



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Gordie Gosse

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Fifth Session

FRIDAY, JULY 5, 2013

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, JULY 5, 2013

Sixty-first General Assembly

Fifth Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Gordie Gosse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

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

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We will begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**Bill No. 86 - Entitled an Act to Ensure Public Safety through the Provision of Emergency Health Services. (Hon. Frank Corbett)**

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I ask that this be read forthwith and be printed without question put. Further, I ask for unanimous consent to proceed with second reading of this bill today.

MR. SPEAKER: We have two things here - the first is a motion that the bill be printed without question being put.

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

The motion is carried.

The second is a request for unanimous consent for Bill No. 86 to be read for a second time today.

Is it agreed?

The honourable House Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, we will be giving consent for it to be read a second time today, but I would urge you to continue in the order of business - the daily routine. When we arrive at Government Business, the Government House Leader can call the bill at that time, but we certainly wish to continue with the daily routine.

MR. SPEAKER: I plan on doing so.

The second request is for unanimous consent that Bill No. 86 be read for a second time today.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

Bill No. 87 - Entitled an Act to Protect Nova Scotians and Provide for the Fair Resolution of Contract Negotiations in Ambulance Services. (Hon. Jamie Baillie)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

RESOLUTION NO. 1800

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

Whereas according to this NDP Government's 50 greatest accomplishments, they're the first government in over 20 years that has not passed legislation to override collective agreements and that has instead used free collective bargaining through a fair and respectful approach; and

Whereas the tabling of today's legislation is proof that this much-touted achievement must now be struck from their so-called list of accomplishments; and

Whereas allowing one week to go by without so much as calling the union back to the table for the purpose of continuing negotiations proves this NDP Government is not really interested in a fair and respectful free collective bargaining process;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the Legislature urge the Premier to strike this accomplishment from his so-called list, and should he refuse to do so, provide an explanation to paramedics as to why this NDP Government feels this accomplishment still applies.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

RESOLUTION NO. 1801

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

Whereas the bill we are debating today is essentially undemocratic; and

Whereas the bill is essentially undemocratic, and the reason why it is undemocratic is because it takes away a democratic right; and

Whereas the right to bargain collectively is seen around the world as a basic democratic right, and that is what this does - it takes it away and it is undemocratic as opposed to being anti-democratic;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the Legislature heed the words of the Premier, as these words are the very words he used in this Legislature in 1999 and contrast these words with the actions we are witnessing from this NDP Government today.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Clayton Park.

RESOLUTION NO. 1802

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

Whereas on March 2, 2012, in response to a month-long strike involving Access-a-Bus and Metro Transit, the Premier was asked to get involved by tabling back-to-work legislation; and

Whereas in response the Premier stated: “my interest is to ensure there’s a freely negotiated collective agreement between the municipality and the employee - that would be in the best interest for everybody - that will be best for the consumers, the best for employees and the best for the municipality.”; and

Whereas today this NDP Government tabled legislation that will effectively end any hope of ensuring a freely negotiated collective agreement between the employees, the paramedics, and their employer, EMC;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this NDP Government reflect on the Premier's change of heart, and question why they failed in their responsibility to ensure essential services were available so that all parties could benefit from a freely negotiated collective agreement.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Bedford-Birch Cove.

RESOLUTION NO. 1803

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

Whereas according to this NDP Government's 50 greatest accomplishments, they are the first government in over 20 years that has not passed legislation to override collective agreements and that has, instead, used free collective bargaining through a fair and respectful approach; and

Whereas the tabling of today's legislation is proof this much-touted achievement must now be struck from their so-called list of accomplishments; and

Whereas allowing one week to go by without so much as calling the union back to the table for the purpose of continuing negotiations proves this NDP Government is not really interested in a fair and respectful free collective bargaining process;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly urge the Minister of Finance to strike this accomplishment from her so-called list, and should she refuse to do so, provide an explanation to paramedics as to why this NDP Government feels this accomplishment still applies.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Glace Bay.

RESOLUTION NO. 1804

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

Whereas according to this NDP Government's 50 greatest accomplishments, they are the first government in over 20 years that has not passed legislation to override collective agreements and that has, instead, used free collective bargaining through a fair and respectful approach; and

Whereas the tabling of today's legislation is proof that this highly-touted achievement must be struck from their so-called list of accomplishments; and

Whereas allowing one week to go by without so much as calling the union back to the table for the purpose of continuing negotiations proves this NDP Government is not really interested in a fair and respectful free collective bargaining process;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this Legislature urge the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education to strike this accomplishment from his so-called list, and should he refuse to do so, provide an explanation to paramedics as to why this NDP Government feels this accomplishment still applies.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Richmond.

RESOLUTION NO. 1805

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

Whereas according to this NDP Government's 50 greatest accomplishments, they boast that they are the first government in over 20 years that has not passed legislation to override collective agreements and that has, instead, used free collective bargaining through a fair and respectful approach; and

Whereas the tabling of today's legislation is proof this much-touted achievement must now be struck from their so-called list of accomplishments; and

Whereas allowing one week to go by without so much as calling the union back to the table for the purpose of continuing negotiations proves this NDP Government is not really interested in a fair and respectful free collective bargaining process;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the Legislature urge the Minister of Health and Wellness to strike this accomplishment from his so-called list, and should he refuse to do so, provide an explanation to paramedics as to why this NDP Government feels this accomplishment still applies.

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

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

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 86.

Bill No. 86 - Ambulance Services Continuation (2013) Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move second reading of Bill No. 86, an Act to Ensure Public Safety through the Provision of Emergency Health Services. This province's paramedics do extremely vital and valuable work in our communities. All Nova Scotians appreciate and respect the work they do for their patients and depend on their skills in an emergency. Nova Scotians' lives will be put in jeopardy if ambulance services, including LifeFlight, were ever to be disrupted. We are taking every possible step to help the parties find a solution and reach an agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I'm introducing legislation today that will send the dispute between Emergency Medical Care Inc. and the paramedics' union, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 727, to binding arbitration so they can reach an agreement that is fair to all parties. The bill gives an arbitrator 90 days to work with both parties to reach an agreement without the possibility of lockout or strike.

This legislation protects Nova Scotians against a potential disruption in ambulance services that would put people's lives at risk. The health and safety of Nova Scotians is our number-one priority. Nova Scotians need to know that paramedics will be there to help in an emergency. The arbitrator will examine the proposal's outstanding issues and new priorities, request each party's final offer, and then select one.

This action was necessary. The parties were no longer bargaining, there was no prospect of a deal, and unlike other health care unions, this union has refused to provide a level of service which is common practice. Government cannot stand by while patients and Nova Scotians are put at risk. At the same time, as I said before, the province recognizes the important contribution and the commitment of the paramedics to their patients, and everyone wants to see them reach an agreement that is fair.

That is why we are taking every possible step to find a solution while protecting Nova Scotians. Thank you.

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

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I first want to begin by expressing my great appreciation to the men and women who are paramedics across this province, who do a vital and integral part of delivering health care to Nova Scotians, many times in some of the most difficult of situations. Whether it's the side of the road in a horrific accident or whether being called into one of our homes when we, as family members and loved ones are in panic mode in the environment, we ask them to come in and provide us with the kind of health care that we believe we deserve and want.

I want to express to them our appreciation for the work that they have been doing and also acknowledge the work that has been asked of them over the last number of years: administering the clot-busting drug immediately; asking them to take a more active role in the CECs across this province, one of which happens to be in my own constituency, some of them are in other parts of this province.

At no time have they said no, they responded looking to try to provide that service in conjunction with other health care providers in Nova Scotia. Each of us, as health care consumers, are always grateful when we arrive and see the top-notch health care providers in this province willing and able and waiting to provide us with the assistance that we want in all of our communities.

This situation has been unfolding really for two years; they've been without a contract for approximately two years. It wasn't that long ago that we talked about it in this House during the Spring session - I remember the member for Kings West brought up the issue about what the contingency plan was going to be. As well, it has been on the top of minds of paramedics' families and as the paramedics themselves have been doing their job, this has been part of the thought process of, what happens to our work? Do we end up with a stoppage? Are we going to be treated fairly? Are we going to be respected in the role we play in delivering health care to Nova Scotians? That has to have an impact on the entire family through this process, so I want to extend my thanks to the paramedics' families for being there and for being an important part of it.

I also want to say that I can understand why they feel a level of frustration and not feeling appreciated in this province, quite frankly, when we've now gone through two consecutive governments that have been unwilling to proclaim the Paramedics Act. That's two governments that have not proclaimed that Act, which was voted on in this House, and have not made it law in the Province of Nova Scotia - an Act that would govern paramedics and allow them to have a college to lean on. It would be a great signal to send to them that we appreciate and value the professional service that they give to Nova Scotia and the professional people that they are in the Province of Nova Scotia. I can understand how they feel a level of frustration when it comes to the fact that two consecutive governments have left this bill without passing it and ensuring that paramedics have the safety of the college to fall back on to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about today in Bill No. 86 - let's be clear, it's an anti-strike legislation bill taking away the right to strike from paramedics. There has been no work stoppage, we're not forcing paramedics back to work - what we're doing is taking away the right to strike from paramedics. The government is acting to respond to the deadline of tonight at 12:00 midnight when the paramedics could be in a position to walk off the job. This bill could have been presented on Monday, it could have been presented two weeks ago, as one paramedic said to me on my way in - this bill could have been presented two years ago to the House of Assembly to have a debate. What they have said in essence to paramedics is, we are going to take away your right to strike in the Province of

Nova Scotia. If I'm a health care provider in Nova Scotia, you need to ask yourself, who's next? Who is the NDP Government prepared to take away that right from across this province?

If you look back over the last couple of weeks - the last couple of months, really, as this debate began to happen and really heat up - it became very obvious that the government was very heavily involved in what was happening at the bargaining table. They brought in a conciliator from Newfoundland and Labrador to be part of trying to bring the two sides together. When those talks broke down, the government began to negotiate a deal directly - undermining the employer, quite frankly.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the real foundation of any collective bargaining is the fact that the employer and employee have to be at the table feeling equal, feeling that they are both feeling respected, feeling that they are both having their voices heard, and negotiating and working out what is an agreement that will potentially last for years down the road. In order for that agreement to have any kind of substance, both the employer and the employee have to feel valued at the end of the day when that agreement is finished. It is never easy.

Mr. Speaker, I have not been part of a collective bargaining situation, I have not been at the table, but I can only imagine how difficult that is on both sides, to sit down and basically negotiate and hammer out terms and an agreement of a path forward of employment in this province. It's an important part of the democratic process in the Province of Nova Scotia. We have a history in this province of men and women fighting to the very end to preserve and protect that right to strike in the Province of Nova Scotia. What we had here was a government that in the weeks leading up came in and really undermined the employer. It really said to the employer, you're not at the table, we're going to do this negotiation. When the negotiation didn't go well, they tried to backpedal and back away from it, and blamed the employer and employee.

