



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordie Gosse

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Fifth Session

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2013

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2013

Sixty-first General Assembly

Fifth Session

2:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordie Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we start the daily routine, I would like to make an introduction. In the Speaker's Gallery today, from Cape Breton, we have the mayor and councillors visiting all the caucuses here in Halifax. So as I introduce you I'd ask you to stand, and we'll applaud at the end of the introduction.

In my gallery, from the CBRM, the Cape Breton Regional Municipality: Mayor Cecil Clarke; Deputy Mayor Kevin Saccary; Councillor Claire Detheridge; Councillor Mae Rowe; Councillor Darren Bruckswaiger; Councillor Jim Macleod; Councillor Lowell Cormier; Councillor Charlie Keagan; Councillor Ivan Doncaster; Councillor Eldon MacDonald; Wayne MacDonald, Director, Engineering and Public Works. I don't see our Communications and Mayor's Office staff, Mark Bettens - there we are. I'd like them to have a warm welcome here today. (Applause)

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

I will now read the subject matter for late debate, as submitted by the honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville:

Therefore be it resolved that the government should be congratulated on successfully achieving its Back to Balance targets, and delivering a balanced budget for Nova Scotians.

We will begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act.

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, before making my statement I beg leave to make an introduction.

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MS. MORE: Thank you. I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Penny Milton who is with us in the gallery today - Penny, if you would stand. Ms. Milton is one of the two experts the province has named to review the approach of the Halifax Regional School Board and associated agencies to the events that lead to the recent tragic death of a student. I am pleased that Ms. Milton is able to be with us here today and that this important work is underway, so I would encourage my colleagues to give her a warm welcome to Nova Scotia. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister responsible for Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act.

HON. MARILYN MORE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today about an issue that has touched every member in this House and affects everyone we represent in our constituencies. A lot

of the discussion is focused on cyberbullying and technology, which are changing the world around us at a rapid pace, but technology is only a tool. The reason that technology tools are used to cause hurt and harm link to broader issues around sexual violence, issues that have evolved over generations and are not unique to Nova Scotia. They require a collective, continuing effort and I appreciate the cooperation and support of every member of this House. I am asking all members today, government and opposition alike, to join my commitment to do whatever I can to better protect young girls and all victims of violence and bullying.

Yesterday the Premier and the Parsons family were in Ottawa, meeting with the Prime Minister. I am told those meetings went very well. It is clear that the Prime Minister sees this issue in very much the same way we do and he understands the concerns that we have about the gaps that exist in the criminal code. The Prime Minister has told the Premier that the federal government intends to move forward with legislation that would address the kinds of concerns that we, and so many Nova Scotians, have. I'm encouraged by the Prime Minister's willingness to work together to lower the risk that any family ever has to go through something like this again.

Mr. Speaker, Rehtaeh's story is not an easy one to listen to, but what society has to come to terms with is that the alleged activities that gave rise to this tragedy could be criminal activities and that they need to be considered. Today our Minister of Justice is there with his federal counterpart continuing our push for changes to the criminal code that would make the distribution of intimate images without consent, a crime. Our government will soon introduce legislation to ensure women, girls, and all Nova Scotians are better protected against bullying and cyberbullying.

Today I am pleased to tell the honourable members that the independent review of the response by the Halifax Regional School Board, IWK, Capital Health, and associated agencies, to this tragic event, is underway. This review will take a close look at what's missing and what changes are needed. I rose last week to announce that two national experts, Debra Pepler and Penny Milton, were chosen for this work. Both have tremendous experience and expertise to share and I am pleased Ms. Milton is in the province today to get this important work underway. I look forward to the interim report by May 10th and a final report by June 14th.

Mr. Speaker, much more work is underway but I also do not want to lose sight of the tremendous work going on already around the province. We will also continue to heed good advice from women's groups, community groups, young people, and people like Wayne MacKay and the taskforce members. They spent countless hours talking and thinking about this issue and we will continue to benefit from and act on their advice. To quote Mr. MacKay, "Bullying is a major social issue throughout the world and is one of the symptoms of a deeper problem in our society - the deterioration of respectful and responsible human relations."

Nova Scotia is not alone in the need to respond to this tremendous challenge but I'm inspired by the countless groups and individual Nova Scotians who have reached out by e-mail, correspondence and phone or who stopped me in the street to say, what can I do?

This collective energy and will presents an opportunity to do things differently, to make a real difference and to better protect girls, women and all Nova Scotians against bullying, cyberbullying and all forms of violence. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for sending remarks to this office and for the most recent edits just before presentation, I appreciate that.

We did respond to a very similar statement by a minister in this House on April 11th and at that time the Official Opposition Leader and members of this Liberal caucus pledged our full support to the minister in her efforts to move this file forward. At that time it was acknowledged that the previous ministers who had the leads on this file, i.e. Education and Justice, had this file transferred to the Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. We, as a caucus, welcomed that.

The minister has stated however in her statement today that, "Our government will soon introduce legislation to ensure women, girls and all Nova Scotians are better protected against bullying and cyberbullying." This caucus could not agree more. Our issue is that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has had two opportunities - one in April and one in October 2012 - to do that by introducing legislation which has been recognized to be very weak.

In response in the statement of April 18th, our caucus noted that those opportunities were 14 months overdue. There was the government task force with a broad range of expertise and that task force presented a report with 85 recommendations to the Minister of Education back in February 2012. Members of that task force, including the chairman, Wayne MacKay, have been less than impressed by this government's weak response. Parents asked the government at that time to accept recommendations from the task force and the all-Party Committee on Law Amendments heard from one of those parents who had suffered the tragic loss of her daughter who took her own life as a result of bullying and cyberbullying.

She pleaded with the Committee on Law Amendments to begin discussions with the federal government on changes to the Criminal Code. The NDP members absolutely refused to support that amendment. There have been other young girls whose families have looked to this government for help, however, it was not until the most recent and tragic case which, in the Premier's own words, garnered international attention, that he decided to begin the discussions in Ottawa regarding the Criminal Code.

Parents are questioning why the Premier did not show leadership when the task force Recommendation 44 was presented 14 months ago. That recommendation reads, “It is recommended that the provincial Minister of Justice make representations to the federal Minister of Justice about evaluating the effectiveness of current *Criminal Code* provisions in responding to bullying and cyberbullying and exploring the pros and cons of a distinct crime of bullying and cyberbullying.”

The question that Nova Scotians have, why was that recommendation not accepted and acted upon 14 months ago? Another question is, why did the legislation that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development introduced as a result of that task force’s recommendations not address the very issue? As I stated in my response to the minister’s statement of April 18th, it is time to take meaningful action, we cannot fail another young person in this province and I know the minister believes that.

The Liberal caucus supports, as we have said, any real steps this government will take to protect our young people.

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and speak to the minister’s statement about cyberbullying and technology today, including sexual violence against our young people. The world is certainly a very different place than when many of us, all of us in this Chamber went to school, started out in life. I know that we all are determined to see that our laws federally and provincially are modernized to reflect today’s reality and protect the 21st Century’s version of young Nova Scotians. Indeed, there are gaps in the Criminal Code that need to be closed. I know the Premier and I have both communicated to the Prime Minister of Canada about the need to modernize the Criminal Code.

When we do those things as fellow Nova Scotians, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the minister that we speak as one voice when in Ottawa. My dad is from Pictou County, and he taught me when I was young that we may argue like cats and dogs between Stellarton and New Glasgow, Pictou and so on, but when you get over Mount Thom, we’re all from Pictou County. When Nova Scotians go to Ottawa, as yesterday, to seek changes to the Criminal Code, we are all as one, so I am pleased that we have been able to add our voice to the Parsons family and to the Premier in seeking those changes, that we need to protect our young people in the Criminal Code.

Changes to the Criminal Code will take time. They don’t happen overnight. I am pleased to note that the federal Minister of Justice, Mr. Nicholson, said today that he wants to see a complete set of changes enacted by the end of June. In national terms, that is relatively quick action to protect our young people, and I applaud Mr. Nicholson for that.

The same is true of the laws of Nova Scotia. There are gaps in our own provincial laws that don't reflect today's 21st Century modern reality of cyberbullying and technology. I call on the minister and the government to take similar action with our provincial laws, and particularly to take aim at providing our law enforcement officials, our prosecutors, and our schools with all the tools of early intervention and prevention, to do what we can as a province to prevent these activities before they become criminal and the Criminal Code needs to take over.

Provincially, we can define bullying and cyberbullying in law and make it an offence, and spell out to bullies the consequences of their actions. Provincially, we can give our law enforcement officials, our schools, and our teachers the tools they need. To give our judges the tools they need to intervene before it ever gets to the criminal level such as the power to confiscate laptops and cellphones when they're used as weapons against our own children, the power to shut down Internet accounts when they're also used as weapons against our own children. That would be an important step to modernizing the laws of Nova Scotia. These are actions within the power of the Province of Nova Scotia, and I encourage the minister and the government to take them now.

Mr. Speaker, we could also show that we are truly leaders in this province by adapting all of the recommendations of the MacKay task force report and not just some, including those that specifically spell out what needs to be done to intervene in our schools before bullying gets to the criminal level.

Protecting our children is the number one job of all of us, as parents, and I know that every member knows that. So too is it true of government, that protecting our young people is the number one job of a responsible and active government.

A few weeks ago Nova Scotia made the national - and indeed, international - news for tragic reasons. Now is the time for action. Now is the time for Nova Scotia to be a leader in the prevention and intervention of cases when we see it, of criminal activity, of bullying and cyberbullying, and all of the harmful effects that we are reminded of far too often.

I sincerely hope that the minister is bringing forward positive, active, constructive, action-oriented legislation in this session of the Legislature, so Nova Scotia truly can be that leader in the protection of our children that we all aspire to be. Thank you very much.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Seniors.

RESOLUTION NO. 776

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

Whereas Esther Chute celebrated her 100th birthday at the Berwick Fire Hall April 21st in the afternoon with hundreds of friends and family, following a late night of square dancing and after attending her morning church service; and

Whereas Esther has dedicated her life to serving her community, and in fact was awarded the Provincial Volunteer Award in 2011, and has recently been honoured by her community in her 100th year for her unfailing volunteer work, and is an active member of her square dancing group, Belles 'n' Beaus, as well as the Women's Institute; and

Whereas Esther is known for communication skills through her cards, notes, and letters, and she is now excited about learning how to use a computer so she can keep in touch with her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren with her new computer;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in congratulating Esther Chute from Berwick on her 100th birthday, and wish her continued good health and happiness for years to come.

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 Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 777

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

Whereas non-profit organizations across the province provide services to many of Nova Scotia's most vulnerable; and

Whereas every day Feed Nova Scotia helps many individuals and families make ends meet by providing healthy food and groceries; and

Whereas Dianne Swinemar recently announced that she is stepping down as executive director of the Feed Nova Scotia board after 20 years of dedicated work with the organization;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join together in congratulating Dianne Swinemar on her successful career with Feed Nova Scotia, and thank her for her years of hard work and dedication providing food for Nova Scotians most in need.

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 the Public Service Commission.

RESOLUTION NO. 778

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

Whereas Nova Scotia has 165 agencies, boards, and commissions that play an important role in the province through their quasi-judicial responsibilities and by providing advice to government on a wide range of subjects; and

Whereas these organizations rely mostly on dedicated Nova Scotians to volunteer their time, expertise, and experience, and would benefit from representation from a range of backgrounds and demographics; and

Whereas the province is currently seeking applications for present vacancies and openings that arise in agencies, boards, and commissions over the coming year, and is encouraging women and members of under-represented groups in particular to apply;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly encourage all Nova Scotians, and in particular women and those from under-represented groups, to get involved and learn more about opportunities for civic engagement, including putting their name forward to be considered for one of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions.

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 Gaelic Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 779

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

Whereas today, April 24th, a new exhibit called Na Gàidheil an Albainn Nuaidh - The Gaels in Nova Scotia, opened at the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, and will run throughout Gaelic Awareness Month in May; and

Whereas the new exhibit shows how the Gaels, who settled throughout eastern Nova Scotia, proudly passed their language, culture, and traditions down through the generations, and have persisted through great adversity; and

Whereas Nova Scotia's Gaelic community has a strong, unbroken connection to the past, as well as the energy of young community members who will carry the Gaelic spirit into the future;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House of Assembly thank all of the contributors for helping to bring the Gaels in Nova Scotia exhibit together for Nova Scotia families, and wish all Nova Scotians a great Gaelic Awareness Month.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 780

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

Whereas across Canada four out of every 20,000 people are diagnosed with sarcoidosis, an autoimmune inflammatory disease that affects anyone of any age, race, or gender; and

Whereas April marks Sarcoidosis Awareness Month in Nova Scotia and across Canada, a month to bring added awareness to this debilitating and often misunderstood disease; and

Whereas the National Sarcoidosis Organization encourages everyone to wear purple and white to show support for the day of awareness during the month;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize the month of April as Sarcoidosis Awareness Month and the dedicated work of the members of the National Sarcoidosis Organization to raise awareness of this disease.

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 Education and Early Childhood Development.

RESOLUTION NO. 781

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

Whereas involving students and teachers in activities that promote sustainability, creative thinking, and teamwork, is key to ensuring a prosperous future for both students and this province; and

Whereas the Resource Recovery Fund Board recently held its contest, Nova Scotia Recycles, aimed at teachers and students; and

Whereas over 8,600 entries from 220 schools were received by the contest judging committee;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House congratulate and thank the students and teachers for taking action and promoting waste reduction in their community by participating in the Resource Recovery Fund Board's 2012-13 Nova Scotia Recycles contest.

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. 782

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

Whereas library users now have access to a large collection of French-language e-books by French Canadian authors, courtesy of a partnership between the Nova Scotia Provincial Library and the Office of Acadian Affairs; and

Whereas the Provincial Library had been looking into options to build on its collections of French-language e-books available to library patrons across the province through its digital media collection Web site; and

Whereas the partnership resulted in the purchase of 204 titles that are accessible through nine regional library boards and delivered through the Provincial Library's digital media collection Web site to users across the province;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly join me in recognizing this partnership between the Nova Scotia Provincial Library and the Office of Acadian Affairs which will support lifelong learning in the Acadian and francophone community by improving access to French-language e-books and French Canadian literature, fostering the development of the French language and culture in Nova Scotia.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 783

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

Whereas National Immunization Awareness Week occurs in Canada between April 20th and April 27th; and

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

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

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

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

RESOLUTION NO. 784

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

Whereas a number of schools in Nova Scotia participated in the 7th annual WOW! Reading Challenge, sponsored by the Adopt-a-Library Literacy Program; and

Whereas 87 schools with 14,000 students participated, the majority being from Nova Scotia but including schools from as far away as Medicine Hat, Alberta, and South Africa; and

Whereas the Reading Challenge was hosted by the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library through a partnership with the RCMP, local policing agencies, schools, school boards, and community members;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House join me in congratulating all schools and students who participated in promoting a culture of reading in this province, thus contributing to more literate communities.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on an introduction.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to draw the attention of the House to the west gallery where visiting today is Adrian White. Adrian is a young man who enjoys politics. His father has the good fortune of working with me but I want to assure everybody in this House that it was his mother who gave him permission to be out of school today to be here to get his real education. Adrian, welcome, and I'd ask everyone to give him a warm welcome. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: We welcome all our guests to the gallery and hope the young lad enjoys this afternoon's proceedings.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 59 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 3 of the Acts of 1987. The Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation (Nova Scotia) Act. (Hon. Charlie Parker)

Bill No. 60 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Residential Tenancies Act. (Ms. Diana Whalen)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 785

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

Whereas today, April 24th, is Administrative Professionals Day, a day which recognizes and celebrates the work of secretaries, administrative assistants, and other office professionals for their invaluable contributions to the workplace; and

Whereas administrative professionals play a critical role in coordinating the office operations of our MLA and caucus offices, government, businesses, educational and health-related institutions, and countless other organizations; and

Whereas day in and day out administrative professionals are on the front lines acting as invaluable ambassadors for our workplaces, keeping us on time and organized, and are living proof, every day, that an organization is only as strong as its parts;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House acknowledge today, April 24th, as Administrative Professionals Day, and extend our appreciation to all administrative professionals for the critical roles they play in not only our success but in the success of companies and organizations across our province.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

RESOLUTION NO. 786

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

Whereas the Cape Breton Regional Municipality has presented the provincial and federal governments with a five-year capital plan; and

Whereas this plan will equate to over 700 direct and indirect jobs in a depressed area of our province that is currently struggling with an 18.6 per cent unemployment rate; and

Whereas the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations has committed to 25 per cent of the cost of the plan;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House support the commitment made by the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations beginning this year

so that the Cape Breton Regional Municipality can go forward immediately with their capital plan.

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 Finance.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Most certainly.

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: I am very pleased to draw the members' attention to the east gallery where we have some very special guests with us today. I'm going to read their names and as I read their name, I would ask them to stand and then receive the warm welcome of the House. With us today are the members of the Hope Blooms group who make herb salad dressing in the North End of Halifax. They are Craig Cain, Tiffany Calvin, Christiana Hubley, Folayemi Kolawole-Boboye, Kolade Kolawole-Boboye, Bocar Wade, and Mamadou Wade, and they are accompanied by their leaders, Jessie Jollymore and Sarina Piercy. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Finance.

RESOLUTION NO. 787

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

Whereas the North End Community Garden in Halifax was founded in 2007 as an initiative of the North End Community Health Centre and is where Hope Blooms Fresh Herb Salad Dressing is an initiative of young people of the community who have tended

their own gardens for the past three seasons, as well as making and selling their very own brand of delicious salad dressing, and who now want to take their enterprise to the next level; and

Whereas CBC TV's hit program *Dragon's Den* provides an opportunity for courageous, aspiring entrepreneurs to pitch their business concepts and products to a panel of Canadian business moguls who have the cash and the know-how to make things happen, if they're impressed; and

Whereas seven young people and three adults from Hope Blooms will be travelling this week to Toronto to make a pitch to the "Dragons in their Den" which will be broadcast on CBC TV in weeks to come;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Hope Blooms Fresh team going to Toronto, as well as all of the children and community members who have worked on the North End Community Garden and on Hope Blooms as well as the supporting organization and individuals, and wish the Hope Blooms team great success when they enter the *Dragon's Den*.

