible approach to gaming in our province.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main goals of the strategy was to create a closer oversight in the rapidly changing and evolving gaming industry. Today we are delivering on that commitment by introducing amendments to Part I of the Gaming Control Act. With the changes being made to the Act, a new and more accountable governance model is being introduced for the Crown Corporation responsible for managing gaming in our province. This provides a closer reporting relationship to government and means the corporation will function like a division of a government department.

Mr. Speaker, the corporation will be named the Nova Scotia Provincial Lotteries and Casino Corporation. The changes to the Act will now set out membership on the corporation's board to include senior civil servants from key government departments that are impacted by our gaming strategy. There will still be the option of appointing a smaller number of independent members to assist with oversight if that becomes necessary. This

means accountability of the corporation to government will be enhanced and more effective coordination of gaming policy and practices across government.

Mr. Speaker, above all we are delivering on another aspect of our gaming strategy with the board changes and more oversight from government of the function of the corporation. Once the new board is in place later this year, we will be able to look at ways to be more efficient and innovative in the day-to-day operations of the corporation while maintaining the revenue from gaming that benefit programs and services that are so important to Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotia wants gaming to be managed in an accountable, socially responsible way, and that's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, with these changes. They want our province to continue to be a leader in the socially responsible conduct of gaming, and the changes being introduced today do just that. They provide for a closer reporting relationship and ensure the corporation will function more like a division of a government department, and the province will continue to move forward with the Responsible Gaming Strategy and has taken key steps to achieve the goal it set out and continues to allow Nova Scotia to be the leader in socially responsible gaming.

As of April 1st, the made-in-Nova Scotia, My-Play System became mandatory in all video lottery terminals in the province. This makes Nova Scotia the first jurisdiction to opt for a mandatory player choice tool like this, Mr. Speaker. Of course, many of you heard, I spoke numerous times on the company Techlink that created the software. A Cape Breton company, I might add, who has really shown leadership not only here in Nova Scotia but throughout the world. Definitely they have the interest of many people, within the industry, from around the world. I look forward to that company moving forward as they grow and ensuring that anybody who is involved in the gaming industry takes responsible gaming tools, as they provide, in the policy changes and the changes you see within gaming in jurisdictions.

The Deputy Ministers' Advisory Committee on Gaming that we announced during the last strategy, Mr. Speaker, continues to work on coordinating actions on gaming policy and practices across the department. I must add we have gotten great uptake within the government and the different departments, to ensure that they want to be there at the table when we look at policies and any changes of practices involving gaming here in Nova Scotia.

I think I mentioned this before - when we initially created the Deputy Minister's Advisory Committee on Gaming, we had the deputy minister of my department and the Deputy Minister of Finance, but it was the Minister of Health and Wellness who originally acknowledged to me that it would be important for her deputy to be at the table. I think she was quite right in that and that committee has been meeting on a regular basis to look at gaming issues within the province and I look forward to working with them in the coming months to move forward our gaming strategy that we released earlier last year. Government is delivering on the commitment to enhance the accountability of the Gaming

Corporation and bring its practices more into line with that of a division of a government department.

Madam Speaker, the steps we are taking are prudent and build on the excellent work that led to the development of the Responsible Gaming Strategy. Our approach balances the need to be socially responsible while ensuring that revenues from gaming continue to benefit sport and recreation, health research, and addiction services that are important to all Nova Scotians. I appreciate all members' time and I look forward to any comments that Opposition critics may have, and I look forward to this piece of legislation moving forward through the process.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in my place today to speak to Bill No. 81, the Gaming Control Act. This of course is a development of the 2011 Responsible Gaming Strategy released in March of last year. The idea is to make this move so that government could have more control over the functions of operations, management and control. It has also taken the Gaming Foundation under its control as well. There are concerns around the corporation coming under a government department. They were a stand-alone operation as well as the foundation.

The new format will see a committee of deputy ministers as the umbrella organization, which would oversee management control functions currently held at NSGC. One issue that comes to mind here that is of a concern is less transparency and access once the NSGC is under the umbrella of the deputy ministers. This really follows, in many ways, from the problems that Nova Scotians saw with the Anielski report. We're getting good information in the hands of Nova Scotians to be able to debate, discuss and look at gaming and all its ramifications in the lives of Nova Scotians. So now there is one organization that manages and controls gambling in the province and I think it's very important for Nova Scotians now to be aware of asking the vigilant questions and especially those around responsible gaming and the kind of educational programs that were a hallmark of the foundation, that they continue to be available in our communities.

There will also be no independence from government prerogative as the arm's-length board of the NSGC will be replaced by a committee of deputy ministers supported by a group of other government officials. The Gaming Corporation was created in the mid-1990s under the John Savage Government as a layer of oversight and independence while the province was experiencing growth in the gambling industry in Nova Scotia. So, again, it was designed to have the kind of perspective that would create a true balance and there's no question that over the past 20 years the Gaming Corporation with its mandate and mission, and in conjunction with Atlantic Lottery, oversaw the operations of the lotteries and the casinos. It did put an emphasis on working towards responsible approaches and the corporation was one of the very first in Canada to deal with the suspected cases of convenience store owners and the possibility of them having an

advantage when it came to playing some of the scratch tickets or even the 6/49 lottery or any of the lottery games available.