As recently as yesterday there was a letter sent out to NDP members blaming the paramedics and their employer. At no time did the government say to their Party, we interfered in that process, we upset the balance, and we came to the table. At no time have they taken responsibly - this is a government now in its fifth year and unwilling to take responsibility for many things, but unwilling to take responsibility for interfering in the collective bargaining process in this province which was a hallmark, the foundation of the New Democratic Party, the fact they've undermined an employer and employees with a level of anxiety that I would dare say it has been a couple of decades since we've seen in the Province of Nova Scotia. A mature, responsible government would acknowledge their part in that instead of pushing it off and trying to blame hard-working paramedics and the employer in the Province of Nova Scotia. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, one of the things . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to remind our guests in the galleries that under the Rules of our House, they are not to show either approval or disapproval at anything that happens here on the floor during our proceedings.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

MR. MCNEIL: Mr. Speaker, I want to go back a little bit and look at this process that has been unfolding and the difficult challenges that we have had. I remember when the member for Kings West asked the Minister of Health and Wellness, in Question Period, what the contingency plan was, was it forced arbitration? The minister was unwilling to answer that question on the floor; he was unwilling to say what the plan was for this government. But it has become apparent over the last number of weeks that we were going to arrive at this point because this was the only plan that government had in place.

The Minister of Labour and Advanced Education just spoke about the fact that there was not going to be a level of essential service, and I think that's important to understand. As you would know, Mr. Speaker, other health care units across this province, other bargaining units usually negotiate leading up to what are very tough times when it comes to that, an essential service model that provides a level of service to Nova Scotians, if there happens to be a strike. While the government was involved in the negotiations of how much money should be on the table and who is doing what, the question has to be asked, why weren't they looking at the essential service piece?

Why weren't they letting the employer and employees negotiate at the table, and why weren't they speaking about the essential service model, and if they were, who were they talking to? Did they speak to the employer or did they speak to the hard-working men and women who are paramedics across this province and ask them whether or not they are prepared to provide a level of essential service to the people of the Province of Nova Scotia?

It has been my belief and it has been my experience that every health care provider that I run across that I have the good fortune of meeting, whether it is on a professional basis or outside, has entered into that service because they want to provide service to the people of this province, they want to be part of the solution. That's why, instead of interfering in the collective bargaining process of trying to negotiate a settlement, why wouldn't they have been working with those hard-working men and women to look at if there's an essential service model that we could provide to the people of this province as we move forward to find and hammer out a deal between the employer and the employees at the bargaining table? Those are all important pieces to finding a settlement that not only is good for two parties, but is equally as important as good for the citizens and people of the Province of Nova Scotia.

It has been talked about that governments have taken away the right to strike from police officers and firefighters in this province - that's not accurate. If you go back to about

2002 or 2003, HRM Police entered into negotiations looking for an agreement. As part of that discussion at the table they gave up the right to strike until about 2015; they gave up that right for a long-term agreement with their employer; and they gave up that right to provide what they consider the services that they wanted to do for the people of HRM.

In 2004-05, there was a bill introduced in this House to actually provide that taking away the right to strike, which was supported by the employees and the employers. It's a very different situation when you're taking something away from a group of employees who are not wanting to give up that right. Police officers in this province gave up that right on their own, in conjunction with the government of the day.

As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, firefighters gave up that right to strike in the Province of Nova Scotia as well; it was not taken from them. It was not legislated away from them without their support or without their knowledge, or without the well-being of those men and women who provide those services to the citizens of this province. What we do know is that in jurisdictions across this country, when any government unilaterally takes away the right to strike from anyone - today we're talking about health care workers - you end up with labour unrest.

You don't have to believe me. Citizens of this province can look it up. There are jurisdictions across this province where there have been more unbinding, legal wildcat strikes in jurisdictions where they've removed the right to strike away from health care workers than there ever have been in the Province of Nova Scotia, where workers have continued to have the right to strike and negotiate freely, openly, and collectively at the bargaining table.

It's important to put it in context. When those say that they're going to take away the right to strike, that they're going to deem it an essential service, that there will be no more strikes - that's not true. It's inaccurate, and it has been proven in other provinces across this region.

Have employees and employers in this province worked together at the bargaining table to remove the right to strike from that collective bargaining process? Yes, they have, but that has been done following the appropriate guidelines and processes that are in place.

Ultimately, what we're looking for here is a settlement that will provide Nova Scotians with what are deemed to be the professional services that they have come to expect in their community. It's not all that long ago, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, that EHS/EMC was introduced in this province. It's not all that long ago, and look at the leaps that have taken place in the professionalism of the service delivery and the confidence that Nova Scotians have in the men and women who provide that service. That's not a very long time for that relationship to have been built up. We should be very proud of that, as a community and as a province. Paramedics should be very proud of the

fact that they have been able to forge and build that relationship with the citizens of this province.

What they have been asking for during this process is to have government recognize that in a monetary way. What they have said is, look at us in relation to paramedics in other jurisdictions. Is there a way to make sure that we're being treated fairly?

Mr. Speaker, I would say that one of the first things, that wouldn't have cost any money, would have been for this government to do what the previous government was unwilling to do and proclaim the Paramedics Act in this Legislature, which has been called upon by the member for Kings West on a number of occasions. It would not have cost any money, but it would have sent a real signal to paramedics that we value what they do, that we understand the difficulty they have of delivering that service, and that we want to put in place a college that is there to support them if anything happens to go wrong. Whether that is in the delivery of that service or whether or not their employer was asking them to do something they were unwilling to do, they would have someone to fall back on to provide them with that backup, with that legal support that is provided to almost every other health care provider in the Province of Nova Scotia. That's the very least we could have been doing here in Nova Scotia.

I am pleased with the fact that we have asked and pushed for the Law Amendments Committee to sit today, so Nova Scotians will have an opportunity to come in to speak on this piece of legislation and to talk about what has happened over the last couple of years - but more intensely, I think, over the last month. I'm sure we'll hear from paramedics. I hope we'll hear from other Nova Scotians about how they see this piece of legislation and what they see as the importance of this, what they think of the NDP Government in Nova Scotia taking away the right to strike from paramedics - something that I'm sure they're all grappling with and never thought that they would believe that the New Democratic Party in Nova Scotia would be taking away the right to strike from health care providers in the Province of Nova Scotia.

I'm looking forward to other labour union leaders coming in and speaking in support of paramedics and in support of the right to strike. I know it's so important to the union leaders, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's important to the employees, to their membership. I hope we hear their voices in Law Amendments Committee, standing with paramedics who have earned that right. Many of those union leaders would know much better than I that that right was earned in a hard-fought way, so I look forward to that.

I want to thank the members of our caucus for insisting on the fact that Nova Scotians need a right and have a right to be heard on this piece of legislation today, Mr. Speaker. It's important that we have the time to let that happen - and we're not holding up this piece of legislation; government will get a chance to act, to deliver its will, to deliver

on its mandate to take away the right to strike from paramedics today. They'll have that opportunity to do that today.

We do think it's important that in the process of delivering democracy, Mr. Speaker, that we allow and be confident that Nova Scotians have had a real opportunity to be heard and a real opportunity to have their say on this piece of legislation.

I would be remiss if we didn't look back to 1999, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important for the Premier, who then was the Health Critic for the NDP, when talking about whether the province's contingency plan for a strike was only taking away the right to strike. There was a lot of irony in the question from the member for Kings West because I believe there was a similar question posed by the now Premier when he was on this side of the House, to the then Minister of Health "... undemocratic, oppressive and Draconian legislation ..."

If you look at the two pieces of legislation, they are almost identical in what they do - they take away that right. The difference is that then it was being held up to force a strike, that that legislation was brought before this House at the beginning of the week and was held up to force a strike. We have no intention of holding up this piece of legislation to force a strike in the Province of Nova Scotia.

It's important for this government to be forthright with the citizens of this province, to tell them their active role in what has been a shemuzzle for the last couple of weeks around the collective bargaining process, the fact that they've undermined the employer, the fact that they've turned around and now said to the employees, you're on your own and now you've got to go back and negotiate with an employer who we undermined two short weeks ago.

I think it's important that they tell Nova Scotians that they are taking away the right to strike from paramedics in the Province of Nova Scotia and I look forward to them explaining that not just to Nova Scotians who rely on this service, not just to Nova Scotians who fought and worked, but to the union leaders who have been so supportive of this government because this government was the one that was going to protect labour. They were going to protect workers, they were going to stand up for workers.

Actually what they've done, Mr. Speaker, is just the opposite. What they should have been doing is ensuring that there was a level of essential service for the people of this province so that Nova Scotians would know that when they called 911, regardless of what the labour situation was between the employer and the employee, that there would be a level of service there.

I would dare say and I think most paramedics would say this, they are in a much better position, the company is in a much better position today to deliver essential services to the people of this province than it was in 1999 when the NDP Opposition Party filibustered a bill to drive it into a strike.

You have to ask yourself, Mr. Speaker, what really is this about? If it was about protecting Nova Scotians, we would have been debating this bill much sooner than we have been. We would have been looking at an essential services piece with the union, working directly with paramedics and saying, could you deliver a piece of essential service, and what can it be to the citizens of this province if there's an impasse when it comes to this strike? I dare say public safety was just as much a concern to the people of the Province of Nova Scotia in 1999, when the NDP Government forced a strike.

We're not going to do that. This government has a mandate to deliver to the people of this province, and I might want to add that they are in their fifth year of that mandate. I would think the training wheels would be off by now and they'd know what they were doing. They are in their fifth year of that mandate. They have a mandate to deliver to the people of this province. They want to take away the right to strike from paramedics, and they're getting that opportunity to do that today.

With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place. I look forward to hearing from all those Nova Scotians who are coming in to be part of the Law Amendments process here in the Legislature today. (Applause)

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today recognizing that this is a difficult day for many of the legislators who are assembled to do our job here today in the House of Assembly. Like all of us, I'm sure, I have many friends who I respect very much who are paramedics, and I'm sure almost everybody - if not everybody - here can say the same thing. I have spent a lot of time over the last few months discussing with paramedics on the ground their views about the work they do and the important role they play in our health care system, particularly in our emergency care system.

I will tell you, even in my own riding executive in Cumberland South, there is a good friend of mine, a supporter and a well-respected paramedic in Cumberland County, who I appreciate very much, knowing what he does when he goes to work every day - no secret to anyone in this House, quite proud of the fact that we have a paramedic in our own PC caucus, who I know recognizes the important work paramedics do, having done that work, facing the difficult bill that is before us all today.

I will only add that even this morning, as I was meeting with the paramedics outside the Legislature, a young woman, a paramedic, shared with me a pretty important story of her last shift before she came down here to Province House today, and the health issues, the emergency issues that she was dealing with.

