



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Second Session

THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2015

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2015

Sixty-second General Assembly

Second Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKER

Ms. Margaret Miller

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. As is the tradition of this Assembly on Budget Day, with the consent of the House we will commence with the motion for Resolution No. 1190, respecting the Estimates under orders of the day.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[ORDERS OF THE DAY]

[GOVERNMENT BUSINESS]

[GOVERNMENT MOTIONS]

[Res. No. 1190, re Estimates - CWH on Supply: Referred - Notice given March 27/15 - (Hon. Diana Whalen)]

MR. SPEAKER: With your consent, I'll now recognize the honourable minister.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. (Applause)

HON. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the notice of motion given by me on March 27, 2015, and the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly, I have the honour, by command, to present a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor 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 31, 2016, which is:

“I hereby transmit Estimates of Sums required for the Public Service of the province, for the year ending March 31, 2016, and in accordance with the Constitution Act of 1867, recommend them, together with the Budget Address of my 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,

J.J. Grant

Lieutenant Governor

April 9, 2015.”

Mr. Speaker, at this time I wish to:

- (1) table the message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor 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 Estimate and Crown Corporation Business Plans resolutions;
- (5) deliver my Budget Speech; and
- (6) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, being Supply to be granted to Her Majesty and the Crown Corporation Business Plans be referred to the Committee of the Whole on Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: The Estimates are tabled.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. DIANA WHALEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just before I begin my Budget Speech, I'd like to make a few introductions if you would allow me.

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MS. WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of staff members who are in the gallery this afternoon - I think they are in the east gallery. I have the Deputy Minister, George McLellan, and Lori Currie from Treasury Board I think is there, and I'm not sure who else is there. On behalf of the House I'd like to thank George and the team for all the hard work that goes into preparing these Estimates. (Applause)

Now, Mr. Speaker, on a personal and more local level, I would like to introduce a couple of friends, and I would also like to introduce two students from Halifax West High School who have been viewing the process of estimates today and seeing what goes on in the government and in the lock-ups and so on with this process. I'd like to introduce Ena Feher and Panos Giannopoulos, who are from Halifax West High School. Thank you very much for being here today. (Applause)

Finally - and I know you are being very indulgent - I'd like to introduce my very important guests, Stewart and Caroline Whalen, who are here with me, and my friends Donna McCready and Kathie Swenson and Norman Doucet. Maybe all of you would just rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

I know it's always an important day when we have family with us as well in the House, so let me begin, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction

Once again, it is an honour to stand before this Assembly to update you on our fiscal progress, and outline our plan for 2015-16. We are making significant progress in getting the government's fiscal house in order, yet there is still considerable work to be done.

When we took office, government spending significantly exceeded revenue. When I rose in the House last year to deliver our first budget, we had anticipated a \$279 million deficit in 2014-15. I am pleased to report this year's deficit is now forecasted to be \$102.1 million. Furthermore, our budget deficit for the 2015-16 year will be \$97.6 million and if our assumptions hold true, we will be able to report a surplus in 2016-17. (Applause)

Net Debt

This is primarily due to our willingness to halt the increase in government spending. When wage increases are taken out of the equation, overall departmental spending has increased only 0.2 per cent. To my mind, this represents remarkable progress. I want to thank all my colleagues and staff for their hard work over the past 18 months.

Our approach to fiscal discipline has been constant, and we have begun the process of refocusing our limited resources on the core responsibilities of government. As I announced earlier this week, members of this House are leading by example, and their salaries will be frozen for the next three years.

Last year when I addressed the House, our focus was on keeping our campaign commitments and laying the foundation for private-sector growth. During the year, we have made significant progress on both. This budget reflects our efforts to control spending and a clear focus on priorities:

- To educate young Nova Scotians;
- To ensure better access to health care;
- To let the private sector drive job creation and economic growth; and
- To spend and invest prudently with a focus on long-term sustainability.

