



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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First Session

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2014

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2014

Sixty-second General Assembly

First Session

12:01 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKER

Ms. Margaret Miller

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. JOANNE BERNARD: Mr. Speaker, Sexual Assault Awareness Month began two days ago with a strong commitment to do more to prevent sexual assault and sexual violence in Nova Scotia. While April is appropriately recognized as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, our efforts are needed 365 days a year.

We need to ensure that victims and survivors have greater access to appropriate services that will help them in their healing process. They deserve our compassion, our belief and our resolve to support them. Survivors, advocates, service providers, front-line workers, law enforcement and government are coming together to raise awareness about sexual assault and sexual violence in our communities.

Sexual assault is an affront to human dignity no matter where or when it occurs. While sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of their sex, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or where they live, we do know that those at greatest risk are women and girls.

Today, I am pleased to reaffirm our government's commitment to improving supports and services to victims, families, and communities. One of the earliest announcements made by this government was our intention to develop the first sexual violence strategy for Nova Scotia. My vision includes working across the provincial government with our partners, stakeholders, and advocates to create an action-oriented approach that supports the resiliency and courage of those impacted.

As we work to support the resiliency of victims of sexual assault, we also need to support the efforts of those who do their part to address these crimes and to work to prevent future occurrences. Today I want to commend and thank the many community service providers, advocates, front-line workers, and law enforcement for your essential and critical efforts.

In closing, I want to urge all Nova Scotians to support survivors of sexual assault, to work together to prevent these crimes in their communities, and to attend the many events that will take place throughout the province. I want to challenge every Nova Scotian to help raise awareness about sexualized violence and sexual assault and to not be a bystander. When sexual assault does take place, it cannot be tolerated. Victims must have access to support and offenders must be held to account for their actions. All Nova Scotians must play a role in changing a culture that enables sexual assault and sexual violence. Each of us can and must take action. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for providing a copy of her statement to me in advance. April is set aside to raise awareness about sexual assault and sexual violence. I agree with the minister that this is an issue that needs to be addressed 365 days a year.

I am pleased to hear the minister commit to improving supports and services to victims of sexual assault, their families, and their communities. As a caring society we must provide the support the courageous victims of sexual violence need to help them heal. We must also ensure that offenders are made to account for their criminal actions.

This morning I am pleased to have the opportunity to salute the many people across our province whose life's work is to provide the programs and supports to help victims - the activists, the advocates, the educators, the health advisors, law enforcement, and justice workers. Their jobs are not easy ones by any means, but it is an important job and an essential job. We all owe them a debt of gratitude - not just during Sexual Assault Awareness Month, but every day of the year.

We know that sexual abuse and sexualized violence in our communities is far more common than people think. According to a 2006 Statistics Canada report, one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime. Statistics provided by the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre indicate that in 2007 the rate of reported sexual assaults in Nova Scotia was 75 per 100,000 people, compared to the national rate of 65 per 100,000 people. As I said, we must provide those victims with the help they need, but we must also take action to prevent sexual violence in the first place. We must curb violence before it begins. We need to take the blinders off.

As caring citizens we need to create a better environment to ensure that victims of sexual assault and sexual violence feel they will be believed when they tell their stories. That starts with meaningful education and awareness. We must send the message that sexual violence is always wrong and not tolerated in our province.

Government and all Nova Scotians must double their efforts to change our culture, reduce the sad and alarming statistics of sexual violence in our province, and support the brave victims who come forward. I urge government to act quickly and decisively to make meaningful progress toward preventing and addressing sexual assault and sexual violence in Nova Scotia. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Whitney Pier.

MR. GORDIE GOSSE: Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the minister for providing a copy of her statement in advance this evening. Encouraging awareness of sexual violence is a very important initiative and it's an issue I take very seriously. Every year I attend events in my community held at Cape Breton University for Sexual Assault Awareness Week.

I applaud the work of organizations around the province that support victims of violence and sexual assault. In Cape Breton we are very lucky to have the Cape Breton Transition House, the Every Woman's Centre, and the Silent Witness program, with silhouettes there to honour women in Cape Breton Regional Municipality who have been killed in incidents of domestic violence since 1990.

Also in Cape Breton I'm very proud that we are home to the first Domestic Violence Court in Canada. The court officially opened in June 2012 at the Sydney Justice Centre. This was an initiative of the NDP Government which I'm very proud to have been

a part of. I know that across the province so many survivors, advocates, service providers, front-line workers, and law enforcement have been working to raise awareness of sexual assault and sexual violence in our communities. I commend their efforts and I'm pleased that the government is prepared to work with them to develop a strategy addressing sexual violence.

I agree with the minister that we need to ensure victims and survivors of sexual violence have greater access to services that can help them to overcome their traumas. These victims absolutely deserve our compassion, our focus, and most importantly support from all Nova Scotians, including government. I'm anxious to see what tomorrow's budget will offer in this respect and I look forward to continuing to be an advocate for victims of violence and sexual assault as the Critic for Community Services and as the MLA for Sydney-Whitney Pier. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 831

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

Whereas Nova Scotians marked International Adult Learners' Week from March 29th to April 6th, celebrating the achievements of adult learners and the organizations that support them; and

Whereas learning is the foundation for growth in all aspects of our lives, and Adult Learners' Week raises awareness of the value of lifelong learning and the supports and services available to Nova Scotians who wish to enhance their knowledge and skills; and

Whereas lifelong learning has a significant impact on individuals, their families and communities, by helping better prepare the province's workforce to seize the economic opportunities of today and tomorrow;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House celebrate the week of March 29 to April 6, 2014, as International Adult Learners' Week in the Province of Nova Scotia, and urge all citizens to observe this week and to be more fully aware of the importance of a lifetime full of learning in all aspects of their lives.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NOTICES OF MOTION

NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

RESOLUTION NO. 832

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

Whereas each Sunday morning the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 83 hosts a large fundraising breakfast to support Legion activities, and the proceeds from their March 30th meal was donated to the Florence Volunteer Fire Department; and

Whereas Legion President Lloyd Harris stated this is just one service group trying to help another for recognition of their service to the community; and

Whereas the fire department helped serve and do other breakfast-related activities, and the Legion members did the cooking;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in saluting Branch 83 for its community-minded spirit and generosity.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: The time is now 12:16 a.m. and we'll conclude Question Period at 1:16 a.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: PATIENT CARE - COMPROMISED

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, we now know that as of this moment 293 surgeries have been cancelled at Capital Health. The strike hasn't even started yet, although we are hours away, and that is how much patient care has already been compromised, proving the point that even the threat of a strike affects patients care. That is why you don't wait to act. I will ask the Premier, will he now admit to those 293 families that patient care has, in fact, been compromised already under his watch?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition makes the very case for why this bill should be passed, and I would encourage both Opposition Parties to pass the bill.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I believe the 293 families make the case that waiting seven months to take action does not protect patient care, that doing nothing with all the warnings that this government has had, and all the deadlines that they have missed has actually affected 293 surgeries. Whether they were essential or not under the Premier's bill is not the point; in fact, they probably aren't. But they are essential to those 293 families and that's why we should not have allowed a strike to get this far or a crisis to develop, and this has happened so many times before in this province's history.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier had seven months to get his act together and only now on the eve of a strike, when families - these 293 in particular - are already losing their health care, that is the problem. So I'll ask the Premier, how can he tell those 293 families that their care has been protected under his watch?

THE PREMIER: What I can tell those 293 families is finally - finally, Mr. Speaker - a government is standing up to ensure that essential health services will be in place. (Applause)

Also the workers in this province - unlike the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, this Party believes in collective bargaining and the right to strike, and we'll do so, Mr. Speaker.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that we are constant in on this side of the House is that patients have to come first, and they have to be protected before a strike so that there isn't a strike and for all time. The Premier has failed to these 293 cases, his bill won't solve their problem in the future, it may not be essential to the union or to the government, but their surgeries are essential to them. That's why there shouldn't be a strike and that's why the government should have acted months ago.

As the Premier once said, Mr. Speaker, that we should not be legislating on the eve of a crisis, he has gone back on what he said and done just that, and 293 families are now paying the price. I'll ask the Premier, on behalf of those families, why did he wait until another crisis developed and 293 surgeries are cancelled, to finally act?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, one of the great ironies of the Leader of the Official Opposition, if we had acted before we allowed the collective bargaining process to proceed he would have complained about the fact that we interfered in the collective bargaining process, which I think if you check Hansard, he already complained about that.

The fact of the matter is on Monday there was a 48-hour strike notice put in place. Our government responded - not only to deal with the issue of labour disruption in the health care system today, but for all time. We put in place a bill that will effectively put out essential services legislation that will ensure health care is there for Nova Scotians but, at the same time, respecting the right of health care workers to strike.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

PREM. - CAP. DHA: INDUSTRIAL INQUIRY - REQUEST

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Premier. Last evening, I sent the Premier a letter requesting that his Minister of Labour and Advanced Education appoint an industrial inquiry commission. The commission would examine the dispute between the Capital District Health Authority and the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union regarding nurse staffing levels and patient safety - and I will table a copy of the letter.

As part of the request, the NDP are asking all sides to immediately accept a 90-day cooling-off period during which time the government would suspend passage of Bill No. 37 and the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union and the Capital District Health Authority would agree to no strike or no walkout, but the Premier has declined the offer. Instead of agreeing to a solution that would protect both the collective bargaining process and patient safety, the Premier has put both in danger.

My question for the Premier is, why did he refuse to advise his Minister of Labour and Advanced Education to appoint an industrial inquiry commission into patient safety and nurse staffing levels in the Capital District Health Authority?

THE PREMIER: I would encourage the member opposite to pass Bill No. 37, which protects essential services legislation as well as the right to bargain. Furthermore, I want to inform the member opposite that the Minister of Health and Wellness is already dealing with health authorities across this province to deal with the critical issue of staffing, not only in the Capital District, but across the province - something that government failed to do for four years.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, a three-person commission would be chaired by a neutral labour relations expert, along with a representative of the employer and of the union. Research and expert opinion during a cooling-off period would bring light into an issue currently where there is not a great deal of light.

Will the Premier reconsider and agree to an industrial inquiry commission on patient safety and staffing levels? If not, perhaps the Premier can offer a more constructive solution than that of stripping health care workers of the fair collective bargaining process.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 37 has struck a balance to ensure that essential health care services would be available to Nova Scotians. They'll know well in advance of any labour issues that may come up in the health care sector. At the same time, it protects the right to strike for health care workers.

It wasn't all that long ago when every major union leader in this province marched across into the Red Room and supported a bill by that government, by the NDP, to strip the right to strike from paramedics - to strip the right to strike from paramedics, Mr. Speaker. We struck a balance, which ensures that health and essential services be in place and ensuring that health care workers are protected to use the right to strike.