I hope all members have had a chance to dwell on the work that paramedics do - not only the traditional work that medics have done over the years but the expanded list of services that we now ask of our paramedics, including in important places like our

emergency rooms - expanded practice and expanded training to handle an expanded list of emergency situations when they are called upon in an emergency: the transfers that happen, the extended paramedic program where paramedics go into our nursing homes and treat seniors in place. It's a great piece of work. A lot of that has only been added in the last few years, but it highlights the ever-increasing role that paramedics play in our society. I say that because common sense, I believe, has to prevail, and common sense tells us that the work that paramedics do is essential to the ongoing health and safety of Nova Scotians.

Do you know who tells me that as much as anybody? The paramedics themselves. They know the essential nature of their work, every day in every community across this province. They know because they chose the practice of paramedicine, of emergency medicine, because that's what they want to do for a living: to help people in those emergency situations. They chose it. No one knows better the essential nature of the work that paramedics do in our province than paramedics themselves. For all Nova Scotians who go to work every day, go out and play every day, drive a car every day, use our highways every day, or live in a nursing home, or need to be transported to the hospital from time to time for important appointments and can't get there on their own, who get into medical distress for whatever reason and need quick care in place and stabilization and then transport to an important regional hospital. They know how essential the work that paramedics do is.

Mr. Speaker, this is a difficult day because we all support and hope for fair, open and balanced collective bargaining to result in an agreement that is fair to all sides and sees important services like our paramedics continue uninterrupted; we all hope for that. The question comes, of course, what do you do when that bargaining process comes to an end and there is no agreement? What do you do if you believe it's an essential service? That is the question that is before us today.

For those of us who believe that it is time to call paramedics what they are, which is essential to our health care system, that means that we need to pay them and to respect the work they do as an essential service including all the things that paramedics now do in our society. It also means that when it's an essential service and collective bargaining has concluded and there are no talks going on and there is no agreement to provide emergency service that we have to face this decision. Who are we going to look to when this time comes, Mr. Speaker? I believe the answer is the general public needs to know that an essential service will not be withdrawn. Their safety, their peace of mind, and their needs at this point now also have to be brought to bear and that is the essence of the bill that is before us.

I will say this - I understand that this is particularly difficult for members of the NDP to be here today, who always wished for collective bargaining to come to a successful conclusion. But even they have now come to recognize that there has to be a better way to come to a fair agreement with fair pay and fair benefits without putting public safety at risk. So they've put themselves on the record with this bill, Mr. Speaker, in that respect and

I agree with that. I agree with that, that at this point where all the steps of fair and collective bargaining in public at least have been taken, the negotiations which went on for a painfully long time for paramedics and for all sides, the conciliations and mediations that have been tried and failed have gone on and concluded and there are no longer talks going on and a strike deadline looms within hours, I agree that public safety now has to be made the priority in a fair way that avoids a strike or a lockout, a way to be fair to all sides has to be found to treat our paramedics with respect and keep the public safe.

I will add, Mr. Speaker, that in my talks with paramedics - there have been many - I don't believe that paramedics want to get to the point where they have to walk out, again, because they know how essential their work is and so we should work collectively with our paramedics to ensure that that's avoided. This bill coming in at the last minute is not an ideal way to deal with a situation like we find ourselves in today but it is here because it's important that we now put public safety first and find a fair way to resolve an otherwise unresolvable dispute. That's why we're here to do our jobs, our three Parties, to do our jobs and come to the Legislature and put ourselves on the record and debate this difficult bill and pass it and then to, I hope, go back to the question of how to manage these situations better, not just this time but for all time.

I heard the remarks of the Leader of the Liberal Party a few moments ago; he had some good things to say. At the end, I'm still not sure whether his Party plans to vote for or against the bill. (Interruptions) Quite an accomplishment to speak for that long . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party does have the floor.

MR. BAILLIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't plan to dwell on this long but I do want to say it's quite an accomplishment to speak for that long and not actually say where you stand on something; that's very unique. It is consistent with the remarks of the Liberal Leader in The ChronicleHerald this morning - I will table this - he wouldn't say whether the Liberals will support the bill or not, and further said, "The government doesn't need my help. This is not a minority government."

As a legislator, I just want to say it's not directly related to the bill before us, but I can't understand why someone would declare themselves irrelevant to the process of debating and passing bills as starkly as to say, "The government doesn't need my help. This is not a minority government." I will table that.

My point is that when we're faced with difficult decisions, the Legislature is the place where we take a stand, we put ourselves on the record, and we tell Nova Scotians what we'll do. We may criticize the government from time to time, but Nova Scotians expect more than that - they expect you to actually say what you would do in the government's place.

Let me be clear, we don't like this bill any more than anyone else, but we do support it because it protects public safety and it provides for some form of arbitration that will result in a fair, I hope, decision that respects the essential work that paramedics do. I will add that none of us want to be doing this every time there's a pending strike in an essential service like paramedics and that's why I also tabled a bill today which I hope the government will take a look at, because if they don't we certainly intend to pursue it to provide for collective bargaining through all of its steps and only when we get to a place like we are today where there's an alternative way to come up with a fair deal that keeps public safety front of mind.

We'll deal with that another time, but that's what we're supposed to do - to tell Nova Scotians what we believe and who we're here to defend and where we stand, and that's exactly what I intend to do as Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party with my colleagues. I expect that of the NDP and I expect it of the Liberals, hopefully, someday.

Let me return to the bill. Even the NDP now sees that the way things are going currently there is a risk to public safety and we can't go on like this because it's essential, the work the paramedics do.

I don't want to let the government off easy - I think it is worth reviewing how we got to this sorry point. We're literally at the eleventh hour, after two sides have spent a long time believing that they were negotiating fairly and openly - at the eleventh hour, we now have a bill like this. The way the government has handled these negotiations for months and months I would describe as gross mismanagement, actually disrespectful to the paramedics and their union themselves, disrespectful to Nova Scotians who over and over again wanted to know that their safety wouldn't be put at risk, disrespectful to the collective bargaining process.

How ironic is that, Mr. Speaker, that for all those who do believe in fair, collective, open, honest and balanced collective bargaining, that the NDP of all people disrespected the fair and open collective bargaining process? It's clear now that in public the NDP says they favour fair and open collective bargaining, but in private they act very differently.

The Minister of Health and Wellness has been accused by some of making backroom deals away from the table with one side, and at the end of the day all he accomplished was to frustrate everybody, further bringing us to the point today where now this legislation is required, frustrating the fair and collective bargaining process, subverting the fair and collective bargaining process.

Mr. Speaker, I know he believes this is all because of a Facebook posting that people have asked about this. He said that Facebook posting was hacked. Well, Nova Scotians will decide about that. Perhaps it was the WikiLeaks guy's fault, perhaps it was some hacker out there, although whoever posted that Facebook posting had a very deep and intimate knowledge of the government's position in negotiating at the table.

Never mind that, Mr. Speaker, that is just a silly sideshow. The minister has been asked and the Premier has been asked over and over if they did have secret meetings away from the bargaining table, subverting the collective bargaining process, yes or no? Did they actually make things worse by interfering in the collective bargaining process, yes or no?

They still haven't answered that, they still haven't been held accountable for their actions in this area. We're going to deal with the bill today because public safety has to be preserved. I just want to assure you, sir, that we do intend to hold the government to account for the mess they made of collective bargaining by fiddling with it behind the scenes, whether it was the Minister of Health and Wellness or the Premier or someone in the Premier's Office, there's mounting evidence - not just a Facebook posting - but mounting evidence that that's exactly what was going on.

Mr. Speaker, for your benefit I will table for the House a complaint that has come to our attention, a complaint that was actually filed with the Newfoundland and Labrador bar association by the negotiator who was actually at the table, believing to be negotiating in good faith to try to reach a fair deal. I'll quote from it for just a moment. The negotiator, a Mr. Dunstan, in his complaint - and, by the way, he complained to the Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador because the mediator appointed by the government is a lawyer and a member of the Law Society of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The complaint alleges first of all that on June 5th Mr. Dunstan, the negotiator for the ambulance service, was informed by a press release from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education that a mediator had been appointed. He never got official notice, only by press release. It's very interesting, Mr. Speaker, because it's important to know the terms of a mediator's appointment which, of course, are not included in the press release, including whether the mediator is appointed under Section 40 of the Trade Union Act or in some other way because the Trade Union Act imposes certain duties on a mediator, including to mediate with the two sides that are at the table and nobody else.

Mr. Speaker, a few days later in his complaint Mr. Dunstan points out that he got a telephone call advising him that they had negotiated a deal with the union through the mediator. It was news to the employer, so who is the "they"? Who stepped in? Mr. Dunstan is still wondering who took his place without his knowledge. I only raise that because far from the world of Facebook and the "dog ate my homework" and all of that, there are serious questions about the actions of the government behind the scenes that are still outstanding, actions that are not fair to paramedics and not fair to taxpayers and not fair to the ambulance service either, and actions that ended up doing nothing more than make it harder to reach a fair deal, driving us all to where we are today - facing a bill that no one wants, but has to be dealt with.

I do want to point out to all Parties, to the government - including the Liberal Party, who haven't said actually what they would do, only complained - that there is no plan for the provision of emergency services in the event of a work stoppage, either a strike or a

lockout. In fact, I have with me the EHS contingency plan, and I will table it for the benefit of the House, which says that during a strike, and the same would be true of a lockout - because I want to be absolutely fair to both sides here - the provincial ambulance system would run at 24 per cent capacity.

In addition, leading up to a strike, including right now, some services will ramp down, including suspension of non-emergency patient transfers and the Extended Care Paramedic Program. Mr. Speaker, we are now in the period leading up to a strike and that means, for example, with the Extended Care Paramedic Program that there are seniors in nursing homes who rely on paramedic visits for important procedures who will go without.

I have with me from Local 727, the union, a description of the Extended Care Paramedic Program which assesses and treats situations in nursing homes that allow residents to remain at home and avoid difficult hospital trips. For those seniors, for those people who rely on paramedics in this program, the Extended Care Paramedic Program, they want to see paramedics paid and treated fairly and with respect, absolutely, as we all do, but they want to know that the paramedics are going to be there in the event that there's no negotiated settlement, that is already ramping down. Non-emergency patient transfers, seniors from nursing homes to hospitals, people needing important medical procedures transferring between hospitals, one could go on about the importance of the transfer work that paramedics do, and that is ramping down now.

So no games today from us, Mr. Speaker; there are no games from us on the Progressive Conservative side. This is a difficult bill, but it's important that people take a stand, it's important that we put the public at ease, that public safety be assured and a fair process be in place to settle a contract that treats paramedics with the respect they deserve. That is why I don't have any hesitation at the start of my remarks, or here at the end, to tell you where we stand, which is, we will support the bill. As far as hearing from paramedics, absolutely, of course, that's easy, anyone can be in favour of that. I do want to say we have been listening very carefully to the public and to paramedics not just all of a sudden today, but for the last long while, to make sure that this gets done fairly and right, that is what the people who elected us to be here expect of their legislators.