On the spending side, we have examined in detail the many programs and services that are offered by government. Our aim has been to find ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our programs. We looked for duplication or programs that are no longer meeting their objectives. Most importantly, we have been willing to challenge the status quo and keep the interests of Nova Scotians as our number one priority.

Under the leadership of the Premier we commenced an ongoing program review and asked ourselves these questions:

1. Do current programs and government activities still serve the public interest?
2. Is there a legitimate and necessary role for government in these programs or activities?
3. Is the current role of government appropriate, effective and efficient?
4. If we continue the program or activity, can we make government more efficient and effective in its delivery?

5. And finally, are the existing programs or activities affordable, given our current fiscal reality?

For too long, governments have turned away from the responsibility to evaluate and assess programs to ensure they were serving the public interest for fear of the political consequences of making tough decisions.

During my budget address last year, I talked of the need to “change the conversation.” The One Nova Scotia report had struck an important chord across our province, and I found a public eager to contemplate new solutions. Our collective resolve to answer the call to action, to halt the slide, and avoid a prolonged decline in the quality of our public services will continue to be tested in the months and years ahead.

In fact, I can say that I discovered something important about Nova Scotians: The general public is ahead of many institutions - including government - in its recognition that change is long overdue.

Our Wage Challenge

The inflated wage pattern of the past several years has prevented a return to balance. The fact that our economic growth stalled in tandem with this wage pattern made the situation even more difficult.

The generosity of 2, 2.5 and 3 per cent wage increases left a major burden for all Nova Scotians. As a result, over \$700 million was added to government's labour costs over the last three years. It is important to remember that these costs are now embedded in the cost of government.

Additionally, it is also important to note that approximately \$5.2 billion of the province's total budget of \$8.9 billion for departmental spending goes towards wages and benefits; that is 58 per cent of all of our departmental spending. However, I am pleased with the fact that we have made real progress, and we have met many of the challenges that arose.

Of course, stronger economic growth and fiscal sustainability are top priorities for our government. But a balanced budget is not an end unto itself. Instead, fiscal discipline is a means toward maintenance of core public services - the services Nova Scotians need to improve the quality of their lives. Our motivation is the improvement of public services - in health, public infrastructure, support for our most vulnerable citizens and an education system that prepares Nova Scotians to prosper in a changing world. This is why we need to continue on the path we are on. (Applause)

Investing in Education

Sustaining top-quality education and investing in early childhood development are core functions of government. Investing in education is the long game - our most strategic investment is in people. As the world continues to rapidly evolve, we have a direct responsibility to help Nova Scotians excel in a knowledge-based economy, and that means taking a lifelong approach to education.

Our government is very focused on investing in early childhood education and the P-to-12 system. That approach also extends to post-secondary support, apprenticeships, training and workforce attachment.

In our first budget, we embarked upon our commitment to rebuild our education system after \$65 million was cut by the previous administration. But it is more than just money itself. We have also begun a program to dramatically improve the education system. We completed the first education review in a quarter century. That review is now prompting action, and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is responding to the recommendations in the report.

Work is well underway, Mr. Speaker. This year, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will invest an additional \$20.4 million in this vitally important sector. This is in addition to \$17.3 million that was invested last year in education. This will include continued investment on class caps for Grades Primary to 2. Additionally, Grades 3 and 4 will be capped to ensure our children get the best possible start in life, and that our teachers can take the time they need to teach.

We know our students have fallen behind in math and literacy, nationally and internationally. This year we will continue to tackle that problem by investing a further \$3 million in a provincial math strategy. This renewed focus will provide more time for teaching math in the early years, ensuring we get the fundamentals right.

We will also invest \$2.4 million in language arts for Grades Primary to 3. Research clearly indicates that the early years of a child's life set the stage for their success. In order to help all our children get the best possible start in life, we will invest an additional \$1.3 million in early intervention programs and \$700,000 in early learning initiatives. There will also be \$1.1 million to fund school mental health clinicians.