So the corporation did play a very strong role in that oversight area. It is currently responsible for managing, controlling the VLTs, the casinos and the lotteries. When I look at the purpose of the bill, and while it does reference managing and controlling, let's be honest here - it's primarily to create a level of sustainable economic activity within the province and increase the net revenues for the province. I think, as Nova Scotians, we are concerned that there is a balanced perspective here and that government - through this new body and the bill - will in fact carry out those dual roles on an equal footing, and that is the concern.

We know, for example, government has already made a choice around My-Play System in that there are two levels of helping individuals monitor their play. In Nova Scotia we've actually gone down the road of My-Play Lite and that is you can get multiple cards to use and tracking is very limited under that format, whereas there is a format which has a very strong degree of control, a very strong - I guess we would say - feedback loop, that allows the player to truly monitor what their play levels are, what their losses are and I think gives people a much better opportunity to make good choice as a user, especially of the VLTs.

So as this bill comes into force and as the Gaming Corporation winds down its operations and comes under the new approach, I think it's important that Nova Scotians do remain vigilant around our lotteries, the VLTs, the casinos and do ask questions around responsible gaming and what's in the total best interest of the province.

With that, Madam Speaker, I take my place.

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

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just for some clarification, the current mechanism of reporting that the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation has and gives to the House, will continue to happen under the new makeup of the board and the corporation, so it will continue to be transparent. I think it shows that we're moving forward with changes to gaming within the province and I think the changes we'll see in this new bill best fit where we're at in the environment of gaming here in Nova Scotia.

Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 81.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 81. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.
The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 82.

Bill No. 82 - Nova Scotia Association of Health Organizations Incorporation Act.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Madam Speaker, I move that Bill No. 82 be now read a second time.

Health Association Nova Scotia represents health and community services organizations spanning the entire health care system in our province. This association is a non-government, non-profit, membership-driven group that represents more than 130 organizations in our province. The organizations that the association represents include the nine district health authorities, the IWK Health Centre, and more than 100 continuing care organizations, nursing homes, and government-funded home care organizations.

The present Act was last amended in 1974. The time for change is long overdue. Active for more than 50 years, the association has evolved over the last few decades in the services they offer and the members they serve. The proposed amendments will reflect the expansion of the association's mandate to provide services to its members not included in the current Act. This includes labour relations, salary administration, and clinical engineering services. It will also permit the expansion of contracted services to non-members and allow for the association to be known as Health Association Nova Scotia.

These proposed amendments are important because they will better reflect the services and current practices of the association. This is an association that has strong ties with provincial and national counterparts in the Canadian Healthcare Association, and together they work to provide a voice to those they serve. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: I rise in my place to say a few words on Bill No. 82, an Act to Incorporate Nova Scotia Association of Health Organizations. Health Association Nova Scotia offers a wide variety of programs, services, and benefits to some 131 organizations across the province that are all equally committed to the health and well-being of Nova Scotians.

The bill is a housekeeping bill. These amendments reflect some changes announced by the former Nova Scotia Association of Health Organizations in March 2010, a name change that was made to reflect a broader definition of health beyond the bricks and mortar of facilities and legislative organizational structures, if you will.

Current and potential memberships include organizations that focus on the social determinants of health, which are as important to the health and well-being of individuals as the treatment of illness and care provided in institutions other than hospitals. The bill also legitimizes services Health Association Nova Scotia has been ably providing to its members for many years.

Our caucus has no problem with the bill. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't acknowledge, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, the outstanding efforts put forward by the health association to its membership. As we can all appreciate, it's very easy for organizations to reinvent the wheel when it comes to creating programs or services, or developing policies. The benefit of membership with the health association is that organizations and facilities can focus on those things they do best: providing exceptional care and leaving the development of programs and services or even the development of policies or statements from a position of strength as a unified group in the hands of Health Association Nova Scotia.

It is this role where Health Association Nova Scotia truly shines. With these few words, I take my seat.

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill No. 82.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 82. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Madam Speaker, this debate ends the government's business for today and I'll hand it over now to the Deputy House Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Deputy House Leader for the Progressive Conservative Party.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Madam Speaker, following the daily routine tomorrow, the PC Opposition Business will be as follows: Bill No. 27, the Cyberbullying Intervention Act; and Bill No. 72, the Capital Projects Review Act. The hours for tomorrow will be from 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is that we do now rise to meet again tomorrow, May 9th, between the hours of 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

We will now proceed with the late debate as put forward under Rule 5(5). It was put forward by the honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park:

“Therefore be it resolved that the NDP Government’s decision to not exempt Halifax Regional Municipality from full pension solvency forces the municipality into an unnecessarily expensive pension arrangement and is detrimental to HRM pensioners and taxpayers.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

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

HRM - PENSION SOLVENCY EXEMPTION: NDP DECISION - EFFECTS

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Madam Speaker, I know 10 minutes will go very quickly in late debate on this subject so I appreciate having the opportunity to bring it before the House in order to talk about it for both the benefit of all HRM taxpayers and property taxpayers, and also a very big benefit from a change that we’re recommending to the pension which would make a huge difference to the pension plan members.