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. (Standing Ovation)

I would like to remind all our guests in the galleries that under the Rules of the House, they are not to show either approval or disapproval on anything here that happens on the floor. They are the Rules of the Assembly.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove on an introduction.

MS. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the members' attention to the west gallery of the House where we have yet another group of very impressive students. These students are here from Bedford Junior High. They are part of Team 35. Now Noah Bugden is not us today, his flight was delayed, but we have Robin Wells - please stand as your name is called - Tristan Kays, Aiden Deveau and their teacher, Julia Hill. I have a resolution that I would like to read explaining what the team is about.

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

RESOLUTION NO. 788

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

Whereas Noah Bugden, Robin Wells, Tristan Kays and Aiden Deveau, all Grade 7 students at Bedford Junior High School, entered a science fair called The Destination Imagination Challenge; and

Whereas these four boys, who call themselves Team 35, won first place at the Twist-O-Rama engineering category of the competition, by building a structure out of duct tape and bamboo, which weighed less than 150 grams and held more than 550 grams of weight; and

Whereas Team 35, along with one other team, was chosen to represent Nova Scotia at the Destination Imagination Global Finals this May in Knoxville, Tennessee;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate teacher Julia Hill and team members Noah Bugden, Robin Wells, Tristan Kays, and Aiden Deveau on their engineering prowess and wish them best of luck in the international competition.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings West on an introduction.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw the attention of the House to the west gallery where Amy Graves is seated. Of course she is a great advocate in the prescription drug issue. Along with her are the parents of the late Olivia Jollota, Dale Jollota and Tom Adams, who will now join Amy with advocacy and education, if we could give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Glace Bay.

RESOLUTION NO. 789

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

Whereas Frankie MacDonald, resident of Sydney and someone who is very familiar to you, Mr. Speaker, and the Whitney Pier Youth Club, has become famous for his weather-reporting You Tube videos; and

Whereas Frankie's commitment to weather reporting is recognized by his thousands of fans across the world and his videos have been featured on both Canadian and American newscasts; and

Whereas today is Frankie's birthday;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate Frankie MacDonald on his international success, and wish him the best of luck in future weather reporting and a very happy birthday.

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

MR. SPEAKER: And he'll probably want his Senators to win the cup.

There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton West.

RESOLUTION NO. 790

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

Whereas Sunday marked the official beginning of 300 celebrations of the founding of Île Royale, now known as modern-day Cape Breton Island, with Louisbourg as its capital; and

Whereas Louisbourg has been perched on the edge of the continent for 300 years and was a bustling seaport and hub for trade and commerce on the Atlantic, a multicultural, multilingual community, and France's prize in the New World; and

Whereas today Louisbourg is North America's largest historical reconstruction, where thousands of visitors interact with costumed animators immersed in the sights, sounds, and smells of this once mighty 18th Century fortress;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the organizers of this very special anniversary and show their support by wearing the pins that are on their desks to promote this very special occasion.

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 Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

RESOLUTION NO. 791

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

Whereas The ChronicleHerald hosted the 5th Annual Nova Scotia Spelling Bee at the Citadel High School Spatz Theatre on Saturday, March 30th; and

Whereas 54 students from across Nova Scotia competed for the Provincial Spelling Bee crown; and

Whereas Jack Dawe, a Grade 7 student at George P. Vanier School in Fall River competed;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in congratulating Jack Dawe on his accomplishments and wish him continued success.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton North.

RESOLUTION NO. 792

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

Whereas today is Administrative Professionals Day; and

Whereas this is an opportunity to recognize and show gratitude for the hard work and attention to detail of administrative staff; and

Whereas administrative professionals are the backbone of every workplace and are essential to every operation;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly acknowledge today as Administrative Professionals Day and take the time to thank our own administrative staff for everything they do and tell them that we couldn't do without them.

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 Education and Early Childhood Development.

RESOLUTION NO. 793

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

Whereas the Acadia Robot Programming Competitions' mission is to foster interest in computer programming, science, math, problem-solving, and teamwork amongst students in both junior and senior high schools; and

Whereas the 2012-13 iteration of the Acadian Robot Programming Competitions took place on February 2nd and featured over 50 teams from across Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the event was a spectacular success continuing to grow in size and scope with each passing year due to the efforts of events staff and organizers at the Jodrey School of Computer Science at Acadia University;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate all events staff, volunteers, sponsors, and participants for their contributions in making the 2012-13 Acadia Robot Programming Competitions in Wolfville a success and memorable learning experience.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Argyle.

RESOLUTION NO. 794

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

Whereas yesterday at Halifax City Hall, residents of Timberlea-Prospect spoke out loudly against any changes to the Otter Lake Waste Management Facility; and

Whereas the Otter Lake Waste Management Facility operates according to a permit issued by the Department of Environment; and

Whereas the member for Timberlea-Prospect and local councillors have diligently represented the concerns of local residents on this issue;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly direct the Minister of Environment to reject any requested changes to the Otter Lake Waste Management Facility operating permit that would remove the requirement of front-end separation and waste stabilization.

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 Energy.

RESOLUTION NO. 795

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

Whereas in the very cold month of December 2012, a hardy group of actors and a one-man film crew took to the roads and streets of Pictou County to be part of a short film written, directed, and edited by Chris Boulter of Lyons Brook, Pictou County; and

Whereas the short film is called *The Duffel Bag* and was filmed entirely in Pictou County using local actors, extras, and locations; and

Whereas on February 16, 2013, *The Duffel Bag* had a very successful screening to a large audience at the Pictou Legion, and future plans include submission to the 2013 Atlantic Film Festival and the 2013 Toronto Film Festival;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Chris Boulter of Lyons Brook, Pictou County, for writing, directing, and editing the short film *The Duffel Bag*, and wish him success in the upcoming film festivals.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

RESOLUTION NO. 796

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

Whereas today marks 98 years since the start of the Armenian Genocide; and

Whereas Armenian people around the world mark this day by remembering the more than one million people who were victims of mass murder and horrific ethnic cleansing; and

Whereas the Armenian people were subjected to forced deportation, expropriation, abduction, torture, and starvation;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House remember all those who were needlessly killed and let today serve as a reminder that we must do everything we can to protect our freedoms and eradicate prejudice and intolerance wherever it exists.

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 Guysborough-Sheet Harbour.

RESOLUTION NO. 797

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

Whereas the Sherbrooke Restoration Commission is a provincially-significant heritage attraction that preserves and interprets the rich past of Sherbrooke and oversees the planning of programs within the Sherbrooke Planning Area; and

Whereas Don Dunbar was the municipal representative on the Sherbrooke Restoration Commission for 11 years; and

Whereas on December 13, 2012, Sherbrooke Village held a Christmas dinner to celebrate Don Dunbar's retirement from this position after his long-time service to the restoration commission and the community of Sherbrooke;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly extend congratulations to Don Dunbar on his retirement and thank him for his dedicated service to both his position and his community, and wish him a happy and healthy retirement.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

RESOLUTION NO. 798

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

Whereas Eastern Passage resident and former École du Carrefour student Alicia LaPierre was part of Karim Amedjkouh's Grade 12 class, which came up with an idea to host a two-week summer camp for marginalized youth in Algeria; and

Whereas the class idea beat out 400 other nominations country-wide for a \$5,000 scholarship from the Education First Educational Tours "Teachers Matter" contest; and

Whereas Alicia, along with four other students and three teachers, will be heading to Algeria in August to host a camp for 15 disadvantaged youth aged 10-18 in Kabylie, Algeria;

Therefore be it resolved that this Nova Scotia House of Assembly congratulate Alicia LaPierre of Eastern Passage for her work as a caring and responsible citizen by helping Algerian children have a summer experience they'll never forget.

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 Queens.

RESOLUTION NO. 799

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

Whereas MLA constituency assistants are the foundation of the provincial government through their understanding of the political process, possessing knowledge of how to access services, serving as facilitators for communication between constituents and their MLAs, and providing follow-up to constituents; and

Whereas Judi Milne, constituency assistant to the MLA for Queens, in addition to strengthening the ability of her MLA to represent her constituents, she has consistently risen above her duties to ensure respect, consideration, and acknowledgement is provided to all constituents; and

Whereas today we honour all administrative professionals throughout Nova Scotia for the value and expertise they bring to their roles;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly recognize Judi Milne for her contribution and dedication to the political process, and her MLA for Queens congratulates her on her outstanding performance in her position as constituency assistant.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

RESOLUTION NO. 800

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

Whereas the importance of literacy touches us all and impacts our lives for the better; and

Whereas Maggie's Place and CAN-U have organized a family literacy event, The Wonderful World of Wizards Literacy Day, to show how much fun and how important and engaging reading, writing and your imagination can be to those who need a good start the most, our youth; and

Whereas those involved have given the youth encouragement to get an early start and become interested in reading and writing for the rest of their lives;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Maggie's Place and CAN-U for their commitment to the youngest members of 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 Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville.

RESOLUTION NO. 801

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

Whereas Kyle Greenlaw, a 14-year-old from Middle Sackville, is one of the youngest people to ever have successfully created an iPhone and iPad app; and

Whereas Kyle Greenlaw's game app iPoke, which has a free and a 99 cent version, was released in December 2012 and was featured with him and his mother on the national news morning show Canada AM; and

Whereas his initiative and perseverance has shown that our young students can achieve whatever they put their minds to, with hard work and ambition;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly recognize and congratulate Kyle Greenlaw of Middle Sackville on developing and now marketing his own iPhone and iPad app, while being one of the youngest people ever to do so.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings North.

RESOLUTION NO. 802

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

Whereas the Port Williams Women's Institute, one of the original founding chapters of the Women's Institutes of Canada in 1913, marks its 100th Anniversary of service for home and country in 2013; and

Whereas the dedicated members of the Port Williams Women's Institute have, over the past 100 years, strengthened their community and country by supporting a wide range of projects including Red Cross work during World Wars I and II, gift boxes to children of the Springhill Mine Disaster, educational scholarships, financial support to 4-H groups, Brownies and Guides, Chrysalis House, the Kings County Music Festival and the Apple Blossom Festival, as well as safety measures such as Buckle-Up Baby, Adopt-A-Highway, Safe Grad and Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and programs particular to rural life, such as promoting the use of reflective triangles on farm vehicles and farm safety workshops for children; and

Whereas the Port Williams Women's Institute will celebrate its continuing good deeds and good fellowship with a series of events throughout 2013;

Therefore be it resolved that the Nova Scotia House of Assembly congratulate the Port Williams Women's Institute for its 100 years of service to Nova Scotia and Canada, and acknowledge its exemplary contributions to our community, to Nova Scotia, and to Canada.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Lunenburg.

RESOLUTION NO. 803

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

Whereas National Volunteer Week 2013 takes place April 21st to April 27th, a specific week designated to thank and honour people who donate their time to help others by supporting causes in which they believe; and

Whereas Nova Scotia has a very high level of volunteerism with almost one-half of Nova Scotians participating in the voluntary sector, delivering programs and services that build healthy community and vibrant community; and

Whereas the Nova Scotia Provincial Volunteer Awards, held on April 15, 2013 recognizes the volunteer contributions of Sue Kelly of Lunenburg for her community involvement;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly congratulate Sue Kelly of the Town of Lunenburg on receiving the Provincial Volunteer Award on April 15, 2013.

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-Musquodoboit Valley.

RESOLUTION NO. 804

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

Whereas Charles O. Dillman of Meaghers Grant was honoured in October 2012 for his commitment and dedication as a 50 Year Member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; and

Whereas this honour was extended by IBEW, Local 625, with the presentation of a pin and citation attesting to the union's sincere affection and deep gratitude for Charlie's loyal and faithful years of membership in the union; and

Whereas in making this presentation on the union's behalf, Local 625 Business Manager Tim Swinamer made reference to Charlie's commitment and dedication to the Brotherhood extending over a significant part of the IBEW's 104-year history;

Therefore be it resolved that the Nova Scotia House of Assembly join the members of IBEW, Local 625, in honouring Charles Dillman's attainment of this professional half-century milestone.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: The time now is 3:14 p.m. and we will finish at 4:44 p.m.

The honourable member for Glace Bay.

PREM. - CBRM CAPITAL PLAN: FUNDING - MATCH

MR. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the CBRM Mayor and Council, Island MLAs and MPs, and many residents, were encouraged by the commitment from the provincial government to support the municipality with 25 cents for every federal dollar allocated for the CBRM capital plan. While this is a great starting point, we'd like the province to clarify their commitment to our capital plan. As indicated by the CBRM, if the province matches our municipality's investment, we could begin to see the benefits of this plan in this current fiscal year.

So my question, can the Premier confirm that his government will match the investment that has already been committed by the CBRM in this current fiscal year?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to meet with the Mayor and members of the CBRM Council and to review their capital plan today. I reiterated the commitment that we have already made. They asked me about whether or not - if money was to come forward in this year. I indicated to them that I would be happy to consider that, if it happens. We want to encourage the federal investment in the province and certainly we would encourage the effective use of our money to trigger a larger investment in CBRM, or for that matter, in other parts of the province.

MR. MACLELLAN: Cape Breton's employment numbers are certainly alarming: 18.6 per cent unemployment and climbing. Mr. Speaker, the highest unemployment in any city in Atlantic Canada is in Sydney, out-migration of thousands of families over the last number of years, and ownership of \$454 million in waste-water improvements in the next decade - a cost that we simply can't afford. This plan will keep families home. It will put tradespeople back to work, and it will grow the Cape Breton economy, which has certainly experienced negative growth for a number of years. Plain and simple, our municipality needs this, so to clarify again for the Premier, if the federal government commits to the CBRM capital plan, will the Premier live up to his commitment for the 2013-14 fiscal year?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I've already said that we're prepared to consider the request from CBRM. We have a capital plan in place. What I told them was that we would be prepared to go back and reconsider the capital plan if money was available, because we want to make use of any investment that would come from the federal government and we're happy to do that. I also explained that the capital planning for the province takes place in the Fall, so that they would know for future years that this is the best way to prepare for budgeting. I also indicated to them that what would be very important to the CBRM are investments, good investments in jobs like IIBG, like the Maritime Link, which would be very beneficial to the people of Cape Breton. So maybe the next time the member for Glace Bay stands up, maybe he can say whether or not he would support those investments.

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the CBRM has constructed a real plan for the economy in Cape Breton. This plan will address the crumbling infrastructure, get hundreds of Cape Breton tradespeople back to work, and provide a much-needed injection into the local economy and, indeed, the economy of the entire province. This also has potential to bridge the gap to new opportunities related to port initiatives, natural resource development, and tourism expansion. But for this to succeed the Premier needs to ensure that the capital plan is presented to the federal government as a provincial priority, one that the entire province can get behind. So my question is, will the Premier confirm in this House right now that he is willing to put the plan forward to the federal government as a provincial priority for the Province of Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I will confirm that I have agreed with the mayor of CBRM to work with him on this project. We're prepared to do that. We have said it over

and over again. We've reiterated in letters. I've answered this here before. My hope, though, is that on the wider question associated with economic development, the member opposite - the members opposite for that matter - will recognize the kinds of investments that are necessary by government in business in order to ensure that there is real economic development and growth in areas like Cape Breton and understand that when we make commitments, whether it's companies like IIBG or to the Maritime Link, or to Port Hawkesbury Paper, they are important for the growth of the economy in that region.

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

PREM. - CBRM CAPITAL PLAN: FUNDING - AVAILABILITY

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, CBRM's capital plan addresses much-needed projects and community infrastructure. Cape Breton has been hit hard by unemployment, out-migration, and the CBRM has a plan to bring new life to the crumbling capital and local infrastructure. The reality is that the potential of this new capital plan is contingent on a commitment from the province. My question to the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations is, does the province currently have the money they've promised for CBRM? Crews in Cape Breton are shovel-ready and waiting to go.

HON. JOHN MACDONELL: I've got to say I'm not sure why the Opposition doesn't understand that yes means yes. We indicated (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations has the floor.

MR. MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, we may not spend 5 cents; it depends on the feds. The letter that I sent to the mayor and council was that we were in for 25 cents on the dollar, contingent on the federal government coming forward with their money. That's what I signed my name to, and that's what I stand behind.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, the CBRM needs absolute clarity on the province's commitment to \$75 million over these five years. We cannot afford to be given any more half-hearted conditional promises by the NDP Government. (Interruptions)

I think what I'm hearing is, will the minister give us unconditional commitment that the government is on board and that this is a provincial priority?

MR. MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, I signed my name to a piece of paper that said we were committed and that we were committed on the basis of the federal government coming forward with their money - and I mean their money in a reasonable time. In other words, we're not going to carry the load on this funding, and in three years or five years they finally backfill it with some federal money. We want a really clear commitment of

their money and when it will be available, and when we know that, then we'll make our money available. (Interruptions)

The members opposite may want to read my correspondence. The mayor had copies of it this morning at breakfast. I think he took it to each of the caucuses. I think it's quite clear what I signed, and I stand behind what I signed.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, after ripping up the MOU with the municipalities, the municipalities know how much to rely on that signature. The truth is that the past treatment of Cape Breton by this government gives the people of the Island reason to be wary of their commitments. Without an absolute guarantee the province will provide the money, the situation starts to look more like what the government did in Yarmouth by cutting the ferry that devastated communities in Nova Scotia and the entire region. We hope the government has learned from this mistake.

My question is, will the minister immediately conclude an agreement with CBRM so they can become a model of job creation and long-term planning for other similar municipalities to follow? (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order, please. That'll be enough for this afternoon, on all sides of the House.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations has the floor.

MR. MACDONELL: Mr. Speaker, first of all, my signature wasn't on the MOU. If the members opposite want to check the MOU, they will find the signature that was on it was a former Tory minister's signature. The page with the signatures had a clause in it that the government could move away based on its ability to fund it. So the members opposite may not like it, but they signed it. I reiterate to the member who asked the question that I stand behind my signature on the letter that I sent to the mayor and council.