With this budget, we are continuing new investment in education by increasing provincial funding to post-secondary education by \$3.2 million in each of the next four years. With this investment, we are also introducing legislation to ensure accountability for the tax dollars they receive. We are working closely with the presidents from all 10 Nova Scotia universities to ensure their direction is better aligned with the social and economic goals of our province. At the same time, we are ensuring that participation and access to a post-secondary education continues to be affordable for Nova Scotians.

Mr. Speaker, to support students who decide to pursue post-secondary education, we have changed the Debt Cap Program to the Nova Scotia Loan Forgiveness Program. Nova Scotia undergraduate students who graduate within a reasonable time will be able to have their entire provincial loan forgiven. This could save students up to \$15,000 of the cost of their university degree.

Program changes will also help students with permanent disabilities. Currently, students need to complete their studies within four years to qualify for maximum assistance under the old Debt Cap Program. Now, under the new Nova Scotia Loan Forgiveness Program, students with permanent disabilities will have 10 years to complete their degree and receive maximum debt forgiveness.

The Loan Forgiveness Program is for all Nova Scotia students attending Nova Scotia universities. Students who choose universities out of province will only be eligible if they can show the program is not available in Nova Scotia. We have also removed interest costs from the provincial portion of student loans, which has further reduced the cost for many to attend our post-secondary institutions.

Workplace Attachment: Graduate to Opportunity

Mr. Speaker, last year we announced the Graduate to Opportunity program that supports young college and university graduates to get started in their chosen field. This will mark the first full year of the Graduate to Opportunity program.

The program provides salary contributions to employers to offset the cost of hiring a recent graduate and assist post-secondary graduates to find career opportunities in Nova Scotia. In the year ahead, we will contribute \$1.6 million to fulfilling our commitment to this program.

To further support lifelong learning we will invest in:

1. Brilliant Labs - a \$400,000 investment in all eight school boards to help teachers incorporate technology, creativity and entrepreneurship in the classroom.
2. Innovation, incubation and acceleration of entrepreneurs and start-ups through innovation centres in Sydney, Truro, Liverpool, Parrsboro, Halifax and Dartmouth. Key sectors will include agriculture and agrifood, seafood, ocean technology, tidal energy, forestry, and information and communication technology.
3. Improved apprenticeship programming through the newly created Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. Future investment in young Nova Scotians will be made possible by maintaining our current fiscal discipline.

The Economy: the Best Fiscal Plan is a Strong Economy

Mr. Speaker, it has been said the best fiscal plan is a strong economy. In fact, the root cause of our fiscal challenge is that in past years, government spending growth has vastly surpassed our economic growth. Previous governments did not face up to this.

At the beginning of 2014, Nova Scotia had the dubious distinction of having the worst performing economy in Canada, measured by real GDP growth, for the last 20 years. In February 2014, the One Nova Scotia Commission offered a stark assessment of our current reality. After two decades of slow economic growth, our province hovered on the verge of significant prolonged decline in our standard of living, our population and in the quality of our public services.

Since then, some indicators have been more promising for Nova Scotia, suggesting our economy is slowly improving. For example, Nova Scotia led the provinces in goods export growth in 2014. There were substantial gains in natural gas output and non-energy exports such as seafood, forest products and manufactured goods.

Forecasters project better GDP growths for Nova Scotia in the next two years. Despite this, there are concerns for the longer-term economic growth. Our offshore is a unique growth opportunity for our province. We remain committed to our Offshore Growth Plan by investing in marketing and geoscience programs to encourage additional exploration activity off our coast in a safe and sustainable manner.

Already the plan is demonstrating success. Despite the decline in world oil prices, Shell and its partners Suncor and ConocoPhillips remain committed to a \$1 billion exploration program that will see the first well drilled this year. Further to that, Mr. Speaker, BP and its partners Hess and Woodside also committed to another \$1 billion program that saw one of the largest seismic data collection programs in the world last year.