I have just, actually, gotten off the phone speaking to the head of the HRM pension plan, the agency that looks after that, and I was questioning some of the numbers that appeared in the article in today’s paper because my understanding was that if there is not a full exemption from the solvency measure that is used for businesses, if HRM doesn’t get

that full exemption, then they will be required to dramatically increase their contributions toward the plan. For the benefit of members and for the benefit of people who may be listening at home, this is not setting a lower standard, I don't believe, it's not choosing something that in some way is postponing a day of reckoning for the pension.

What it really is, is that in legitimate pension management there are two different ways to value a pension plan. One of them suggests that the business could go bankrupt at any time, could cease to exist, could be wound up, just as we're seeing now with the NewPage plan, that if your pension plan is winding up, you need to have enough money in that plan to cover your long-term obligations to the current pensioners and to the people who have worked for you for whatever length of time. So that is a standard that's higher because there's a risk that you might cease operation and have an obligation to a lot of people who have paid into the plan.

The second legitimate valuation is exactly what we do with provincial plan members, people who are covered under the provincial superannuation plan, we assume there that there will always be a Government of Nova Scotia and that what we need to plan for are the ongoing obligations, not a sudden ceasing of operations that mean we have to cover everybody, the workers and the current employees who have retired. So what we're looking at is a second valuation, which is equally legitimate, and that is a valuation that is called the going-concern basis. We assume that they will never cease to exist, that where Halifax and Dartmouth ceased to exist, we created HRM, there's still an entity that carries on and carries the ongoing obligation.

Now, Halifax is not given that exemption whereas many other provinces have exempted their municipalities - Manitoba is one, Alberta and Ontario have been studying it and offering it. There's a whole list of provinces and, Madam Speaker, I'm looking for that as we speak, but I want to make it clear that this would not be cutting edge. It would not be risky. It's not a move that's going to be in any way imprudent. It is well accepted in other provinces as a fact of life that their municipalities will always continue to exist and will be able to meet their obligations.

So the fact is, why are we holding our municipalities with defined benefit plans to a higher standard than ourselves, in terms of the funding, to what is really an unrealistic standard? We're asking them to fund and find the money, and we know where governments find money. They find it from the taxpayers and from the pockets of their employees, as well, for a pension plan. But we're asking them to be funded to a level that they're never going to need, so basically millions of dollars coming out of the city coffers and out of the pockets of their employees to go into a plan that will be funded to a level that they are never going to be called upon to draw. So it's million of dollars, really, that could be put to good use in public services and in other ways.

Just to confirm the amount of money, Madam Speaker, what I was told just now was that the employees currently put in approximately - it's a little over - 10 per cent of

their pay towards their pension plan. If the whole plan is not given an exemption they will then have to increase to 15 per cent of their pay. That's a lot of money out of the pockets and out of the bottom line, the take-home pay of HRM employees at all levels. What was pointed out, too, was that not everybody is at a high-pay level. So some people who might only be earning \$20,000 or \$25,000 a year, that's a lot of money out of the money they need to live. It has a huge impact on every employee of HRM, as you can imagine, going from a 10 per cent to a 15 per cent contribution.

Now, a good thing about HRM, Madam Speaker, is that it is jointly sponsored. What the Liberals have proposed, and in our press release yesterday morning we said it should be offered to jointly-sponsored plans at a municipal - defined-benefit, jointly-sponsored municipal plans should be exempt from this windup solvency measure. The reason for that is jointly sponsored is a higher standard of governance. It means the employees and pensioners are at the table with the employer and they each bear 50 per cent of the benefits or the extra contributions. HRM is already at that standard, they have a jointly-sponsored plan, it is well managed and we believe that is a stronger reason to support their claim that they should be given the same benefit of being valued on a going-concern basis - the same benefit that the Province of Nova Scotia gets and the same benefit that has recently been given to Dalhousie University.

It almost seems that the government has passed over HRM, or jumped over the municipal issue, and gone and allowed Dalhousie University and other defined benefit plans at universities to have this same new standard, the standard of a going-concern basis. We accepted that Dalhousie is not going to go out of business and I think by the same standard it's even more obvious that the city of HRM, the region of HRM, is not. Also other municipalities that may meet the requirement of being jointly sponsored and being stable, they also should be allowed the same benefit.

I realize you don't generally make a rule for one municipality over another but HRM is definitely the largest, over 9,000 plan members if you include the retirees and the working members. It has a tremendous impact on the economy of Nova Scotia and HRM. As I said, with a stroke of a pen, through legislation the government can change this rule and say we're no longer saying you need to be funded as a corporation, as a company would, where there's a risk even with the best of companies, that they disappear. Look at Nortel, Madam Speaker - remember Nortel? The stock traded at over \$100 a share and suddenly it's gone and the pensioners have come to see us - those are federal pensions by the way. Those companies, even the strongest and mightiest, can disappear but it's different with a municipality or with the provincial government, and I feel we have to use a different standard.