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

**PREM. - CYBERBULLYING:
EDUC. TASK FORCE (2012) - RECOMMENDATIONS**

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, in a recent TV appearance, when asked about cyberbullying, the Premier responded that in order for people to take this seriously, there has to be a criminal sanction. The Minister of Education's appointed task force on cyberbullying submitted its recommendations to government in February 2012, and Recommendation 44 states that it is recommended that ". . . the provincial Minister of Justice make representations to the federal Minister of Justice about evaluating the effectiveness of current Criminal Code provisions in responding to bullying and

cyberbullying and exploring the pros and cons of a distinct crime of bullying and cyberbullying.”

My question to the Premier is, why did the government not take this recommendation seriously when it was brought to his government a full 14 months ago?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we took all of the recommendations seriously. They are the basis of the action plan that we have moved forward with since then. The Minister of Justice is the co-chair of the federal-provincial-territorial working group on cybercrime. They are working very specifically on these kinds of provisions. I understand from my conversation yesterday with the Prime Minister that he will be consulting with that working group and they are looking for language around the kind of legislation, the kind of reforms that we are seeking with the Criminal Code.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, the conversation that the Minister of Justice is having today, the committee that was struck by the Minister of Education 14 months ago recommended that the province start that conversation 14 months ago.

Mr. Speaker, in the Law Amendments Committee we heard from Pam Murchison, a mother who lost her daughter as a result of the cruelty of cyberbullying on May 3, 2012. She was bringing her daughter's issue to the forefront and pleaded with the committee to accept Recommendation 44, so again my question to the Premier is, why didn't the Premier act earlier and why didn't the Premier act to protect our kids at the first opportunity, instead of waiting 14 months?

THE PREMIER: The Leader of the Official Opposition is simply misinformed. The reality is that that task force has been in place now for some time. As I said, not only are we participating in it, the Minister of Justice is one of the co-chairs. They are the ones who are bringing forward recommendations and they are examining these issues. We're obviously an important part of that committee and, of course, we're committed to that.

I made very clear our intentions yesterday with the Prime Minister, but that is only the latest, of course, in a long string of representations that we've made on this matter.

MR. MCNEIL: What we know for sure is that Recommendation 44 was defeated by the NDP Government in the Law Amendments Committee on April 2012, and on October 2012. Those are the facts, Mr. Speaker. What their own government's task force asked for was that this government start a conversation 14 months ago with the federal government. Not only did they sit on Recommendation 44, but Recommendation 42: “It is recommended that the Nova Scotia Department of Justice, the Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association and Internet service providers work together to develop a protocol to facilitate police access to information during the investigation of bullying and cyberbullying cases.”

My question to the Premier is, when can Nova Scotians expect this government to act on Recommendation 44 and allow our police forces to have the tools they need to protect our children?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, it is particularly ironic that the critic for the Opposition was both the Education Minister and the Health Minister and in 10 years did absolutely nothing on bullying - did absolutely nothing on bullying - and in 14 months we have done more to move Nova Scotia into the leadership in this country on cyberbullying than they ever would have dreamed of. It is this government that is moving forward to ensure that we protect our young people; it is this government that is putting in place the educational standards; and they're putting in place the supports in the health care system to help our young people.

I know that out there parents will not give way to his cynicism and the negativity of the Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - SCH. DRUG EDUCATION: RELEVANCE - ENSURE

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the power of educating our youngest citizens is key to economic success, but what we don't oftentimes link is the power that education has when it comes to saving lives.

Mr. Speaker, the world has changed. The prevalence of prescription drugs has piqued the curiosity of our youngest citizens and is playing havoc with the lives of our young people. Unfortunately, we are hearing more and more about the tragic outcomes associated with prescription drugs when time after time we hear the countless stories of lives that are ending far too soon.

Could the Minister of Health and Wellness outline what role he plays to ensure drug education in our schools remains relevant and is incorporated into the school curriculum?

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for bringing this question forward. I know all members in the House are disturbed when we hear cases of prescription drugs and death because of abuse of prescription drugs. As a father, I know almost everybody in here as a parent couldn't imagine having to go through that ordeal.

As the Minister of Health and Wellness, I have worked with many partners throughout different departments but outside partners. I know Chief Mander from the Valley, for example. After becoming Minister of Health and Wellness, I requested a meeting with him. We sat down to make sure that we were working together and moving

forward to make sure that everybody can make a difference in preventing one death, we do all that we can do.

We had a rigorous TV campaign around awareness. I think one of the key things we need to ensure is to educate our young people on the importance of the dangers around prescription drug abuse, the mixing of alcohol and prescription drugs. I'm also working with our ministers like the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, on a number of programs that I hope will start that education at the earliest possible time. Of course some of them are through the SchoolsPlus program that we have in place throughout the province.

I look forward to continuing to work with ministers and I continue to work with partners in law enforcement and clinicians in the community, to make sure that we do everything we can to prevent any deaths in the future.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, again last week another family went public when Dale Jollota spoke of the tragic death of her daughter Olivia, who passed away in April 2012. She was just 15 years old. A bright, young, junior high student in Dartmouth took one Dilaudid that was ultimately ruled, some nine months later, to be the single cause of her death. Her parents spoke publicly for the need for more education around drug awareness, more so than ever at an earlier age.

Can the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development explain to us what she has been doing to assure that drug education remains relevant and incorporated into the school curriculum, especially at the upper elementary, middle and junior high grades?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Thank you for bringing this very important topic to the floor today. This is a very serious problem that we're dealing with in Nova Scotia and other jurisdictions across Canada. I know that everything is being done in every department to raise awareness around the dangers of prescription drugs. It is incorporated in our curriculum, right from Primary, teaching children about prescription drugs not being candy, for example, the very early education of keeping one safe from Primary right through.

I know the member asked what was happening in our education system. It is incorporated from Primary through to the junior high grades, though Health. It is also incorporated in other areas - Healthy Living and in Health.

There is curriculum that addresses it at Grade 9. One of the things is that the prescription drug use continues to change. The drugs continue to change so we are working with professionals in the Health and Wellness Department to make sure that our education is relevant and up-to-date. We will continue to do that to make sure that the curriculum that

we are offering our children brings the very best available resources so that we make sure that our children know not to use prescription drugs. Thank you.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where to start with that response because in the junior high program there is one paragraph of outdated information.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting the minister should say, really, all of this. I have a copy of an e-mail sent to parents from teachers in an elementary school in Dartmouth. In fact this elementary school feeds into the same junior high that Olivia was attending. The e-mail in part reads as follows, and I will table this, "In health we will be starting our unit on Healthy Self. The grade 6 outcomes have changed and we no longer do a unit on drugs however we do still cover a few outcomes on sexual health."

Mr. Speaker, the world is changing. This minister and this government refuse to believe it. This is unacceptable. Could the minister please explain to all members of the Legislature why the Grade 6 outcomes have changed, so that our youngest citizens, the very students who are getting ready to enter junior high, are no longer receiving education on drugs and the lethal impacts that they have on their lives?

MS. JENNEX: We are working in our school system to raise awareness around the dangers of prescription drug use, especially when mixed with alcohol, and not using other people's medications. I misspoke when I said teaching children not to use prescription drugs - what I meant was not using prescription drugs that are not their own or to mix them.

Our school guidance counsellors are working very closely with Addiction Services and also with our DHAs. We are making sure there is information through our guidance counsellors and through our curriculum, throughout our whole system. We are really very concerned about the prevalence of prescription drug misuse and abuse, and we will do everything we can to make sure that the information that we provide our children is current, up to date, and relevant so that we can make sure children are very aware not to misuse drugs. Thank you.

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

PREM.: CHILD PROTECTION LEGISLATION - INTRODUCE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier met with the Prime Minister about modernizing the Criminal Code of Canada to protect our kids against assault or sexual assault, bullying, or the distribution of intimate pictures on the Internet. That is all good and we all support that, but there is also a role for the province to play in updating our provincial laws to protect children by way of early intervention and prevention before activities ever get to the criminal level.

I ask the Premier, will he commit to updating Nova Scotia's laws by introducing and passing strong protective legislation for our kids in this session of the Legislature?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, in any legislative session there are additional pieces of legislation coming forward. We intend to do that with respect to this issue as well.

What I can say, though, is that we're not going to limit the protection that we have just to children. The fact of the matter is that simply because a person passes out of their minority and into young adulthood does not mean that society should stop protecting them or their personal integrity. People who are engaged in this kind of behaviour and activity act maliciously. They act with the intent to harm people, and those kinds of activities ought to attract the appropriate sanction.

In this country where that appropriate sanction comes from is the Criminal Code of Canada. That's why I was in Ottawa yesterday to speak to the Prime Minister, and I'm happy to report to the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party that he takes the same position.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for that answer, and of course we take the same position. No one is suggesting that protections for Canadian citizens or our fellow Nova Scotians should stop when they reach adult age, but the fact of the matter is the Premier has gone to Ottawa. The Premier's pointing at the Criminal Code, but he is the Premier of Nova Scotia and has the power to strengthen and modernize Nova Scotia law as well, particularly to provide the tools that our law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and school officials need to intervene in cases where they see bullying or cyberbullying in the modern age.

Nova Scotians are waiting for someone to act, and that's why I want to ask the Premier again, will he bring in meaningful, strong provincial legislation on bullying and cyberbullying and all that's associated with it here in Nova Scotia? Will he introduce it and pass it in this session of the Legislature?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we've already brought in legislation, as he would know from his time here in the House. We intend to continue with that. As he would also know, we carry on these conversations with the federal government. We respect their jurisdiction, where that lies with them. We think they should act. We don't fill the field that should be inhabited by the federal government.

I've seen some of the suggestions that the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party has made. I believe some of them are of a constructive nature. We have been considering them along with all the other input that we have received with respect to these matters, and shortly legislation will come forward. I want him to know that in many cases, what he's asking for is already covered. The jurisdiction of the courts is a broad one in these matters, and judges are able to exercise this jurisdiction if they so choose.

However, we are engaged in ensuring that the legislation that we introduce will be effective in terms of ensuring that we provide the best possible protection whether it's children or adults.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is considering an awful lot of things these days, but Nova Scotians want action.

The federal government, faced with the same challenges across our whole country, is today committed to bringing forward amendments to the Criminal Code by June, the month after next. He said that today in his meetings with Justice Ministers, including our provincial Justice Ministers - and I'll get that for the Premier if he's unsure of what the federal government has committed to.

The time for consideration has quickly come to an end. The legislation that the Premier has brought forward up to this point is inadequate. Nova Scotians want strong, real action to give all officials involved the ability to intervene and prevent bullying from happening when they see it, not just account it and study it, as the Premier's bill has done. They want more. This House of Assembly at this time, this Spring is in session - will he bring forward appropriate, strong, protective legislation this Spring and pass it in the same speed that the Government of Canada is moving on to protect people at the national level?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, we intend to bring forward additional legislation in case there is any doubt that needs to be clarified, but, of course, as you would know the passage of any bill through this House, and the speed with which that can happen, is actually dependent on the co-operation of the Opposition.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

JUSTICE - MACINTOSH CASE: INVESTIGATION - PREM. ORDER

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Justice about why our justice system failed the victims of abuse in the Fenwick MacIntosh case, and why it failed all Nova Scotians. I asked the minister if he would order an independent inquiry into these matters and the minister flatly refused. The Premier, based on his previous career, knows full well that something went horribly wrong in the administration of our justice system in the way this case had been handled.

Since the Justice Minister is refusing to order an independent inquiry into the events around the MacIntosh case, will the Premier of Nova Scotia reconsider his minister's misguided refusal and order an independent investigation into this matter?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, first of all I'll just correct the member for Richmond - the minister did not refuse. In fact, he pointed out, I believe, to the House that there is already an internal review that is underway. I understand that today, in Ottawa, one of the

colleagues of the member for Richmond actually asked for a federal inquiry into this matter, and for good reason. It appears that over the period that this thing was under consideration, this case was under consideration, there was some 14 years where twice the federal government, through their officials, went ahead and issued passports to Mr. MacIntosh despite the fact that there was an outstanding warrant for his arrest.

This, of course, warrants investigation, this is not something that happened during our time in government; in fact, federally, I believe the Liberals were in power. Indeed, provincially, during some of that time the Liberals would have been in power, but like a lot of other things we have inherited, we have inherited these issues. I want to assure the member that if an inquiry takes place it should be led by the federal government and, if it is, of course, we would participate.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows and I have acknowledged already that the federal government has a role in this, there's no question. But the investigation started in Nova Scotia. The question is, why did investigators in Nova Scotia take so long and not push this matter further? Second, once Mr. MacIntosh finally arrived back in the country it took the Public Prosecution Service of Nova Scotia - and the Premier being a lawyer knows that right away there were concerns with the delays that he was going to argue that this wasn't brought in a timely manner - it took three full years for the Public Prosecution Service to even walk through the doors of a courtroom with this case.

That is clearly unacceptable and it calls out for answers as to what went wrong in that matter. So rather than make these victims wait any longer, even if it was not this government that was in power when this happened, will it not show leadership on behalf of the victims and on behalf of all Nova Scotians and order an independent investigation as to what went wrong in Nova Scotia regarding the Fenwick MacIntosh case?

THE PREMIER: I don't actually disagree with much of what the member for Richmond has said. The Fenwick MacIntosh case is a deeply disturbing case and why it is that it took as long as it took to get to where it should have - regardless of whether or not the prosecution service was issuing warrants for arrest and all of the other things it has done - I believe it does need to be reviewed. There is an internal review going on now. We know that there is a federal responsibility with respect to this. I want to see the end of the internal review.

If that does not produce the appropriate results, where we can understand what happened, then I am certainly open to a further independent review. I would like to see one that would also take into account the delays that took place or the actions that took place on behalf of the federal government as well. It would be my desire that if this matter is going to be looked at that it's looked at comprehensively, that of course the questions associated with the prosecution service here in Nova Scotia are looked at, but surely to goodness we also have to look at what happened that led to these delays from the federal perspective as well.

MR. SAMSON: Again, Mr. Speaker, there is no one else that would like to see that more than myself, that both levels would be looked at. At the same time I don't think anyone is advocating having two separate independent inquiries take place. It would be the preference that there be one. But unfortunately we have a division of powers at play here and what the federal government will do is outside of our control here in this Legislature, but we know what our province can do.

These victims have waited long enough, Mr. Premier, you recognize that. Why it took three years for Public Prosecution Service to even get this to court once he was here, has to be answered. The victims deserve no less. We asked in December 2011, when the Court of Appeal threw out these charges, for the minister to undertake a review; he refused. So here we are waiting again. If the Premier is not prepared to call a full independent inquiry now, will he at least, today, publicly commit to disclose the findings of the review taking place in the Public Prosecution Service?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly willing to take advice with respect to releasing information of the review. I would want to know whether or not there are any legal impediments to that but I'm certainly prepared to consider it. Further I want to inform the member for Richmond that today, in Ottawa, the Minister of Justice is meeting with his federal counterpart and he is requesting of his federal counterpart, a full inquiry into this matter.

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

PREM.: POWER RATES - FREEZE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, a few moments ago the Premier said that what Cape Breton really needs is private investment and more jobs. That's true and now he has his chance because Sydney is in the running for a \$800 million iron ore pellet plant, which comes with 700 good, private sector, well-paying jobs. But they are competing with Sept-Îles, Quebec, for those same jobs. Sydney has a lot going for it: it has the better workforce; it has a better port; it's got a better location for trade and for the bringing of supplies and materials. But because of this government, Sydney has one other thing to consider and that is that they pay the highest power rates in all of Canada, something that is important to actually attracting good jobs. Sydney is being forced to compete with one hand tied behind their back - the highest power rates in all of Canada.

So will the Premier, in the interest of attracting those jobs that he talks about, agree to rip up his expensive plan, freeze power rates, and help Cape Breton attract the jobs that he says he wants them to have?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I'm not the only one who can't believe the audacity of the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, the Party that created the power rates of today, the Party that privatized Nova Scotia Power, the Party that tied us to

expensive, fossil-fuel-driven electricity. If anything, the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, the next time he stands up, should apologize to Nova Scotians for forcing communities to compete with one hand tied behind their back.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I want every Nova Scotian to look at their power bill this month, because they will see that it is orange and the reason it is orange is because today's power prices are all the responsibility of the current government and the current Premier. That's what Cape Breton is up against - 1,800 jobs lost under this government since they came in. What we don't know is, on top of those jobs that are lost, how many are not coming here at all because places like Sydney are competing with one hand tied behind their back for new jobs and investments?

Will the Premier, who watches and receives those orange power bills every month coming from Nova Scotia - will he freeze power rates and give Sydney a chance to win those jobs?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, when they look at their power bills what they see is a reflection of 10 years of mismanagement of this by the Progressive Conservative Government, and then an additional seven years of mismanagement by the previous Liberal Government.

You know, finally the people of Nova Scotia have a government that understands energy policy, understands that in order to have stable long-term rates we have to get off of fossil fuels, that we have to move to renewables that will provide us with good, long-term, stable rates for business, something that they can depend on.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would go so far as to say no doubt one of the advantages that companies like IBG are looking forward to would be the establishment of the Maritime Link and its ability to be able to get access to power which, incidentally, will come ashore in Cape Breton.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, when our power rates have gone up 30 per cent in four years, when they are 15 per cent above the national average and now the highest in Canada, when the unemployment in Cape Breton Island is 18.5 per cent, and when 18,000 Nova Scotians moved away last year the mismanagement is his and his government's and nobody else's. Those are the facts.

Now they have a chance for 700 jobs, real good, private, good-paying, long-term jobs - will the Premier freeze power rates and give Cape Breton and Sydney a chance to win those jobs?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia created the economic despair that we see in Nova Scotia today. It has been difficult to get past the \$1.4 billion deficit that they left behind; it has been difficult to get

past the pathetic record that they had with respect to economic development, the worst in the country year after year. But here is a government that is turning the corner to a brighter future for Nova Scotians.