Major project investments in the near term include the Maritime Link, the shipbuilding project, the Macdonald Bridge re-decking and the Halifax Convention Centre. The Donkin Mine and Liquefied Natural Gas export opportunities all are further reasons for optimism.

In addition, we are enabling the development of a world-class tidal energy sector. With the highest tides in the world in the Bay of Fundy, we have a unique competitive advantage. But, we have an obligation to do better. The solutions of the past have not worked, so government needs a new approach to private sector and social enterprise growth.

A New Way of Doing Business

As I said, 14 months ago, Nova Scotians received the report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building our New Economy. The report called for changes in attitudes, policies and practices across government and community sectors.

The report said:

“We believe there is significant value in reorganizing business-related programming within a new department with a new Minister and a crystal-clear mandate to support all aspects of business expansion in Nova Scotia. We believe this clarity should extend to the actual title - the Minister of Business.”

I am pleased to report the government is implementing that recommendation today.

I would also like to congratulate my colleague, the Honourable Mark Furey, the first Minister of the new Department of Business. Under Minister Furey's leadership the department will:

- provide stronger direction;
- align government policies and programs more effectively; and
- be more efficient and focused on supporting business growth and innovation.

This also reflects a long-standing request by the business community. The Department of Business will lead a portfolio of government departments and agencies that enable rural and urban business growth. The role of the Department of Business will be to focus on creating the most positive business environment to strategically promote business growth at all levels and regions in Nova Scotia.

This will be extremely beneficial for innovation and growth in our rural economy as the responsible use and development of our natural resources - together with tourism - are among our best opportunities for renewed prosperity in rural Nova Scotia.

In creating the new Department of Business and eliminating the former Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, government will achieve \$29 million in savings in 2015-16 - and ongoing savings in subsequent years of greater than \$40 million per year.

During our first year in office, government created Invest Nova Scotia. This organization is led by the private sector. It will support the work of the Department of

Business by bringing additional expertise to decision-making about sector development and investment of public funds, in a transparent and accountable way.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate government's decision to have a private sector board lead our tourism sector. This new body will rely on sector expertise to guide this vitally important industry.

The creation of a new Department of Business is continuing our government's commitment to following a new economic development strategy - one that is distinctly different from previous governments. From now on, government will focus on helping to create the right business climate - instead of picking winners and losers.

Business and government play different but interrelated roles in creating a competitive, productive economy - we know our role. A recent example of this is the Premier's work to facilitate the creation of a private sector-led equity fund of \$50 million by Victor Chu. No public funds were required, and this decision represents a private sector vote of confidence in our province. Taken together, Mr. Speaker, these initiatives allow business leaders to play a much larger role.

Office of Regulatory and Service Effectiveness

Another key initiative of our government is the recently announced Office of Regulatory and Service Effectiveness. This office will be housed in the Department of Business and will be led by a Chief Regulatory Officer.

In November 2014, my office received the Nova Scotia Tax and Regulatory Review Report, which I commissioned in February of last year. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that our new Office of Regulatory and Service Effectiveness is mandated to develop a regulatory reform agenda directed at implementing each and every recommendation Laurel Broten made relating to regulatory reform.

A key focus of this office will also be the recently announced joint initiative with New Brunswick to streamline the regulatory environment between our two provinces. Government will also consolidate the inspection, compliance and enforcement functions of the departments of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Environment, and the public health inspectors from Health and Wellness into a new division within the Department of Environment.

This change will unify inspection and enforcement activities and allow resource departments to focus on sector growth rather than policing activities. This change will take effect July 1, 2015. In addition, this fall we intend to rationalize our non-resource landholdings by creating a flexible new entity with a mandate to:

1. Sell surplus land and return it to productive private sector use;

2. Keep land that could support sector development, and innovation or incubation sites; and
3. Manage land that is contaminated or has environmental issues and challenges.

This new entity will work closely with the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, we have listened. We have carefully planned and we are embarking on a new era that redefines government's appropriate role in creating a competitive and productive business environment. In doing so, we have streamlined government and will achieve better outcomes.