So we are saying we don't need to fund - we should change the rule that the province has the control to do, the NDP Government could do that. They could change the evaluation method we're going to use for the municipalities that are jointly-sponsored plans. By doing that it's a win-win-win. I don't believe we're exposing any more risk to

Nova Scotians. I don't believe it is imprudent in any way when you look at the strong management of the plan in HRM; at the same time you'll be saving the taxpayers of our municipality.

There is no question that if HRM has to come up with another \$30 million, we estimate - a conservative estimate - that their share of the plan difference is \$15 million, so collectively it's \$30 million a year between the employees and the city. If they have to come up with that money it will come back, it will rest on the property taxpayers and we've already heard in other ways why it's very difficult for taxpayers today in HRM and in our province. There are a lot of pressures and this is one method where you could help the affordability, help the employees and set a standard that is reasonable and prudent all the way around.

Making this change in Nova Scotia to allow HRM and the other municipalities that qualify to be exempted from the windup measure of solvency which we use for corporations just makes sense and it's a win-win and it does not cost the provincial government a penny. We're not doing anything that impacts the bottom line of Nova Scotia and we're making a big difference to the lives of particularly the employees of HRM who would be asked for so much more in their own contributions if this is not granted, but also to the taxpayers who will also have to bear the brunt of the employer's portion of the increase that's not necessary.

Madam Speaker, with that, I look forward to the rest of the discussion. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are two words that come to my mind when I think about pensions, one is security and the other is prudence. I believe what people are really looking for in a pension is security and in order for people to have security of income, there has to be prudent activity.

I think about - we have some concerns about this point we're debating today because while I believe that some flexibility and solvency can be a good thing, we also have to remember that we can't be creating imaginary pension plans. By that I mean that what you put into the plan and how it's managed does have a direct impact on what comes out at the other end. We can't get away from that. Everybody who invests, whether it's in a pension fund or whether it's in their own personal RRSP account, goes to the same market to invest.

When I talk about prudence, there has even been a municipality - the Town of Canso has had financial difficulties, so anybody working for that municipal unit . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: They don't have a defined benefit plan.

MR. MACMASTER: Well, they don't have a defined benefit plan but if they did, I guess my point is that there can be situations where governments, be they municipal - and I also think of a country across the ocean, Greece, where a number of events have led that country to be really teetering. You even hear stories about people going back to the land, trying to buy up land so they can live off the land, which is really amazing in this day and age for a country that had a relatively strong amount of wealth, when you compare it to other countries in the world. Sadly, they are in a very severe state of decline right now and the uncertainty in that country is reverberating throughout the world, as we see with the stock market.

I think, Madam Speaker, even closer to home, the recent protests over tuition increases in the Province of Quebec, the riots that we see on the streets there, the coverage of that reminds me a lot of the riots that we were seeing in Greece. So we must be responsible, especially in this Legislature, when we're making rules because a lot of times people will skip the rules, if they can, but still want to get what they want.

We cannot have imaginary pension plans and solvency of a pension plan needs to be addressed.

AN HON. MEMBER: There's two VOAs.

MR. MACMASTER: I know there's two VOAs, I know you've mentioned that. However, when I think about - I know I heard presentations in Law Amendments Committee from Dalhousie University and they said, well we're never going to go out of business and if we did, we could sell the assets of the university to make up for the pension shortfalls.

The problem I have with that, Madam Speaker, is what would we say to all those people over the last - and I didn't go to Dalhousie, I don't know how many years they've been in operation but I'm going to say the past 100 years . . .

AN HON MEMBER: Since 1812.

MR. MACMASTER: . . . since 1812. So what would we say to all the Nova Scotians who donated and bequeathed estates and made donations to that university for the hope and the education of future Nova Scotians, if we just took those assets and eliminated them, to pay for the shortfall in a pension plan? To me, Madam Speaker, that would not be responsible and I think it would bother those people who made those donations.

If we want to have people making donations in the future for things like education, and we see it all the time with capital campaigns, then we need to make sure that people making those donations feel like their money is going to be put towards future education of Nova Scotians.

I guess what I would say is if people don't want to have or take the responsibility that comes with having a defined benefit pension plan, there are other alternatives. The beauty of a defined benefit plan is supposedly you don't have to worry about it because if it's prudently managed and if all goes well you get what you're promised in the end. But with that comes the responsibility of making sure the plan is solid. As I mentioned, I think some flexibility is good for solvency - if there's a major decline in the market, you don't have to make it up right away. I think that makes sense, and it can work.

I'll speak a little bit about that in a minute when I speak about NewPage, because it certainly didn't work there, although I wouldn't be critical of the decision to allow them to have more flexibility with their solvency, it did not work in that case.

If people don't want the responsibility that goes along with a defined benefit plan, then what I would say to them is why not choose a defined contribution plan? Very simple, the employee puts an amount in, the organization employing that person puts an amount in. However it grows through investment, whatever it comes out to be at the end of day becomes what that person has. There are strengths and weaknesses to that. At least you know what you have, and it can't be taken away from you. But I know a lot of people prefer not to have to think about where that amount is going to grow to.

In reality, the same thing is happening inside a defined benefit pension plan; the same responsibility needs to be taken.

Madam Speaker, how much time do I have left?

MADAM SPEAKER: You have this side of three minutes.