As to power rates, I want the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party to know this - we're not going to freeze power rates. We put power rates down 10 per cent when we took the HST off home electricity, something that the Progressive Conservative Party voted against.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

PREM. - EIBI: BUDGET - DETAILS

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, two years ago this month the Premier made a commitment to the families of autistic children from one end of the province to the other - the Premier committed to doubling funding for EIBI from its 2005-06 level of \$4 million to \$8 million, so that in the words of the Premier "children living with autism should have access to the best treatment as early as possible to give them the best chance for success now and in the future." I will table the Premier's speech.

In 2011-12 funding increased for EIBI by \$2 million, and the funding amount of \$6 million remained unchanged in last year's budget. Last evening the Minister of Health and Wellness confirmed funding for the 2013-14 year now stands at \$4.1 million. Could the Premier please explain why he has failed to double the EIBI budget, like he promised families and children he would do back in 2011?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of the fact that instead of leaving what was in place, where EIBI funding meant that there was simply a lottery where some kids got access to the services that they needed and others did not, we are committed to ensuring that all children get access to these services. That's what the budget does. In addition to EIBI, we put in place a range of other supports that also support children on the autism spectrum.

We're very proud of this. I believe that parents are very happy with this. There is always more to do, and we intend to do more, but we have, under very difficult circumstances, kept our commitments and ensured that children today get the services that they need.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier and this government made a commitment to children with autism and their families before the end of their mandate, and they have broken this promise. The Premier indicated two years ago that every preschool child in Nova Scotia who needed the EIBI program for more than one year would get it. Perhaps this government's agenda is such that if we slow down assessments, we can cut the treatment budget.

Would the Premier explain how every preschool child in Nova Scotia who needs EIBI treatment will be able to get it when funding has been cut to 2005-06 levels?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I think it's pathetic to have a member of this House stand up and actively try to mislead people in the province. It is pathetic when parents who are dealing with questions associated with the health of their children are actively misled by a member of the Legislature. The budget for EIBI was \$2 million, and it's now \$4 million. We are ensuring that children who are on the autism spectrum are getting the support they need.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this Premier did not keep the promise that said the EIBI program would move from \$4 million to \$8 million; it's right in the speech that I just tabled. That's exactly what was said. Two years ago, this Premier made a grand announcement about EIBI support and he had broken his word. He spoke about the unfairness of a lottery system for EIBI and how his government was going to fix it once and for all so no family would be denied. This Premier not only failed to fulfill his full commitment of doubling the EIBI budget to a full \$8 million but he has cut the budget back to the 2005-06 level of \$4 million. Obviously, the Premier likes the flash of announcements, but when he thinks everyone's back is turned, he decides it would be acceptable to balance the budget on the backs of autistic children and their families in this province.

The reality is that children will wait from two and a half to three years after being diagnosed, until they are four years old, and then get a little bit of help, but not the entire EIBI program. If \$4 million was insufficient to this government in 2011, why is it now all of a sudden adequate in 2013?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, there are days in this House where I can't believe a member of the House would try to prey on the parents of children who need services. The reality is that we made commitments to people which we stand by, which we keep. We ensure that the kids who need these services get them. They have in their caucus a Minister of Health who with respect to this did absolutely nothing. We are ensuring that there are appropriate services in place. We are living up to the commitments we made to those parents and to those kids. That caucus brought forward for us recommendations, for example, with respect to insulin pumps for kids, and then broke that commitment by voting against the very budget that implemented it.

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

DEP. PREM. - C.B. ECONOMIC PLAN: DISASTER - ADMIT

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question through you is for the Deputy Premier. We learned last week that unemployment in Cape Breton has soared to 18.6 per cent, and I'll table the document to back that up. Statistics Canada shows that

provincially we have an unemployment-to-job ratio of 15 to one. And I'll table that document. It's obvious that with such high unemployment in Cape Breton, that the ratio at home would be much higher than the provincial average. So, my question to the minister is, will the minister admit that their economic plan has been an absolute disaster for the people of Cape Breton?

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell that member what has been a disaster, the taking of the Service Canada jobs, taking out services for veterans, that's a disaster; mail service in North Sydney, that's a disaster. That's who ruined our economy, it's that Party over there, and they love their federal brothers who are doing it.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised, all along I thought we were in the House of Assembly, not in the Parliament buildings of Canada. But I will say this, it is true that he has created some jobs - with the moving companies who are taking the people off Cape Breton Island and moving them to other parts of Canada to work. There are over 11,000 - I repeat, 11,000 - unemployed people in Cape Breton. Along with the job losses, people are also losing hope. They're losing hope. Cape Breton's population has decreased by almost 4 per cent in the last four years, due to the hardships inflicted by this NDP Government.

So my question is, will the minister admit that life is so tough in NDP-governed Cape Breton Island that hard-working people are being forced to leave their beautiful island?

MR. CORBETT: I will agree hard-working people are being forced to leave. It's because of his federal cousins, Mr. Speaker. They will not stand up and represent the people who elected them. They will get up there (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order, please.

The honourable Deputy Premier has the floor.

MR. CORBETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must have struck a chord over there. The fact is that when they are asked by the media, they distance themselves from their federal cousins. Oh, those are federal Tories; we're Progressive Conservatives. They're all the same. They're all blue, and they will not do the true-blue thing and look after Cape Breton. They look after Conservatives first.

MR. MACLEOD: You know, it's hard to believe that member is actually from Cape Breton. The number of unemployed people has increased by almost 6 per cent in the last four years in Cape Breton. The NDP have created a perfect storm, a perfect storm of high taxes, higher power rates, and no real plan for creating jobs. As a matter of fact, the NDP budget shows that there is no plan for creating jobs. The budget actually allows for a forecast with more job losses - their own budget, Mr. Speaker.

Will the minister finally admit that in order to get our economy running again, we need to cut taxes, stop wasteful spending, and start creating jobs?

MR. CORBETT: Well, we've got the lowest business taxes. You know what? I've been in this House now for going on 15 years and I remember, I remember one of the first things they did in a campaign, Mr. Speaker, one of the first things they did in the campaign, and they tried it in metro here - they wouldn't dare bring it to Cape Breton - was close Sysco and open hospital beds. Half of that was right. They've forsaken the steelworkers in Cape Breton, but didn't open any beds. That's the type of group you're dealing with, with those guys.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - TOOTON CASE: WAIT TIMES - EXPLAIN

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, there is an old saying: There's a story behind every number. For Nova Scotians waiting for orthopaedic surgeries, there are unfortunately thousands of stories so I will outline just one, as I have her permission to do so.

Carol Tooton has been waiting for an orthopaedic surgery for 18 months. In actual fact, due to a mix-up in the referral process, it has been 30 months. Despite placing herself on a cancellation list her surgeon told her to expect to wait another three to six months. When you exclude the referral process, that's a wait of two years; when you incorporate the mix-up with the referral, Carol's wait time is almost three years - how is it acceptable that some 30 months later Carol is still waiting for her orthopaedic surgery? My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, access to the appropriate health care services is a priority for us. When we came into government there was a mess within the finances of the province, but somewhat of a mess within the health care system. I say that because the health care system wasn't sustainable. The money that we've seen, the growth in health care spending over the last number of years leading into us coming into government was increasing exponentially. We had some of the highest increases in the country, but yet we continued to see wait times grow. So we've taken the approach that we tried to change models of care.

We know that orthopaedic surgeons have some of the longer wait-lists within the surgery services here in the province. I'm unaware of the mix-up in the referrals; that is definitely an unfortunate situation. I'm not too familiar with the exact case that the member opposite has brought forward, but I'm more than happy to take any information from the member to see what we can do to see if we can assist in ensuring that doesn't happen again, for one, but that individual can get the service they need.

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, Carol has worked with massage therapists, chiropractors, physiotherapists and, finally, four months ago broke down and resorted to pain medication. Carol is doing what she can, her health care system however is letting her down. I found an interesting quote the other day that couldn't be more appropriate. In 2008, in response to the opening of Scotia Surgery, the current Premier, while Leader of the Official Opposition stated: "I know our public system, given adequate resources and effective direction, can improve wait times from within." I will table that.

Scotia Surgery, while it can't help Carol, is still providing service, however wait times for orthopaedic surgeries in our province continue to produce failing grades. Could the minister please tell us whether it is inadequate resources or ineffective direction that is causing wait times for orthopaedic surgeries to continue to grow?

MR. WILSON: Mr. Speaker, we have addressed wait times and we have seen wait times reduced in the province. Not all of them, I would agree there's a lot of work that needs to be done around the wait times of orthopaedic surgeons. We have really high success rates in addressing wait times for those more urgent and serious cases, like cardiac surgery for example. In Nova Scotia, Nova Scotians get those surgeries when they need them, as quickly as they need them.

We know that orthopaedic surgery waits have been less of a priority compared to cardiac surgery - that's why we recently invested another additional \$2 million to do what we would call an orthopaedic blitz, where we try to tackle anybody over a year wait to try to reduce that wait-list. As we move forward, the hard work that we've done to get back to balance will allow me, as Minister of Health and Wellness, to look at additional funding toward orthopaedic surgery, so that we continue to drop those wait-lists.

We have a number of professionals out in the district health authorities who are working in prehab clinics, for example, we had created one in Pictou, Cape Breton, and the Valley to help reduce the wait times, to help support people on the orthopaedic surgery wait-lists. We want to work extremely hard to see if we can reduce those numbers into the future, that's why it was so important to get back to balance this year, Mr. Speaker. As we move forward it is my hope that we can have more funds to address the orthopaedic waits that we see in the province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ENERGY: EMERA RISK ASSESSMENT - DETAILS

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. On April 18th Moody's Investors Service assigned a AAA-backed issuer rating to Emera for the Muskrat Falls project. The reason for this high grade rating is because they said there is no risk to the company in the project, and those companies, of course, being Nova Scotia Power, Emera, and Nalcor, and I will table the Moody's rating. There is no

risk to the companies because of course all the risk is going to be borne by Nova Scotia ratepayers on the Maritime Link project. Why does the minister feel that eliminating the risk for a very profitable private company such as Emera is a good idea and shifting it to ratepayers is also a good idea?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Emera has been around since the 1990s and, as we know, it was the Liberal Government of the day that created Emera so perhaps in the member's research he can get the answer he's looking for there. Today the URB has the role to determine what is best for the ratepayers of Nova Scotia and that process is underway with the present hearings and by this summer we will have an answer on whether it is the right deal for ratepayers of this province.

MR. YOUNGER: Well Mr. Speaker, it is this government that has shifted the risk away from Emera and to Nova Scotia ratepayers, not any other Party, not any other government. There were other options, of course; this project could have moved ahead under a different type of deal where Emera would have taken the risk and any strategic benefits of the undersea connection could still be realized, as found by Synapse, the board's own consultant, and I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year Credit Suisse also gave a high approval rating for the Maritime Link project, because again Emera assumes no risk. In fact Credit Suisse gave Emera stock an outperform rating in part because, "electricity transmission focused endeavours, in particular related to Nalcor projects, in our view, are the key drivers for the stock in the future." Key drivers, Mr. Speaker. Why is the NDP so focused on increasing the share price of Emera rather than ensuring the true lowest cost energy alternatives for ratepayers, which we now know is a made-in-Nova Scotia solution?

MR. PARKER: Made in Nova Scotia, that's what COMFIT is all about. COMFIT is the Community Feed-In Tariff that has been very popular in this province and many municipalities and non-profit groups are looking at that. Green energy is what this government is committed to and Muskrat Falls is certainly an important part of that but again, the URB has the role and responsibly to look at all the evidence, including the interveners, including the experts who have testified. It will be cross-examined, the evidence will be fully tested, and in the end the decision will be made by the URB to determine whether it is the best possible transaction for ratepayers in this province.

MR. YOUNGER: This government is so proud of the COMFIT projects that their own study, the Dalton study, as found by the Synapse report that I just tabled, forgot to include their impact when it looked at the Maritime Link project. That's how important they were to this government. This government is so focused on protecting Emera that last year it signed an agreement with the company to not negatively impact it through regulatory charges, and I'll table the Premier's press release. I'm sure most businesses wished the province would have signed such a deal with them, instead of burdening them with 1,400 higher user fees, a reduced threshold for the small-business tax, and ever

increasing power rates but as always the NDP sides with Emera and not small business owners. It's so bad that Credit Suisse and the report I tabled just calls the hearings regulatory noise. Why is the NDP so focused on increasing profits over one company, over the well-being and success of every other small business in the province?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, you know, I've been trying since the Spring session started, and before, to figure out what the Liberal position on energy is. What is it that they're really trying to do? I do know they want to put the HST back on home energy, and they want to eliminate Efficiency Nova Scotia. They are talking about deregulating the electricity market, and that's a 30 per cent to 50 per cent increase. They want to cozy up to Hydro-Québec. Really, I'm trying to determine what the real Liberal plan is here.

I found on March 28th the honourable member for Dartmouth East tabled a document - I guess it's maybe what their Liberal plan on energy is. They had this document, it was a one-pager - I guess it's actually about two-thirds of a pager. They said that Muskrat Falls - they compared that to their alternate plan. Well, the alternate plan really is, the Liberal plan is untitled, this document is - a lot of typing mistakes in it, but it tells me maybe what the Liberal plan is, but they're putting it forward as their expertise on energy.

It mentions that there's a zero per cent risk to ratepayers, but I would say, Mr. Speaker, that there's really a zero per cent chance that it is going to succeed. That's what the Liberal energy plan is all about. I'll table that.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

COM. SERV. - SHELTER ALLOWANCES: INCREASE - LACK EXPLAIN

MR. TREVOR ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, the last time the shelter component for income assistance recipients was increased it was by the former Progressive Conservative Government in 2006. That's seven years, and over the past four years under the NDP we've seen no increase, although market rents have steadily climbed. Can the minister explain to the House why the NDP Government continues the trend of no increase in shelter allowances for income assistance recipients?

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the honourable member for the question, because I know that he has brought this question up for the last several years. The explanation is still the same: we realize that we are going through tough economic times, and we're the first government that has created so many different initiatives that give people multiple opportunities to increase their income.

We have done that through many different means, in terms of providing the Poverty Reduction Credit, the Affordable Living Tax Credit. We have increased the child tax benefit. We've also increased the IA rate by \$17 a month this time, and that's a total of a

\$47 increase. So there are many, many items that we have provided for people of Nova Scotia to tap into those particular programs, so that they will see - and have seen - an increase in their income levels. Thank you.

MR. ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, landlords in HRM are awaiting a decision from the Utility and Review Board that will see a potential large increase in their water costs this coming July. With rising energy costs, including electricity, landlords are starting to feel the squeeze, and ultimately it will be felt by tenants.

Jeremy Jackson, president of the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia, was recently quoted in The Halifax ChronicleHerald, stating, "The challenge that we have is if you think about apartments, oftentimes it is the students, it's the seniors, it's the working class, the folks that, you know, obviously aren't in the high income brackets. They're the ones that are going to take the biggest hit." I'll table that, Mr. Speaker.

Although the increase in personal allowance in this budget will be seen as beneficial, it is simply in one hand and taken out by the other, when we're looking at potential increases in rent. When will the minister and her government understand that with no shelter increase for income assistance recipients, they will continue to live unhealthy lives and be at risk for potential homelessness?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: As the member opposite knows, we've had many discussions about the challenges of increasing the shelter rate, because in turn, what often happens is - and history has shown - the landlords in turn increase the shelter rates. Then it goes exactly in one hand and out of the other hand.

We're trying to prevent that by taking a holistic approach where individuals and families and seniors are being boosted up in their income from this variety of programs that I have talked about. In fact, we have been very focused on helping seniors in terms of those who receive the GIS no longer paying income tax, increasing that amount, along with the land tax rebate, which we've increased twice, from a total of \$400 right up to \$800 since this government has been in, as a maximum.

There have been many different programs and I think what is important is to note that helping families and individuals increase their overall income is a much better solution than providing an increase in shelter rates that one day they'll have in their left hand and the next day they're passing it along to the landlord in their right hand.

MR. ZINCK: Mr. Speaker, rising electricity costs, rising food costs and increasing rental rates, along with numerous policy changes and adjustments within the Department of Community Services, has made it more difficult for income assistance recipients to recover from addiction, live day to day with mental health issues, and more importantly move towards becoming employable.

With all these challenges that low-income Nova Scotians have faced over the past four years, how can they believe that the NDP Government has moved forward with the Poverty Reduction Strategy in a positive way?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, there is so much I could talk about with regard to this, and those are such things as I've previously mentioned. If you take the original Poverty Reduction Strategy that was developed in 2009 and do a comparison, you will see that this government has absolutely exceeded any of the objectives and goals that were in that strategy.

We're also developing the first housing strategy in this province that will address some of those issues that are being brought forth. We do know that times are tough and there are increases in food prices, and we understand the issues around electricity, so that's why we've taken the HST off home heating that the other two Parties opposite would put back on if they were in government. We developed the first mental health strategy. We're entirely changing the internal workings of Community Services. We're redesigning the income assistance program, and I can go on and on.

Those on the opposite side never, ever looked at even one strategy to develop and we have multiple strategies and there is action behind those strategies. Just ask those people who have had an increase in their income level, like a young working couple with two children, for example, who now have over \$2,400 in their pocket annually. That would have never occurred with those Parties on the opposite side.

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

FIN. - RETAIL SALES: HST REVENUE - FIGURES EXPLAIN

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. As everyone knows, the 2013-14 budget is based on extremely optimistic revenue projections for the province. HST revenue, which is reliant on retail sales and transactions, is estimated to grow by an additional \$78.9 million, or almost 5 per cent. But just this week we received retail sales figures from Statistics Canada that show a far more sombre reality. Nova Scotia had negative retail sales growth in all measures; on a month-over-month, year-to-date, and year-over-year basis, retail sales decreased 0.6 per cent, 2.2 per cent, and 1.6 per cent - all three of them decreasing.

Given these disappointing retail sales results, how can the minister stand and support the inflated HST revenue figures that were included in the budget this year?