Mr. Speaker, let me just end where I began - that we've done our homework, that we have spoken to many paramedics, personal friends and supporters who do important work every day. We know the work that they do is essential and their contract should reflect that. Fair and collective bargaining should reach an agreement that reflects that, but hoping that will happen after conciliation, after mediation, after all of the steps, is not enough when public safety is suddenly at risk.

We don't particularly like the bill, but we're here, and we all have to take a stand - all of us. That's why we support the bill. We'll see it through today and assure the public that their safety is number one. That's what we're here to do, and that's what we're paid for as MLAs. We now know where the government stands. I hope at some point we'll hear

from the Liberals where they actually stand on this. I don't know why I say that, because they haven't said on many other important questions.

Then let's also agree that when we return to this place we'll come up with a process for essential services like this that allows for free and open and transparent collective bargaining with all the principles that we believe in that make that happen, and that keeps the public safe when you have to resolve an unresolvable dispute through fair arbitration - not a lockout and not a strike.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

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

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, with the consent of the House and after conversations with the two House Leaders, upon the successful passage of second reading of this bill, we would agree to hold the Committee on Law Amendments at 1:00 p.m. this afternoon and carry on from there. If this bill were to be passed by 1:00 p.m., we would carry on and do the Committee on Law Amendments at 1:00 p.m. I'm asking for consent on that.

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

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud our caucus was able to work to ensure that the Committee on Law Amendments is going to take place today at 1:00 p.m. I should advise anyone who wishes to make a presentation at the Committee on Law Amendments that they are to call the Legislative Counsel Office at 424-8941. Should they wish to make a presentation, they should certainly call beforehand in order to ensure that their name is added to the list. I can advise that we have a few more speakers on this bill, but we will see the Committee on Law Amendments sit at 1:00 p.m. in order to hear from Nova Scotians regarding Bill No. 86, and then have this bill returned to the House for debate once that process is completed.

MR. SPEAKER: The request is for unanimous consent for Bill No. 86 to be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments, to meet at 1:00 p.m. today. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay. (Interruptions)

We're still going to follow the procedures that are in place today. We're just making this motion so this motion can get passed, so that the Committee on Law Amendments can meet today at 1:00 p.m. Then we will resume business in the Legislature. Thank you.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Kings West.

MR. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and add a few words to a very important debate - a debate that, in our caucus' view, should not have arrived here moments before a potential strike.

I think it's important first to outline that we have a good record over the past couple of years of asking for two very important supports for paramedics. One, that the college of paramedics Act be passed in this Legislature, which would outline the scope of practice, provide a mechanism for them to have their concerns, their issues, and the growth of their profession be regulated through such a body. I think it has been unfortunate and a real disservice to our paramedic profession that that has not been advanced through the Legislature.

The second area that I started to speak out on early in 2013 was the loss of paramedics generally, but very concerned about losing advanced care paramedics from our province. What started as a trickle moved to really a stream of paramedics who were leaving our province. We know that tells us something about work life, compensation, it tells us what things are going on that are not well for the future of the paramedic profession. We had hoped at that point and, you know, months ago that government would have been looking very closely at the pending end of the negotiations, reaching a point where, in fact, a strike could take place.

The signals have been there for this government to have taken some steps, some processes, which could have prevented us from arriving at the Legislature to deal with an issue that could come to a head at 12:01 a.m. tomorrow. In fact, yesterday I spoke publicly about the government needing a crisis to manage and they have given themselves this opportunity, through the situation faced by our paramedics, to actually come here to Province House and look like they, in fact, are working in the best interests of Nova Scotians. They've had two years to work in the best interests of Nova Scotians and have paramedics given the respect, the compensation, the advancement of their profession in a way that should not have them, you know, out doing information pickets and ultimately a possible strike.

I think a strong and capable government in the fifth year of its mandate would, in fact, have dealt with this issue to guarantee Nova Scotians that there would be no disruption in the life-saving, in the front-line administering of this important sector of our health care delivery. As we know, Mr. Speaker, that has not taken place.

I think when we look back at the development of this profession in Nova Scotia we, in fact, are one of the leaders in North America. We have some of the best trained, the most capable who are on the front lines day in, day out, in a life-saving and a health care-advancing means. To have us arrive here at this point, I think, speaks to the fact that the NDP Government has lost its way in dealing with a true collective bargaining process.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that what I hear, at least in the Annapolis Valley, I hear in the Kings ridings, is that government has interfered with the process here. I'm not sure of the very nature of the parking lot meeting of the Minister of Health and Wellness, but I can tell you that's what is being talked about on the ground, that that sort of process should never, ever have taken place and, in fact, has put us at this point in the process where we now have this pending crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think we had to arrive - I disagree with anybody who says government had no other choice. Government had a choice two years ago to deal with what was a pending crisis in the province. What it really speaks to and I feel, and what NDP people in my riding tell me, it's a further abdication of NDP principles and practices not to have a thoughtful, planned, collective bargaining process unfold in relation to paramedics. It signals to many others that this could now be the way of the future, with this type of interference.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't want to speak too long on this important issue; there are perhaps many other members who would also like to have something to say on Bill No. 86. What I do know for certain is that Nova Scotians truly value their paramedics and they want a fair settlement for them. I feel that the arbitration process of the past has not served them well. When I spoke to two paramedics at a delayed Canada Day celebration in Greenwood last night, they now fear the worst. I think we will still continue to see, after that arbitrated settlement, that our paramedics, our best and brightest, our young paramedics will continue to leave this province. I don't think this government has done anything to stop that flow. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that I am pleased to be here today, but I'm not - but I don't think anyone is. I know certainly our paramedics in this province are not happy to be at this point either. It has been a long road the last two and a half years whereby we would have hoped something could have been brought together by way of an agreement that would have been fair, a process that we are all used to in this province. It's common, we negotiate, we negotiate some more, it breaks off, we get to a conciliator at times, it breaks off and then here we are, unfortunately, at the arbitrated piece.

The reason I say "unfortunately" in some ways, Mr. Speaker, is that having been there in the past and in talking to former colleagues whom I know well, some are here today and they will tell you, some of my former partners will tell you that every time we've been to arbitration we feel that we lose, and they feel that they lose as paramedics in the province. They don't get the better end of the deal. The reason they feel it is that it's because of the work they do. I'm not sure everyone really understands but I think most, if they have ever called an ambulance, certainly in an emergency situation or in a

non-emergency situation, in all honesty understand the role these men and women play in this province.

I want to go back a little bit, I want to talk a little bit about historically where we've been, what we've gone through, and I want to talk about where we are now. When I first got involved as a paramedic - and we weren't called a paramedic in those days - you got your first aid and your CPR, Mr. Speaker, and you pretty much were done, if you will, and you had to have a Class 4 driver's licence, and then you associated yourself with a company at that time. There were 500-odd companies at that time that were doing business, some funeral, some not funeral-based, some were associated. You would drive a cab and when a call came in you would leave that taxi and you would go and do an ambulance call. When we really think about that, it has not been that long ago at all.

We've come a long way since then and so should a lot of other things come a long way, and some have. Mr. Speaker, in those days, once we completed that task we had to go and assign ourself, as I was saying, with one of those companies. Generally a lot of us did about 500 hours of free time because those companies didn't pay a lot in those days and then, if you were fortunate enough, you got on a casual, part-time, sort of list and when an opening came up, if you were dedicated and you enjoyed what you did and the owners of those companies felt that or in most of those days needed it because people were leaving then - it wasn't a long career because you worked a lot - you were fortunate enough to score what would then be a full-time job.

I'm going to tell you, Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago and again, not that many, in 1999 when I was hired in June 1999 it was \$4 an hour - that's what we were making as paramedics. It's hard to believe, \$4 an hour, and we worked a schedule - and I should touch on that. I just want people to have an understanding today of what we are and where we've been. I say "we", you know what? I am no longer a paramedic, it has been seven years since I practised but when I say "we" I'm referencing these fine men and women we have in this province today doing this job. In those days we worked 72-hour shifts where I worked, then you had a day off and you came back for another 24 hours and you had a day off and you came back for another 24 hours - 168 hours of work before you worked any overtime. If you think there wasn't any overtime at \$4 an hour, let me assure you there was, and lots of it.

Was it a great thing? No, not really, it wasn't the greatest hourly rate or number of hours to be working in a two-week period, but we did it and we made a living at it, some of us, and some of us stuck it out.

As the years go by, which is a good thing, training gets better, and there are opportunities. Doctors like Dr. John MacLachlan, who I recall was in Windsor at the time, decided we'll back you guys up, we'll be your medical control, and we're going to teach you a few more skills; the defibrillation came along, a couple of medications, and so on, and intubation, and all those things that people in this province have come to know today,

and as that moves on we get out of that model that we had in those days of the 50-odd operators and EMC comes into place, EHS is set up.

I think most would look back and see that as a turning point in making this job, a paramedic job in this province, a career because prior to that it wasn't really a career. I think six years was the turnover, if you lasted that long. I remember before EMC came along in 1997 - I was working in Sackville in those days, and even then 48-hour shifts were not unusual, they were very usual, and we were one of the higher paid in the province at \$6.50 an hour by then.

Can you imagine? When we used to tell people - they used to think when we'd go and pick them up and you'd have general conversations and transfers and things like that and they would say, oh, how are you guys doing? And you would just talk about all kinds of things. In those days they were listening to the new system that was coming into place and part of that was taking place in this very Chamber, how those rules would be set, how all would go, and they would ask questions - you guys must be paid pretty good, your hours are pretty good. When you started to explain to these people, Mr. Speaker, you work 168 hours every two weeks before you put any overtime in and, oh by the way, we're one of the highest paid at \$6.50 an hour, they didn't believe you. They thought that was crazy then and it was.

When we look back, a lot of us that stayed around would ask ourselves how or why and it was because these people, these paramedics loved that job. They love it a lot, Mr. Speaker, and that's why they do it.

Things have improved greatly over the years, so did the pay. The hours were cut back pretty quickly, it was almost cut in half where I was working at the time. Your wages went up, things seemed to be better and there was a process where we built and we went around the province and brought all these 50-odd companies in under one umbrella. It took a while, it took two or three years to get that all done and numerous people and administration through EMC and Medavie Blue Cross at the time. There were some good working relationships, things looked very good.

Today some may argue that it's not so good but today things have changed yet again, when we think about what paramedics are doing today in this province. I'm not sure - again, unless you have called upon those paramedics - if people understand clearly the important role that they play in this province. When we talk about them being essential they are indeed essential, Mr. Speaker, we cannot do without these fine folks working and being available when these phone calls come in to represent all Nova Scotians. We are answering now 500-plus calls a day I'm told, hard to believe we're doing that many when you take in all your transfers and such like that. We know the impact that this is going to have.