MS. MACDONALD: It's very sad that the Premier is not interested in a common sense solution that would bring some sanity to a situation that is now spinning toward a situation that none of us want.

A 90-day cooling-off period before a legal strike would also allow the Liberal Cabinet members, and the members of the Liberal Government more generally, to hear from health care workers about the adverse effects of essential services legislation - if they haven't already heard about this.

Will the Premier again reconsider and allow his MLAs more time to study the negative effects this type of legislation will have on labour peace in this province because of the negative effect this type of legislation has had in other provinces, and if not, why not?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that every province other than Nova Scotia has a form of essential services in their individual provinces. If the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the New Democratic Party really wants to do something for patients in this province, I would encourage her to stop filibustering this bill and pass it tonight.

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

**HEALTH & WELLNESS - CAP. HEALTH MENTAL HEALTH UNIT:
STAFF - LACK EXPLAIN**

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned from the Minister of Health and Wellness that there is a mental health unit with five patients, here at Capital Health, that will go unstaffed when the strike happens, unstaffed despite the fact that there is an existing essential services plan in place. These are vulnerable Nova Scotians in need of constant help who will be left alone when the strike starts, even with essential services plans in place already. I ask the Premier, how can he say to those five Nova Scotians that their health care is protected?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the Leader of the Official Opposition that there is no essential services plan in place. What we have is an emergency service plan, quite frankly, which has no parameters around it. No one has to provide service; that's the very issue we're dealing with here in this House.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the Premier should read his own bill because that's exactly the kind of plan that his bill will require, yet today it leaves these five mental health patients at risk of being without care. It's why you don't wait until there is a crisis to act. There was a time in Opposition when the Premier said that this is the worst time to be making up bills as you go along because it should be done when there is labour peace. He had seven months to do that and he didn't act. Now they bring in a bill, risking that it won't be passed, and leaving in time to protect people like these five individuals, these five Nova Scotians who are in need of mental health services. I'll ask the Premier, why did he wait and put their health care at risk?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party just said to this House that our bill would solve that problem. It is the very reason why we encourage the Opposition Parties to pass this bill.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I actually said that their bill would not solve that problem; that is, in fact, the point. Now we are hours away (Interruptions) That's right, it's

actually not funny - a couple of hours from now, real Nova Scotians at mental health units, waiting for surgery, they're going to go without health care because once again, like so many times in the history of this province, a government waited until there was a crisis to actually act and that is wrong.

The Premier once agreed with that statement and said it's the worst time to be bringing in a bill, that it would be much better to put in place a plan for all time when there's labour peace, when neither nurses nor any other health care worker would feel that they are targeted. Instead, it's the same old way. They wait until there is a crisis and then they bring in a bill. In fact, by doing all we can, including giving up our own day today, to the government, to try to move this bill through, I actually think we're trying to clean up a crisis that the government, itself, contributed to by doing nothing until it was too late, but here we are.

Now we have people in hospital beds in Capital Health being sent to their home district, being sent home, being released from the hospital because no one is going to be there to care for them. I'll ask the Premier this question, how is sending people out of the hospital and back home protecting their care?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the last time the Progressive Conservative Party was in power they did nothing, quite frankly, to protect the essential services of the people of this province. For the last four years Nova Scotians have felt neglected by the NDP. We have a bill in front of this House, which will protect essential services and allow health care workers to keep the right to strike.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - VETERANS SERVICES: STRIKE - IMPACT

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you will be to the Minister of Health and Wellness. All members of this House appreciate the great sacrifices that have been made by our veterans, sacrifices that allow us the many freedoms that we enjoy today. Those brave men and women gave all so that we could have 100 per cent freedom. Not 75 per cent freedom, not 50 per cent freedom.

So my question to the minister is, is he satisfied that, starting in six hours, veteran services will not be staffed at 100 per cent? How can he justify that our veterans will not be receiving 100 per cent of the services that they need and richly deserve?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, this was a question asked earlier in the week in terms of what emergency services would actually be covered in the event of a wildcat strike or a legal strike, which can start tomorrow at 7:00 a.m., and we were informed that veterans and their needs would be looked after.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, most Nova Scotians would be saddened and shocked to learn that veterans will suffer during the impending nurses' strike. The information that we have is that the services will not be 100 per cent staffed. In February, the MLA for Fairview-Clayton Park, who was critical of other Parties' support for our veterans said, "Doing nothing is not an option." I will table that quote.

My question for the minister is, will the minister detail for the House the actions that members of his Liberal caucus have taken to ensure that our veterans get 100 per cent of the health services that they deserve? Have they followed their own advice that doing nothing is not an option?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, it is our understanding that there will be provisions to look after the needs of our veterans at Camp Hill who could be impacted. We've been assured that the necessary contingencies are in place, and if that is not the case, due to call-ins or people who don't show up for work, then that is certainly contrary to what we have been informed of at this stage.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I consider all the freedoms we enjoy, and I am 100 per cent grateful for every one of them. I know that all Nova Scotians feel the same way. Will the minister please tell the House what contingencies have been made available to our veterans once this strike begins?

MR. GLAVINE: The member opposite is actually raising a very, very good point here in the Legislature, that we know that this would be one of the requirements, that under essential services legislation it would not be any concern or worry that our veterans wouldn't get the full services that they require. That is our understanding, that tomorrow, when there is a legal strike, that our veterans are looked after. I can let the member opposite know that that will be one of my calls tomorrow, to make sure that our veterans indeed are being looked after at Camp Hill. You know, as we linger into the wee hours of the morning here, I'd be willing also to join the member opposite and head to Ottawa and get some real concern for our veterans. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

PREM.: STRIKE RESTRICTING LEGISLATION - LEADERS' STANCE (2007)

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Premier. On the eve of a potential strike in 33 hospitals across the province back in 2010, The Chronicle Herald published an article, which I'll table, in which it says that none of the Party Leaders at the time thought that laws restricting strikes in the health care sector were necessary. Let me read what the article says was said by the Premier: "Liberal Leader Stephen McNeil said Nova Scotia effectively has . . ."

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Please make your reference to the Premier as the Premier.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party has the floor.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I do know this.

In the article, the member for Annapolis is quoted as having said that “Nova Scotia effectively has essential services legislation already because collective agreements require emergency services staffing plans.”

My question for the Premier is, why is he suddenly determined to impose on nurses legislation he said just a few short years ago was not needed?

THE PREMIER: As the Leader of the New Democratic Party would know, in the last seven months we’ve had potential labour disruptions in the health care system. Unfortunately, the provision that you’re referring to has not always been implemented, and she would know full well that when negotiations between an employer and a union begin to break down, they do not end up always agreeing on what is an emergency service. She would know that well - she took away the right to strike from paramedics because she wasn’t sure they were going to provide emergency services. She’s making the very case on why this should be put in legislation to ensure we never face this again.

MS. MACDONALD: It never ceases to amaze me how the member for Annapolis can take a set of facts and twist them so that they are completely unrelated to what really happened. Nevertheless, Nova Scotians will find this out soon enough.

In 2007, in this House, the current Premier said of the Progressive Conservative essential services legislation, “I believe government wants to hold this over the heads of the nurses who are in negotiations now. Is that the kind of Nova Scotia that we want?” he asked. “Is that the new Nova Scotia?”

My question for the Premier is, is the new Nova Scotia one where the government can hold essential services over the heads of nurses?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the new Nova Scotia that Nova Scotians voted for on October 8th was a government that respected the right to strike from all Nova Scotians, unlike the New Democratic Party that stripped that right from paramedics. Let me be clear: this is putting in place essential services legislation that would ensure that we protect services for patients. The New Democratic Party has a decision to make - they’re either going to support patients or they’re going to support their union bosses.

MS. MACDONALD: The Premier had even more to say about essential services legislation in 2007. Once again, in this House, he said, “It has been proven from one end of

this country to the other - this legislation will not work.” Those are his words, Mr. Speaker, not mine.

So my question for the Premier is, why does he now want to impose bad legislation on thousands of Nova Scotians that he himself has said will not work?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I know the honourable member has been here longer than I have, but she seems to be forgetting a key fact to that piece of legislation she’s referring to - it actually stripped the right to strike away from health care workers. I would encourage her to look at the bill that’s in front of this House today which actually puts in place an essential services plan to provide health care services to Nova Scotians well in advance of a strike, and it also protects the health care workers’ right to strike. That Party is going to have to determine whether or not they are going to support the patients or their union bosses.

MR. SPEAKER: I just want to remind all members on both side of the House that if you have something to say, get yourself on the paper with your House Leader and take your turn.

The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

JUSTICE - EAST COAST FORENSIC HOSP.: STAFFING - SAFETY

HON. CHRISTOPHER D’ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I assure you I’m on the list.

My question through you is to the Minister of Justice. Capital Health is warning that there is no emergency staffing level agreement . . .

HON. FRANK CORBETT: Geoff, at least you’re a good ballplayer, not like that one.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: Are you done, Frankie?

MR. CORBETT: Sorry. Yeah, I’m done.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: You’re not on my list.

MR. SPEAKER: Start over again.

MR. D’ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Capital Health is warning that there is no emergency staffing level agreement and that the current staffing plan creates an unsafe environment for patients and staff - and I’ll table that document. There are approximately 11 nurses at the East Coast Forensic Hospital during normal staffing levels,

and I'll table that one as well. So my question is, can the Minister of Justice update the House on what the staff levels could look like later today in the event of a strike?

HON. LENA DIAB: Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, I have been in contact with the East Coast Forensic Hospital and I've been informed from the leader of the Forensic Services and Offender Health, he has confirmed that we have an upgrade in staffing of one extra RN at night and security will not be affected by the strike.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: According to the staffing level document on April 2, 2014, the staffing level for Rehab A could drop to one. So I guess what you're saying here is maybe one plus one - I know you'll probably have an opportunity next to update that. According to the same staffing level document, staffing level for Rehab B could also drop to one. In these two rehabilitation units there are 30 beds each, Mr. Speaker, so that would mean two or three nurses for the 30-bed units.

So my question to the Minister of Justice is, do you accept that these two rehabilitation units with patients referred there by the courts will maintain adequate oversight with only one or two nurses on that site?

MS. DIAB: A very important question. Again I will repeat that the leader of the Forensic Services and Offender Health has assured us that security will not be affected by the strike and, in terms of the exact numbers, I will have to either get those to you or request that you refer that question to my colleague, the Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Well how about this, Mr. Speaker, that a (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington on his final supplementary.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do hope that she does have the opportunity to update herself with the minister who is just sitting a few seats down from her.

The East Coast Forensic Hospital also houses a 24-bed mentally ill offender unit where court-ordered assessments are performed and treatment is provided to offenders diagnosed with mental illness. According to the staffing level document, the staffing level could drop to zero in the offender health services. Does the minister accept that the mentally ill patients who were court ordered to undergo assessment will receive adequate oversight with the zero nurses on strike? You may just refer it.