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, as I've said here before, the revenue forecast for this year's budget passed last night. For the first time in a decade, it received the unqualified opinion of the Auditor General. We're prepared with the consultation process of all of the senior economists in the major financial institutions in the

country and other important organizations such as the Conference Board of Canada and APEC. Those forecasts, those assumptions were supported as being reasonable assumptions, given the progress this government has made and the fact that we are about to turn the corner on 20 years of the worst economic performance under previous governments.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, there's no turning the corner; they're burying their heads in the sand is what's happening. The revenue projected from HST will be dependent on people working and having disposable income to buy cars, electronics, and everything else. While retail sales are down, next year's projections for employment are also down. It has been projected that there will be 1,100 fewer jobs in Nova Scotia next year, and the Budget Assumptions document that we were given projects an unemployment rate of 9.2 per cent in 2013-14, which is actually higher - in other words worse - than it is today. So with higher unemployment projected for the coming year, the likelihood of any significant increase in HST revenue is very unlikely.

Given that the Budget Assumptions document itself does not support the HST revenue estimate in the budget, would the minister commit to tabling in the House the assumptions that were cherry-picked to create this unrealistic revenue projection?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that we see in this House that is cherry-picked is the very select, highly-distorted, often factually incorrect information that comes from that Party over there.

Last month Nova Scotia was the only province in the country that added full-time jobs in the economy, following a prior month when we had also seen a reversal in the job numbers. We have some fantastic opportunities on the horizon and the member may have seen the senior economist from APEC speaking at a KPMG conference not so long ago, where she talked about how Nova Scotia has very positive opportunities in front of us that indeed will mean economic growth and job potential in this province. We don't hear the members of the Opposition talk about those things. All we hear from the Opposition is negativity, is cynicism. We are the Party that will bring prosperity to this province.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, the government's own Budget Assumptions document which was passed out to every member of the House here, along with the budget information, shows indicators like high unemployment, flat population growth, more part-time work, and more - all negative figures. None of these would support a marked increase in HST revenue or in personal income tax revenue.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business surveys, if we can go to them as well, regularly survey their members, and their recent findings continue to show a lack of optimism and confidence among business owners. They don't see any significant growth in their staff numbers because they feel unsure about the future. Here, again, is another indicator, one that shows business confidence and it doesn't support a projection that

would say we're going to get more people working and more personal income tax and more HST. Can the minister tell the House how she can reconcile the inflated revenue projections with the reality of a cautious and uncertain business climate in Nova Scotia?

MS. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I would think that the honourable member would be aware that while retail sales are very important and yes, in fact, have a relationship bearing on HST revenue, they're certainly not the only driver of HST revenue. One of the most significant drivers of HST revenue, in fact, is construction. In the area of construction, once again, Nova Scotia is in a very, very strong position. All you have to do is look around the HRM and you see the construction that is going on. (Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite seem to think that it's not good to have construction in the HRM, but let me tell you that construction in the HRM and the generation of revenue in this area benefits the entire province. It means that we can not only balance our budget but reinvest in things that the Liberal Party cut when they were in government, like the children's dental program.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

EECD: PAC REQUEST - DETAILS

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee met on December 5, 2012, and they heard from witnesses from the Department of Education. Committee members had questions that the witnesses were unable to answer, and those questions were sent in correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee to the Department of Education on December 19th; I will table that correspondence. On January 21st the deputy minister acknowledged receipt of the letter and said a response would be forthcoming shortly; I will table her response.

As of March 12th, the committee had still not received a response, and so a second letter was sent, and I will table that. On April 4th, a third letter was sent to the department, and I will table that. It is now April 24th, and still no response from the department.

We heard concerns yesterday, Mr. Speaker, from all members of the Opposition and from the member for Halifax Atlantic, that this government is preventing this House from doing its work, and this includes the work of the legislative committees. So my question to the minister is this: Is the failure to respond to the request from the all-Party committee at Public Accounts due to the fact that the minister and her department do not know the answers? Or are they withholding information and impeding the work of this House?

HON. RAMONA JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, I will make sure that I speak to the deputy minister to exactly see the train of this. This is the first time I am hearing of this situation, and we will make sure that the information will be forthcoming. Thank you.

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, that first correspondence went in December. It is now four months. I would expect that the minister might know what's going on in her department.

Mr. Speaker, these questions were put to the Public Accounts Committee on behalf of parents and teachers and students. We know this government has not identified education as a priority; they've continued to cut funding from schools for the last three years. The minister does not know how many students have special needs, and denies that there are nearly 2,000 kids on a wait list for critical assessments. We know that the department should be able to answer every one of the committee's questions.

I would hope that the minister respects the legislative committee structure - either that or why will she not give the answers. So my question to the minister is, why has there been no response to the committee's requests that were submitted four months ago?

MS. JENNEX: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my first answer, I definitely will be reacting to this and making sure that the information is forthcoming.

I also want to make it very, very clear that this government has a priority for our education system. We have brought in a plan with Kids and Learning First. We are making sure that our youngest children in our province are supported with literacy with Succeeding in Reading. We're making sure that our children are getting the appropriate math with our math program that's going to be moving forward.

This is a government that has moved forward, Mr. Speaker, and we are making sure that we have education as a priority. As I said, I will look into this situation, and I will be back to the honourable member as soon as I can.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

NAT. RES. - PORT HAWKESBURY PAPER: WOOD SUPPLIERS - MIN. MEET

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Port Hawkesbury Paper is in an industry that's highly stressed. Paper products are not used as much as they once were, and although we do hear good reports about the mill, that it's achieving success with sales orders, we do know that the industry is stressed. And now that the mill is up and running, wood suppliers are one of the costs for the mill. And they are now under stress as well, because they're called upon to provide wood to the mill at a very competitive price so the mill can sell paper at a competitive price.

So my question to the minister is, will the minister meet with these suppliers and hear their recommendations, and work with them to ensure that they have a future to keep supplying the mill?

HON. CHARLIE PARKER: Mr. Speaker, certainly I thank the member for the opportunity to, I guess maybe, continue our dialogue that we had in the estimates. It sounds very similar to what we had previously discussed. But as we know, when there were challenges there in that mill, our Premier stepped up and immediately met with the workers and their families and the businesses in the area and the Forestry Infrastructure Fund was put in place, as well as the Hot Idle initiative, and kept that mill alive and kept the opportunity to create good jobs, 1,400 good jobs in the community. And some of those are in the woods, in the contracting and woods operators, and truckers, and silviculture contractors, and so on.

So we certainly had a full commitment to Port Hawkesbury, to Cape Breton and eastern Nova Scotia, and we continue to do that - and I would be pleased at any time to meet with the forestry workers or their representatives to see in what way we can continue the dialogue.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his gracious offer.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thinking of a couple of things here. Silviculture rates for wood contractors have not changed for the past 15 years. Now, before the members opposite say the previous government should have done something about that, we are where we are, and this represents - I want to say that silviculture represents a needed revenue stream for some of these wood suppliers. They don't just cut wood, they also go out into the forests and make sure that the forests rejuvenate.

So will the minister review these rates, and recognize that it costs more to do silviculture work today than it did 15 years ago?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, we know the value of the forest industry to this province, and certainly as I indicated in the earlier response, we kept the forest industry alive through the troubling period we had, and now with the new operator things are once again on much more stable ground. The silviculture rates, I understand, are under review, we're looking at that, and we will continue to work with the stakeholders in the industry, and of course prices depend on supply and demand, you know, the market conditions. Certainly with the two large pulp mills in eastern and central regions of the province there is some competition, and that's a good thing for the private woodlot owner.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, another issue that's been raised is the amount of wood that's being purchased from New Brunswick. And, of course, when wood is purchased out of province, we don't have the same silviculture fees going back into our province, so that's affecting these suppliers as well. But I do know that part of the agreement with Port Hawkesbury Paper is that they are to buy 200,000 tons of pulpwood from private Nova Scotia suppliers each year.

Can the minister assure us all that those targets look like they're going to be hit this year in terms of the amount of woods purchased from Nova Scotia suppliers, and could he provide that information by tabling it here in the Legislature?

MR. PARKER: Mr. Speaker, initially, when the mill started up last September, there was a contract to provide 200,000 tons from private woodlot owners, and there were some challenges in meeting that in the first three months, so there was a small amount of wood, I understand, that was purchased from New Brunswick. Since that time there's been no wood purchased from out of province. And so 200,000 tons was the quota, out of the 600,000 tons, a third was the commitment to private woodlot owners. My understanding now is that the arrangements have been made with various sawmillers and private woodlot co-operatives and owners, and actually it's almost half - it's actually 48 per cent of the wood is now being purchased from private woodlot owners in eastern Nova Scotia.

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

IMMIGRATION - RDAS: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED STREAM - EFFECT

MS. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Immigration. It has been said that the community-identified stream provides rural communities with their best opportunity to get the economic benefits of immigration. In 2011 the number of nominee certificates under that community-identified stream was 146 and that means 146 families that went to rural parts of the province. The success of the stream is solely attributable to the former RDAs. Their hard work ensured the benefits of immigration were spread across the province and not centralized just in the urban core.

My question to the minister is, now that the province is transitioning away from RDAs, could the minister please tell us who is responsible for ensuring the success of the community-identified stream?

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day it's the Office of Immigration and to a point - I like the encouragement from across the way - it's the federal government. We will continue to work with RENs when they develop and work with them as champions for rural Nova Scotia, especially as it relates to immigration issues.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not very happy with that answer because there's a gap in our system for immigration to rural areas. I hope the minister will be looking into this. The RDAs provided not only the identification of community, people who could come and immigrate to their areas, they also provided the newcomer navigators and support that helped people stay in those areas, so it was a very important part of immigration to rural Nova Scotia. The provincial nominee stream and the work done in communities throughout the province help all rural communities.

While the Regional Enterprise Networks, which are supposed to replace RDAs, are going to have a new mandate and focus, it's important that we don't lose the focus on immigration in rural areas, that's important. My final question to the minister is, will Regional Enterprise Networks be mandated to identify immigrants under the community-identified stream or will this government just hope for the best when it comes to the future success of attracting immigrants to rural Nova Scotia?

MR. CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, the theme of today is, what part of yes don't they understand? We will work with the RDAs (Interruption) - and I know the member for Glace Bay wants me to talk for a minute and a half, but no, because it wouldn't be fair because I'm sure that the member has another supplementary. The thing is we are working with these groups and it is community focused, we understand that, and we were working with these groups. It's not as they would portray it. It is a fact that we are working with all individuals and all communities to grow our immigration.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, however you felt about the provision of regional development services for economic development, it is important that the government recognize immigration was part of the service. That's what is important and that's what is being missed. It's very important that the government replace that service on the ground in rural Nova Scotia. That is the purpose of my question today - on the ground. The minister has not provided an answer about who is going to provide the service in the absence of the RDA.

I don't mind asking him - with 10 seconds to go, maybe he can provide me a written answer or an answer to the House, it's important to many members in this House - who is going to be the point of contact for community-identified immigrants in rural Nova Scotia?

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private Members' Public Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 34.

Bill No. 34 - Ratepayer Protection Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise on Bill No. 34, Ratepayer Protection Act. Astute watchers of the Legislature will note that this bill is slightly different than the last version because, of course, after a year of arguing against it, the NDP Government actually finally adopted one of the parts of this bill which was removing the bonuses from executive salaries, which was included in the original version of this bill and, of course, we all remember the government spent over a year saying it wasn't necessary, it was a bad idea and then finally adopted that Liberal idea. In fact, it's one after another that they are adopting some of them.

For example, in the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, you will remember that the government started talking about a competitive electricity market after, again, years of - well, actually, I shouldn't say years of saying it was a bad idea. There were a few years of saying it was a bad idea, and before that, years of the now-Deputy Premier saying what a great idea that would be. So they're having trouble deciding how they feel about that issue, I guess.

This includes the remaining tenets of that original bill and forms just part of some of the things that we believe need to be done in the electricity market in Nova Scotia. For example, the government made a halfway step in their bill and said, well, you know - they argued, and the Premier stood up time after time and told us about why audits of Nova Scotia Power were a bad idea and how they were already done. Then, of course, they introduced a bill that included discretionary and optional audits. We have left that in this bill, because we believe they should be mandatory. We do not believe that should be a discretionary issue, and we believe that they should focus on the issue of value for money.

We know some of the audits which are done on fuel - and there are audits that are done now, but of course those are primarily around fuel - that there have been a number of cases found, especially in gas hedging and other parts of that market, in terms of coal supply and so forth, where Nova Scotia Power has incorrectly made assumptions. In fact, a FAM update - a fuel adjustment mechanism update - that came out just two days ago showed, and I apologize if I get the number not exactly right, but I believe that Nova Scotia Power underestimated their fuel costs for the year so far by \$45 million.

Now keep in mind, Madam Speaker, that is \$45 million out on the fuel adjustment mechanism, which automatically causes rates to go up - something which is excluded from the Third Party's bill or argument that they're going to freeze rates. In fact, the fuel adjustment mechanism, which continues to be the single largest contributor to rates, means that rates would continue to go up. At the moment, because of the deal that was signed last year, we are building an ever-increasing value in the deferred costs, which ratepayers will

get whacked with in just a few years' time when the current stabilization agreement runs out.

This bill would also require that Nova Scotia Power publicly post their estimated and then actual costs on their Web site in audited fashion on a regular basis. Why is this important? Well, we need to know what the true costs of Nova Scotia Power are, what they're going into these hearings with. What happens now is that if they overestimate some of the costs - for example, if they go in and they overestimate the cost of salaries or fuel for the trucks - well, they still get to retain that in the rates. The only thing they don't get to retain it on that is an actual cost is fuel, so it allows them to make more money.

Finally, one of the other parts of this bill - I know I have only a few seconds left, Madam Speaker - is the fact that any rate settlement negotiations would be held in public and not in secret. It would not be a series of secret meetings resulting in a rate hike without the public being able to watch these. I just can't imagine that the government would want to continue to support the idea that Nova Scotia Power automatically holds these in secret. In fact, if they weren't able to reach something in a public fashion, then the costs of the hearings would be borne by Nova Scotia Power and not by ratepayers. At the moment, ratepayers are stuck with tens of millions of dollars in their rates as a result of the costs of hearing. Thank you very much.

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

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm glad to talk about this bill on Liberal Opposition Day, and the Liberal Party plan for energy, or whatever I guess might be a plan - a few points that they write on a Web site somewhere.

Last week I rose in my place to talk about this very issue. One of the things I mentioned was around the Liberal Party plan for energy. I mentioned a screen capture of the Liberal Party Web site, and I've tabled this before, this one document. It was in February 1, 2013, and that has four points of the Liberal Party plan. It was four points, which quite blatantly talk about importing power and talk about Hydro-Québec and cozying up to Hydro-Québec.

You know, Madam Speaker, what's interesting is that a week after our Party put out an information piece on the television, I noticed just a week later that the Liberal Party changed their energy policy. They added some things, and one of the things they added was: explore possibilities about renewable energy in Nova Scotia and a made-in-Atlantic Canada solution. Interesting, because with the Liberal Party we never know where they stand on things. One day they say one thing, and the next day they say another.

I want to take a little history lesson back, and one of the things we do know about the history book, and I've said this before, is that history - we can predict the future by

looking in the past. One of the things we do know is that in 1996 the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia were the creators of what we know now as the HST. They are the creators of the HST, and you know what they did? They applied the HST to electricity costs in this province.

In 1999 the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Liberal Party ran - they brought in the HST in 1998. In 2003 they campaigned against an NDP plan to take the HST off life essentials, just like home heating. In 2005 the Liberal Party Leader at the time, Danny Graham, brought forward a resolution that I'll table here - a resolution condemning the NDP plan to remove the HST from home energy. That was in 2005. In 2006 the Liberal Party Leader of the day, Francis MacKenzie - I know they don't ever talk about him very much, but Francis MacKenzie, the Leader of the Liberal Party, talked about how it would not - in fact, the Liberal Leader at the time said: the province needs to encourage Nova Scotians to conserve fuel, not subsidize energy costs by taking the HST off of home electricity. I will table that.

The other thing is that in 2008 the Liberal Party Leader of today voted in favour of a budget that the Progressive Conservatives brought in that put HST back on home energy, and during the 2009 election campaign the Liberal Party Leader said that "... it was bad, bad public policy to take the HST off home electricity." You know, Madam Speaker, that is exactly what the Liberal Party believes today when it comes to our energy security.

Our government has a plan for lower power rates for Nova Scotians - stable power rates, so that we can get off fossil fuels. I wish the member for Yarmouth would actually stand up for the people of Yarmouth and talk about a plan to get off renewables. The Liberal Party has no plans for the future.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: I'm glad to have what I guess is only a couple of minutes to speak to Bill No. 34 today. I don't have any Web sites printed off or anything like that to speak to or to talk about, and this point or that point. What I do want to say is we're supposed to be talking about ratepayer fairness - I thought that was the topic of the bill. I should probably look up the number and the exact name of it, but I know it's along those lines somewhere. I thought we were going to talk about that, but instead we're going to banter back and forth about who's got the greatest ideas. Well, so far we haven't seen too many of those, and that hasn't worked. But what the idea should be . . .

HON. JOHN MACDONELL: This might save you.

MR. PORTER: Might save me, John's saying. Thanks, John. Anyway, Madam Speaker, unfortunately we don't have a whole lot of time, but we should touch on a few things that the ratepayer, the taxpayer - they're one and the same. I've argued that many times. Everybody seems to have an idea or two or three as to what might be the best plan of

attack, and we're moving toward an election somewhere and we'll all have a plan to put forward and to talk about and to try to take to the public and let them decide what's best.

What's mostly been touted by this government is the Muskrat Falls package. We've talked about that a lot in this place. We haven't really seen much change. Certainly the plan is still moving forward, and it will be under review. We hope that the review is significant and shows what it will cost. We don't know. We've talked about that many times. We don't have a true cost. I think ratepayers want to know, given the title of this bill is ratepayer fairness, they want to be treated fairly. They want to know what the rates will be. I know what is not fair and they will tell you first-hand that every year they are up 3 and 4 per cent and more, 30 per cent over the last few years has been something they have struggled with.