Investing in People

Mr. Speaker, the work of government must always be focused on improving the lives of Nova Scotians. Our goals are improved health and wellness, enhanced community and social well-being, and population growth.

Given our demographic trends, we'll also continue to invest in aging well and enhancing workplace opportunities for youth and older workers. We will also support population growth by focusing on three goals: retaining our youth, encouraging Nova Scotians to come home, and attracting other Canadians and immigrants from around the world.

The link between population growth and economic growth is clear - a strong economy is not only a good fiscal plan it is also the best population growth plan. For the first time in many years, we had modest population growth in our province in 2014. In areas such as immigration, we are making real headway. More immigrants chose to make Nova Scotia their home last year than at any time in the last 10 years. In addition, Mr. Speaker, more immigrants are also choosing to stay.

The most recent Statistics Canada figures indicate a 71 per cent retention rate for immigrants who arrived in Nova Scotia between 2007 and 2011 - the highest rate in recent history. In our first 18 months in office, government has made a number of changes and launched initiatives to bring more immigrants to our province:

- Last summer the Premier appointed Wadih Fares and Colin Dodds as joint chairs of the Premier's Immigration Advisory Council;
- We changed the Provincial Nominee Program to ensure that international students who want to stay in Nova Scotia, have a way to do so;

- The Nova Scotia Demand: Express Entry stream was launched, providing a faster route for skilled and educated immigrants in response to labour-market demands; and
- We have strengthened the partnership between government and settlement service providers to enhance services for people, families and communities.

In 2015, we achieved a 50 per cent increase in provincial nominees over last year, bringing the total to 1,050, up from 700 the previous year. We are continuing to work hard. This year we will continue to focus on attracting new immigrants to Nova Scotia and ensure that they are supported to make this province their permanent home. We look forward to introducing a new business immigration stream that will attract immigrant entrepreneurs with strong business skills. We need their talent and their enthusiasm to grow our economy and our communities.

Immigrants contribute economically and culturally to our province. My riding of Clayton Park West is one of the most culturally diverse in the province. And I see first-hand the benefits of opening our doors to newcomers.

Health Care

Mr. Speaker, in relation to all Nova Scotians, we have a responsibility to provide excellent health services. As I stated earlier, controlling our spending and encouraging economic growth enables us to have the capacity to invest in these core services. Of these, health care is far and away the most expensive, and continues to account for the most significant amount of our overall provincial budget.

On April 1st, the Nova Scotia Health Authority became a reality. Its mandate is to deliver health care efficiently and effectively while remaining focused on the patient and front-line care. This patient-first approach will ensure consistent, high-quality health care across the province. Bringing our resources together under a unified structure, with strong leadership, will ensure we can focus more money on health services and less on administration. By planning provincially, and looking at innovative approaches, we expect better health outcomes for Nova Scotians in the future.

This year, we will invest in areas that are important to Nova Scotians:

- \$2 million to reduce orthopaedic wait times for hip and knee replacements and other surgeries;
- \$3.8 million to increase home care supports;
- \$1.5 million to the Senior Citizens Assistance Program to help seniors stay well and in their own homes longer;

- \$1 million to expand services for Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention for preschoolers with autism; and
- \$700,000 to expand the sexual assault nurse examiner program.

The agreement we've made with health care unions will streamline the number of bargaining units significantly in that sector, from 50 to four. Coupled with the Essential Services Act passed in 2014, these initiatives have allowed Nova Scotians to have greater confidence in their access to health care. These changes will allow our focus to be sharp and unwavering: on the patient.

Support for Those in Need

During my travels, I heard it said repeatedly: the people of this province feel a duty to support those who are most in need. It is one of our province's strengths and one of the reasons I am proud to be a Nova Scotian.