MS. DIAB: Mr. Speaker, I won't refer this one, no. These are patients and these are our most vulnerable, and yes, we do have to protect them. Again, as I said earlier, security will not be affected by the strike, as we've been assured by the leader of the Forensic

Services and Offender Health just a few hours ago. Any more information, I'd be happy to gather that information and share it with the member opposite later.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - CAP. HEALTH: PATIENT SAFETY - ADDRESS

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm on the list, so I'm glad to be able to stand and ask a question through you to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Yesterday, the Minister of Health and Wellness admitted for the first time that there is a staffing problem in health care in the Capital Region that affects patient safety. He says that he will deal with it.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is, when will he tell Capital Health to address the patient safety, and will he direct Capital Health administration to leave their offices, tour the floors and see for themselves exactly what is going on within the health care sector in Capital Health?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, to the member for Sackville-Cobequid, I do want to assure him and all members of the House that, in fact, the Capital District is the one remaining on my list to do - not just really a tour, but a great deal of discussion, and also to review what is taking place in many of the units and floors of the QEII, Dickson Centre and other facilities in Capital Health. We certainly want to get a full sense of what the staffing issues are. We got some glimpses and insights yesterday, as well as leading up to the wildcat strike. These will be investigated, reviewed and addressed in the coming weeks.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I know I've asked the minister yesterday if he was able to get a full sense by the many presenters who were witnesses at the Law Amendments Committee, and I hope he takes the time to talk to his colleagues who sat at the Law Amendments Committee. I know the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal spent some time there early yesterday morning. I hope he takes that opportunity to hear from them about what they heard, what the sense was around staffing levels within Capital Health.

Last night we suggested a solution to the current labour dispute and that is what we are offering to the government. The Liberals would have saved face by withdrawing legislation that harms collective bargaining - no matter what the Premier says, it does harm the collective bargaining process - and there would have been a 90-day cooling off period with no work stoppages, and a commission would review nurse staffing levels and patient safety, something the minister just said he wants to look into.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness, what was his response to the letter sent to him, and could he update us on what he advised either his staff or the Premier on what his response was to our offer for the commission?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that we've arrived at this point in a labour dispute where health care services are not at the 100 per cent level that Nova Scotians have come to expect and certainly deserve as we all work and want to see the highest quality of health care delivered daily throughout our province. What today's legislation, Bill No. 37, does is prepare a path for the future. I'm sure there will be other occasions when there will be labour disputes and negotiations will be challenging, but from this point forward, Nova Scotians will know exactly what services will be in place.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, and through you to the Minister of Health and Wellness, the path forward is not going to be that good for the government. During any collective bargaining - and I don't know what kind of experience the Minister of Health and Wellness has had with it - no matter what decision you make, you can't back yourself into a corner. You have to be able to look at where you can go out. What we have done is offer a way for this government to have a cooling off period. We know the tensions are high on all sides and it would have been a way for them to find out if this is a direction that the government truly wants to go. Is this the path forward for them over the next four years?

The Minister of Labour and Advanced Education could immediately appoint an industrial inquiry commission under Section 73 of the Trade Union Act. I ask again, to the Minister of Health and Wellness, will he urge his colleagues to do so, to save both workers' rights and, most importantly, address patient safety?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I may not have all the nuances of collective bargaining; I have been a union rep and have the greatest respect for the negotiating process. There are times when we do reach an impasse and when that happens in health, we should not jeopardize not knowing what tomorrow will bring. One of the requests that is in the letter is to drop Bill No. 37 and that would not be being a responsible government to the citizens of this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HEALTH & WELLNESS - ER BACKUPS: PREVENTION - PLANS

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Yesterday the minister said that there would be patients sent out of Capital Health for service. In the New Glasgow news Dr. Nicole Boutilier, vice-president of Medical Affairs for the Pictou County Health Authority, said the Pictou County Health Authority plans to retrieve as many of its patients as possible from Capital Health, to lessen the burden on the staff and services in the Halifax area.

Dr. Boutilier said we are going to have to make do with what we have, which is going to back us up in the emergency department. I have had the opportunity to visit the emergency department, perhaps about 20 times over the last two and a half weeks, and they

can do without this strain. My question to the minister is, what preventive measures has the Liberal Government taken to prevent emergency room backups?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, we know that as we get into tomorrow, based on what we have seen in the last couple of days, many of our hospitals across the province will be challenged. However, they have all agreed to be supportive, to make sure that they co-operate with Capital Health and get as many patients looked after as they can, with their resources. Having met Dr. Boutilier and many of her clinicians at Aberdeen, I know that they will certainly be doing all they can to support patients first.

MR. DUNN: Mr. Speaker, the Capital Health Authority plays a major role in the health care of the whole province and some procedures are only done in Halifax. The trickle-down effect can already be seen. In order to free up as many beds and staff as possible, the Pictou County Health Authority has cancelled all in-patient elective surgery, 11 to date. During the strike and botched labour negotiations the one clear loser is the patient. Will the minister accept responsibility for the province-wide chaos he and his government have created?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that we have arrived at this impasse and the possibility of legal strike action will take us into tomorrow. But you know there is always a point in time, both through negotiations and through the legislative process, to make a choice that does work in favour of patients not just here in the Capital District Health Authority, but all those who are impacted when services are disrupted. I think we have taken a very balanced approach to the future and we hope that we can get the co-operation of the House to move Bill No. 37 through and end this disruption and uncertainty for patients across the province.

MR. DUNN: The cancellations and emergency room backups don't stop in New Glasgow. Several other hospitals are also facing similar struggles. Cape Breton is experiencing more strain on the system when patients are recalled, emergency rooms are backed up, and certain procedures and surgeries are cancelled. These patients require varying levels of care, and the authorities do not have the ability to hire more nurses or add new beds, so they must use the resources that are available.

My question to the minister is, how much more of this government mismanagement will Nova Scotia patients have to endure?

MR. GLAVINE: Yesterday was a very, very challenging day here in the province, and not just with the wildcat strike and the interruption of services. We had Cape Breton Regional Hospital go on emergency power. We had Canso shut down, and will not have power restored for perhaps a couple of days more. We had an MRI machine in Cape Breton go out of service. I can assure the member opposite, all of us here and the people of Nova Scotia, that was one of the days - yesterday - when I saw the strength of the Department of

Health and Wellness, and the duty officers man the emergency centre and carry things on almost as normal as any day in our province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Whitney Pier.

**IMMIGRATION - NURSES OUT-MIGRATION:
IMMIGRATION STRATEGY - EFFECT**

MR. GORDIE GOSSE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Immigration. At the Law Amendments Committee we heard from Jessica Lemesurier. When she left her nursing job in Ontario to come to Nova Scotia, she told her partner she couldn't work in a province that didn't respect her job. When she left Ontario, she told her parents that she couldn't imagine things getting worse. Well, Mr. Speaker, things have gotten worse - a whole lot worse for our health care workers in this province.

My question to the Minister of Immigration is, how would the outward migration of nurses to other provinces affect Nova Scotia's Immigration Strategy?

HON. LENA DIAB: To the member for Sydney-Whitney Pier, as he knows, I love Sydney and there are many immigrants who live in Sydney-Whitney Pier. This particular legislation, as the member has heard us talking about it for the last two days, is throughout Canada, and we are the only province in Canada that does not have it.

MR. GOSSE: When Jessica testified before the Law Amendments Committee, she told the committee that younger nurses she has spoken to will now consider finding work in other provinces, due to both working conditions and the Liberal essential services legislation. My second question to the minister is, is the Minister of Immigration looking at nurses as skilled worker targets in the immigration strategy?

MS. DIAB: I, in fact, was present when the individual spoke yesterday and I also heard her say that she was in various other provinces as well. We have many nurses in this province and I'm very confident in the levels that we do have. Immigration is one that we wish to attract - through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, our priority is to bring all our youth back that have left Nova Scotia, whether it's nurses or everyone else, and through immigration we do intend to concentrate on the skilled workers, yes.

MR. GOSSE: At Law Amendments Committee we heard from many health care professionals who wanted to know why the Liberal Government seems to want to drive them into quitting their profession, or taking their training and expertise elsewhere. Members from both my caucus and the Progressive Conservative caucus asked many questions to try to gain a full appreciation of what the nurses have been going through.

My question to the Minister of Immigration is, given the importance of immigration to Nova Scotia, why did the minister not ask one single question at the Law Amendments Committee to the nurses thinking of emigrating to other provinces?

MS. DIAB: I would love to have a discussion with the member opposite at any point he wishes with respect to the duties of a chairman, whether it's the Law Amendments Committee or any other day. (Applause) I can assure the member opposite and everyone in the Legislature that I've been chairing meetings for about three decades and very much understand what it takes. I also do recall at the Law Amendments Committee that I was able to attend and did in fact ask . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd just like to remind the minister to direct her comments to the Chair and not across the floor.

MS. DIAB: My apologies for that. I couldn't help but look at the member opposite there. (Laughter)

AN HON. MEMBER: Get over yourself, Gordie. (Laughter)

MS. DIAB: Anyway, I think my point has been made. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg.

NAT. RES.: FOREST ROADS - CLOSURES

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you will be to the Minister of Natural Resources.

Yesterday the minister announced the April 3rd closure of the forest roads on western Crown land formerly owned by Bowater. These road closures come just two days after the government hit the six-month countdown clock for fibre access. My question to the minister is, why did he put up yet another roadblock for our forestry industry, and will they stop the six-month countdown clock while the roads are closed?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Just for clarification in this House - the reason why there are some roads that are closed that are access points for our woodlands is because of safety reasons. As the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal would know the Spring thaw creates a lot of challenging conditions, especially on our dirt roads, and the equipment required to go into those woodlands to take the fibre out wouldn't be possible, so that's why those roads are closed.

MR. MACLEOD: That was a great explanation, Mr. Speaker, on why the roads are closed. The question was whether or not the countdown will stop on the clock - will the six months be there for the forestry? The forestry industry adds about \$579 million to our

provincial economy and the members on this side of the House believe that our traditional industries must be protected. The Ivany Report states that in future, as in the past, the traditional rural industries - tourism, manufacturing, mining, fisheries, forestry, and agriculture - will provide the essential foundations for Nova Scotia's rural economies.

My question to the minister is, does he think that locking the gates to Crown land access is providing a good foundation for Nova Scotia's rural economy, and will he stop the clock until those roads are opened?

MR. CHURCHILL: Just to explain to the member - not every access road is closed for woodcutters to go in and cut fibre and take it out. The roads that are closed are closed because of safety issues, and the equipment that is required to go in there wouldn't be able to pass the roads anyway. The member opposite refers to a six-month countdown. There is no six-month countdown. I believe what he's referring to is the six-month, short-term allocations that were given out to woodcutters across the province. There is not a countdown to the end of those six months that will prevent them from cutting wood. In fact, during this particular time right now, our department is negotiating long-term fibre allocations that will go beyond those six months.