Not only individuals, our business community that I spoke of many times has struggled to stay and some we have forced away. The everyday people who are trying to work and pay the bills, I'm talking about two people both working in the family, making decent money, working hard, are still struggling. I see these people. I know as members we all see these people. I've said this many times, as well, that we have to figure out what is fair for ratepayers. At some point it has to stop. We have to say enough is enough.

We have put out there publicly that we will freeze the rates and what that means is we will freeze the rates. We've done the calculations, we've done the math, and we're confident we can do that. That's not a political statement; that's a fact, we've done that. We're willing to say, we'll do that. Then we'll look at what the best plans are moving forward for the ratepayers in this province. We think there is a better way of showing how that can be done, looking at the audits or looking at the ideas going forward.

Why does it cost this much or that much? Are these really the facts as to what people think? They don't like paying the high rates on power. Every January, here we are again, coming up on January 14th we're going to have another 3 per cent and they look at the URB as a rubber stamp. We would never say anything to discredit the URB, it's a process in place today, but it needs to be changed. We know there are changes that must happen.

If we're going to change the way that energy is created in the province, if we're going to move to renewables, if we're going to move off of this and into that and we're going to talk about Muskrat Falls and whether we're going to build a cable and spend billions of dollars and then not own it at the end of the day - I should point that out - we should talk about if that's fair to ratepayers.

That's what this bill is supposed to do. There's nothing really in this bill that says this is really the be-all and end-all and fair to ratepayers. I think we have a great opportunity moving forward to do something about the cost of energy, if we really want to, and that's not buying from one or buying from this one or buying from this one. Why not

look at buying from anywhere? What we should be buying from and looking for is the opportunity to get the best rates from whomever. We've said that. We're interested in the regional idea.

I don't care where we get it and I can tell you right now, talking to ratepayers, they don't care where they get it either, as long as they're getting the rate they can afford. That is what is important, Madam Speaker - I know I'm running short on time - and that is what's fair to ratepayers. We in this House have the opportunity to do that and to build those rules in legislation, enforce that kind of moving forward, if you want to call it that. (Interruption) Thank you, time flies by rather quickly in here, unfortunately, and we're just getting warmed up on this.

We have the ability in here to create that, to create a world where you can have rules made in this House - whether it's with the URB or without the URB, or how those decisions will be made, but the opportunity to go out and seek out reasonable energy rates that people can afford.

As I've said, we're not doing that, we've got a one-track mind right now when it comes to Newfoundland and Labrador. That might turn out to be a great deal, but since nobody wants to share the cost - and surely they must know, but there's a guesstimate they're kicking around by way of some formula, and we haven't even got a shovel in the ground yet and we're thinking we know what the overall cost is. We don't. That's not fair to ratepayers either.

In moving forward - I know my time is almost up - I want to say if we're going to talk about fairness to ratepayers, we should really put our money where our mouths are and start doing the right thing and develop policy around that.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 1.

Bill No. 1 - Accountability in Economic Development Assistance Act.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

MR. ZACH CHURCHILL: Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to get up and speak to this Liberal bill, which is our hope that it will bring some accountability to the current economic development strategies of this government. We have seen, over the course of the last number of years, the NDP cut larger and larger cheques to some of the biggest corporations in North America, without any job guarantees tied to those cheques and without any guarantees to Nova Scotians that there will be a return on those large investments.

I think there has been approximately \$700 million that has been given to seven companies, \$700 million that has gone to seven companies only, and we have not seen a return on those large sums of so-called investments that have gone to these companies. We don't know what the direct benefits are to Nova Scotians, if any, or if the companies are providing what they said they were going to be providing when they signed the contracts to get these big cheques.

You know in six of those companies, I think they received approximately \$590 million. It was a case that, collectively, they actually laid off 1,300 people, Madam Speaker. These are the things that I don't think we can allow to happen. We saw the mismanagement with the Bowater issue when this government cut that company a cheque without any guarantees to Nova Scotians. When this caucus asked questions about those guarantees and tried to ensure that the investment was going to be put to good use and that we were actually going to maintain those jobs here, the government said we're going to be the lowest in the polls we've ever been because we're being critical of that deal, a deal that was supposed to last for five years - five months later that company took half of that, I think, \$50 million that was given to them and left.

We have the same case with Daewoo. We were promised there would be 500 jobs in Daewoo and there was \$60 million, I believe, that was given to Daewoo, and Nova Scotians were told 500 would be jobs created. There's, now, 15 people working at that plant. (Interruptions) And now these folks say that it's inexperience speaking right now.

If I was the government, if I was the member for Guysborough-Sheet Harbour, I would be very concerned about the fact that his government has cut these large sums of cheques while cutting back from education, while cutting back from health care, while cutting almost \$100 million out of universities, cutting these big cheques to these big companies who are laying people off.

This isn't an economic development strategy. It's the same problem that I think every Party who has had the privilege of governing in this province has had. It's the same mistake, I think, that every Party who has governed in this province has made. It is based on the assumption that you can just buy jobs in the Province of Nova Scotia without looking at the fundamentals that impact our economy, that impact our ability to compete for outside industry to come in, or that help foster our province as a place of entrepreneurship and small business growth.

This government has just done the same thing every other government has done and there have been Liberal Governments that have done this as well. And it's okay, I think it's important that we learn from those mistakes of all Parties and, hopefully, each Party that becomes a government gets better at understanding what those challenges are and making better decisions as a result.

What this bill aims to do, and I don't think that its goals would be in opposition to anything that the government has been saying or anything in their agenda - at least I hope not. This bill seeks to create transparency when it comes to these economic development cheques that are given out, to ensure there are job guarantees when cheques are given, and to ensure that the companies are actually producing what they said they were going to do in order to get that money.

This bill accomplishes two main goals, Madam Speaker. One, a recipient of economic development assistance must provide, upon request, the details of the economic development assistance agreement signed with the province, the terms and conditions and how the recipient is proceeding with regard to meeting any targets and timelines set out in the terms and conditions; and the second thing is the government must publish this information on agreements and progress on a publicly accessible central Web site so that Nova Scotians have access to that information.

What this bill seeks to do is simply create measures of accountability and transparency around these big cheques, to ensure that Nova Scotians are aware of what's happening and to ensure that the companies that are receiving taxpayers' dollars are doing what they said they were going to do. I don't think there would be anything in this bill that would be in opposition to what this government has been saying, and we hope that they take this bill seriously.

The member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville said he hoped that I would get up and speak on behalf of my constituents, which I'm happy to do - I think he's the third or fourth person this week to call me out and ask me to get on my feet. I guess that shows the people at home that I'm doing my job, Madam Speaker, and that I'm doing my best to keep this government accountable. It will never be a problem for me to get up on my feet and speak about any of these issues and speak about them frankly and, hopefully, coming from a place where I understand these issues.

If you look at what this government has done for economic development, the numbers actually speak for themselves. We have a government who stands up and says - first they promised Nova Scotians, when they ran, they were going to create 2,000 a year, that they had a plan to do that. We have since seen job losses in the thousands since this government has taken office. We actually have an economy that is performing more poorly right now, after three years of this NDP regime, than it did in the recession.

The government's new narrative is oh well, no, no, things are bad now, but because of all the great things that we're doing, we are now turning a corner to prosperity and success and whatever else they believe is going to happen. If you actually look at the government's own budget, the figures that are there would indicate that the corner we're turning is just bringing us backward in terms of economic output and employment. According to the government's own budget projections for next year, we have a decreasing population, again. We have higher unemployment and they still say they're turning a

corner to prosperity when even in their own projections, things are getting worse. If you look at the numbers now, they're not much better than they were three years ago and in a lot of cases, they're worse.

If you look at the unemployment rates, they are extremely high. We have Cape Breton, which almost has a 20 per cent unemployment rate, that's completely unacceptable. If you look at the North Shore it's almost 13 per cent. In the Annapolis Valley it is 11.5 per cent and in southwestern Nova Scotia it is 13.2 per cent, that's the second-highest unemployment rate in the province. The government's decisions around economic development have actually, in my humble opinion, worsened the economic position of the province, not improved it.

Now you look at the decision this government made around the Yarmouth ferry, to cut this province off from one of the largest tourism markets in the world that was established for 100 years. Even during the recession there was approximately 80,000 people coming over, or using that vessel, for the few years during the recession, that's 80,000 people coming over paying for rooms, buying food, buying souvenirs and travelling throughout the province from Yarmouth.

After talking to businesses all across the province, all the way up to Baddeck and back around to Yarmouth, it was clear in speaking with those businesses that they felt abandoned by this government when they made that decision to cut the Yarmouth ferry. They felt that this government did not consult the tourism industry before they made that decision and businesses have been hurting as a result of that. Pictou Lodge went into receivership - a very long-standing, established, beautiful resort in beautiful Pictou County. It lost 700 room bookings a year, all the way in Pictou. Speaking with tourism operators in Baddeck, there were businesses there that lost 20 per cent to 30 per cent of their room bookings a year, and that's in one of the tourism hot spots in the province. They all related that back directly to the loss of the ferry because there was a referral network throughout the province, bringing those tourists to the various destinations. (Interruption) I do digress a little bit. The ferry is an important issue to me and my constituents.

The numbers do not reflect that this government's economic strategy has been working. The only thing this government has done is cut these big cheques to big corporations and hope that in so doing, jobs would somehow appear. I've heard this government boast about the support they're giving small business. They're talking about now they've cut, I think, the small business tax by another 0.5 percentage point. That's a good move, small businesses do need tax relief. (Interruptions) For four years in a row and listen, I'll give credit when credit's due. We did not oppose those cuts to the small business tax, we supported them. We think we need more tax relief for our small businesses that are really tied up with red tape and some of the highest taxes in the province, when it comes to income and other things, power rates - you know we have the highest power rates in the country.

The costs to our small businesses are extremely high, but what this government didn't even tell the small businesses, when the Minister of Finance presented this new policy to the Chamber, is that she actually lowered the small-business tax threshold so that small businesses that are succeeding and making money are now going to be paying higher taxes because they're in a higher tax threshold. So the small-business tax cut is actually revenue neutral for the government, and actually hurts a lot of small businesses, that in some cases will be paying upwards of \$10,000 more in taxes a year; and they're paying more in those taxes because of this government.

So what we want to see is a government that will actually start looking at investing in the small-business sector and providing the supports for the small-business sector, because it just isn't about money, and addressing the fundamental challenges that businesses face when it comes to power rates, high gas prices, and the fact that we have an overregulated jurisdiction here in Nova Scotia with some of the highest taxes in the country. That hasn't happened. What this government has done is said, well, we're going to try and buy jobs, with big cheques to seven big companies - none of whom have brought jobs into this province yet. We have laid off - six of those companies laid off 1,300 people - and if this government keeps championing this move like it's somehow good, the people will decide their fate I'm sure.

This piece of legislation is simply to ensure that when government cuts these big cheques, there's a system of accountability in place, and transparency, that allows the taxpayers who are putting money into these companies, allows them to see where the money's going, forces the businesses to have job guarantees before they get any money, and ensures that all the information is made public to the taxpayer. If the government isn't afraid of transparency and accountability, they should move forward with this bill, because it is a good move, and I think one that a lot of Nova Scotians would be happy with. I have heard countless, countless concerns from Nova Scotians in my constituency and beyond about these corporate handouts.

You know, Ed Broadbent, who was a great Leader of the NDP, used to call companies that received those cheques corporate welfare bums. What a long way the NDP has come since those days. (Interruption) Perhaps the member for Pictou East doesn't remember because he was a Liberal back then. But Ed Broadbent and other NDP Leaders like Alexa McDonough always opposed these corporate handouts. And here we have an NDP Government in place who's giving out more than any government before them. You know, it's unreal. And it's not resulting in any sort of increase to our GDP, increased jobs, and in fact, our actual unemployment rate is actually going up as a result of this.

So, I don't know why this government continues to push for these, Madam Speaker, if they want to be accountable and transparent to the people, I would advise the minister, next time she speaks to the chamber of commerce, that she provides all the information about her plans and policies when it comes to their taxes, and I'd like her to be honest with those folks, and I think that they should move forward with this piece of

legislation so that Nova Scotians can once again have confidence in this government's ability to be accountable to them.

A Liberal Government, Madam Speaker, will end corporate handouts, will focus on the fundamentals, and focus on supporting our small businesses. And with that, I'll take my seat. Thank you very much.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

MR. CLARRIE MACKINNON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to stand in my place today and speak about Bill No. 1, an Act to Ensure Accountability in Providing Economic Development Assistance, submitted by the Liberals. Well, I hope I have time to table a number of things from the Liberal days, because there is absolutely no understanding over there about what real job creation is. There is no understanding that job creation is based on performance. Today, it's based on performance. It's based on 10 years of performance usually.

I will have an opportunity, I hope, to table some of the lack of accountability issues that came forward in the Liberal days. One company, one company got millions and millions and millions of dollars, their performance was over 18 months, and then they went down the tube. That's the accountability record of the Liberals. And I am proud to say that I have been a member of the New Democratic Party since the 1980s, for the member for Yarmouth's information, since the 1980s when I got discouraged with the Party of the members opposite.

Speaking on Bill No. 1, job creation accountability, there are two philosophies, two trains of thought that pervade both Parties on the other side. One train of thought is a Party of doing nothingness. How would you like to be a member of a Party of doing nothingness? Because there are some members who believe that you don't have to put any money into job creation, the jobs will just come. That's in a society when we are competing with other provinces; we are competing with other states. Job creation is vital, vital for the benefit of Nova Scotians.

Then we have the other philosophy; the other philosophy is one of anytime there is a standing by a community, standing by the people, it is considered to be corporate welfare. Corporate welfare they're saying, when you stand with the people, when you create jobs and preserve jobs, we hear over there, corporate welfare.

I want to ask a question today because I'm very proud of the answer. The question that I am going to ask is, last month, which was the most productive pulp mill in Canada? What was that pulp mill? That pulp mill was the one that we stood beside, that pulp mill was Port Hawkesbury Paper - PHP. We actually saved 1,400 jobs and every time we use that figure, it's always poo-pooed in this House.

We are told repeatedly that it's only a few hundred jobs. Well, we know, in my constituency there were 27 companies that were hurt when NewPage went down the tube. I want to ask where were the Leaders of all three Parties when NewPage went down the tube? Because I was on my way into the Legislature for a meeting; I came in for a meeting the very next day after the NewPage announcement and I got a telephone call saying, Clarrie, turn your car around and head to Port Hawkesbury because the Premier is going to be there and he wants some members with him.

Ask Billy Joe MacLean, my friend Billy Joe MacLean, ask him about the Premier's involvement. I turned my car around and I went to Port Hawkesbury because the Premier was there the very next morning. So where were the other Leaders? Where was the Leader (Interruption) I made several trips down there and the Premier was there and some local members. I would like for the member for Inverness and the member for Richmond to stand in their places and talk about the Strait area and what was done by this government.

Because of the lack of experience by the members opposite and the Leaders opposite, there was no understanding how saving the former NewPage mill would actually save hundreds of small businesses throughout the Strait.

On top of that, the Liberals didn't understand that the province will gain its entire loan back and make \$150 million in new tax revenue over 12 years. So I ask again, what pulp mill was the most productive in Canada last month?

You know, Madam Speaker, in one 24-hour day we had two announcements: one was IBM and the other was PROJEX - 960 jobs were created. And I was actually very embarrassed in this House when in the Speaker's Gallery, company representatives were up there and they were referred to as "corporate welfare people". That is the message that was sent to them.

Now I just heard the member for Yarmouth talk about DSTN and the number of employees there - totally, totally off the mark because there has been a lot of rehiring and callbacks and so on. You know something? The Liberal caucus actually met in Pictou County and I've heard this from the Liberals, several members, on a number of occasions talk about seeing seven cars in the parking lot - we drove by and we saw seven cars in the parking lot. You know they didn't even know where the parking lot was. A Party that can't get the parking lot right, there's something wrong, okay, because if you drive down the main road in Trenton, beside some old buildings there are some cars parked. They didn't realize that you had to go in by Nova Scotia Power Inc., the generating station there, and that there are gates there and commissionaires and 50, 60, 70 and sometimes 100 cars there in the parking lot. They couldn't even get the parking lot right.

Furthermore, we are saying that we are going to experience some good things in Nova Scotia after going through a time that has been the worst since the Great Depression. What we're looking at is a situation where we are turning a corner - and the members

opposite don't understand this at all. I'm sure if they tried to turn an economic corner they would all get lost. The situation with DSTN is one that we have actually saved a lot of jobs by reopening that plant.

The Leader of the Liberal Party and the Liberal Party actually criticized by saying that the company shouldn't be allowed to compete for business in the province, including shipbuilding work that might otherwise go to outside Nova Scotia. Actually there are some changes being made in the plant so that they can do more and that's why they are calling people back, so there was actually a stand taken against DSTN and I find that very, very discouraging.

You know in the past few months the Leader of the Liberal Party has threatened to kill more than 10,000 jobs for families in Digby, Truro, Cape Breton, Pictou, Halifax, Dartmouth, Port Hawkesbury, and Shelburne, to name a few.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. I just want to remind the member that the use of the terminology "killing" something in the House of Assembly has been ruled out of order and unparliamentary. I would ask him to retract it, perhaps rephrase his comments.

MR. MACKINNON: I'm very sorry, Madam Speaker. I will certainly withdraw that, but it was destroying the possibility of many hundreds of jobs. You know, they have repeatedly talked to us about the Irving situation. They have talked to us about funding an enterprise, and Jim Irving has said repeatedly that without the province's role we would not have gotten the great ships projects.

AN HON. MEMBER: He said thank you.

MR. MACKINNON: He said thank you. Yes, he did. He said thank you, and I remember that day when there were workers with tears in their eyes. I remember one man saying to me - his two sons were working with him at the facility there, and he said - I'm trying to remember the quote, but it was something like, I believe my sons will have jobs here for the rest of their working lives. That was a proud day, a very proud day, in Nova Scotia when we heard that.