MR. MACMASTER: Thank you. I just wanted to make that point and, sadly, I think we're starting to see defined benefit plans go the way of the dinosaur - they're disappearing. I threw that word in just for the member for Guysborough-Sheet Harbour because I know that would resonate with him. They are going the way of the dinosaur because organizations are finding they cannot afford to support the indexing that's involved, and really the guarantee that people are going to have the benefits they're promised at the end of the day, because they're dealing with the realities of the investment climate.

If we start with governments, giving them flexibility - and we've seen here with the provincial government plan over \$0.5 billion being placed into it, which was borrowed and ultimately comes from the taxpayers. We can't be asking taxpayers to do that, in my mind, because they can't afford that because they're already trying to do it for themselves. Many Nova Scotians, as we know, don't belong to a pension plan. They're paying taxes like everybody else, and if we have to increase taxes to pay for pension plan top-ups in government, I don't believe that's fair to the Nova Scotians who are out there working every day trying to put some money aside for themselves. If they were paying less taxes,

they'd have more ability to put money aside for themselves. We have to think about that as well; we have to think about their security, Madam Speaker.

I know I have to finish up here, but I think I will just talk a little bit about NewPage. The solvency relief didn't really work for them because, unfortunately, the company went bankrupt. Instead of current employees in the company putting more money in more quickly to top up the plan, it was delayed. That, we hoped at the time, would have helped the company survive, but it didn't. This is the reality that can sometimes happen, and we have to be aware of that.

The last point I would like to make - I know the minister responsible for pensions is going to be coming forth with some legislation and I hope that it takes into account what I tried to put forth last December by way of an amendment to the Pension Benefits Act, because I believe, and to this day I believe, that's what the pensioners of NewPage, there are different groups and they come with different sets of interest, but I think that amendment balanced those interests. I hope the bill that comes forward is representative of all of those interests, and we will wait to see it.

One final thought, Madam Speaker. There was another bill I put forward during this sitting, and that was to give better information to defined benefit pension plan members each year - not a full actuarial review of the pension plan, but an overview of what happened in the past year and how it is affecting the plan. With better information we relieve the frustration that some of those defined benefit pension plan members, like those in HRM and in our provincial government, feel when they don't know what's going on inside their plan. As we saw with the NewPage workers, there was a great deal of frustration when they didn't know what was going on with their plan.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. MARILYN MORE: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to stand in the Chamber and talk about this very relevant topic. It's interesting, because I now meet people on the sidewalk and at receptions and social events who want to talk about pensions. It's a very relevant and critical issue for many of us.

It's unfortunate, though, that the resolution that we are currently debating is one that is not factual. It's inaccurate because the premise is suggesting that we have made a decision about municipal pensions, and that is not the case. So I just want to remind members that last Fall we passed the Pension Benefits Act, and I clearly stated at that time that the Department of Labour and Advanced Education would be continuing with consultations about the regulations. We are in that process and I'm pleased to say that we are getting to the final stages of the consultation and that we expect to have the regulations - we'll proclaim the Act and bring in the regulations by the end of summer or early Fall, probably. So there has been no decision made about the regulations as it impacts on

municipalities, and in particular Halifax Regional Municipality, which is the basis of the resolution today.

I do want to set a little bit of context here. This is not a new issue, and I'm sure members in the Chamber who formerly served as municipal councillors, especially those within Halifax Regional Municipality, know that this is an ongoing issue, and I'm sure they have been following the issue over the years.

Our department has had regular and continuing discussions with the plan administrator for HRM. We have received a number of communications from members of that plan. We fully appreciate and understand their position, but I just want to mention as well that we have a responsibility - as the regulator for private pension plans, and also plans that come out of the universities and affect municipalities - we have a responsibility to do a very thorough consultation with those who will be impacted by the regulations, and as I said, that consultation is ongoing.

As a government, we have made accommodations for the HRM pension plan over the years. At the same time, I just want to mention that there's a reason for these valuation tests, and that is - as I have been reminded many times by the chair of the pension panel, Bill Black - that when an organization, a level of government, or a business promises certain benefits for the beneficiaries of their pension plan, they have the ultimate responsibility to make sure they have the assets to cover those promises. I am somewhat reassured by the previous speaker, the member for Inverness, for his understanding of the caution necessary when you're the regulator to move forward with any amendments or changes.

I want to say, we're also consulting with the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities. They are very aware that their members are in different stages, in terms of having defined benefits, defined contributions. They know there is currently relief, that it impacts on municipalities and they have asked us for a decision before 2016. I want to repeat that, before 2016, because the solvency relief will not run out until that time. That has enabled us to use a more thorough process in dealing with the proposed regulations as they impact on municipalities, as different from the universities, so the timeline is quite different. The pressures are different.

I want to say, Madam Speaker, that three years ago HRM asked for more time for its pension plans to recover from the ravages of the economic downturn. They wanted three years without solvency payments, followed by seven years of makeup payments and we granted that request. However, as we all know, time did not fix that funding crunch and the financial recovery has not been as quick as some had hoped - as all of us had hoped.

We also acknowledge that the one size fits all approach that previous governments took to pension reform was ineffective. So since taking office in 2009, our government has

had to bring forward a number of band-aid regulations to address shortcomings of the old legislation.