MR. MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the forestry industry needs a real plan for the future, not short-term fixes. All we've seen from this government is band-aids and gate closures. When will the minister release the long-term plan for Nova Scotia's forestry industry?

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, in fact, it is this government that is keeping our eye toward the future when it comes to this critical industry to rural Nova Scotia. That is why our government invested over \$1 million into innovation to help move this industry forward on how to improve our harvesting methods, our processing methods, as this critical industry goes through a transformation phase. We're the government that is also tackling the issue around our fibre challenge for the long term, including private wood suppliers across this province, so that this industry is not only important to today's generation, but for future generations.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

TIR: BRIDGE CLOSURES - LIST INFO

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. A recent report indicated there are 391 bridges in Nova Scotia that have serious damage. I think I get phone calls on 300 of them. The province's chief highway engineer says the condition of some of the bridges have really reached a critical point. The suggestion is that some of the smaller bridges might have to be closed. Is there a list for bridges that might need to be closed in the near future?

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that report that was produced a few weeks ago, I think, was a very important one for Nova Scotians to get a sense of what the infrastructure deficit looks like for the government and obviously for the people of Nova Scotia. We've got over 4,300 bridges, and as the member suggested, there is a level of critical concern for about 300 of those.

I want to assure the House and again the importance of the question is this, we don't take the lead as politicians. For sure, we rely on our department for things of this critical nature. Our engineers are top-notch, they're world-class, and they tell us what the issues are, they tell us what the timelines look like, they tell us what the repair requirements would be, and we take our lead thoroughly and first and foremost from them; our chief engineer, Bruce Fitzner, does a great job at that.

I can tell the member that there is no list, per se. What we are going to do though, given the fact that this is now a public conversation, we can go out into the communities. If there are very low-volume bridges on that list, which many of the 300 are, then we can start to look at maybe what some of the alternatives are. Again, we're not going to force-feed that on the communities. It will be a community decision that we include all stakeholders in, and if the decision is to move on a bridge, we will do that. Again, there is no list and no urgency to close bridges at this point. Thank you.

MR. HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, bridges classified as poor condition have pieces of concrete falling off, there is structural erosion because of sediment, and so on. Those considered in serious shape had various forms of erosion and crumbling that affected primary structural components. Does the minister plan to follow the advice of the engineer to make these significant repairs that need to be made?

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, without question. One of the things that we run into and some of the challenges, I guess, with the perceptions on this particular issue is that Nova Scotians see a bridge and it may look like it's in a state of disrepair, and it may be aesthetics, or it may be some of the structural concerns. But at the end of the day, again to the member's question directly, we would not put any Nova Scotian on a road that was deemed to be unsafe.

We take the lead entirely from our engineers. When they tell us to take action, we do so. Any time there's a critical point where we can't keep a bridge operating, we close it immediately. Short of that, we give any indication of slowing down or any challenges that might exist there, we let the public know, and communication is part of that process as well. Without question, our engineers take the lead, and we follow their advice.

MR. HARRISON: It's indicated that just half of the province's 4,310 bridges are more than 50 years old, and again, I think my constituency has about 4,000 of them. An engineer in the department has said that the budget is tight - there's no question about that - and I think a lot of people appreciate that.

How many of those bridges listed as poor or worse will have to wait for repairs before the salt really takes its toll on the roads and bridges?

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. A lot of our inventory of bridges is post-Second World War era. Some of them are even at the turn of the century - the 20th Century, so very old bridges. A lot that are in existence now were built for rail, so there was no intention to ever have motor vehicles on those, and of course we're using those. They're an important part of our stock and inventory on our Nova Scotia roadways.

Again, we take full lead from the department on this one. Of those 300, we have a very detailed breakdown of each and every bridge. The engineers typically do their inspections on an annual basis, but any sign that there may be decay or issues - we're always better off to take a look, as opposed to just taking our chances. The engineers are out there, and I know that the member has 98 per cent of our bridges in the province, by the sounds of things, so any time the member has a specific question, he's more than welcome to bring it to us, and we'll check right away.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

PREM. - NURSING CARE: INVESTMENT - INFO

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Premier. Prior to the election, the Premier told nurses, "We need to change how we're delivering health care to protect front-line nursing care." He added, "Let's make sure that the dollars are spent on front-line care." Yet today, the Premier seems to be singing a much different tune. Now it appears that the Premier believes the current level of front-line nursing care in Nova Scotia is more than adequate. In fact, just this week he told nurses, "What more do you want? How much above the national average does Nova Scotia have to become?"

My question to the Premier is, what happened to the investment in front-line nursing care that was promised before the election? Where has your government decided to spend health care dollars instead?

THE PREMIER: I think that when tomorrow's budget is introduced the member opposite will recognize that we have a major investment in health care. She would also recognize that when we were going into this campaign we assured Nova Scotians that we would put patients first. That's why the Minister of Health and Wellness is going around this province, to take from an administrative-focused health care system to one that is focused on patients.

It's the very reason why we've introduced Bill No. 37 - so that we can put a focus back on patients to ensure that essential services are in place. At the same time, we're

protecting the right to strike for health care workers. I want to add that, unlike the New Democratic Party, we have not stripped the right to strike away from health care workers.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, one of the few election promises the Liberals intend to keep is to amalgamate the district health authorities into a single super health board. While the Premier and his Minister of Health and Wellness are out trumpeting the benefits of this unproven plan, they're neglecting to tell Nova Scotians just how much that will cost. In Alberta, the amalgamation of health authorities cost \$100 million, and \$46 million of that alone went for severance packages and pension payouts to the executives who lost their jobs.

My question for the Premier is, how much money does his Liberal Government have earmarked for pension payouts and severance packages - money that could be invested in front-line nursing care?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I want to encourage the Leader of the New Democratic Party to pay attention to the budget tomorrow and recognize the investment that will be made in health care. As well, I want to, again, remind the honourable member that there is a bill before this House that would protect patients in this province. It is unbelievable that the Leader of the New Democratic Party is putting the interest of the union leader ahead of patients in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I guess she got the word after the last one.

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

MR. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. During Question Period, in a response by the Minister of Health and Wellness, regarding our concerns about the veterans of this province, the minister made reference that he would be glad to go to Ottawa to bring forward the interests and the concerns of the veterans of this province. For the record, my colleague, the member for Northside-Westmount and I have already been to Ottawa, but I would be glad to go with him to show him where the minister's office is so that he can really do something well, because doing nothing is not an option.

MR. SPEAKER: Point taken. We'll move on.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, just before that, on the point of order from the member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Technically it wasn't a point of order, so we are not going to entertain any responses to the point of order.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: We'll save that one for another day, Mr. Speaker, but I assure you there will be another day on that one.

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

The motion is carried.

We will now recess for five minutes while we get set up.

[1:25 a.m. The House resolved into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Ms. Margaret Miller in the Chair.]

[4:13 a.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Ms. Margaret Miller in the Chair.]

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

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 37 - Essential Health and Community Services Act.

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

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker, in light of the fact that there is a labour disruption that is going to be taking place in less than three hours, I would ask that you request unanimous consent of the House to have Bill No. 37 now considered for third reading.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 37. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

I hear several Noes.

The motion is defeated.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Madam Speaker, in light of the decision by the NDP caucus not to allow this bill to be read a third time, I move that the House do now recess and meet again at 2:15 p.m., when the Budget Speech will be delivered. The replies from both the Official Opposition and the NDP caucus will be delivered following the speech, and we will look to call Government Business following that.

MADAM SPEAKER: The motion is to recess until 2:15 p.m. today.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The House stands recessed.

[4:16 a.m. The House recessed.]

[2:15 p.m. The House reconvened.]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 800.

Res. No. 800, Estimates - CWH on Supply - Notice Given March 31/14 - (Hon. Diana Whalen)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to notice of motion given by me on March 28th, 2014, and the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly, I have the honour, by command, to present a message from Her Honour, the Administrator of the Province of Nova Scotia, relating to the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the Province for the fiscal year Ending March 31st, 2015, which is:

“I hereby transmit Estimates of Sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending March 31st, 2015, and in accordance with the Constitution Act, 1867 recommend them, together with the Budget Address of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, and any resolutions or bills necessary or advisable to approve the estimates and implement the Budget measures to the House of Assembly.

Signed,

Linda Lee Oland
Administrator of the Province, April 3rd, 2014.”

Mr. Speaker, at this time I wish to:

- (1) table the message from Her Honour, the Administrator of the Province transmitting the Estimates for the consideration of this House;
- (2) table the Estimate Books;
- (3) table the government business plan;
- (4) table the Crown Corporation business plans;
- (5) table the Estimate and Crown Corporation Business Plans resolutions;
- (6) deliver my Budget Speech; and
- (7) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, being Supply to be granted to Her Majesty and the Crown Corporation Business Plans be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: The Estimates are tabled

The honorable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

MS. WHALEN. Mr. Speaker, before I begin my Budget Address I'd like to just make a few introductions in the gallery, if I might.

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MS. WHALEN: Thank you very much. I think it's very important to all members of the House to know that we're joined today by a number of staff from Treasury and Policy Board who have worked very hard for many months to put all of the work together to bring us the budget today. I would just like to make note of my Deputy Minister Margaret MacDonald, and from my department as well Diana Eisenhauer and Kym Paquette and your team. If you would just rise the others from Treasury and Policy Board, we'd like to give you a warm welcome, please. (Applause)

As well Mr. Speaker, all members of the House know that we would not be here in these very important roles if we didn't have the support of family and friends and I would like to introduce in the gallery my son Stewart Whalen, who is in the Speaker's Gallery, as well as close friends Michael Power, Donna McCready, and Kevin Cosgrove. Would you just rise - that would be wonderful - to receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

Thank you very much. With that I shall begin.

Introduction

It is an honour to stand before the Assembly to deliver the new government's first budget.

Our government's focus in this budget is to:

- Keep our commitments to Nova Scotians
- Be open and honest about our fiscal challenges, and
- Lay the foundation for private sector growth

Since our swearing-in last October, we have undertaken a series of measures to meet our commitments and effectively respond to Nova Scotia's clearly articulated desire for a new direction. Today's budget will elaborate on that mandate for change and prepare the foundation for the work ahead. And from that perspective, government understands this basic principle: the short-term solutions of the past have contributed to a more difficult path to a prosperous future. We will embrace solutions designed to promote our province's long-term interests - and reject the fleeting and short-sighted temptation of quick fixes.

Fiscally, government will remain highly vigilant over the expenditure of public dollars. Economically, we will work in partnership with Nova Scotians to advance the

interests of individuals, families, and communities. And socially, government will not waver from its commitment to support our most vulnerable citizens - and maintain a safety net that protects every one of us.