Work has already begun to transform our programs to focus directly on supporting our most vulnerable through benefit reforms that will help them improve their lives. Our focus this year will be on continuing to transform services for persons with disabilities. This year we will take the first step toward stable, multi-year funding for disability support program providers. We will change the way we fund these providers to ensure more equitable distribution of funding and improve accountability - all to better serve Nova Scotians who depend on these services.

We will also invest an additional \$2.5 million in direct family support programming.

Work on income assistance benefit reform will continue this year as we focus on the benefits we provide and, as importantly, how we provide them.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that later this month, Nova Scotia's first sexual violence prevention strategy will be released. We will invest \$2 million in prevention, in education and to support survivors of abuse.

Government is also looking at the feasibility of implementing social impact bonds in Nova Scotia. Social finance has the potential to create opportunities for both investors and community organizations. This may be a way to provide access to new sources of funds for projects that will benefit our society.

Due to the success of the program, we will also be extending the Domestic Violence Court in Cape Breton with an additional \$430,000 commitment.

In the year ahead, government will continue to focus efforts to support those in need. We will maintain the Affordable Living Tax Credit that provides \$65.8 million to

over 200,000 low-income Nova Scotians and we will protect income assistance rates. When we speak of the importance of fiscal discipline, it is precisely because we need the capacity to do more for those who most need our help.

Fiscal Plan 2015-16: Building on Our Progress

With this context, and the information I have provided on where we are investing in a better future - education, the economy, and our people - I would like now to focus on our fiscal plan for 2015-16. We have essentially held the line on spending; in fact, total government spending has increased by only 0.7 per cent in our fiscal plan.

We are poised to turn the corner on total debt if we can sustain our fiscal plan. Every dollar reduction we make with regard to debt service is a dollar available for new programs that can help us transition our people and our economy. While this is a significant accomplishment, it has to be recognized that government's expenses still exceed our revenues.

The key categories of the current year budget are:

1. Total revenues are expected to be \$9.92 billion;
2. Total spending is estimated at \$10 billion;
3. Interest payments on public debt will be \$872 million, or 8.7 per cent of the expense budget;
4. Health expenditures will be \$4.1 billion, or 46.4 per cent of total departmental spending; and
5. Education expenditures will be \$1.2 billion, or 14 per cent.

When I commenced my remarks, I described our program review process and the five questions we ask ourselves as we pursue ongoing program review. After checking if public objectives are being achieved, the last question we ask with respect to each program is: is it affordable and is it providing the best value for all Nova Scotians?

A recommendation from the Tax Review involved the Film Industry Tax Credit - and the need for modification. The report said our Film Industry Tax Credit is considered to be one of the most generous in the country. We have heard from many people who work in the film industry. Some clearly are here in Nova Scotia and contributing in many ways to our province.

Our challenge has been to find a new structure that will offer support to the industry and, at the same time, increase accountability and benefit to our provincial economy. Nova Scotians want their tax dollars to support Nova Scotia.

I want to be clear today: the Film Industry Tax Credit remains. I also want to be clear on another point: we cannot look at this tax credit in isolation. We need to consider it with all other tools that government uses to stimulate the economy and help industries - not just the film industry. There is only one taxpayer and only one pot of money. We need to maximize return on this and every investment.

In order to rebalance this credit, we will change it from one that is fully refundable to one that is 25 per cent refundable. The remaining 75 per cent of the eligible tax credit will be provided as a non-refundable credit. In other words, 75 per cent is available to film companies against the taxes that they owe in Nova Scotia.

These changes will take effect July 1, 2015. This timing will ensure projects that are currently in progress can continue, and also provide the industry time to transition. We have budgeted \$24 million this fiscal year to ensure there is no interruption to the credit.

The film industry relies heavily on this subsidy. I recognize this change will be deeply felt and many will react negatively. We simply cannot afford to maintain the credit in its current form.

In addition to the tax credit, we are establishing a creative economy fund. This \$6 million fund will be designed in consultation and collaboration with the industry and will be open to creative industries - including publishing, animation, music, sound recording, and film.