I have to say as well that the Liberal Party has actually taken a stand against 400 good jobs on the South Shore in Digby and at the feed mill in Truro in relationship to the Cooke Aquaculture project. Years ago, I used to be the administrator of aquaculture in the province, and I saw Charlotte County in New Brunswick being transformed from an area with relatively high unemployment to an area that had very good employment levels, and that was based on the investments that were made there. I remember the Leader of the Liberal Party speaking against the 400 good jobs, as I stated, on the South Shore. I know there is one word that I can't say, but I can say that many, many jobs would have been terminated if either one of the other Parties were in power.

So I know my time is getting close to running out, but we are creating jobs. I'm sorry I don't have time to table a good number of headlines from back in the Liberal days. I have many, many of them here. I wonder, since I am referring to them, if I could table all of these, because the headlines are very, very disturbing.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. I want to remind the member that the use of props is out of order as well. Thank you.

The honourable member for Pictou East has the floor.

MR. MACKINNON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm not going to take issue with you at all, because that would not be right. I was only going to refer to them with the proper headlines and read them here, of course, but my time is just about gone. I just want to close by saying I'm glad that we are creating jobs. I'm glad that we are creating and preserving jobs.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Cape Breton North.

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: It's my pleasure to join in debate here this afternoon on Bill No. 1 that's put forward by the Liberal Party on accountability, an Act to Ensure Accountability in Providing Economic Development Assistance.

We all know that we need accountability in providing economic development here in the province. There's been thousands and millions and millions of dollars spent since I've been here that seem to be spent unwisely, I guess is the best way to put it. I haven't seen the job numbers going down, as far as unemployment rates, since I've been here. Spending money wisely is what we have to do more of.

Madam Speaker, I'm hearing about millions of dollars going to a shipyard contract. I think it's great that we have that shipyard contract here and I think the good people of the Irving shipyard deserve that contract because they're the people who work there. They're the people who are the experts and they are the people who are building ships here in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Since that money has been put in place, I haven't heard of one job that has been created there so far. I asked for those job numbers and I didn't get them, Madam Speaker. Businesses in Nova Scotia are struggling, small businesses. You know we hear about here in Halifax all the cranes that are in the air and how great Halifax is doing, 9 per cent unemployment, and that's great.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please. It's becoming difficult to hear the honourable member for Cape Breton North.

MR. ORRELL: As I said, Madam Speaker, it's great to see the cranes here in Halifax. I don't see any cranes, not even on the ground let alone up in the air, in Cape Breton. The cranes I see in Cape Breton are on the endangered species list.

Madam Speaker, businesses in my community are struggling. The high taxes are killing those businesses. I heard here just a few minutes ago that the business tax rate has gone down. Do you know what? That is true and that's true probably for a certain percentage of the population, but the threshold for those businesses has gone up. When those thresholds go up, those businesses get the cut in their percentage rates; they pay a lot more taxes, a lot higher taxes. If that was transparent like the bill here produces, we'd see that.

Even the member from Guysborough-Sheet Harbour earlier was talking about, oh, we lowered the tax rate but he didn't know the threshold was raised. (Interruption) Well, he didn't say it if he did know it. So he bragged about the thresholds that we took down and he never bragged about the threshold going up. So our small businesses that may do well, marginally well and get over that threshold, are going to pay a higher tax rate. That does nothing for the business in my area.

Businesses are struggling, they are paying the highest power rates, they're paying the highest transportation rates and they're paying the highest taxes. Madam Speaker, businesses that rely on power are paying more.

We're hearing about the Muskrat Falls and the trans-Atlantic cable that's going to come across and going to create all these jobs and we asked the question, where are the jobs going to be? Not one was told about Nova Scotia. They're going to Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker, and Newfoundland and Labrador is going to benefit from it. Newfoundland and Labrador got stung by Quebec and now they're not going to be that slow and they're not going to do the same thing and give us all those jobs.

Madam Speaker, we need to put a bill in place that's going to help as many people as we possibly can, create as many jobs as we possibly can. You know this bill will create transparency, ensure that jobs are produced, but I haven't seen in the bill where it says anything if they aren't produced. The jobs that are being produced or so-called produced by this NDP Government with all their handouts, we don't know if there's any job. We know there are 1,300 jobs lost since all that money has been invested.

If this bill was in place maybe we could find out where the jobs are and we can look at patting them on the back, if they actually were created, but they don't like the non-pat on the back when we bring it up that they haven't been created.

We want to make sure that that money is being spent on what it is agreed to be spent on. But let's be clear, Madam Speaker, we need to create jobs. I'd rather see a bill come

forward that would create jobs and add the transparency with it, because that's what we need in this province.

In Cape Breton we have an 18.6 per cent unemployment rate, the highest in the province. Madam Speaker, in some areas of Cape Breton there's 30 per cent unemployment. We haven't got a firm commitment in this budget to create jobs in Cape Breton. The North Shore is over 13 per cent, southwestern Nova Scotia is over 13 per cent.

Madam Speaker, Halifax is doing well and we all think that's a good thing because to have a vibrant province, we have to have a vibrant capital city. But if we don't spread that growth around to other parts of the province, that's not helping us who live in rural Nova Scotia.

I heard the member from Pictou County talking earlier about what happens if we don't spend this money, jobs will just come? Well, Madam Speaker, if we had a competitive province, if we were open for business, if we had lower power rates, lower taxes, lower transportation costs, businesses may want to come here and not have to get the big handouts to get here. Businesses might talk to other businesses in the area and encourage them to come here because we know we have the best workforce. Irving Shipbuilding has told us that, we showed that. They won it on their merit; it's economics 101.

We've heard that we have \$600 million invested in projects over the last little while. How many jobs were actually created? The statistics we have are 1,300 jobs lost, part-time jobs are gaining, full-time jobs are leaving. We know people can't live on part-time jobs. Economic development is essential in this province but we need to do it in a way that's sustainable, that people don't just pack up and leave when they go. We're thankful that the Port Hawkesbury Paper got some government money to make sure they stayed open, but are there guarantees that they will stay open? Where does that equipment go if this Port Hawkesbury Paper does decide to shut down and pack up and take it with them? Are there guarantees that it stays here?

They gave them \$130-some million when Stern had to put \$33 million into it with no guarantees that equipment would stay here - the most efficient paper-making equipment in the world, from what we understand, with probably the best workforce. We heard about the growth of Port Hawkesbury Paper so we know they have the best workforce in the paper industry. We want to make sure that stays there.

Their power rates are probably the highest in the paper-making business. That's not conducive to them staying there. We have to make sure that Port Hawkesbury Paper is successful and stays here not only for the people working in the mill, but for the surrounding areas. We hear that the owner of the Home Hardware in Port Hawkesbury does better with his store in St. Peter's now than he does in Port Hawkesbury. We need to

create a business climate that encourages economic development. As I said earlier, we need to lower taxes; we need to decrease our power rates.

We're hearing a lot about renewable energy and no one on this side of the House is against renewable energy. We want to make sure we can afford renewable energy. I'm from Cape Breton and I'm very proud to be from Cape Breton. Every day I hear about this old, dirty imported coal to burn power. If it's that dirty and it's that terrible, let's take it off the grid right now and let's rely on our renewables and whatever we have, because you know what? Years ago we went off the oil onto coal because it was cheaper. Now if we mine our own Cape Breton coal, we can get it cheaper again and we get clean, local coal and put people to work. That's economic development, Madam Speaker. We don't want to give a business just a straight handout to make them come here.

We want to buy those renewables that we can afford. We want to use natural gas; we want to use wind power, solar power, and tidal power. We want to develop that so Nova Scotians can afford them, so businesses can afford them. If businesses can't afford their power rates, out of business they go and there are two, three, four jobs at a time we lose.

We're all for transparency. We know that transparency, by definition, enables people to have a say in what affects them and answer any questions they might have. If this government were more transparent, we'd get the answers that we were looking for. We need a written summary of the economic development and the terms and conditions of each agreement. That's great, that's really good, but we want to make sure we create jobs. We need bills in this Legislature, not bantering back and forth between Parties. We need to actually sit down and work and create jobs.

How many jobs are we going to create by studying? I can't stress enough how the rural areas of Nova Scotia, Cape Breton in general, need jobs. We need to make sure businesses want to set up here, but even better than that, we want to make sure the businesses that are here stay here, and if some of them need some assistance, that's great. Sometimes it's just to get over a little hurdle. That hurdle that we're trying to get over now is a 30 per cent increase in our power rates in the last four years.

Madam Speaker, most small businesses that are employing two, three, four, or five people - that hurts their bottom line. They can't expand, they can't move to another area, they can't hire more people, and they can't increase their technology, because they're paying the power rates. We need to make sure businesses want to come here. Jobs aren't just going to come here without the climate to make sure that people can set business up here. It's not going to happen.

Although this bill sounds good, and we want to make sure that we can keep an eye on what's going on in the province, we want to concentrate more on creating jobs. Tax cuts work great, but we have to work on the tax cuts with small business and increase the threshold, so they can make sure that they actually pay lower taxes. There are no incentives

for businesses to try to produce more if they're going to raise the threshold and have to pay more taxes because of it.

I did also hear the member from Pictou County ask where the PC caucus was when Port Hawkesbury Paper was struggling. You know, Madam Speaker, we were there, the whole caucus, and we met with all people from the mill. We met with union people to management, we met with the council and mayors, and we heard the same thing from all of them. This mill is essential for that area to survive, and it was off again, it was on again, it was off again, it was on again. I want to know if there's a guarantee that that mill will be there for 12 years, like the member said.

AN HON. MEMBER: There's no guarantee that you'll be here.

MR. ORRELL: There is no guarantee any of us will be here. Call an election, and we'll see how many are going to be here. It's amazing that any business in the province can actually compete with the conditions they have. We were talking about threats to jobs, and since this government has been in power there has been no real threat to jobs. It's been jobs that have gone. The threat's not there - it's actually happening. If this bill can put some transparency into what this government is doing today, then that's a good thing, but I don't know if this government would take this bill, because I don't know if they want to see what's going on. If we can create jobs, we're all for it.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll take my place.

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

MS. KELLY REGAN: I'm delighted to rise in my place this evening to speak to Bill No. 1. This bill is aimed at introducing transparency to economic development assistance packages developed and pursued by government. A Liberal Government would end corporate handouts, would end the NDP practice of writing blank cheques with no job guarantees, and would work toward diversifying the economy of Nova Scotia. In fact, I think this is exactly the kind of bill that the NDP would have championed back when they were in Opposition. No one could express outrage better than the NDP when they were in Opposition. They would have . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: We were better at it than you guys are.

MR. MAT WHYNOTT: We actually proposed things.

MS. REGAN: I do believe the member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville is a little confused, because we are in fact debating a proposal, which is what this bill is.

Back in the day when they were in Opposition, they would have been howling about corporate welfare bums, and now they're happy with it. They were continuously

shocked and appalled any time a government gave money to a company, and in fact what they did was they turned around and gave money to companies, and they didn't even have to have any job guarantees. It was wonderful.

People voted NDP. They thought that the NDP was going to come in and do things differently. The Premier stood there at the debate, and he said that he could balance the budget without raising taxes. Now, we don't know what unicorn he rode in on; we don't know if he thought he had found a colony of leprechauns who had pots of gold. We don't know if he was an alchemist and he had found a way to turn Cape Breton coal into gold, but somehow the Premier thought that he could actually balance the budget without raising taxes.

Now do you know what? It's amazing to me that that crowd across the way bought that hook, line and sinker, but they did. Then, of course, they had to climb down from it and had to climb down from it. They just promised that they could do it and it didn't matter - well actually the Minister of Finance would know that if she actually read the bill that there is a plan, but do you know what? She doesn't want to do that. She just wants to trip across the way, same as the member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville.

What bothers the crowd across the way is that the Liberal Leader wouldn't make a promise like their Leader did, knowing he was going to break it. He wouldn't do it and they can't handle that. So instead, what did the NDP do? They raised taxes, raised fees, gutted education, they slashed advanced education, \$1.5 billion . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove has the floor. If people have conversations they'd like to carry on, please take them out of the Chamber.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

MS. REGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I often go out and knock on doors and talk to my constituents and one of the things I hear from people is how shocked at how bad this government has been. They are shocked and appalled. They cannot believe - I mean they took a leap of faith, voted NDP, and they got Keystone Kops. It blows them away, they cannot believe it.

This government, after howling about the slush fund for years, in fact raised the money spent on it to new heights. They changed the name but it's still the slush fund. No matter how you slice it, it's still the slush fund.

This government has introduced strategy and framework, after framework, after strategy, with no goals, no targets, no timelines. It's just all airy-fairy. There are rainbows and there are unicorns and four-leaf clovers and fairy tales and the culmination of that fairy

tale of course was the budget, which only somebody who wasn't clued in would actually think was balanced. I mean heavens. (Interruptions)

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

MS. REGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So every day when they stand up in the House, the members opposite say we're turning the corner, we're turning the corner. We keep saying, to what? Drive down Bedford Highway, there's building after building closed, shutting down, leaving, they're going. Do you know why they're going? Because nobody is buying and nobody is buying because they have no money because they have no jobs.

The last time I ran for office, in 2009, you couldn't find an open space on the Bedford Highway. We were lucky, we lucked-in at the last minute in 2009. Now when you drive down the Bedford Highway, there are all kinds of empty space and that's because this government has failed - failed in their job creations. But hey, don't take my word for it, let's just look at the figures there; let's just see what the unemployment rate is. (Interruption) Unfortunately, Statistics Canada does not do an unemployment rate just for Bedford, I realize that the Minister of Communities, Culture, and Heritage may think that, but it doesn't actually work that way.

And so - sorry, I misplaced the - here we are; here we are. Here we go; let's just take a look at that. Let's just look at that - the unemployment for Cape Breton is 18.6 per cent; the unemployment rate for the North Shore, 12.9 per cent; the unemployment rate for Annapolis Valley, 11.5 per cent; the unemployment rate for southern Nova Scotia, 13.2 per cent; and, even though the rate in Halifax is lower than it is there, the fact of the matter is Halifax, HRM, is hurting as well. All you have to do is drive down the street and look at the number of buildings that are empty, and then you know that this government has not done its job.

This government has not done its job. It has put - you know what? If you'd put money into companies with job guarantees, you wouldn't have run into those kinds of problems. But you didn't, you were handing out blank cheques all over the place, and I know you don't like it when we point it out, and I don't blame you, I'd be embarrassed if I were you, too. But the fact of the fact of the matter is "they saw ya comin'. They saw ya comin'". (Interruptions) I think if there are job targets, it's less of a problem. I think we've been through that already. I understand you have some problems with that. But you know, this bill would force companies to be accountable if they take government money.

And I would think that the members opposite would think that's a good thing. Now, maybe they don't think accountability is a good thing - certainly we've seen that they like to pretend that they're accountable when they try to hide information like, oh, announcing that we're going to drop our small-business tax rate, and then oh, forgetting to mention that oh, you're going to drop the threshold as well, so that there are businesses who are

suddenly going to have to pay that tax. Kind of forgot to mention that to the chamber of commerce, didn't you?

This bill is aimed at introducing transparency to economic development assistance packages developed and pursued by government - and that's a good thing, Madam Speaker, that's a good thing. This government has taken a failed approach of corporate handouts to big companies and not required them to meet certain performance obligations. and that, to us, does not make sense. A Liberal Government would end these kinds of corporate handouts, would end the NDP practice of writing blank cheques with no job guarantees, and would work toward diversifying the economy of Nova Scotia and of communities across the province.

Without a diversified economy and a strong economic system, Nova Scotia's economy will continue to flounder and, Madam Speaker, what's the definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. That's what this crowd has been doing - doing the same old thing, handing out money, don't require any jobs, let them lay off people, and apparently they're okay with that.

Madam Speaker, if a company plans to take some money from the citizens of Nova Scotia, they should have to account for what happens to it, they must show what they are doing with it and how many jobs they've created - and Nova Scotians deserve nothing less. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker, that concludes the Liberal Party's business for today. I certainly want to thank all members who have taken the opportunity to stand in their place and give remarks. With that, I will call upon the Government House Leader to provide us with business for tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Madam Speaker, the member for Glace Bay is just an unending wealth of information. You usually don't find guys that good looking and that smart.

The hours for tomorrow will be 12:00 noon to 6:00 p.m. and after the daily routine we will be doing Public Bills for Second Reading, Bill Nos. 36, 37, 42, 51, 54, 55, 57 and 59. I move that the House do now rise.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is that the House now rise to meet again tomorrow at the hour of 12:00 noon.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The Adjournment motion was submitted by the honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Upper Sackville:

“Therefore be it resolved that the government should be congratulated on successfully achieving its Back to Balance targets and delivering a balanced budget for Nova Scotians.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Fairview.

GOV'T. (N.S.) - BACK TO BALANCE TARGETS: TARGETS - ACHIEVEMENT CONGRATS.

MR. GRAHAM STEELE: Madam Speaker, since I resigned as Finance Minister almost one full year ago, I have not taken a large part in the proceedings of the House. I no longer speak for the government because only a minister can do that and I no longer speak for the Department of Finance.

My focus is back on serving constituents in the constituency, which is where I started back in 2001. I was a little surprised when the gist of the Speaker's ruling yesterday was that I had never stood up in the House to state plainly that there was no intention on my part to mislead the House in the presentation of last year's budget. It's still not clear to me what opportunity there is for a government backbencher to make such a statement in response to a point of privilege.

Nevertheless and in any event, I'm taking the opportunity to do that now. Let me say plainly and directly, there was in the presentation of last year's budget absolutely, positively no intention on my part to mislead the House. Building a \$9 billion budget is an exceedingly complex process. It was my privilege to play a lead role in that process four times while I served as Minister of Finance. The process takes place over about eight months. There are literally thousands of line items. The economic model used by the Department of Finance has over 600 variables - everything is connected to everything else.

There is new information coming in on these line items and these model variables all the time, every single day. As a result, in the preparation of a budget there has to be a

cut-off date. There has always been a cut-off date and there will always be a cut-off date. There is no Finance Minister, ever, who has stood up in this House with a budget that is up-to-date as of the day of the budget. That may be possible with a \$9,000 budget or a \$90,000 budget but it is not possible with a \$9 billion budget, with thousands of line items and hundreds of variables, all of which are inter-connected and on which new information is coming in every day.