Changing the conversation

Mr. Speaker, it has often been the practice of governments to downplay challenges and focus on self-congratulation during Budget Addresses. Today, I would like to break with that tradition. Instead, I intend to speak bluntly and say what many Nova Scotians already know: the status quo in our province is not working.

We are facing significant economic and fiscal challenges. Our population is shrinking and aging. And, while there are some positive signs on the horizon in terms of economic prospects and growth, there remains a steep hill to climb.

The first indicator of that task is this fact: government is projecting a deficit of \$279 million for fiscal year 2014-15, compared to a forecast deficit of \$562 million for the year just ended.

For the first time ever, health care spending will top \$4 billion in 2014-15, which represents 41 per cent of total government spending of \$9.9 billion. Other governments have tried to control health spending, and I acknowledge the efforts of the previous government to hold the line on cost pressures and growth. The problem with their approach, however, was that it simply squeezed an already over-burdened system, resulting in reductions that have simply proven unsustainable over the longer term.

Mr. Speaker, we need a new approach, and we must be innovative and creative in tackling these issues - not just for today, but also for the future.

From the perspective of government expenditures, we are further challenged by wages and salaries. Most public sector unions are concluding three-year contracts this year. Those contracts obligated Nova Scotia taxpayers to increases of 2, 2.5, and 3 per cent. As a direct result of those increases, the cost of wages and salaries will rise by \$137 million in 2014. Over the course of the three years since these increases began, the cost to the system will be over \$300 million annually.

The work done by public sector employees is highly valued. However, a sustainable future will depend on the willingness of all partners to understand the depth of the challenge facing our province - and a willingness to place our collective interests ahead of narrow agendas.

Nationally, public sector wage settlements have averaged 1.2 to 2.1 per cent over the last four years, compared to Nova Scotia's 2, 2.5, and 3 per cent pattern, yet we have the second lowest per capita GDP in Canada. This is simply not sustainable. Public sector

workers deserve a fair wage, and taxpayers deserve an affordable public sector. We will balance those needs as we move forward in our mandate.

On the revenue side of the ledger, there have also been significant difficulties.

In December 2013, I provided Nova Scotians with a fiscal update that projected a 2013-14 deficit of \$482 million. This was in stark contrast to the budget that was presented in this Legislature in April 2013. Mr. Speaker, the province has gone from an estimated \$16 million surplus to the current expectation for 2013-14 of a deficit of \$562 million.

Some of the major factors that contributed to the 2013–2014 deficit include increased utilization for social programs under the Department of Community Services, a one-time recognition of pension obligations, Prior Year Adjustments, lower than expected provincial source revenues, and the reversal of a decision made by the previous government to change the timing of monthly income assistance payments.

Our fiscal reality

Turning to the 2014-15 fiscal year, in today's budget, these are the major factors contributing to the bottom line:

- Total revenues are expected to be \$9.6 billion
- Total spending is estimated at \$9.9 billion
- Interest payments on the debt will be \$878 million - or 9 per cent of the total budget
- Health expenditures will reach \$4.1 billion - or 46.4 per cent of total departmental spending
- Education expenditures will be \$1.2 billion - or 13.8 per cent of total departmental spending

These are the realities facing our province. Investments in health and education are critical for the well-being of our citizens. As are investments in social supports, infrastructure, and the primary industries that help drive our economy. But, we do have to make choices. We cannot do everything, and we cannot continue to do what we have always done.

As I said earlier, government will resist the passing temptation of a short-term political solution in favour of a long-term approach that returns public finances to a surplus position in a balanced and well-planned manner.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, government will respectfully ask all Nova Scotians to participate in this longer-term vision. As the Ivany Commission pointed out: “this is the

time to come together to build a vision for a better future, and to work together to achieve it.” Meeting this statement of purpose will require a great deal of collaboration, vision, and compromise - and I will speak further to these matters a little later in my remarks.

When I announced the fiscal update late last year, I made a commitment to avoid the tendency of new governments to blame their predecessors for fiscal difficulties. We do not intend to revisit the past four years except to recognize that our starting point is in a steep deficit position and we have a lot of work to do. In October 2013, Nova Scotians gave us the privilege of governing. We have accepted that challenge and the responsibility for prudent fiscal management.

In that spirit, government has worked over the last five and a half months to be disciplined in our fiscal planning. We will now take a closer look at how and why we do things in government. We must determine if government should be delivering certain programs and services, and if the way we deliver them makes sense. To do this properly we will need the creativity and expertise of the Public Service - and we will rely on their diligence and professionalism to help chart a new course.

There is a great deal more to do, Mr. Speaker, but these fiscal realities strongly underline the fact that significant tax reductions are unaffordable at this time. Therefore, the cut to the Harmonized Sales Tax proposed by the former administration will not occur this year.

Had this taken place, the current year’s deficit would have risen to \$426 million. At a time when most Nova Scotians reasonably expect government to provide necessary services while pursuing a more balanced approach, this would have been irresponsible. We recognized this in our election platform and were clear with Nova Scotians that the HST reduction is not affordable at this time.

Economic Picture

The International Monetary Fund suggests that global economic growth in 2014 will be 3.7 per cent, and a further expansion of 3.9 per cent is expected the following year. While these anticipated growth rates are less than those experienced prior to the onset of recession in 2008, they do signal returning levels of confidence.

Furthermore, while the Canadian economy has out-performed much of the advanced world since the end of the recession, domestic demand is expected to soften in the coming years. Canada’s growth forecasts for 2014 and 2015 are 2.3 per cent and 2.6 per cent, respectively.

In Nova Scotia, our economic outlook continues to exhibit the effects of recent challenges. The province’s forecast for growth in real Gross Domestic Product lags behind Canada at just 1.4 per cent in 2014 and 2.1 per cent in 2015.

It is important to place these forecasts in context: in 2012, real GDP shrank by 0.1 per cent as forest products and natural gas output fell. We expect that 2013's growth was only 0.3 per cent as employment fell and income growth slowed. The reality is, at just 1.6 per cent, our average economic growth since 1990 has lagged behind all other provinces in Canada.

In 2013, the number of people working dropped by 1,700 - that's the biggest annual employment loss in 20 years. While this is projected to reverse in 2014, the fact is, without a change in direction we face a future of limited employment growth as our labour force ages.

In preparing this budget, I met with economists from banks and universities. We agreed that economic opportunity and population are the fundamental challenges threatening our prosperity in Nova Scotia. A stronger economy and the associated employment opportunities will allow us to retain our youth and increase immigration. Recruiting and retaining talent are crucial for our economic prosperity.

As I travel around the province, I've reached out to younger Nova Scotians to engage them in the discussion about our economy.

While Canada's population grew by 27 per cent since 1990, ours grew by only 3.3 per cent. Last year alone, our population fell by over 5,000 people. This has an effect on the province's ability to raise revenue - and provide services to Nova Scotians.

What is truly worrisome is that half of the people leaving are between 15 and 34 years old. That's when they should be transitioning from school to work, starting careers and families, and even thinking about opening their own business.

As the Ivany commission observed: Our relatively low rates of attraction and retention for international immigrants, along with our negative inter-provincial migration trend, are factors that most clearly differentiate Nova Scotia from other Canadian provinces and contribute to our weaker economic growth over the past 30 years.

The first step government proposes to deal with these realities is to develop a comprehensive position relative to increased immigration levels. Immigration is an issue that is very near and dear to my heart. My riding of Clayton Park West has seen tremendous positive growth and is the most diverse community in Eastern Canada as a result of immigrants making it their home. It is clear that increasing immigration is a critical part of improving our economy. I agree and our government has made this a priority. We are committed to enhancing our ability to attract and retain immigrants in Nova Scotia by introducing new immigration streams.

We will engage with businesses and communities to ensure that we are aligned with the needs of the labour market, and we will work closely with the federal government to

maximize federal immigration streams and programming.

Mr. Speaker, we can't achieve these goals alone. They will only be achieved through partnerships, especially with the federal government.

Keeping our commitments

Mr. Speaker, since being elected, our government has taken steps to fulfill its commitments to the citizens of the province. In just a few short months, a number of elements in government's plan have been met.

First, the structure of our electricity market has not met the needs of our families and businesses for decades. Therefore, one of the first acts of our government was to modernize our system and add more competition to the Nova Scotia Power monopoly by legislating a new framework that allows the producers of renewable energy to sell directly to customers. (Applause) This innovative step will help move our province away from the burden of a centrally controlled monopoly system.

Second, government will introduce legislation that will create a new structure for Efficiency Nova Scotia that will result in greater accountability and provide cost savings to ratepayers. The new entity will be structured to compete directly with Nova Scotia Power.

With rigorous oversight from our regulator, each dollar spent by ratepayers will be directed towards the most cost-effective option - either reducing our energy needs through efficiency programs or providing energy through the electricity distribution system. This level of competition and scrutiny will ensure that every dollar ratepayers spend through Efficiency Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia Power will be for the least expensive option. And, as promised to Nova Scotians, the efficiency tax will be removed from every Nova Scotia Power electricity bill on January 1, 2015. (Applause)

In keeping with our plan to ease the burden on all Nova Scotians, in February I announced the first comprehensive tax review in a generation. This review will include a thorough examination of taxes, fees, and the regulatory burden on the private sector. Through this review we will chart a course that considers simplicity, fairness, competitiveness, and sustainability. We know we need to be more competitive. And we will make adjustments and lay out a plan to get where we need to be in the long term.

In light of the importance of this review, today's budget will not introduce any new tax measures. We are also holding fees, tax credits, and rebates steady with no increases or changes in 2014-15. (Applause) The one exception is the elimination of the Graduate Retention Rebate, which I will discuss later in my remarks.

We have to review taxes with an eye to supporting business growth and economic activity. But I do not want Nova Scotians to expect lower taxes in the short term, as this is

simply not realistic. Where we can make a more immediate impact for business is with regulations. Streamlining regulations should have a significant and positive impact.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that a number of actions have been taken in the short time since we came into office:

- First contract arbitration was a significant issue for many businesses in this province. Amendments to the Trade Union Act removed automatic access to first contract arbitration and gives employers more time to try to negotiate affordable agreements with their employees. Now a party will have to prove the other is not bargaining in good faith before first contract arbitration can be invoked. These amendments will bring Nova Scotia's legislation more in line with the model used by the federal government and several other provinces, which covers 85 per cent of Canadians.
- We have also streamlined the administrative penalty system in occupational health and safety. Our new regulations focus on repeat and serious offenders. But for most employers - who work hard at keeping their employees safe - regulations now support education. Fines collected will now go towards initiatives that will help make workplaces safer. And the process to appeal penalties is simplified, with the Labour Board hearing all appeals, leading to consistent, fair decisions.
- Government is working with employers and industry to modernize apprenticeship. We are reviewing regulations for a number of trades and have already changed metal fabricator regulations to allow more apprentices to train under one journeyman. This will give employers the skilled workers they need to help grow our economy. This session, legislation will be introduced to create an industry-led agency that will give employers a bigger role in Nova Scotia's apprenticeship system.
- We have reduced red tape for microbrewers in Nova Scotia while creating greater convenience for their customers by allowing products made onsite to be sold within their premises.
- Regulations that would have unfairly penalized Nova Scotia's scrap metal sector have been halted.
- To eliminate barriers for small businesses and to support growth in a promising sector, we also followed through on a commitment to make u-vint and u-brew operations legal in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, these are important changes that will make a big difference over the long term. This signals the willingness of our government to listen to business owners and

work with them. If we want businesses to expand and invest, they need to feel confident. They need to know that the environment is stable and predictable.