To ensure creative industries are best positioned to realize their potential, we will also move responsibility for this sector to Nova Scotia Business Inc. Aligning the creative sector with NSBI is a vote of confidence in the industry which will now be better positioned to take advantage of supports that will help it focus on international exports, expansion, and growth.

Towards a Modern Equitable Tax System

I have referred a number of times to Charting a Path for Growth, the report of the Nova Scotia Tax and Regulatory Review. Since receiving the report in November, I have personally been consulting with Nova Scotians from all walks of life. I've listened to social justice advocates, business leaders, students, and many others.

Nearly 500 people attended our sessions and we received more than 300 emails and letters. Many participants in the sessions spoke about the need to address our demographic challenges. Others spoke of protecting programs and services that serve our most

vulnerable Nova Scotians. Still others spoke of the need to change and the urgency around it.

The tax and regulatory report challenges us all to look at our tax system differently. It's a conversation we all need to have. I want to be very clear today - we are taking a long view. Some of the measures that are recommended need more careful analysis. We need to understand their impacts on people and we need to consult further in some cases. A systematic and structural plan that rolls out over a number of years is necessary.

That being said, in this, our first budget since receiving the release of the report, we're making the following decisions:

- The Film Industry Tax Credit is being modified, as I have explained;
- We have made the decision to maintain the volunteer firefighter tax credit - for the people who stand ready to help Nova Scotians in a time of need; and
- Likewise, the \$10 million provincial tax exemption on printed books will be maintained to support publishers, authors, and booksellers, and also to support students and public libraries.

In addition to these decisions, we will move forward on several other tax changes:

- We will rebalance taxes paid on income earned through wages or dividends by lowering the non-eligible dividend tax credit. Over the past few years, the dividend tax credit has not kept pace with changing conditions. To ensure the system is equitable, the rate is being reduced from 5.87 per cent to 3.5 per cent. This change will restore \$30 million in revenue for the province.
- We will also increase tobacco taxes by 2 cents per cigarette because evidence suggests increased pricing results in lower consumption.

Our plan for the year ahead includes:

- The establishment of a tax working group to act as a sounding board on implementation challenges and opportunities with regard to the tax recommendations;
- Consideration of our existing credits and exemptions to ensure best value; and
- Ongoing consultation and conversations with Nova Scotians about key recommendations in the report.

As part of the 2015-16 budget, I have also tabled our four-year fiscal plan. This plan outlines our projected revenue and expenses. To reiterate, I'm proud of the fact that government has outlined a plan that will see our province in a surplus position next year - a full year ahead of earlier expectations.

The net-debt-to-GDP ratio is regarded as the most comprehensive indicator of the province's financial position. It hit a recent peak of 37.7 per cent at the end of 2014. This ratio is expected to improve over the fiscal plan, reaching 33.4 per cent by 2018-19 - bringing us closer to the goals set in the One Nova Scotia Report.

However, to achieve the plan, we must continue to control spending and examine the effectiveness of our programs and services - and, perhaps most importantly, set the conditions to grow the economy. Our guiding principle will continue to be fiscal sustainability so we remain able to invest in core public services that enable Nova Scotians to improve the quality of their lives.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, this budget takes a major step towards a modern, flexible, and sustainable government. In the year ahead, our work will continue to be guided by the responsible stewardship of Nova Scotia's finances. To date our concentration has been on our core responsibilities:

- Ensuring a high-quality health care system that is able to modernize and improve access to Nova Scotians;
- Rebuilding our education system in a way that offers all Nova Scotians the skills they need to excel in a changing world; and
- Taking further steps to create the conditions required to allow the private sector to create meaningful employment opportunities for Nova Scotians.

We have met these core responsibilities while keeping spending at historically low levels - and we have headed towards a surplus position. Again, this fiscal discipline will provide us with options to address the things that matter most to Nova Scotians.

I believe we all share certain common values: we want better access to health care; we want an education system that allows young Nova Scotians and their families to excel and thrive; and we want a vibrant private sector that maximizes our advantages and creates jobs across the province.