I have to say, Madam Speaker, one of the reasons we have taken our time on this is because there has been considerable transformation, review, and change happening in the jurisdictions around us, particularly in Ontario. Because many Nova Scotians also have combined plans, some of them originate in Ontario and what happens in Ontario impacts on many retirees here in our province, so it's very important that we stay in sync with what's happening across Canada and also in other jurisdictions outside of Canada. We're taking our time, we are understanding the impacts, we're trying to do the best practices, and certainly Nova Scotians will benefit from that.

As I mentioned earlier, Madam Speaker, we passed a brand new Pension Benefits Act last Fall and it makes it easier for employers to offer pension plans and it addresses the concerns that organizations such as HRM and Dalhousie have raised with us, in terms of the larger issues. The details will be known as soon as the regulations come into effect, and I said the timeline now is probably at the latest, late summer to early Fall.

We recognize that many municipalities with defined pension plans are having difficulty meeting their legal solvency requirements, while still balancing their books in terms of the operations of the programs and services that municipalities provide, but I want to go back to the main point. These solvency requirements exist to protect employees and retirees and we cannot get away, as a regulator, from that basic premise.

Now we agree, HRM, Halifax has been going strong since 1749 and we don't see any change in that viability any time soon, but we also have to be mindful that HRM - like other municipalities, like other businesses and organizations - has an aging workforce and certainly that's going to have a great impact on their pensions as well.

Madam Speaker, I just want to finish by saying, just reaffirming that pension plans have been seriously affected by the global economic downturn and the continuing low interest rates. We recognize that municipalities with defined pension plans are having difficulty meeting those requirements. We have accommodated and given them a solvency relief until 2016 and we've been working very closely with municipalities and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities and other public organizations to fully understand their pressure but also to encourage them to take responsibility for, perhaps, some reform and changes that they need to do themselves in order to be able to cover the benefits that they have promised their employees and their retirees. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The time allotted for late debate has elapsed and I thank all members for a good debate this afternoon.

The House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 2:25 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 902**

By: Hon. Keith Colwell (Preston)

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

Whereas Phyllis Colley was born and brought up in North Preston and moved to East Preston when she married and it was here she and Albert raised their 12 children; and

Whereas Phyllis was baptised more than 50 years ago and served in the church choir for some 30 years and the church missionary group for 30 years; and

Whereas Phyllis was one of the charter members of the East Preston Senior Citizen's Club;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House formally acknowledge the many contributions that Phyllis Colley has made to her church and to her community for over the past 30 years.

RESOLUTION NO. 903

By: Mr. Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas on the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the *Titanic*, students from Baddeck Academy opened a production held on April 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th to educate residents on the ill-fated voyage of April 15th, 1912; and

Whereas 25 junior and senior students, directed by teacher Jason Kempt, brought the *Titanic* to life based on a book written by Peter Stone with music and lyrics by Maury Yeston; and

Whereas since the *Titanic* is such a major historical event, many residents of the Baddeck area were able to experience what happened on that fatal day while proud members of the cast recreated the moment;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly applaud and congratulate director Jason Kempt, cast members Morgan Bishop, Dylan Burke, Kendall Cogan, Sean Donovan, Emma Flynn, Cassidy Fraser, Bhreagh Fuller, Emily Gillis,

Madison Grant, Fiona Kerr, Caleb MacCormack, Donnelle MacKinnon, Katie MacLean, Leah MacLeod, Tyler Newell, Jenny Nicholson, Tiffany Noble, Rebecca Phillips, Dan Ritter, Amy Urquhart and crew members Dakota Bernard, Laken Cameron, Malcolm MacKenzie, Steven Maufort and Mark Trickett on a job well done.

RESOLUTION NO. 904

By: Hon. Keith Colwell (Preston)

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

Whereas Betty Nauffts was born and brought up in Halifax until she married and moved to Dartmouth where she and her husband brought up their son Jeffrey; and

Whereas Betty worked for many years in the nursing field until retirement; and

Whereas Betty found time to volunteer with the St. John Ambulance Association, St. John's Anglican Church Ladies Auxiliary, the RCMP's Seniors' Safety program, Victims' Services and also as a school board trustee;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize the many contributions that Betty Nauffts has accomplished for her community and Nova Scotia.

RESOLUTION NO. 905

By: Hon. Keith Colwell (Preston)

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

Whereas Dawn O' Hearn grew up in New Brunswick and moved to Nova Scotia to finish her education as a respiratory therapist and later completed her science degree majoring in psychology; and

Whereas she married Kerry O'Hearn and they moved to Lake Echo where they raised their two children and presently works for Trudell Medical Marketing as a marketing manager for Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island; and

Whereas she was a charter member of the Lake Echo Lioness Club and was and is the Chair of the Professional Conduct Committee for Respiratory Therapists;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House formally acknowledge the hard work and service of Dawn O'Hearn for the past 35 years.