Acting on the advice of the comprehensive tax review, we will set the proper tax and regulatory environment, thereby allowing our businesses to drive economic growth in our province. (Applause)

Investing in Nova Scotia's future

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia's education system must be strengthened to meet the needs of a changing world. To that end, this government launched the province's first education review in 25 years. The review will examine all facets of curriculum, as well as technology, and how to improve the education system to ensure the success of all students in our ever-changing world. Over the next four years, our government will invest \$65 million in Nova Scotia's future through strategic investments in education.

These investments will include creating class caps for Primary to Grade 6 to ensure that our students get the best possible start in life and that our teachers have the time they need to teach, and provide individualized attention to meet the needs of their students. This year an investment of \$7.2 million will keep class sizes small in Primary to Grade 2 and help to ensure that teachers can give each student the attention he or she needs to succeed. (Applause)

Literacy and math are vital skills for the leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators of tomorrow. In the coming year we will focus in these two areas through the early literacy framework and a math strategy.

- The early literacy framework will feature a suite of supports including the reintroduction of Reading Recovery for Grade 1 students. We will also have targeted support for Grade 3 students who are struggling with literacy, and other flexible tools that can be tailored to the needs of individual students. This \$3.5 million investment will bring total funding for early literacy to \$7.9 million.
- The math strategy will fund initiatives at each school board that will coach teachers and provide them with the supports they need in the classroom. The strategy will also include a program focused on Grade 10 math students to help them succeed in this key area - \$2.4 million will be invested in 2014-15 in this initiative.

Parents of preschool children with special needs, including autism, face daunting wait-lists for critical services. We will begin to tackle this issue by investing \$1.3 million in early intervention programs. (Applause)

We are increasing funding by \$1.5 million for high-needs students to ensure that all students and their diverse needs are supported. We must support all of our children so that

they can complete their educational journey, realize their dreams, and become the future leaders of this province.

The Tuition Support Program provides options for students with special needs who require specialized services and programming outside of the Nova Scotia public school system. Tuition agreements have been modified to allow students to remain in their programs beyond four years, and continue to access the supports they need in order to be successful.

In the coming year we will provide each school in the province with access to student support grants. These grants will allow schools to tailor programming to their local communities and relieve some of the fundraising pressures schools are under each year. Each school will receive \$5,000 plus \$1 per student for a total investment of \$2.2 million. (Applause)

Nova Scotia Virtual Schools provide online high school courses to students enrolled in public high schools in Nova Scotia and open the door to new opportunities for our students, especially those in small rural schools. Through an investment of \$1.2 million, more students will be reached.

Schools Plus is an innovative model that helps students, families, and communities get a full range of support services in the heart of their communities - their schools. Schools Plus brings a range of mental health services and other health programs together with mentoring, homework support, social work, and justice services into schools where children, youth, and families can easily access them. In the coming year, four sites will be funded at a cost of \$500,000. (Applause)

Schools, and the professionals who work within them, play a vital role in the social, emotional, and educational development of our children. Guidance counsellors are an integral part of the fabric of our schools and leave an indelible mark on the lives of each and every student they work with. Through the 2014-15 budget, we will increase the number of guidance counsellors in the system with a \$907,000 investment. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will also work with their colleagues in Health and Wellness to provide additional clinicians in support of students dealing with mental health issues.

Health and Wellness

Health care is a cornerstone of government's plan to put Nova Scotians first. Our challenge is to use health care assets in the smartest, most efficient way possible - focused on front-line care.

As I stated earlier, for the first time health care spending will top \$4 billion. We are at a crossroads with our health care system, and while this problem is not unique to Nova

Scotia, we do need to find solutions that address our unique demographic and health challenges. Increased health care costs are driven primarily by wages and use of the health care system. By keeping our focus where it must be - on patients and their families - we will reduce wait times, improve outcomes for Nova Scotians living with chronic disease, and work to ensure that all Nova Scotians have a family physician.

To that end, we will fully implement the Tuition Relief Program for Medical Graduates at a cost of \$750,000. In total we will invest \$10.6 million in programs to train, recruit, and hire physicians, with a particular emphasis on rural and remote areas of the province where we have traditionally had difficulty attracting physicians.

Funds will also be invested in a number of critical areas that include targeting the national standard of six months for hip and knee replacements, implementing a province-wide surgical strategy, and supporting our seniors by updating and implementing the Continuing Care Strategy and developing a Dementia Strategy.

Dealing with serious illness results in great emotional and physical stress for both patients and their families. To help alleviate a small part of that burden, we will increase the family income threshold for the Boarding, Transportation, and Ostomy Program from \$15,720 to \$25,500. This change will help more Nova Scotians cope with the impacts of illness that requires travel for treatment outside of home communities.

We will increase the age of eligibility of the Children's Dental Program to 14 and will invest \$323,000 to clear oral surgical backlogs at the IWK hospital.

Health care is not just about hospitals and emergency rooms. We know that investing in health promotion and wellness will reduce the strain on our system and help Nova Scotians lead long and healthy lives. In 2014-15, we will develop a Chronic Disease Innovation Fund through a \$300,000 investment that will incent new approaches to support Nova Scotians living with chronic disease.

Mental health and addiction issues will touch one in five Nova Scotians. This government will continue to support the ongoing implementation of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. In addition, we will work with the IWK to implement a trauma-informed care model.

We will also move forward with a provincial approach to service delivery by reducing the number of district health authorities from 10 to 2 - one for the IWK and one for the province. Legislation will be introduced in the Fall sitting of the House with full implementation April 1, 2015. These changes will be undertaken with a focus on quality health care, close-to-home supports, and the goal of building stronger regional capacity.

Competitive, diverse economy

Mr. Speaker, a strong, vibrant economy is the key to addressing many of the challenges outlined in the Ivany report. In order to grow our economy, we need a diverse and competitive business environment. We need more businesses that innovate and adapt to a rapidly changing global economy, and it is clear that the private sector must be the engine of Nova Scotia's economic growth.

Government is a partner, and we have an important role to play. We need to help create conditions that attract companies and investment and that allow businesses that are already here to grow and prosper. To that end, we will offer support to Nova Scotia businesses through an expanded Credit Union Small Business Loan Guarantee Program. This expansion will increase term loan guarantees under the program from 75 per cent to 90 per cent.

Through expanded apprenticeship opportunities and modernizing the apprenticeship system, we will give our apprentices the experience they need to fill good jobs, which in turn will help our communities and our economy grow. These changes will be supported by a \$2.6 million investment in the coming fiscal year.

We know that Nova Scotia businesses are online and they expect their government to be there too. Through a \$174,000 operating investment, we will enhance the Access to Business (A2B) web portal to provide businesses with quicker, easier access to the services and programs they need, when and where they need them. We will also make a capital investment of \$4.15 million in the A2B web portal.

Tourism is a \$2 billion industry in this province, contributing significantly to our GDP. We must market and promote Nova Scotia to visitors across Canada, Europe, and the United States as one of the top destinations in North America. We will also open our doors and our waters to the world by ensuring the ferry service between southwestern Nova Scotia and New England is operational later this spring.

Encouraging innovation in our forestry sector makes good business sense, which is why we will invest \$1.8 million in a silviculture program, a harvest tracking system, and various forestry initiatives to help this industry transform itself through new technologies, products, and practices.

Growing and diversifying our economy is a challenge we must tackle together - all sectors have a role to play. Our government will play its part.

Primary industries are key drivers of economic success in our rural communities. Our government is committed to working in partnership with local businesses in the agriculture and fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

In the coming year, we will work with apple growers to help the industry develop higher-value products. This \$200,000 investment will leverage additional funding from industry. We will also take concerted steps to increase the number of new farmers entering the industry. Through the Select Nova Scotia program, we will continue to work with partners in our primary industries to support and grow awareness of the importance of buying local and the incredible products, services, and businesses located right here at home.

The province's fur industry is growing rapidly, employing over 1,000 Nova Scotians and contributing significantly to our economy. To support research and innovation in the mink industry, we will invest \$500,000 that will leverage funds from the private sector.

The fisheries and aquaculture sectors have a bright future ahead and will be supported in the coming year through new investments in lobster marketing. An initial investment of \$250,000 will focus on national and international expansion and the development of lobster value-added products.

Smart, strategic investments

This province has some of the finest post-secondary institutions in the world, educating our best and brightest. Our universities help to drive the economy. To support their efforts, the operating grant to universities will increase by 1 per cent in 2014-15. We will also invest \$5 million in the Excellence and Innovation Program to encourage collaboration and partnership within the post-secondary system. (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. (Interruptions)

I would just like to remind the visitors in the gallery that we here on the floor are pleased to have you here, but that's the last warning. If there are any other disturbances in the gallery, we will clear the gallery.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

MS. WHALEN: The Graduate Retention Rebate will be eliminated effective January 1, 2014. Instead, we will focus our investments on supporting students while they are studying, and to enable new graduates to gain experience, enter the workforce, and build their future here in Nova Scotia.

To help graduates focus on entering our workforce and building a life here in Nova Scotia, we will eliminate the interest on the provincial portion of student loans. This interest-relief program is a \$1.6 million annual investment in our students and the future of our province, and will be retroactive to 2008. For fiscal 2013-14, we must expense \$14 million to cover the costs of the interest relief back to 2008.

Graduate Scholarships for Innovation and Research will be introduced this year. These scholarships, valued at a total of \$1.85 million, will focus on putting money directly into the hands of smart, talented graduate students who are conducting research that is connected with industry, is innovative, and has the potential for commercialization.

We will also launch the Graduate to Opportunity Program to support young graduates to develop the skills and experience they need to be successful in their chosen field. In the first year of hiring a new graduate, employers incur costs associated with their training. It understandably can take a little time until new employees are fully productive. This program helps offset some of those costs for employers, encouraging them to give some of our bright new graduates the career jump-start they need and an opportunity to stay here. In year one, this investment will total \$1.6 million.

The Student Career Skills Development Program partners with not-for-profit organizations to create career-related summer jobs for post-secondary students. Through an additional \$1 million investment, a total of 750 student positions will be supported in 2014-15. This is a 50 per cent increase to support student summer employment.