In the case of last year's budget, everyone agrees that the new information came in after the cut-off date. This was explained at length when the Department of Finance appeared before the Public Accounts Committee. Anyone who still has questions about that point should review the transcript of that meeting. The only question left then is whether the new information was material in an accounting sense of the term, and again, everybody agrees that it wasn't.

I know that \$27 million sounds like a lot of money and it is, except in the context of a \$9 billion budget. The Auditor General himself attests to the fact that it was not material. Remember that the Auditor General reviews the revenue estimates every year. Last year he signed off on the revenue estimates, as he has every year. He would not have signed off on the revenue estimates if there had been a material change. So, Madam Speaker, we had new information that came in after the cut-off date and it wasn't material in the context of a \$9 billion budget.

The commitment of this province, and indeed, of any participant in the financial markets, is that non-material changes will be incorporated into the next scheduled financial statements, and they duly were in the September forecast update. In short, routine matters were dealt with in a routine way. That's the end of the story, or it should have been the end of the story.

Madam Speaker, I was flabbergasted to read in the February report of the Auditor General his view that the new information should have been stated at budget time. I did not understand his position then, and I do not understand it now. If the information came after the cut-off and was not material, which everyone agrees on, then what accounting rule says that it needs to be reported anyway? There isn't one.

The Auditor General says that errors should be corrected, which is another accounting rule everyone agrees with, but this wasn't an error. It was new information that wasn't material that came in after the cut-off. That's not an error or a mistake in any normal sense of the word. If the Auditor General's interpretation is accepted, then the concept of the cut-off date become meaningless, because any change has to be reported, or maybe it's not just any change.

The Department of Finance followed the rule of materiality, just like the Auditor General, and just like the department always has. The Auditor General now seems to be suggesting that a different rule should be followed, but he hasn't said why or what the new

rule should be. If the rule of materiality should change so that changes of a certain size should be reported, even if they're not material, the Auditor General has not said what the new threshold is, nor has he said how close to Budget Day is too close.

Madam Speaker, I could go on about this, but the point is essentially this: the Auditor General in his February report is applying a new rule that he hasn't spelled out, that is different than what has been applied before or that he applies himself, and that nobody in the Department of Finance, including me, could have anticipated at the time the budget was delivered.

There is another aspect of this matter that I think is relevant, and I think can only be understood by somebody who has sat in the chair of the Minister of Finance. The Province of Nova Scotia is a participant in the bond markets. As a public issuer, there are certain rules and conventions that apply. There is a process for the release of financial information of a public issuer. The Auditor General is suggesting a change in well-established rules about the release of information. The markets would consider this to be very peculiar behaviour. When you have a budget with thousands of interrelated line items and hundreds of interrelated economic variables, you cannot be dribbling out information just because one of those items has changed on a given day.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let me say that I am proud of the work I did as Minister of Finance. (Applause) I am proud of the Back To Balance process, and I'm proud that my successor as Minister of Finance was able to deliver a balanced budget to the people of the province this year. I have never deliberately misled the House, and I did not in delivering the budget last year. I respect this House and all that it represents, although I do believe that the level of posturing and partisanship on all sides should be a concern to all citizens of the province and all members of the House.

I am proud of what I have been able to accomplish as a member of this House for the past 12 years. The older I get, the more painfully aware I am that I could always have done more, and I could always have done better. I say all this knowing that these may well be the last words I say in the course of debate in this House, because this sitting will end soon, an election is imminent, and I am not reoffering as a candidate. One day, perhaps when my children grow up, they will look at Hansard for the period 2001 to 2013 and see what their father did and said while he was here. They are still young and it may be many years from now when they do that and if I am not around when they read these words, I want them to know that I love them, I am proud of them, and I hope that what they read here in Hansard makes them proud of me. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker, just on a point, unfortunately for those words from the member for Halifax Fairview, I don't believe Hansard is recording late debate, and that's the unfortunate part, but I would encourage him to look at possibly

tabling his speech to make sure it does get in the official record because I don't think any of us would want his children or anyone else to miss the words that he has spoken. I don't believe that late debate does get published (Interruption) at least it wasn't before, but if it is now that's fine. If not, I hope the member will find a way to get those words into the record.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

MS. DIANA WHALEN: I think I would be remiss if I didn't say a few words as I know the member has spoken from the heart today and it's really quite moving. We haven't heard much of that in this House in the last number of years, perhaps - number of months, definitely. I want to say that all members of the House have a high respect - certainly we do on this side of the House - have a high respect for the former Minister of Finance. I think he was very well regarded, always, as a member who did his research and who has been here for the right reasons.

I have often said to other members, or people in the public, that when you look around the House and talk individually to members, what has urged them to run, or the motivation that we have to run and put our name on a ballot, I think across the board, is to make a difference in the province and to leave a positive impact, to do something positive for our province and our communities, and our families, in fact, a legacy for our families as the member for Halifax Fairview said. As members of the House know, Halifax Fairview is the neighbouring riding to mine, a very closely related community, really. Our children attend the same high school and go to the same theatre schools and so on. We do have a lot in common and I want to be sure that everybody knows that we have the highest respect for that individual.

I'm pleased that he had a chance to speak today, to bring his viewpoint and his comments to the House. At the same time he didn't really address the motion that was before us and the motion was sort of the flip side of what we talked about last night, which is about whether or not the budget is balanced. We could speak to that, we could speak to some of the legacy of the NDP Government. I think the former speaker, the member of Halifax Fairview, has said an election is imminent and I think that has and does play a role in the partisanship that emerges in the House and perhaps the entrenched views that become more and more - the word that he used I had written down. I haven't got it here but becomes very, maybe, hyper-partisanship, that we become dug in into our positions. But there are certainly points that we feel are fact and that we feel need to be brought out.

I think that if there was any praise for the NDP Government, it's that they've had an ability to use public relations to run advertising to their benefit, to frame issues into slogans and sound bites, and that has been a very deliberate attempt from day one, from the moment the NDP Government was formed. That is not something that I highly respect because I think it dumbs down the issues and it begins to take huge issues like health care and just distill them down into a slogan, or the need for good education gets distilled into a

little jingle and lots of ads are run on TV with the hope that everybody is going to feel more positive, even if the facts don't bear that out.

In Question Period today, and again last night, I raised the issue of retail sales being down, and that a lot of other figures - I'm going to table the retail sales. I know that probably the government members have seen it, but this is just the most recent Stats Canada retail sales figures. I said that the February figures were down year over year - from January to the end of February, seasonally adjusted, it seemed like any way you took it they were down. The figures were up to 2.2 per cent down in sales and activity.

I said, just that one figure alone, how does that indicator support that we're going to make HST go up by 5 per cent next year, that suddenly the revenue is going to bounce up 5 per cent from where it was this year? That's just one of the three factors that has been inflated in the budget as we see it, as the Liberal Party sees it. It has also been inflated for personal income tax.

I mentioned yesterday in the same debate that we have 9.2 per cent unemployment forecasted in the Budget Assumptions book, the book that we're given to give the economic basis for the assumptions in the budget. That says it's going to be 9.2 per cent unemployment, which is a little bit worse than this year's 9.1. So it's not improving. It's still bad. I heard the figure 1,100 fewer jobs anticipated for the coming year, and yet we somehow think that the revenue side, personal income tax, is going to go up by almost \$150 million. I mean, where does this \$100-plus million come from if it's not from people working and paying income tax? That doesn't have any other figures involved.

The Minister of Finance mentioned other factors that might be involved in the HST, and I'll grant you that there are other forecasters that might help the HST, but personal income tax is based solely on people working and contributing through their payroll deductions, or if they're self-employed, paying their income tax directly. That personal income tax requires people working and earning more money, so if it's going to go up by a \$140-some million, it means that we have to either be earning more money and pushing ourselves into a higher income tax bracket, or more of us have to be working. Those are the two things that would create more personal wealth, and therefore more personal income tax being paid to the province.

I think people don't mind at all paying their income tax when they are doing better and earning more money. I think the majority of Canadians, the majority of people I know, want to have services for the money they're paying, but they're willing to pay their income tax. Where is the evidence that we'll suddenly have a good enough economy, enough people earning more, working more hours or whatever it may be, to contribute that much more?

It's right here in the budget summary that next year there's an increase of \$145 million projected from last year's estimate to this year's estimate, and I just don't believe it.

I just frankly don't believe that there is the evidence in place, the indicators, the economic evidence to say that this is going to happen. I think there's a lot of anticipation for some projects that are coming, and I hope that many of them will come to fruition, but when I see a continued rate of 9 per cent unemployment and the figure that we're expected to lose jobs, and somebody, I believe in the Third Party, today said that we had a net loss of - I forget - hundreds of people who have left the province, just left the workforce, left our province.

None of that bodes well, I'm sorry. We have an aging population, a fairly flat population. We know, again, and this is in the Budget Assumptions book - it says clearly that we have more people working part-time, fewer full-time workers. People are working part-time or juggling several part-time jobs to make a living.

I don't believe the budget is going to be balanced. I think that what has been tabled has been - it does, if you just look at the figures, if you accept the high revenue forecasts, if you choose to overlook the fact that we prepaid universities by \$34 million, thereby driving up last year's deficit so that this year could be in balance and would show a small surplus, I do say that on paper, if you buy those aspects of the budget, then you could remind yourself, by reading the cover of the budget, that it seems to be balanced. But you have to read the cover, because that's just there to reaffirm, I guess, or reassure members of the NDP caucus who might be a little bit worried as they go forth to defend this budget in their own ridings.

Madam Speaker, the budget is really not balanced, and right off the bat we know that Acadia and NSCAD were prepaid \$34 million that they need to run their operations in 2013-14 - they got the money in fiscal year before us, 2012-13. They got the money on the last business day of the previous year, which allowed that expenditure to flow through in the last year, blowing up the deficit by a further \$34 million and allowing the government to show what appears to be a balanced budget this year.

All the public needs to know is that one fact, and then the myth of the balanced budget is blown out of the water. On top of that, if people want to look further they can question whether they believe what they see in their communities when they talk to business people and ask, are you planning to hire more people? Do you think this will be the year you have expansion? Then I think what they're going to hear is what CFIB hears - that's the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which does regular checks with their 6,500 members to see how they feel, what their business confidence is. They are not feeling buoyant; they're not feeling like they're going to expand in the coming year. That's the latest from CFIB. So that doesn't support that the small business sector is going to be doing anything - and we know we've got some real issues in some of our big employers.

Again, the government has put more money in, over almost \$600 million into big business, corporate welfare, and yet we have fewer jobs in those businesses than we had before the money was committed to help shore them up. So, it's just an unusual

circumstance to give more money and have fewer jobs. And, Madam Speaker, none of those factors support that this budget is balanced - and therefore I don't accept the premise.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It was nice to hear the former Minister of Finance's comments tonight. I know they were heartfelt, and I'm going to try to revise my speech a little bit to respect what he had said about partisanship. And I know, not that I sat on that side of the House as a member, but I did work for former governments in this province, and once you've been on the side of the government side of the House, I think you realize it's not as easy as it looks.

I often think about that when I'm sitting on this side, and if I'm offering some criticism and, hopefully, maybe sometimes more so recommendations to change things, I always have that in mind. And at the end of the day, we're all human beings, and I think we all care about the province. I think we all would like to see it go in the same direction, we just see different ways of getting it there, or different paths to getting there. So I guess the - I think I'm going to skip that part, Madam Speaker - starting off so nicely here, I hate to spoil it.

Madam Speaker, I know that in government it's really all about making decisions, and I know we often talk about decisions made in the past. And we certainly, in this corner of the House, have a record that we have to defend in the past because there have been many times over the last 250-plus years that Progressive Conservative Governments have been the government for Nova Scotia. And I think about my predecessor, Rodney MacDonald, whose 2009 budget went down in defeat and triggered an election, and I do know that many members opposite will say that government was making bad decisions, but I think that they have to remember that there is a balance, and at the time there was a prepay for universities in 2009 and I know that the current government did not agree with that at the time, and that's fine, but I want to point out that this budget has a prepay in it for universities - for two universities. Not all of them, but two of them.

Also, I think about one of the good things that was in this budget - and Madam Speaker, we vote for and against budgets for many different reasons - this is one item in the budget which I voted against last night, but was not voting against this particular feature of the budget, and that was insulin pumps for children, and I know they've also added a couple of years for young people who need dental care, that the government is going to pay for that - I believe it's 14 to 16, or 13 to 15, it escapes me at the moment.

But Madam Speaker, I would compare that with the Family Pharmacare Program that was brought in under the MacDonald Government. That certainly cost money, but it's something I know I continuously recommend that people in my constituency have a look at, if they don't have medical insurance through where they work, and if they need to get an affordable means of looking after expenses they would have in their family.

The reason I'm pointing out these things is that government is all about decisions. Governments past and present will either side between austerity, which is cutting back on expenses, or they will favour spending money. The point I want to make is government is all about making decisions. I think ideally we try to remember that when we're making expenditure decisions, we don't want to be borrowing from the people of the future to pay for our needs today. That is one matter that I have difficulty with, with this budget, because we see more debt being added, and there's always decisions being made.

I know back when I worked for previous governments in the early 2000s, there were tough decisions made, but they did lead to balanced budgets, and that led to a reduction in the amount of debt that was going on for people who have been born since who are going to pay. I know in just the last three years we've seen, on average, \$1,700 per person after this fiscal year of debt that's been added. I think we need to remember there's a balance between trying to provide services while making sure we're not creating a cost for people down the road to have to pay. We're paying today for past over-expenditure.

I think things are a little more transparent today, and thank God for that. We do have an Auditor General who's very active, and I want to congratulate the Auditor General for being that extra set of eyes for Nova Scotians and for finding things. That is a good thing, and if I'm ever on the government side of the House I will welcome his eyes. At the end of the day I think he makes - maybe a she at some point - the current Auditor General, I think he makes this province a better place with his eyes looking at these budgets.

Madam Speaker, how much time do I have left?

MADAM SPEAKER: Just over four minutes.

MR. MACMASTER: I also want to make a point, in the early 2000s - I know that government has - I talked about the debt already, and I want to mention something about taxes. I actually had an e-mail from a constituent, Dr. Chiasson. I'm going to read it, and I will table it. He's feeling as though our taxes are too high.

It says, "was reviewing the latest NDP budget. I always knew Nova Scotia had high tax rates, but just astonished to what degree. I did some quick research this evening. I have copied the Revenue Canada tax table below. Nova Scotia taxes its highest bracket at 21 per cent. Right next door P.E.I. is only 16.7 and N.B. lower at 14.3. Ontario and Alberta are less than half of our tax rate. I hope your Party will expose the high tax rates currently in place and make this an election issue. No wonder there is a lack of business growth in this province. As an election nears I thank you for listening to my concerns about this imbalance."

I think the doctor raises a good point. With high taxes it hurts the economy, and wouldn't we rather grow tax revenues by way of having a stronger economy than by taxing more, as we have seen? That is another reason why I am not able to support, and I didn't

support, this budget that was voted upon last night. When I think about going back to 2002-03, and I know that was a very significant year - it was the first balanced budget in 40 years. Madam Speaker, did you know that budget was balanced with half as many royalty revenues as are coming into the province this year? Did you know that budget was balanced with an 8 per cent provincial portion HST, not a 10 per cent like we currently have?

It is possible to balance budgets and still deliver good services for the public, but that takes discipline and commitment, and it takes integrity. I think the former Finance Minister gave a good speech tonight, and he talked about how partisanship is a cause for concern and I must state, again, that when in Opposition, the comment could be made: we know what you are against; tell us what you are for. I know I always aim to tell what I'm for and not just what I'm against because I think we have a duty, on this side of the House, to be supporting the government to make decisions that are in the best interest of the province. With that Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

MADAM SPEAKER: I want to thank all members for participating in tonight's debate. I also want to tell all members, and in fact all Nova Scotians, to be assured of the fact that the good people at Hansard, the diligent and hard-working people at Hansard are in fact recording and printing all of the Adjournment debates that are held here in the House of Assembly, so I want to be sure and have that on the record. (Applause)

We will now stand adjourned until 12:00 noon tomorrow.

[The House rose at 6:26 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 805**

By: Hon. Wayne Gaudet (Clare)

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

Whereas a new commemorative medal was created to mark the 2012 celebrations of the 60th Anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II accession to the throne as Queen of Canada; and

Whereas medals are being awarded to Canadians who have made significant contributions to their community and our country; and

Whereas Ronnie LeBlanc of Meteghan was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contributions to his community;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Ronnie LeBlanc on being awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for outstanding contributions to his community.

RESOLUTION NO. 806

By: Hon. Wayne Gaudet (Clare)

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

Whereas the Mass Consulting Yarmouth Marines Midget A Girls hockey team participated in the 36th Annual SEDMHA Honda International Minor Hockey Tournament, which was held in Halifax-Dartmouth April 4 to 7, 2013; and

Whereas the Mass Consulting Yarmouth Mariners Midget A Girls played against New Brunswick District Five in the Odyssey Divisional Finals; and

Whereas the SEDMHA Honda International Hockey Tournament is one of the largest and most respected multi-level hockey tournaments in North America;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Mass Consulting Yarmouth Mariners Midget A Girls hockey team, and their coaches, for winning a gold medal in the Odyssey Divisional Final during the 36th Annual SEDMHA Honda International Minor Hockey Tournament.

RESOLUTION NO. 807

By: Hon. Wayne Gaudet (Clare)

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

Whereas the Mass Consulting Yarmouth Mariner Midget A Girls hockey team participated in the Southwest Conference League Championship in Bedford on April 14, 2013; and

Whereas the Mass Consulting Yarmouth Mariners Midget A Girls Team defeated the Bedford Blues 2-1, to win the Conference League Championship; and

Whereas the hockey team also won the Joe Lamontagne March Break Tournament, won gold at the Chicks with Sticks Tournament in Yarmouth, and also qualified for the provincials where they brought home the Fair Play banner;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Mass Consulting Yarmouth Mariners Midget A Girls hockey team and their coaches for a successful season, and wish them continued success in the future.