RESOLUTION NO. 906

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 the Truro Rotary Club's prestigious Paul Harris Fellowship, an award usually reserved for Rotary members, is occasionally given to honour a non-Rotarian who has given extensively in some way to the Rotary Club; and

Whereas Ken Eisner of Valley, Colchester North, has provided space for the club's annual major fundraising auction for almost a decade; and

Whereas Eisner's business acumen is evident from his many successful property development projects and he has also served on numerous charitable boards and been involved in countless other community-minded deeds and functions;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Ken Eisner for being honoured by the Truro Rotary Club by receiving its prestigious Paul Harris Fellowship and for his commitment to improving his community through the generous donation of his time, talents, and resources.

RESOLUTION NO. 907

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 Lyn Sutherland of Tatamagouche, Colchester North, teaches environmental and social studies, French, and music at Wallace Consolidated Elementary School; and

Whereas Sutherland has started an edible garden at the school, leads the school choir, teaches students to play guitar, and has introduced the knitting club; and

Whereas Sutherland also organizes a youth art show in the community by collecting art from the local schools and displaying it at the Cultural Centre in Tatamagouche;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Lyn Sutherland for being chosen to receive a well-deserved provincial teaching award.

RESOLUTION NO. 908

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 members of the Great Village Garden Club have long been known for their “green thumbs” and for their widely-anticipated annual Spring plant sale; and

Whereas the club’s activities over the years have also included a wildflower contest at Great Village Elementary School, perking up the grounds at the Elizabeth Bishop House, tending the war memorial grounds, and supporting the 4-H floriculture competition at the Nova Scotia provincial exhibition; and

Whereas in April of this year, the Great Village Garden Club is celebrating its 60th Anniversary;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Great Village Garden Club on their milestone anniversary and encourage them to continue with their numerous projects which provide beauty and enjoyment for everyone.

RESOLUTION NO. 909

By: Ms. Karen Casey (Colchester North)

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

Whereas the Canspell National Spelling Bee has been held annually in Canada since 2005; and

Whereas the Postmedia Canspell National Spelling Bee is administered and managed by the Postmedia Network, Canada’s newest media company, and the country’s largest publisher of paid English language daily newspapers; and

Whereas regional finals are held in 21 Canadian cities from Vancouver to Saint John’s, and the winner in each regional participates in the national final;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of assembly congratulate Ryan Spencer, a Grade 5 student at West Colchester Consolidated School in Bass River, Colchester North, for being selected as a competitor at the regional finals held in Halifax.

RESOLUTION NO. 910

By: Ms. Karen Casey (Colchester North)

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

Whereas the Canspell National Spelling Bee has been held annually in Canada since 2005; and

Whereas the Postmedia Canspell National Spelling Bee is administered and managed by the Postmedia Network, Canada's newest media company, and the country's largest publisher of paid English language daily newspapers; and

Whereas regional finals are held in 21 Canadian cities from Vancouver to Saint John's, and the winner in each regional participates in the national final;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of assembly congratulate Alex Deshaw, a Grade 6 student at Redcliff Middle School in Valley, Colchester North, for being selected as a competitor at the regional finals held in Halifax.

RESOLUTION NO. 911

By: Ms. Karen Casey (Colchester North)

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

Whereas the Canspell National Spelling Bee has been held annually in Canada since 2005; and

Whereas the Postmedia Canspell National Spelling Bee is administered and managed by the Postmedia Network, Canada's newest media company, and the country's largest publisher of paid English language daily newspapers; and

Whereas regional finals are held in 21 Canadian cities from Vancouver to Saint John's, and the winner in each regional participates in the national final;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of assembly congratulate Cassidy Gallagher, a Grade 8 student at Central Colchester Junior High School in Onslow, Colchester North, for being selected as a competitor at the regional finals held in Halifax.

RESOLUTION NO. 912

By: Ms. Karen Casey (Colchester North)

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

Whereas the Canspell National Spelling Bee has been held annually in Canada since 2005; and

Whereas the Postmedia Canspell National Spelling Bee is administered and managed by the Postmedia Network, Canada's newest media company, and the country's largest publisher of paid English language daily newspapers; and

Whereas regional finals are held in 21 Canadian cities from Vancouver to Saint John's, and the winner in each regional participates in the national final;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of assembly congratulate Mari Budgey, a Grade 6 student at North River Elementary School in Colchester North, for being selected as a competitor at the regional finals held in Halifax.

RESOLUTION NO. 913

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 the Nova Scotia Agricultural College has gained international fame for the excellent academic standards it maintains; and

Whereas students must be enrolled in four or more courses per semester, must be in the top 10 per cent of their program of study, and must have an average of 80 per cent or higher to be included on the President's List; and

Whereas Nova Scotians can be proud of the academic excellence of these students and look to them as skilled, creative, well-prepared future leaders;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Connor MacCallum of Valley, Colchester North, a second-year engineering student, for being named to the Nova Scotia Agricultural College President's List for the Fall and winter semesters of 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 914

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 the Nova Scotia Agricultural College has gained international fame for the excellent academic standards it maintains; and

Whereas students must be enrolled in four or more courses per semester, must be in the top 10 per cent of their program of study, and must have an average of 80 per cent or higher to be included on the President's List; and

Whereas Nova Scotians can be proud of the academic excellence of these students and look to them as skilled, creative, well-prepared future leaders;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Thomas Herrington of Debert, Colchester North, a second-year Bachelor of Science (Agriculture) bio-systems management student, for being named to the Nova Scotia Agricultural College President's List for the Fall and winter semesters of 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 915

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 the Nova Scotia Agricultural College has gained international fame for the excellent academic standards it maintains; and

Whereas students must be enrolled in four or more courses per semester, must be in the top 10 per cent of their program of study, and must have an average of 80 per cent or higher to be included on the President's List; and

Whereas Nova Scotians can be proud of the academic excellence of these students and look to them as skilled, creative, well-prepared future leaders;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate William MacKenzie of Debert, Colchester North, a second-year engineering student, for being named to the Nova Scotia Agricultural College President's List for the Fall and winter semesters of 2011.