The Strategic Cooperative Education Incentive provides the private sector, government-funded, and not-for-profit organizations with 50 per cent of the required salary for co-operative education opportunities. This incentive will increase by \$500,000, providing support for an additional 75 student co-op positions.

Stronger families, stronger communities

Caring for our citizens is a responsibility this government takes very seriously. We must make sure that those who need help get it and that those best able to provide help have the resources they need. In the year ahead, we will maintain a focus on our most vulnerable through targeted, strategic investments that will make a difference.

Improvements will be made in many areas, including:

- A \$1.5 million investment in the Senior Citizens Assistance Program that will help an additional 300 seniors annually to stay in their homes
- A \$2 million investment among Family Resource Centres for the provision of early education and parenting support to give our children the best possible start in life; and
- An increase of \$500,000 among transition houses, women's centres, and 2nd-stage housing organizations.

A multi-year sexual assault strategy focused on prevention and victims' services will be developed in 2014-15. We will devote \$2 million for each of the next three years to support action and change in this area.

This government is committed to transforming Services for Persons with Disabilities. Provision has been made within the budget to continue this important work to create a much clearer road map toward significant improvement of programs. In the coming year, we will expand eligibility for the Nova Scotia Child Tax benefit. This expansion will ensure that another 1,300 children receive the benefit.

Mr. Speaker, we know that accessible transportation is a key determinant of health and well-being. Our municipal partners continue to be challenged with increasing costs and changing demand for public transit and community transportation. In the coming year, we will work with our partners and industry, and invest \$2 million in public transit in the Halifax Regional Municipality and \$1 million in public and community-based transit in other communities. An additional investment of \$500,000 will also be made to the Community Transportation Assistance Program.

Building Nova Scotia - Together

On February 12, the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy - led by Ray Ivany - released its final report to Nova Scotians. I commend the previous government for initiating this important work and all parties for supporting the report and its conclusions.

The policy advice and strategic directions put forward in the Ivany report are directed to leaders and decision makers in all our key sectors - business, labour, municipalities, First Nations, social enterprises, the voluntary sector, government, and individual Nova Scotians.

The report clearly and articulately makes the case that we must all work together constructively to address our shared challenge of slow economic growth and population decline. It also calls upon us to overcome the psychological barriers of division, distrust, and discouragement. Our current fiscal situation is compelling evidence of the need for broad-based collective action.

To support this work, we will create the ONE Nova Scotia Coalition. This coalition will reach across party lines and sectors with the mandate of implementing the changes called for in the Ivany report and by Nova Scotians across the province.

Concluding thoughts

Mr. Speaker, over the past number of weeks I have been privileged to meet with many Nova Scotians to discuss our financial situation and opportunities. The input I have

received has been invaluable and enlightening, and I am committed to continuing these conversations. The challenges we face from a financial perspective can only be addressed if we understand how inextricably linked the economy and our population are.

While we recognize the need for serious fiscal and economic measures, we are making strategic investments that support young Nova Scotians, employers, and Nova Scotia families. There are significant opportunities ahead that will help to fuel our economic growth. These opportunities will only be realized if we have the people to grab them. Nova Scotians will only stay or return if there are jobs to keep them here.

The targeted investments we will make through Budget 2014-15 have been strategically selected to ensure government is doing its part to support business, families, students, and communities. In the coming year we will be focused on keeping our commitments to Nova Scotians, speaking openly and honestly about our fiscal challenges, and laying the foundation for private-sector growth that will drive our economy.

Again, I want to thank all Nova Scotians for their willingness to share their views on this budget and how we move our province forward together. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East. (Applause)

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the government for that wonderful round of applause I was given as soon as I stood up. (Laughter)

It's my pleasure to rise today in my place and provide our response to the Budget Address. Today is a sad day for Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians had hoped this government would be better, they had hoped this government would be different, and today those hopes are shattered. This is a "do as I say" budget, not a "do as" - not as I do - "do as I say, not as I do" budget. (Interruptions) Are you with me? I'll come back to that.

This is a "you pay more, I spend more" budget. The lead up to a government budget is always a time of speculation and hope. This budget was no different except that maybe there was a little more speculation and a little more hope, given that this is this Liberal Government's first budget but, Mr. Speaker, today the speculation is over and today the hope is gone.

Under this new Liberal Government we will have fewer Nova Scotians, fewer revenues, but more bureaucrats. The civil service will increase by 550 people. This budget is about bigger government and Liberals first; 550 new people working in government - Mr. Speaker, would we have nurses marching outside today if we had 550 new nurses?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Unfortunately I had given a warning earlier that if there were any further displays from the gallery, so we're going to pause while all the visitor tags are removed from the gallery. (Interruptions)

We're going to clear the entire gallery, unfortunately.

Order, please. The honourable member for Pictou East has the floor.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today we learned that what is important to this government is not the same as what is important to Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians want to believe that their government shares the same values and basic understanding of finance that they do. It's pretty simple to Nova Scotians - if you think you're going to bring in a certain amount of money you adjust your spending accordingly. Every Nova Scotian does that on a daily basis - when Nova Scotians make less, they spend less. This is kind of the way the world is supposed to work.

Today Nova Scotians will be disappointed by the incredible lack of spending restraint by this government - actually this government blew the doors off the spending, spending more and more. This is a "do as I say do" government (Interruptions) I actually wrote it too, sadly. It's a do as I say, not as I do. (Applause) I will try it again too, don't worry.

Mr. Speaker, before I proceed to get into the details of the budget, let me first say that there is an incredible amount of work involved in pulling together the financial data for the province. As you can imagine, there are stacks and stacks of books that take many months to prepare, and we certainly want to thank the dedicated Finance staff who do this work - and I particularly want to thank them for sitting with us and answering our questions this morning during lock-up. They have every right to be proud of the work they do and I sincerely thank them, and I know the members of this House do as well. (Applause)

The Finance staff did what they were asked to do - sadly, this government has not done what it told the people of Nova Scotia it would do. This government had a chance to show some leadership, to get the finances of this province under control - they did not. Instead they want Nova Scotians to sit back and take it while in their first year of government this Liberal Party spends \$279 million more than they take in. A \$279 million deficit is not living within our means. This is a 100 per cent Liberal deficit. This government spent us into deficit, spent us further into debt.

Mr. Speaker, this Liberal spending spree amounts to \$400 million more even than departmental spending under the NDP. Over the years of their mandate this Liberal Government plans to rack up total deficits of \$552 million - \$0.5 billion in new deficits over their four-year mandate.

Now, I should say that in their last year they do forecast a very small surplus of \$13 million. Mr. Speaker, where have we seen a government forecast a razor-thin surplus in the last year of their mandate? We all remember that the NDP forecasted a \$16 million surplus in their final year and the actual number we are seeing today for that is a \$562 million

deficit. Will this Liberal Government get control of its spending by the time it gets to its fourth year or will we see history repeat itself?

Mr. Speaker, there is nothing encouraging in today's budget. Nova Scotians make decisions every day on how to spend their money. They don't sit back and say to themselves, this year I'm going to spend recklessly and I'll deal with it later.

This government did not even try to get our debt under control; instead, they want Nova Scotians to sit back and take it, while in their first year in government they add a whopping \$400 million to our debt. Our debt will increase \$1.1 billion over their four-year mandate. It would be an understatement to say that this is not good. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Pictou East has the floor.

MR. HOUSTON: I thank the minister for his comments.

While in Opposition this government made numerous mentions of how our debt is crippling us, yet today they sit here and say they can do nothing about it. I ask this House, what will \$0.5 billion in more deficits and \$1 billion more in new debt do to the credit rating of this province as the world learns that we have no control over our spending? We already spend \$900 million a year in debt servicing costs, what will happen to this if our credit rating changes?

Nova Scotians shouldn't have to accept a government that thinks it is okay to do nothing to control spending. We need bold action to get our province on track. Today I ask, where is that action? There is nothing to get us to a place where we can ultimately lower taxes. Clearly, lowering taxes is not a priority of this government; their priority is spending. There is no tax relief in this budget. What we do have, though, is a tax review study, another study that will probably go nowhere towards providing tax relief to Nova Scotians. Worse, 30,000 young, mobile Nova Scotians will be paying more in taxes this year, due to the government's scrapping of the Graduate Retention Rebate.

The minister just said she is concerned about young people leaving the province, yet this government doesn't mind slapping them with a massive tax increase. This government doesn't mind sticking them with the largest tax increase in history in Nova Scotia.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in this budget to get spending under control. Now we had heard the Liberals say, time and time again, that they were going to cut departmental spending by 1 per cent, except, of course, health care and education. Today we find out that they did not even come close to achieving this goal. They did nothing to get spending into a range that we can afford. In fact, they went pretty far the other way, with pretty dramatic spending increases.

I'm looking at the list of departments here and their estimates for the year, and I think less than half of them achieved their goal of a 1 per cent spending decrease. This is a "do as I say, not as I do" budget. (Applause) I don't know if I'll try that one more time or not, actually. (Laughter)

Most egregiously there is nothing in this budget to help support and rebuild our economy. There is nothing about attracting more Nova Scotians. They don't expect to retain Nova Scotians and instead are projecting a further decline in the population. We see nothing on tax relief, nothing on spending control and nothing on increasing our population. On the other hand, the only thing we do see is some broken promises. I wonder what this government would say to the people impacted by Boat Harbour. This government has gotten quite a bit of media over their comments about Boat Harbour yet there's nothing in this budget for it.

I think all Nova Scotians will remember the Liberal promises around education and restoring \$65 million to education. Many Nova Scotians who relied on that promise will be disappointed to hear that it won't be fully kept until four years. There is \$18 million in new money in the Education budget for this year but I think many people expected the \$65 million to take place this year and I think that while campaigning, the government allowed them to think just that. That is a concern for me and it will be a concern for Nova Scotians.

But the biggest concern we have today is that we have not seen any restraint at the top. When we look through the departments and we look specifically at the administration of the departments and the offices of the ministers and their deputy ministers, we see some pretty shocking budget increases. Sadly, it starts right at the top with the departments reporting into the Premier. We see a 9 per cent spending increase and 5 per cent people increase, just in that department alone - so much for reducing spending. I would say that's do as I say and not as I do.

That is a theme we've seen across the departments. We have some departments, even in TIR, where we see spending at the top level up 60 per cent in the top administration: Education and Early Childhood Development, 34 per cent; Fisheries and Aquaculture, 27 per cent. We're seeing spending increases at the top and that's not what Nova Scotians are expecting to see. The sad reality is that if this government would have just held the line on spending, not even a 1 per cent reduction, just held the line, then this budget could have been balanced with room to spare.

This government had a choice. They could have held the line and balanced the budget but they chose not to hold the line and instead they increased spending and nowhere were these spending increases more offensive than at the top. That's a sad thing because this is a do as I say budget, not do as I do.