I remember 1999, I was there when that went on and that was no fun either. Those were tough times. We did end up out on strike, very difficult times, challenges. The management team who put together what they could for a resource plan to try to cover what they could are limited, it's no different this time that the plan is not adequate. You can't have 25 or 30 ambulances on the road where you would typically have over 100, and you can't respond to calls. I have personally witnessed during that time ambulances not being available to go to serious emergencies. We cannot have that in this province and I know that those paramedics out there don't want to see that happen either. Not one of them has ever said to me, we want to be on strike and we want to jeopardize it, they don't. But what they do want, Mr. Speaker, is they want to be treated fairly.

When you think about the work that they do today and the advanced care that's being provided, I mean, you look at the accreditations that have gone on in this province, the investment that has been made in EMC/EHS - call it what you want - has been a good thing. Top in North America when you look around, can you image that? If you just think about that for a second and you think about how big North America is and the services that are being provided - and these emergencies don't happen just in Nova Scotia by the way, as we all know, they happen worldwide. To have a group of individuals who can meet those criteria and become number one, become the top of their game, that's because of their commitment, their dedication, and their training, a lot of it on their own time.

Now there have been a lot of new people come into this industry, that is a good thing because this industry now really is a career that you can come into and you can work 25 or 30 years or whatever you would like because you are now working reasonable shifts. The only thing missing here still seems to be the piece that we're here talking about today, and that is what is the fair rate of pay. They want to be paid fairly for what they do and I don't think that any Nova Scotian would argue that.

I've talked to many - not just paramedics, I've talked to a lot of individuals throughout the course of the last couple of years that negotiations have gone. The reason I've had that conversation and the ability to have that is because people know where I came from because I worked in my hometown, as well as working in other locations around the province - Sackville for a lot of years, Pictou County while we transitioned over there. I had the real pleasure of meeting a lot of paramedics from around the province. I had the opportunity to work in the provincial ambulance Communications Centre which takes calls and dispatches all of the ambulances in the province. What an opportunity that was to meet all of these fine people who provide the service on the street.

We have a number of paramedics, as you all have heard over the last couple of years and more, who have left the current situation - EMC, EHS - and they've gone elsewhere. They have gone to Ontario, they've gone to Alberta and they've gone wherever they could find work, some of them to the other side of the world. That is true, that is the reality and the numbers are quite high unfortunately, they're staggering, but they're going because they want to be able to make a living. They want to be treated fairly, they believe,

as do I, as do all Nova Scotians, I believe, that what they do in this province for a living is serious every day and worthy every day of being treated like the valued people that they are.

No one has ever said to me, no, I don't think they are worth this or they're worth that, this isn't about that. This is about unfortunately here we are two and a half years into an agreement and we should never be here, this should have been resolved long ago. It's unfortunate that we are here today, but we are here and it will get resolved. Every negotiation that has ever happened, to my knowledge, in one way, shape or form, fortunately has been resolved, so too will this one.

I spoke with paramedics this morning, I've spoken to paramedics in the past, and none of them want to be going through this process; they make that clear. I will say again, they enjoy what they do for a living, they don't like the stressors that come with it and, you know, we're somewhat fortunate today because when you talk about those stressors and the calls years ago that got done, there was no ability to debrief - something that came in as the years progressed along with what became available, what was negotiated - you dealt with those things. You dealt with life-and-death emergencies all day long. You still do, that hasn't changed; the only thing that has changed is the numbers have gone up.

One thing that we can't do, and I don't believe anybody would ever want to do, is to put anyone in this province in jeopardy; wouldn't it be an awful thing to have that happen, but do you know what? They also deserve to take a stand. They have to take a stand and this is their stand and that's okay, that's how it should be if it needs to be. There has to be a method, but that method needs to be fair, we should never have reached it.

In 1999, yes, we were on strike for a number of hours and anybody who worked in those days and anybody who studied it at all, looking back - and we never like to look back for a reason - those were not fun times. You cannot say, you cannot stress enough the importance of life-and-death situations. People might think, that's an easy thing to say, that's not easy to say because I want to tell you if you really think about life and death and we all know life and we know death, everyone in this room knows death, how shocking that can be, how hard that is on families, the importance of trying to prevent that and we do everything as paramedics to try to prevent that.

We have such talent and ability now with great medical control to go out there and provide defibrillation, drugs, intubation, and clot-busting drugs now that you could almost call miracle workers because these people in the streets are doing that. They are not waiting until you get to a hospital for a doctor or nurse to provide that care, they are doing that, the line is in, they're doing their job, and they're providing that medication. That is saving lives in this province - that is serious business.

Sometimes, again, I'm not sure that people understand exactly, it's an easy, quick comment, this is life and death, and this is serious business that we are talking about. Nova

Scotians have to be protected and these fine people want to protect them, never a doubt. There have been so many calls that I couldn't even imagine going into, to try to define the work that these people do. The strangest thing, or maybe the oddest thing, if you want to call it that or not, you can be doing so many different calls on any given day, from a cardiac arrest to bringing a baby into the world before your shift is out, to shootings, you name it - we all hear what the news is about - or transferring patients around between appointments, who need that care, who need that transportation, or dialysis, as we've talked about many times in this very Chamber.

There's an interesting piece right there. We know what would happen. I know in my area there are dialysis patients who are travelling by ambulance because they are not well enough to travel by car or with family and wait it out and so on. It takes a lot out of them. Anyone who knows anything about dialysis knows it takes an awful lot out of patients who go through that process each day. When you reach a certain point, you physically just cannot deal with that anymore. We know those are the kinds of things that are going to be affected.

I always said that being a paramedic in my career was one of the greatest jobs I ever held.

AN HON. MEMBER: Better than this one?

MR. PORTER: Better than this one, you want to believe it. Do you know why? Because the people you meet, sometimes at the most distressed time in their life, you go in and you are providing something. They are there and they are looking for you to provide that.

We've got great people right here in the gallery today, some of whom I have had the pleasure and honour of working with, doing that for Nova Scotians today. We cannot forget the importance of that when we think about their worth or their value when we're negotiating a contract. All of these things have to come into play.

I hope that going forward with this process, when this bill is passed today, that that is all taken into consideration - that when the asks are put on the table and when the asks are offered from one side and from the other, these things are considered. They have to be. They must be considered. There's no way that you could make a decision without looking back at the work that is being done every day.

It's not just another job. It's not just a man or a woman getting in an ambulance and driving down the road and doing this or doing that. There is a lot more to that, Mr. Speaker. I may speak with a bias - and I don't mean to be biased. I call that an experience that I had the honour to be part of. I'm no longer an active paramedic, because my tag has long since expired, and it's probably something that I may not ever get a chance to go back to. That's fine.

There are a lot of good men and women out there, young and not-so-young, who have been at it for some years. There are still men and women working today who were in the business before I was in it, who are still there, many years later, providing that care. They are doing that because they love their job. They like what they do for a living. I don't think I've ever heard any one of them say, you know what, I don't like this.

People haven't packed up their families and gone west because they don't like what they're doing. They're going into the same job. They are just going to a place where they feel they are being treated appropriately and fairly. They feel that that doesn't happen in Nova Scotia, or hasn't happened. I am sure they are waiting to see it happen, in their own minds, that we need to have an agreement that works for us and a process that is fair to everybody, including the general public.

We know they have to be protected. When they call for a fire truck, the fire department comes; when they call for a police officer, the police car comes. They expect that when they call 911 for an ambulance for their parent or their sister or their child who is in a position of emergency need, that ambulance is coming. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that that is in place. That is what the paramedics want to do and want to be available to do as well.

I understand the position they are in. Remember, I said I was there in 1999, and that wasn't fun either. Today it's not fun by any stretch of the imagination. You know this is a great job as well, Mr. Speaker. We've been here - you've been here a lot longer than I. We do it because we also enjoy what we do, for the most part. I think you know.

This is a tough day. It's an awkward day. It's a unique position to be in. There are only two of us in this Chamber who could really speak to what that means or has meant in the past, Mr. Speaker. What an interesting and awkward and unique opportunity, as I call it, to be in this place, as a legislator, having gone through 1999, having been a paramedic in the past, knowing a good number of the paramedics around the province as I do and maybe having a bias - I call it a passion instead of a bias. I call it an experience instead of a bias, and I call it the right to be treated as they should be treated: fairly, and in a negotiation process that works for them, that they can believe in, that they can come to work and enjoy safety, that they can come to work and know that they are being compensated as they feel is appropriate, to have good working conditions, to have policies that matter about their health care.

I know that there are a number of issues out there around bargaining, about time off, vacations. All of these things matter in collective bargaining. Every one of them matters to all of us, to every type of employment. It is so important to get back, we know in other industries, our Leaders talked about them this morning and the essential service they provide, we need to look at opportunities, we need to talk to paramedics beyond after today's issues are over with, after the process that is being put forward is completed. We need to meet and talk a lot about what is best for the paramedics in this province, what can

they live with? What is acceptable? What should we be doing as legislators to make that work?

It's been a lot of years since we've been in this position in this province. There have been other collective agreements negotiated, they've ended up in arbitration and every time the paramedics will tell you they have felt that they have not been treated fairly, that they didn't get what they should have. Again, easily said, but the arbitration process that is being put in place, it's one or the other, you have to choose.

I guess I hope in saying that that when we go back to that process, when this is all said and done and the arbitrator has an opportunity to consider exactly what he or she should do, that all things must be considered - every aspect of the job that they do compared to what we're doing across the country, across North America. Let's not forget what I mentioned a few minutes ago, the accreditation piece. We don't get accredited as a top service in North America because we are second to anybody, we are second to none in this province and I would stand beside any one of them any day and work with them any day, and have.

There are so many examples I could give about calls; I will reference one. I had a call within the last three or four weeks from an elderly lady who was having some medical problems at home. She would be known to those paramedics that arrived; she didn't know, when she picked up the phone to call who would come but she was pleasantly surprised when the ambulance arrived with two people on it, one of which she knew so well, the other she didn't. She called me to tell me a story; she had three trips and she referred to two of those trips where she knew the paramedic that arrived and the second one for some time.

She spoke about how she was treated as an individual person in a situation that she was in, requiring an ambulance to take her to the hospital because she could not physically get herself there in the situation she was in. She talked about one of these calls and one set of paramedics coming with a third and she said, "Chuck, why would there be a third person on that ambulance?" I said that was probably a student because that's how it sort of works and did you ask him? She went on to tell me that's why they were doing this and doing that procedure and so on, reporting and working with the other paramedic that was in the back of the ambulance with them. I said that was very likely a student, somebody riding along and gaining their apprenticeship and experience and all those things that are required to become employed as a paramedic. It's part of their education now.

How far we have come there. I spent two weeks on something called an EMA course when I got in this business, two weeks. First aid and CPR were wonderful, we thought, how to use an oxygen tank - and by the way you have to have your Class 4 licence so if you can get a taxi or a four-door car and go try out you can get a Class 4 licence and you are good to go. I can't believe when I think that and we did that and that "good to go" really meant how fast can you drive and I can tell you I have been on some ambulance trips whereby speed may have been a factor from time to time.