RESOLUTION NO. 916

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

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

Whereas the Ladies Fire Auxiliary members work diligently at fundraising to help provide the necessities to ensure the safety and efficiency of the local fire brigade;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Audrey Fields, a member of the Great Village and District Fire Commissioner, and a member of the Great Village and District Womens' Fire Auxiliary for receiving a plaque in appreciation for 30 years of personal sacrifice and dedication to the fire service of Nova Scotia.

RESOLUTION NO. 917

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 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 risk their lives, have taken on the role of first responders, and deal with incidents of great emotional stress; and

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

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate manager Jennifer Fancy of Wilson's Fuel of Great Village, Colchester North, for being presented with the Steve Francis Award by the Great Village and District Fire Brigade.

RESOLUTION NO. 918

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 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 risk their lives, have taken on the role of first responders, and deal with incidents of great emotional stress; and

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

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Jeremy Smith of the Great Village and District Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving the Firefighter of the Year Award, Most Improved Firefighter Award and a Five Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 919

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 Brandon Slack of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving a Five Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 920

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 Colin Jennings of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving a Five Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 921

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 Gordon Myers of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving a 10 Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 922

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 Chris Geldart of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving the Wendell Barnhill Most Improved Firefighter Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 923

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 Donna LeBlanc of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving Firefighter of the Year Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 924

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 Frank MacMichael of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving his 40 Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 925

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 Chief Wade Jennings of the Debert Fire Brigade, Colchester North, for receiving his 20 Year Service Award.

RESOLUTION NO. 926

By: Mr. Leo Glavine (Kings West)

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

Whereas Jessica Avery is a good all-around athlete who is receiving more and more attention as a high-calibre hockey player; and

Whereas Jessica had an outstanding season as a member of West Kings as the league's top scorer and a second place finish for her team; and

Whereas the Valley High School Hockey League recognized Jessica's outstanding season and love of the game when she was named Player of the Year at their annual banquet;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Jessica Avery on her hockey accomplishments and wish her every success in future endeavours.

RESOLUTION NO. 927

By: Ms. Diana Whalen (Halifax Clayton Park)

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

Whereas the Willett Street Reserve Committee was formed at a neighbourhood meeting of concerned citizens on December 2, 2010, with the objective of preserving a passive recreation reserve area for the continued use and benefit of area residents; and

Whereas this volunteer citizens committee sprang up in response to the HRM proposal to clear the land and blast away the existing bedrock to construct a transit terminal on the Willett Street parkland reserve; and

Whereas in order to address the issue and lobby to overturn the threat of parkland destruction, community volunteers organized themselves into four effective subcommittees; HRM Relations, Media Relations, Environmental Liaison and Community Liaison;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate the Willett Street Reserve Committee for lobbying to maintain the natural lands in their neighbourhood and showing the determination needed to press the HRM to choose a more appropriate location for the terminal.

RESOLUTION NO. 928

By: Ms. Diana Whalen (Halifax Clayton Park)

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

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

Whereas on May 2, 2012, Connie Boudreau was recognized for her community service and volunteerism with a Community Champion Award from the Mainland North Volunteer Recognition Committee for her work as a fundraiser at École Rockingham Elementary School and a soccer coach and a hockey coach with the Halifax Hawks Minor Hockey Association; and

Whereas Connie, a board member of Adsum for Women, is also a talented performer who has entertained seniors and others throughout HRM and as far away as the Villa Acadienne in Meteghan, as a member of the Mother Pluckers Music and Hockey Society, a non-profit band whose members share a mission to be positive role models of aging through music;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House congratulate Connie Boudreau on receiving a 2012 Community Champion Award for her significant contributions to her community through her music, coaching and involvement in her children's school and wish her continued success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 929

By: Ms. Diana Whalen (Halifax Clayton Park)

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

Whereas Pet Valu Clayton Park has been providing excellent service and value to pet owners and pets since opening in the area in March 2011; and

Whereas owner Allyson Smith of Halifax and the employees at Pet Valu Clayton Park have taken up the cause of homeless pets by actively creating awareness about the SPCA and pet adoption; and

Whereas Allyson and her staff at Pet Valu Clayton Park are committed to and inspired by the work of the SPCA and have initiated fundraising projects year-round to help the cause of finding good homes for abandoned and homeless animals;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in applauding Allyson Smith and the employees of Pet Valu Clayton Park for their great service to their customers and their commitment to increasing awareness of pet adoption and wish them every success in the future.