Nova Scotians want our government to look for efficiencies and look for ways to save money and we want them to spend money where it will get results. Nova Scotians

want spending with results and I want you to think about the consolidation of the district health authorities and hold that thought for a second while I tell you about a new department, the Department of Internal Services.

The shuffling of departments and creating new departments is not a new thing; many governments like to think that they know how to organize things better than the previous government. What is unique about this government is that they seem quite content to shuffle paper for the sake of shuffling paper because while they are moving 553 staff to this new department, they are not budgeting for any savings. I am left to wonder, what is the purpose of this exercise? Stop and think about that for a minute. The theory is that we have people in different areas doing the same thing so let's bring them together so that things become more efficient, but not this government. This government would rather spend time, energy, and money bringing them together without even forecasting any savings.

Now ask yourself, how will they make out with the consolidation of the district health authorities? We have been told that that's a process that will save money that can be reinvested in front-line health care, yet they haven't been able to quantify any savings. Today's government press release says that they will save money but we know they have no idea how much. So six months in office, a tour of the province by the Health and Wellness Minister, 10,000 bureaucrats at their disposal and they have no idea how much might be saved, and there is nothing in this budget for any savings. Does this government even know how to save money and control spending, because we certainly haven't seen it yet?

Nova Scotians want the government to act responsibly with their money and spend it wisely, and we're not seeing that today; we're seeing quite the opposite. Where there are new spending initiatives, particularly some of the better ones, we have to worry about how this money will be spent. We want results with our money - spending money, yes, but producing results. I'm thinking about \$250,000 in spending to promote our lobster fishery. This is a great idea but only if that money is spent wisely. If that is money used to hire another ex-Liberal consultant to produce a report, then the people of Nova Scotia will get no results from that money and that's a concern of ours.

I'm particularly worried about how the money that is allocated to the family resource centres will be dished up. I was pleased to see \$2 million to support these organizations but I have been hearing concerns from the stakeholders that the department will simply look at the number of organizations and give them all a pro-rata share. What the government should be doing is looking at the populations that those organizations served, looking at the wait-list of those organizations, and coming up with a metric to allocate that funding out to get it to where it matters. We want to see this government do the hard work not the easy work.

Over at the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, we're going to spend millions to enhance access to business information. This is another web portal that in theory would reduce red tape and provide Nova Scotians with access to services, information about services, and programs. It should make it easier for Nova Scotians to use the Internet to get information and do some more of the work themselves, but if you become more efficient with a website wouldn't you expect to save money in your department through lower staffing and we haven't seen that; there are no savings.

Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned about seeing the increase in spending and I'm worried about the lack of results that we're just going to get. I want to make sure that the government is conscious that when it's spending money it's getting results for Nova Scotians.

The Liberals bought the election and today we're getting the bill. This budget doesn't make the lives of Nova Scotians better and I'm reminded about some comments that I read from the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board last year. At that time the Opposition lamented there was little help for sky-high gas prices; there is little help for the rising cost of living that is reflected also in the high price of food, and she was then, as I am today, looking at the budget and saying, what's in this budget for the average Nova Scotian?

Mr. Speaker, in closing today I will say that Nova Scotians will be disappointed with this budget, and they should be, because Nova Scotians were looking to the government to exercise some control over their spending and we haven't seen it, and based on their forecast we won't see it during their term and that's a shame for Nova Scotians. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start with a few remarks in reply to the budget, I want to first congratulate the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board today on her first budget.

I'd like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to express my admiration for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and the difficult circumstances in which she has had to do what is clearly one of the most important jobs that a Minister of Finance and Treasury Board undertakes on behalf of the government and the people of the province. The member is an honourable member and a hard-working member, and I want to acknowledge that. (Applause)

I also want to acknowledge the reply from the Finance Critic in the Official Opposition. This is also his first occasion to have an opportunity to reply to a government budget, and he did, as well, a very amicable job. (Applause)

Now I would like to turn to the budget and make a few remarks on this very important document. A budget is not only a fiscal document, a financial document - it's a political document. It's probably the most important document that a government produces annually during its mandate, because it tells us a lot about the character of that government: its point of view, its beliefs, who and what is important, what a government values, what its priorities are, and what the people of the province can expect in terms of the direction that a government is going in.

It is also the government's plan to fulfill promises or to break promises, in terms of what it said to the electorate during an election campaign. As well, it's a blueprint for the province's future on a year-to-year basis, and sometimes we get a glimpse beyond one year into multiple years.

Of course, every budget contains many things that are good for the citizens of the province. It is simply not possible to spend the billions of dollars that we spend in a budget and not do some good - or not do a lot of good, actually. I am very much prepared to say and acknowledge that there are many good things in this budget, and initiatives that I and we and probably the entire House will agree with, such as the multi-year sexual assault strategy that will be developed and will have investment put in under the leadership and the oversight and the direction of the Minister of Community Services. This is something we all support and can agree with.

However, Mr. Speaker, I, like my colleague in the Official Opposition, have serious concerns about many aspects of this budget. Among the greatest concerns that I have is the elimination of the Graduate Retention Rebate program, the tax credit that so many recent young graduates of our community college and our university system have been able to take advantage of. I know the minister is of the view that this is a program that wasn't working and that wasn't achieving results. I remain unconvinced of that fact.

I'm not saying that it was a perfect program and that it might not have needed some tweaking and some changes in the parameters of that program, but what has happened here is that a program that was working for many people and that did require tweaking has had a scalpel taken to it, and it has been eliminated. That is very unfortunate, because the impact of that could be - and I would say will be - the loss of young people, young recent graduates out of our province to elsewhere in the country. That is something we are desperately in need of policy solutions for.

We had some insight last week into the fact that this elimination was coming, when the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, responsible for the student aid program, stood up in the House and made an announcement - which we support - around the elimination of interest payments on student loans for students, a program that will cost roughly \$1.6 million a year, versus this program, which is roughly between \$42 million, \$45 million, maybe \$50 million.

This is a program introduced about four years ago. It started as a program that cost about \$1 billion. Over the past four years its popularity and its use resulted in a growth in the use of this program. It's hard to argue that a program that is being used and is popular with young graduates is not doing the job it needs to do. Imagine how many more young people would leave the province if we didn't have such a program in place. I'm very, very disturbed that this is a decision that was taken and a choice that was made.

In briefing the media over in the Red Room, the minister indicated that it simply was a budgetary question. The money that is being saved by the cancellation of this tax credit is not going back into the pockets of students, and that is really unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

A smaller change in this budget, but one that causes me as much concern as the cancellation of the Graduate Retention Rebate - and something that just defies logic and common sense - is the fact that the government have taken the scalpel to the nursing strategy and funding for the nursing strategy.

Now how in the world, Mr. Speaker, does this correspond with what we've been hearing and dealing with here in the last number of days? Moreover, how does that correspond with the commitment that the Liberal Party and all the members on the government side made in their platform in the election campaign that we just went through a few short months ago? How does that correspond to that? That platform commitment said that the NDP Government had neglected the nursing strategy, and that the Liberal Party, if elected in government, would reinvigorate that strategy - and I guess one would have to assume would at least hold the funding at the level at which it was, not see a 12 per cent reduction in expenditure in that initiative.

Do we not need nurses anymore in the Province of Nova Scotia? Do we not need to be addressing the issues of nurses anymore in our province? This is very disturbing, Mr. Speaker, and let me say what else I find disturbing about the government's approach, particularly to the nurses.

I've listened to the Premier talk many times about how he will not pick winners and losers in the economic development area, but he has absolutely no difficulty picking winners and losers with respect to ratios of staff to clients in the public sector. This budget talks about dealing with ratios of guidance counsellors to students, and this document talks about ratios of teachers to students in the classroom, but this government won't talk to nurses about their ratios in terms of ratios of nurses to patients. Mr. Speaker, who exactly is picking winners and losers in the public sector arena? It seems to me that the Premier has no difficulty, and this budget document clearly reflects that.

This budget document also sees cuts in the agriculture area. It sees cuts in rural roads and infrastructure. Our rural communities are in trouble in many parts of our

province, and what are they receiving in today's budget? They are not seeing a stabilization of things that are required. They're seeing cuts.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government whose members, when they sat on this side of the House, criticized and ridiculed the Jobs Fund, but they've put an additional \$5 million into it. This is a government who, when they sat on this side of the House, criticized and ridiculed the growth in the debt of the province, yet are projecting to add a billion dollars to the debt of the province over the life of their government. As I indicated, this is a government that criticized investment in certain industry and certain industrial initiatives as picking winners and losers, yet this budget very much reflects a mentality of picking winners and losers.

In the coming days we will have an opportunity to look very carefully, to scrutinize the various areas of government line by line and department by department. I'm very much looking forward to doing that, but there are two other very significant concerns I want to raise before I take my place.

The first thing I want to raise as a significant concern is the fact that pretty much every initiative of government has some dollar amount assigned to it in the budget documents - with one very glaring exception, and that is the amalgamation, the merger of the district health authorities. The initiative appears throughout the budget documents without any indication whatsoever of what the cost will be or what the savings will be. We are being given nothing in terms of what is a central, core initiative of this government.

The other thing that causes me considerable consternation with respect to where this government is going are the comments in the document in the minister's speech which she spoke to in general terms in the Red Room, and that's with respect to the sustainability of public sector wages. I think anybody who heard the minister and who has read that portion of the speech can only conclude that this is a government that is now openly contemplating austerity measures in terms of wage restraint in the public sector, given how I and other members have been trying to understand how it is that a dispute with 2,300 nurses has grown into a dispute with all of the workers in the health care sector, from one end of the province to the other, as well as other workers in the community services arena.

I'm starting to get a little nervous, Mr. Speaker, about what this government's real agenda is with respect to dealing with its own workforce as an employer in the province. I guess we'll just have to stay tuned and see how that plays itself out, but it's beginning to look like it's going to be a pretty rough ride for the foreseeable future.

With those few words, I will take my place. I look forward to having an opportunity to examine those areas that I have responsibility for, and some that I don't, particularly in the health field. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, since the House hours were initially called until 11:59 p.m., in order for us to move to government business consideration of Bill No. 37 on third reading, it would require the unanimous consent of the House. In light of the fact that we have a labour disruption currently underway and the health and safety of Nova Scotians at risk, I would ask that you request from the House unanimous consent to have Bill No. 37 now considered for third reading.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The honourable Government House Leader.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the NDP caucus continues to refuse to allow the passage of Bill No. 37, the government once again has no legislative tools to allow this bill to be considered during today's sitting. As a result of that, I would move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow, Friday, April 4th, from 12:01 a.m. until 11:59 p.m., at which time, following the daily routine, government business will be third reading of Bill No. 37.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House now rise to meet again on Friday, April 4th, between the hours of 12:01 a.m. and 11:59 p.m.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until 12:01 a.m. tomorrow.

[The House rose at 3:49 p.m.]