AN HON. MEMBER: Somebody else must have been driving.

MR. PORTER: My colleague said somebody else must have been driving. I would never admit who was driving, but I can tell you in those days it was hurry up and get here because it's an emergency and we need you.

That was the mentality, we all lived that and now there are so many rules, good rules, safe rules, the way that it should be done. You credit that to that paramedic body because they're the ones who have grown in this, not us. They are the ones who have said, we want to be safe coming to work, I want to go home tonight to my family, they deserve that. Yes, they do. It is those men and women working who have helped create this and make it what it is, they have made it what it is.

We can talk about the administration side and all of those things, yes, somebody has to manage it, but it is the everyday workers who go to the homes, who deal with the people that are ill or transfer the people from hospital to hospital, or to dialysis for treatments or whatever it might be, or go to their home and provide another kind of care, an extended type of care.

We have a variety of levels of paramedics in this province; we had P1s, we had P2s and we had P3s. I think the P2s are intermediate, they were at one time, ICP at that time, are now limited, I don't think there are many left. I know that I was one of those for a lot of years and moved on to an advanced care level of paramedic before I left. I do know that some of those leaving are certainly those advanced care paramedics, we know that. They're providing a level of care that they believe they should be compensated for and are being compensated for in other places.

They want what's fair, they want a negotiation process, a bargaining process that meets their needs, that says hey, let's sit down and talk. Let's not wait two years, though, or two and a half years.

I know in the past we've had circumstances where it's not uncommon where we know that this negotiation or this contract is about to run out. There's a process, you file, you go through that - I don't need to tell anyone here that, Mr. Speaker. We tend to always wait and then we're a year out before we really start talking, maybe, or we've met, perhaps, and we've started the ground work but we haven't got into the nuts and bolts of what really matters until the later stages.

When I think about negotiation, I'd like to see that really backed up. I'd like to see us - the member for Inverness asked me a few minutes ago why we wait so long. Well that was a great question. Can we start earlier? Sure we can, it just takes an agreement from both sides to start earlier and, for whatever reason, we tend to drag it out.

I know there's a lot to that because I've been at the table, Mr. Speaker. There's lawyers who you are dealing with and of course they're busy and there are days and you try to fit half a day or a day in or two days or whatever it might be, here and there, and then you don't come back for another few months. You've got to go back to your membership and you have to talk to them, you have to include them.

I think they would like to see us sooner rather than later, successfully in this process because what it means is we should never get to where we are today, we should be able to accomplish that task. Now that may be easy for me to stand here as a legislator and say yes, okay. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? It has to be done, this is what people expect.

There's no reason to do anything different. When we look at the quality of people, again in this particular job, and I'm speaking only to this job today because that's what we're talking about, we have great people working in all our jobs, Mr. Speaker. In emergency services we have put things in place to look after two-thirds of it, in all honesty. We need to now go back and we need to figure out how to tie the other one-third in.

It can be done, Mr. Speaker, it will be done, but it has to be done fairly though. Again, I can't stress enough that I hope that arbitrator takes everything today, all that is being said into consideration, every bit that will come from paramedics into consideration, every bit and will come from whomever else in government, EMC, whomever, into consideration, every bit of where we've come from into consideration, every bit of what's provided for care today into consideration.

I know, Mr. Speaker, from my time there that there were many people who came and went - some after a week because they couldn't or they decided that this isn't a job that probably I am in the right place. If you don't think it takes a special kind of person to do that job, just ask those people outside today and those in the gallery, they'll tell you. Talk to them, you'll soon figure out that they are a special kind of people, just like other emergency services workers on the front lines are a special kind of people.

Not everybody can go to an accident scene, Mr. Speaker, and deal with some of the situations that are there. It's so important that we remember what these people do and these examples - life-and-death situations. They are saving lives out there. It's not just running and picking them up anymore and putting them in the back of the ambulance and heading out onto the highway and quickly making your way to the nearest hospital and quickly getting in and unloading them so you don't have to deal with it, so that somebody who is trained can.

We are so well trained - we, them, the paramedics are so well-trained in this province, Mr. Speaker, at all levels, to deal with these situations. When times get tough, they have another alternative, they have a place to go to talk about these things and treatment, if they so desire. That can always be made better, too, and I can tell you that I've talked to some of them, there's room to improve there too.

There's always room to improve, and as every collective bargaining session goes by, we would hope that improvements will continue to be made as needed. That's part of that fair and collective bargaining process, Mr. Speaker, remembering what it is and how important a job these individuals are providing at the most distressed point in someone's life something happens to their father, their mother, brother, sister, their child. Every circumstance that I've referred to is real. When that arbitrator takes the time to consider all facts and all things he or she needs to remember. What I'm talking about today is real; this happens every day.

Unless it happens in your family you probably don't fully understand but anyone who has ever called an ambulance and sees the great care they've been given will tell you that. Just like anyone who has ever called a fire truck when they've had a fire will tell you the same thing. Or a police officer to come and be looked after and provide for their safety. Much has changed, it is time that we bring the paramedics in this province into the fold, into that change.

I know there will be a lot more said today, I'm sure there will. I know that the Committee on Law Amendments will take place this afternoon, and I think that's great. I hope that we do have people come in and tell their stories, if nothing else. Paramedics are probably going to speak, I assume, I haven't seen the list. Wouldn't it be nice to have some Nova Scotians come in who have used the system or are familiar with the system or other health care providers come in and tell their stories, to share how important the role is that paramedics in this province play.

Some may think I have a bias and no, I'm not trying to present a bias. I'm talking from experience, I'm talking because I know these folks, I'm referencing some of these things. Public safety is something they have always cared about, regardless of the bargaining situation. We'll always be first to them, I'm sure of that. They've told me that numerous times. They do not want to be here today, they do not want to be on strike.

There's a way to avoid all of that, there was a way to avoid today, obviously we were not able to make that happen through the collective bargaining process and what a shame that is. We need to be better, they deserve to be treated better when it comes to that piece, as do all Nova Scotians. All Nova Scotians deserve to be protected. All Nova Scotians deserve not to have their services ramped down. We know what happened back a while ago when other labour disruptions to the health care system started to unfold and it looked like there was some potential for this very same thing. How quickly things started to change and how things got behind, what an unfortunate circumstance.

I know the government would agree with that and I see the former Minister of Health and Wellness shaking her head. I know they don't want to be there. I also know that it's tough to be at the table but there is a responsibility as government, as employers and all of us to ensure that the right things are done at all times.

I had only planned to take a couple of minutes, I haven't gone too long I hope but I can tell you that in closing I think I've stressed many times the importance of the whole process. I think that I've stressed a couple of examples without going into detail what it means and what these folks do every day on the streets of Nova Scotia by providing care. Hundreds of times a day in many different examples, in many places. We have to make sure all is considered moving forward. We have to make sure that paramedics who are second to none - and this isn't just around here. This is accredited in North America, the top of their game because they're good. They're excellent, as a matter of fact. Anyone who has used their care will tell you that.

I alluded to a story a few minutes ago that took place recently about that woman who called requiring service and got it and just couldn't say enough from the smallest detail to dropping them off at the hospital and ensuring before they left that she was going to be looked after at the next level. She was quite taken by that. That's one example of one day, that happens hundreds of times a day, 365 days a year in this fine province. Let's not forget that when we are saying those words that we believe in a fair, collective bargaining process. Thank you for the opportunity to rise today and offer a few comments.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, today feels a bit like *dèjà vu* for me in standing as the member for Richmond in this House, because approximately 14 years ago the government of the day, on October 22, 1999, introduced Bill No. 9 which was an Act to Provide for the Continuation of Ground Ambulance Services in the Province. Here we are, 14 years later, and we have Bill No. 86, an Act to Ensure Public Safety through the Provision of Emergency Health Services.

The actors involved since the past 14 years have changed quite a bit; in fact, the government itself has changed from 14 years ago. There are a few of us remaining in this Legislature who were here in 1999, the last time the paramedics went on strike. For the Official Opposition caucus, the Liberal caucus, there is but myself and my good friend, the MLA for Clare, who remain from 1999; in fact, we are the only two on the Opposition benches who remain from the debate on Bill No. 9, as there are no members of the Third Party who were elected at the time.

On the government side we do have a few of the same faces that were here back then. We have the Premier for one, whom I believe was the Health Critic when that bill was brought in in 1999; we have the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, who is also the Government House Leader; we have the current Minister of Finance who was there as well; we have the MLA for Timberlea-Prospect who was there; as well as the MLA for Halifax Chebucto; and, as well, my good friend the Minister of Agriculture and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations - I knew I was missing one; I wasn't sure which.

We stood on this side of the House, in Opposition, both the NDP caucus and the Liberal caucus, and we stood behind Nova Scotia paramedics. Today, 14 years later, there is only one Party in this House today that stands behind Nova Scotia paramedics, and that's the Nova Scotia Liberal caucus.

If you had told me 14 years ago when we were having this debate - it was in October and it wasn't as warm as what it is today - if someone had said 14 years from now there will be an NDP Government and that NDP Government will bring in legislation to remove the right to strike for paramedics in Nova Scotia, I would not have believed it. But, then again, I've had to say I can't believe it many times in the past five years under this NDP Administration.

We're standing here debating Bill No. 86 and when I reflect back 14 years ago, earlier I asked for clarification on one of the motions being put forward and you'll forgive me if I'm a bit sensitive having been here 14 years ago because I'm sure even the Premier will remember that at one point during the debate either on the paramedics or the nurses, it came down to a question of what did twelve o'clock mean when the Government House Leader, the Honourable Ronald Russell at the time, was giving hours there was a debate whether he meant 11:59 p.m. or did he mean 12:00 a.m. and we had that whole debate here in the House, which I think you'll notice now when the Government House Leader, who was here at the time, gives his hours he's very careful to indicate when he says 12:00, whether it's p.m. or a.m.

We were a bit sensitive back then of being sure everyone fully understood what was happening, so you'll forgive me if I was seeking clarification earlier on exactly what was being asked for.

Mr. Speaker, not only had you told me 14 years ago that an NDP Government would be looking to remove the right to strike to paramedics, as much as I would have been in disbelief over that, the thought that less than 24 hours before a strike deadline that a majority NDP Government would bring in a bill to stop paramedics from being able to exercise their democratic right to strike, but would also be asking the Opposition to send it direct to third reading without having second reading, without having the Committee on Law Amendments.

I'm extremely proud of the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Party, who said no. He said we are going to have the Law Amendments Committee, and we are going to allow Nova Scotians to be able to come forward and express their concerns on this bill.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I don't expect to see many people here this afternoon because most Nova Scotians have no idea because this has been happening so fast and I don't think in any way that should be a reflection if there is a small amount of presenters today because asking paramedics and others to come to the Law Amendments Committee, paramedics are

professionals, they're professionals in what they do. They didn't ask to have to come and speak publicly at Law Amendments Committee, they didn't ask to have to come to debate a piece of labour legislation, so in no way should the numbers that appear at 1:00 p.m. at the Law Amendments Committee be seen as a reflection of the concern here, because even back then I remember few paramedics were comfortable in coming forward, in fact some expressed some concern that there may be retribution if they were to speak publicly. We need to keep that in mind as we move forward today. I'm certainly proud of the fact that we fought under the guidance of our Leader to ensure that at least we are going to have the Law Amendments Committee process.

Mr. Speaker, there is still time for the government to change this bill, Bill No. 86, because through Law Amendments Committee, which I've had the pleasure of sitting on for many years, many times we'll hear presentations that express concerns over clauses of the bill or intent of the bill and make very positive suggestions. When the Leader of the Third Party says the Liberals haven't said how they're voting, the process is not over. That decision will be made at third reading once the Law Amendments Committee is finished, once we see whether government is going to entertain any amendments to this legislation, to do so before that would be premature, and I'll get back to the Leader of the Third Party in a few minutes.

Mr. Speaker, 14 years ago the government of the day, the Hamm Government, brought in Bill No. 9 one week before the paramedics were in a legal strike position. For one week we stood in this House in Opposition, Liberal caucus and the NDP caucus, we sat 24 hours a day in some cases and we stood behind paramedics, and we stood behind the right to strike, the right to free and collective bargaining. I'm proud of the job that we did back then and I have to tell you that I still can't believe that here we are debating Bill No. 86 under a majority NDP Government.

Madam Speaker, when the government says everything was done and we had no choice that rings hollow because of the fact that the parties haven't been at the table for a week. There are no discussions, there are none taking place, and yet here we are bringing in this regressive type of legislation. Some have referred to it as back-to-work legislation. It's not back-to-work legislation because there is no strike, no one has stopped working. This is anti-strike legislation from an NDP Government - call it for what it is.

The other question to be asked about Bill No. 86 is who made the decision to go with final offer arbitration because when the government and the Government House Leader say it's binding arbitration, well, that's kind of cute when you just say it that way but you have to expand on what exactly does it mean, because there are various forms of binding arbitration.

This NDP Government has chosen what I would believe - if one would go back in Hansard when the NDP were in Opposition, they would have called it one of the harshest forms of binding arbitration that exists because with final offer arbitration both parties give

their final offer, they say that's it, here's what we want, here's what we're prepared to accept - nothing more, nothing less. The arbitrator can only pick either the final offer from the paramedics or the final offer from the employer. In other forms of binding arbitration the arbitrator could sit there and say I like what the paramedics are asking for here, I also like what the employer is offering, so I'm going to take a little bit from each side and I'm going to say here is what I believe is fair. Bill No. 86 does not allow that to take place.

Now I don't profess to be a labour lawyer and I'm sure there are those with much more expertise, but I would submit to you that final offer arbitration is the riskiest one for all the parties because you either win or you lose. You don't have a little win or you don't have a small loss, it's big in either way.

As taxpayers, there's great concern in using this form of binding arbitration. For paramedics it's extremely risky. How do they put their final offer, knowing that the arbitrator can only pick one, either theirs or the employer's.

Again I ask the question, and maybe the Premier can answer it, who made the decision to go with final offer arbitration? Were there negotiations with EMC? Were there negotiations with the union leadership or was it just a decision made at One Government Place to go with this form? Again, if you were to look through Hansard, I do believe you'd find quite a few quotes where the NDP has expressed significant concern over this type of binding arbitration.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to touch on an issue that is interesting because the Leader of the Third Party was mentioning concern over not being clear on what our position was. He went on to say how important it is that, as legislators, we be here to state our position and stand behind it. That's kind of ironic coming from the Leader of the Third Party, because I remember not that long ago when there was a government bill that we were debating in the House, when debate ended the Progressive Conservative House Leader asked for a recorded vote - which is right, it's very normal to do so.

The bells rang, I believe, for up to an hour, which is normal. After that everyone comes back, sits in their seats, and we have a recorded vote. But in this case, after the Progressive Conservatives asking for a recorded vote, here we sat, everyone was in their seats except the Progressive Conservatives. So we asked, maybe they got lost, maybe they are stuck outside, maybe we should send the commissionaires to look for them. Why would they ask for a recorded vote and then not show up to vote?

To hear the Leader of the Third Party questioning any member of this House about where they stand, or standing behind their principles is quite a bit rich when we look at the previous experience here in this House.

Madam Speaker, on Bill No. 86, I wanted to remind Nova Scotians - and I know there are several paramedics who have made their way here today. Some may have been

here back in 1999, some may have not, but I thought it might be helpful in order to bring us back then to what life was like when the NDP sat in Opposition and defended workers' rights, and what life is like now under a majority NDP Government. So let me assist.

Madam Speaker, these are all in Hansard and I will certainly table them once I am done. These are all from debate on Bill No. 9 from back in 1999, October in fact. I want to do a few quotes from the Premier, who was then the Health Critic for the NDP, when it came to Bill No. 9. He said, "Part of what this bill is about is the right to bargain collectively, that is what it is really about, the right to bargain collectively. That is the principle that is at issue in this bill, in this House, at this time."

He went on further to say, "This government has seen fit, in its wisdom or lack thereof, to bring forward a bill that is designed to specifically restrict the rights of individual workers in this province, in this case, paramedics."

He went on further to say, "It is designed to restrict their right to bargain collectively, to decide their own future, to bargain with their employer in good faith. That is the hallmark of collective bargaining, the ability to bargain in good faith. It is certainly regrettable when you see the government move so quickly to take away what is a basic democratic right. It is Draconian."

This one is one of my favourites, "I want to tell you that the right to bargain collectively, which is done away with for paramedics in this legislation, is jealously guarded right around the world . . ." Again, this is all from the current Premier when he was the Health Critic in 1999:

"I have to tell you it is a shame when a government, through a piece of legislation, decides to bring forward a bill that takes away the ability of those people to be able to negotiate for their own best interest. You can't put any other spin on it; there is none. That is the overriding principle of this bill, to do away with collective bargaining."

The final quote I will give from the Premier is, ". . . the reality is, if I may quote the Minister of Justice when he was a member of the Opposition, when you became the government, it became your responsibility. You don't get off the hook by saying that the former government ought to have done something." In this case you don't get off the hook by saying a government 20 years ago should have done something either.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to help out those who are following the debate today, as well, to have a sense of what was said in 1999. I wanted to give a few comments from our current Minister of Finance. She said at the time:

"The bill . . . before us is entitled an Act to Provide for the Continuation of Ground Ambulance Services in the Province. A better title for this bill

would be an Act to permit the Hamm Government to break faith with the paramedics of Nova Scotia, or an Act to demonstrate what the government really thinks about paramedics - and that is you cannot be trusted. They are saying this to the very people whom we trust every day, trust in life-and-death situations every day, and this piece of legislation says loud and clear you cannot be trusted by your government. We do not trust you.”

Those are very powerful words - that was the current Minister of Finance, the honourable member for Halifax Needham, when she sat in Opposition during our marathon debate on the government’s attempt to prevent paramedics from their right to strike and bargain collectively.

She went on further to say, “This bill should be called an Act to stop paramedics from striking, even though we have not designated you as an essential service and even though we are not prepared to pay you the going rate for such a designation. You know, this is wrong; this is absolutely wrong. This is bad legislation and I think, as legislators, we should be able to do much better.” I would submit to you, Madam Speaker, we should be doing much better today, as the Minister of Finance thought we should have been doing much better 14 years ago.

She goes on to further say back in 1999:

“But this is not a common-sense approach. This is an overreaction. This is suspending collective bargaining while negotiations are ongoing because a strike might occur. Well, with all due respect, that is the way the collective bargaining process works. In all collective bargaining that is going on, ultimately a strike might occur. We have the legislative parameters, they are there. The rules are laid out quite clearly.”

The question today is what rules changed that we now have an NDP Government 14 years later that is looking to take away the right to strike from Nova Scotia paramedics?

The last quote that I wanted to give from our Minister of Finance was when she said in 1999:

“Government has a wonderful opportunity, as an employer, and let’s be clear here, government provides almost all of the money, if not all of the money in the Emergency Services, for emergency medical care. So government has an opportunity, and indeed, a responsibility to be a role model, if you will, for what an employer should be like, how an employer should behave. An employer who is not prepared to use the processes that are available to him to reach negotiated settlements with his workers, what kind of an employer is that, Mr. Speaker?”

Madam Speaker, the final quotes that I want to give from 1999 - before I do get there, I certainly want to take the opportunity to commend the paramedics in Richmond County, who I've had the pleasure of speaking to and hearing their concerns not only the last little bit, but certainly over the last number of years. I'm proud of the fact that it was a Liberal Government that created the ambulance service we have today which is being copied by countries throughout the world. That is something we're all proud of and it's something that comes with responsibilities to ensure that there is proper compensation for those who work in that industry, and this is what brings us here today.

Madam Speaker, I want to make it clear, it is not my place to judge what's good or what's not good for paramedics. Paramedics are to make that decision - that is why we have collective bargaining. It's not my place to say whether a health plan is better than higher wages or whether a defined benefit is better than getting more vacation days. That is for the paramedics to decide.

We should be reluctant to judge what paramedics have done or how they've chosen to go through this bargaining process, because at the end of the day, they are the ones who must look after the interests of their families, the well-being of their children, and their own future. The decisions they make are theirs, and we certainly respect their ability to be able to make those decisions. Again, I want to thank all of those in Richmond County and in the Strait area who have brought these concerns to me.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated, the NDP has a history of defending workers' rights, or at least saying that they defend workers' rights. Again, it's troubling when you look at what was said in 1999 to what is being said today. Obviously the government, the minister, and the Government House Leader today were talking about the safety of Nova Scotians being the overriding concern here. I can tell you that 14 years ago, the government said the same thing, both for the paramedics' strike and for the nurses' strike. As legislators, that was the burden we carried: do we defend the workers' rights to strike, as part of their collective bargaining rights, or do we say no, the safety of Nova Scotians is the overriding principle, and workers' rights have to take a back seat?

That was the debate. That was what I had to face. Continuing to have the debate, knowing that a strike was a possibility, was a challenge for all of us. I'm sure it was a challenge for the member for Halifax Chebucto, for the Minister of Finance, and for others. The decision was made then that these rights were so important that they had to be defended and they had to be preserved. So it's rich today to hear the government saying, well, it's all about public safety and we have no choice; rights will have to take a back seat because of public safety.

That was no different back in 1999. Public safety didn't change. The contingency plan that was in place in 1999 was no better than the contingency plan that's in place today in the event of a strike. That has not changed. What has changed is the NDP. They have now decided that what they stood for in 1999 is not what they stand for today.

Madam Speaker, with all due respect, when you hear the government talking about public safety and their overall concern for public safety, let us not forget that in 1999 our current Minister of Health and Wellness walked the picket line. Where was public safety back then? So to hear the government now saying that the Opposition would be irresponsible to stand up for paramedics is extremely unfortunate. What they believed in in 1999 and what they believe in now has changed quite a bit. Bill No. 86 is a mere example of so many others where this government has changed.

I want to finish by giving a few other quotes from the now-Minister of Labour and Advanced Education and Government House Leader who, while in Opposition in 1999 - and I believe he may have been the Labour Critic at the time - said:

“Then we have the Minister of Health who says no we are not going to get involved in the collective bargaining process. That is not our style. We don’t have to do that. No, we won’t. Then, on Thursday past, they summon all and sundry to the closed doors and say we must put legislation together because this group of dutiful employees can’t be trusted to bargain collectively. We must put our heavy hand on the heads of these workers and push them down. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what this legislation does, push workers down.”

The Government House Leader and Minister of Labour and Advanced Education went on to say, “We will give money to a billion dollar company, but we won’t give money to workers. Okay, I understand it now. That’s the box we live in. Well, well. We want to give all kinds of money to the Bank of Nova Scotia.” We can kind of change “the Bank of Nova Scotia” to include, I guess, quite a few other billion dollar companies and others that this government has chosen to support, but today brings forward legislation to put the hand down on paramedics in Nova Scotia.

One of the other quotes is:

“Well, that is what we have asked the Minister of Labour to do, or the Minister of Health, in his wisdom, to withdraw this and let them get back to collective bargaining. What is so horrendous about allowing Nova Scotian workers to arrive at their own destiny? It is not to say that the overriding concern with this legislation is public safety, is a crock, you know that. You know that is not factual. This is legislation to restrict workers’ rights, it is plain and simple. . . . I think they are, I think they would like to have their members speak about this.”

Mr. Speaker, he went on further to say:

“They are not only being dumped on by this government, but what they are becoming now is the front line of defence for every other union in this

province that commences collective bargaining, because this government has clearly said to employers, if you are having problems with your workers, come see us, we will fix it.”

Madam Speaker, I believe Bill No. 86 sends exactly the same message to all other health care workers in this province and to their union leadership that if there are going to be problems this government is prepared to fix it with legislation such as Bill No. 86.

Madam Speaker, allow me to end with this. The Minister of Labour and Government House Leader said:

“They have an option to go and take this legislation back from whence it came, to go and tell the employer to bargain in good faith, that we are not as a government going to go and load the debt for you. We want you to sit down and bargain. We have seen instances from one end of this country to the other of where eleventh hour negotiations have come to a settlement that was acceptable to both parties. As I said earlier, this group for some reason got an itchy trigger finger and had to shoot at the hip.”

How ironic that 14 years later it’s a majority NDP Government that has decided to shoot from the hip and Nova Scotia paramedics are the losers for it. Merci.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Madam Speaker, there will be no peace in the world without goodwill and many would believe that these negotiations started a few weeks ago but would you believe it has been two and a half years since a contract was in place. I know many people out there in the province reading the papers would believe this only started a few weeks back. I recall my colleague from Hants West here in the Legislature asking a question this past Spring about this matter but there seemed to be no urgency at that time to solve it. Now we are in the eleventh hour facing a 76 per cent reduction in the paramedic service we depend on in our province.

What do we do? Madam Speaker, I just want to mention a couple of the services that we’re looking at: Extended Care Paramedic Project which assesses and treats non-emergency situations, for instance in a nursing home, allowing residents to remain at the home and avoid difficult hospital visits; our Collaborative Emergency Centres, emergency rooms in the province that are staffed by paramedics at night to allow these facilities to remain open when no physician is present; the RESTORE program, heart attack patients who call 911 receive faster treatment with the administration of TNK, a clot-busting medication; community paramedicine where paramedic staff community clinics with a nurse practitioner to provide primary health care to residents. There are all the services we’re talking about.

Now there is motivation, I believe, for both sides to delay settlement to the end and by that I mean to the end of a strike deadline, to force either's hand to agree in the others favour. I know paramedics feel arbitration tips the scale in favour of the employer. We believe paramedics are an essential service and that should be put in the terms of the contract for good reason. The first I can think of is that we don't want paramedics to face two and a half year delays for the renewal of their contracts but also for some of the reasons I've just mentioned, we don't want the public living with fear that paramedics are not going to be available for them when they need them. If we do answer the question with that, Madam Speaker, and with this legislation, if we answer the question what do we do to prevent an interruption of service so that the paramedics are there for us, I believe the question that remains is what can we do to make life better for paramedics so they feel valued and they enjoy their work environment?

I know some of the issues that are being discussed and I want to put them on the record, Madam Speaker. I know that right now after a paramedic is ill for four days, after that point they must go on short-term disability, and there is a cost to that. But, by being forced to go on short-term disability, many of them don't want to. I know I've had situations where I've had a flu - I had one this past Spring and it lasted for pretty well two weeks - granted, I did work during that time, but one of the points I'd like to make is these are people who are working helping people who may have weak immune systems due to illness. And I think if you're trying to care for somebody and your own immune system is compromised because you have flu, you don't want to be passing that on to somebody you're trying to help get better.

I also know that another matter for paramedics is their health benefits and the premiums they pay. Every time they get paid there is a premium paid, it comes off their paycheque, to pay for that. Their own employer is the insurer for those health benefits and it seems to them every time they do get a raise, the employer raises the health premium and they lose some of the benefit of that raise. They feel there's a conflict of interest there because their own employer is also the provider of their health benefit. So, the question that has been asked is why isn't that put to market so other insurers can bid on it so the paramedics can ensure they're getting a fair shake, that they're getting their health benefits at the best price they can get them for?

I think of the money that paramedics are saving our health care system. We know that it costs about \$1,000 a day - round numbers for ease of math - to keep somebody in a hospital bed. Paramedics are helping to keep people out of hospital beds, and that's saving money. I think about the delay, and I mentioned it and I think it's a good reason why we do need paramedics to be considered an essential service, the delay in their contract - if they get a five-year contract, they're already halfway through it, moving towards three years completed in that contract once this latest one is negotiated. That means there have been delays.

I know there has been talk about a defined benefit pension plan. Well, had these matters been negotiated two and a half years ago and if that was a feature of the negotiation of the agreed-upon settlement then that would have started two and a half years ago. I know they're looking at premium rates of pay for when they're working on weekends and at night and of course that will only likely apply after the settlement. I don't know, maybe the representatives for the paramedics will put that in, make that part of their ask to the arbitrator. It's likely that it may be something that's going forward versus something that could have happened perhaps two and a half years ago.

Of course, I know one of the matters they are looking at is wages and they're looking at what people are getting paid to do the same work in other jurisdictions and they're also asking to be recognized because in many cases they're offering services, they're providing treatments that they are trained for that are not being offered in other jurisdictions - treatments that are important in the running of our health care system.

I don't think all of the matters that are on the table are purely economic; I can think of one example, which is vacation, I know that paramedics have to give seven business days of notice for vacation and that is certainly reasonable, but there are times where that may not be possible for the person who is looking for the time off. I think if they can find somebody, a fellow colleague, who is willing to cover off for the vacation period, they've assisted management in ensuring that all hands will be on deck when they're needed. I believe there's a concession that could be made to them in such situations where, yes, try to give the seven days but in situations, as long as it's not a recurring issue, where a vacation day is needed, if an arrangement can be made, why not?

I know that morale is low among paramedics right now; some say it's at its lowest point that it has ever been. I don't want to make too many comments, but I am hearing things; I don't want to make a lot of comments because I don't want to make relations worse. I guess it begs the question, would government management be different? I suppose it's possible, because we know that there have been suggestions that paramedics should be brought back under government as employees of the government. Now, whether that question would be answered - would they be treated differently by managers in government? - I don't know. I guess the question that it is raising in my mind is, what is creating the corporate culture in the present organization, where morale is so low and where it appears that management is not - and I'm sure it's coming from both sides, and in fairness, I'm not in the environment. I can't provide a judgment on that, nor would I want to. The reality of it is that the culture that exists there now is not healthy. People are not happy. Maybe that's a requirement.

I know when I was in business at St. F.X., when we were taking business, we were told, if you become managers someday, recognize that many times, for problems that are in the workplace, the solution is management. The solution lies in the hands of management, because they are ultimately the ones in control. When we were learning that, we would

accept responsibility for that. I want to make that point today, because I think that is at the heart of a lot of these issues: the bad morale that exists right now.

I do know that paramedics don't feel that the arbitrator will choose their side, and that is why it is very important for their union right now to make sure that the arbitrator who they get a chance to give their blessing to is somebody they feel will be fair to the paramedics.

In summing up, I believe paramedics are an essential service, and that is why I will be supporting this legislation. We cannot risk having only a quarter of this service in operation. It is too important. It is essential. If government continues to use the private-sector manager to run this operation, it needs to take a more active role to ensure that paramedics feel respected by their employer, that they feel valued, and that they enjoy their work environment.

Madam Speaker, as I said when I started, there will be no peace in the world without goodwill, and I think we need to return to that here between management and the paramedics so that we can restore the morale in that workplace. I believe paramedics' work is so important. We need them to feel good about going to work so that they will be at their best when we are at a time of need and we need them. Thank you.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: Madam Speaker, I thank all the members for their input today. I now move second reading of Bill No. 86.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 86. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Madam Speaker, as per our earlier agreement, I move that the House recess until after the Law Amendments Committee has met and reported back.

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

The motion is carried.

The House will now recess until the Law Amendments Committee has been completed.

[11:29 a.m. The House recessed.]

[2:46 p.m. The House reconvened.]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, with the unanimous consent of the House, I move that we revert to the daily routine, the order of business, Presenting Reports of Committees.

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

The motion is carried.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

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

Bill No. 86 - Ambulance Services Continuation (2013) Act.

and the committee recommends this bill to the favourable consideration of the House, without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[2:48 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Ms. Becky Kent in the Chair.]

[2:50 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Gordie Gosse resumed the Chair.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports:

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

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

Bill No. 86 - Ambulance Services Continuation (2013) Act.

and the chairman has been instructed to recommend this bill to the favourable consideration of the House without amendments.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, with the indulgence of the House, I would like to now ask if we could have agreement to do third reading of Bill No. 86.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 86.

Bill No. 86 - Ambulance Services Continuation (2013) Act.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to move third reading of Bill No. 86. The bill gives an arbitrator 90 days to work with both parties to reach an agreement without the possibility of lockout or strike.

This legislation protects Nova Scotians against the potential disruption in ambulance services that would put people's lives in jeopardy. The health and safety of Nova Scotians is our number-one priority. Nova Scotians need to know that paramedics will be there to help them in an emergency.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 86 now be read for a third time.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for Third Reading of Bill No. 86. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Mr. Speaker, that concludes the government's business for today. I move that we do now rise, to meet again at the call of the Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to rise.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

We will now stand adjourned.

[The House adjourned at 4:52 p.m.]