Mr. Speaker, in my role as Finance Minister, I'm responsible for considering the many competing demands that are placed on government. I have said we cannot afford to be all things to all people. Our small province needs to be sure that every dollar spent is

getting the best return for our taxpayers. That is the hard reality of planning a budget and examining all the important services that we are asked to fund.

Before I conclude, I want to thank all of my colleagues and, most especially, the public servants who have contributed so much to the development of this budget and to the ongoing high-quality services that they provide to Nova Scotians. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, can you indulge me on a point of order, please, or a couple of points of order?

Number one is the accessibility of our public gallery. This is the people's House and yet for a while, probably through three-quarters of the minister's speech, there were two people sitting in the west gallery. I was wondering if you could have a quick look at why people were restricted in joining us to listen to this important speech where they are finding whether they are being affected or not by the minister's budget.

By the look of the amount of people who were sitting downstairs and by the number of people who were here in the public gallery, there was no access, so I was wondering if you could review that.

Secondly - by the way, minister, there's a little piece missing between Pages 15 and 16. There is a paragraph that you read that's not in our documents - and secondly, we all know, we've been here for a long time, that we do not refer to other colleagues in the House by their names so I'm just wondering if we could remember that, too.

Really, where is the public gallery? Why don't we have a public gallery that is accessible to Nova Scotians?

MR. SPEAKER: I'll take that point of order under advisement and I'll come back to the House tomorrow with some information.

The honourable Acting Leader of the New Democratic Party.

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise, but on a point of personal privilege. I think that every member of this House comes here not in their individual capacity but in their capacity to represent their constituencies and represent the people of the province. In the time that I've been here, I have never seen the media excluded from the Chamber, outside this House, to conduct their work - or from the gallery - particularly during a very important day here in our province, the delivery of the budget.

I feel, as a member, that the refusal to have people who communicate to the public the work of this Chamber, what the government members are doing, what the Opposition members are doing, is a violation of our privilege as members of this Assembly. I would ask you as Speaker to look into how did this occur and communicate back to us how it occurred with some consultation so we can make sure that this does not happen again.

MR. SPEAKER: I will take that under advisement and report back tomorrow.

The honourable Premier.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. You actually control this Chamber Mr. Speaker. You know the capacity of what happened. Never before in the history of this House, has a sitting government sat here (Interruption)

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

THE PREMIER: Never in the history of any political Party has our staff been removed from this gallery, so to allow these two members to stand up and suggest it was government who controls who is in the gallery of this House is misleading and unreasonable.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please.

The honourable member for Pictou East.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, before I begin do I have permission to make an introduction?

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you. Seated in the west gallery today I have my good friend Norman Lord and his son Curtis Lord and maybe they could stand up and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today and give a reply to the minister's budget. First off I do want to thank the minister for the preparation of the budget. I can only imagine the incredible amount of work that goes into preparing these documents. I do thank her for that work. With her indulgence I would also thank the host of staff who work on these documents, I'm sure through a number of iterations and changes and drafts, including sitting with us in the lockup and answering our questions. I would say to them, whether we may disagree on political points in this thing, it's certainly not a reflection of their work, so I certainly want to thank the staff for their work.

I will say that I came in today with a certain degree of apprehension and some optimism that all of the tough talk we heard leading up to today would have some positive results. I come from a part of Nova Scotia that desperately needs some good news. It needs some jobs. As I read these budget documents, I was asking myself - who is positively impacted by this budget? Who will this budget help? That's the lens that I was looking at this budget document through.

After listening to the talk leading up to today and sitting down this morning and starting to read these documents, I will say that when I went through the glossy highlights and the Budget Address, I looked at all the shiny documents and the summary numbers and I have to say that I was encouraged. At first blush when I looked at this document, I was more encouraged today than I was yesterday and that's a good thing. But in doing our job and digging through the details of the budget, it became apparent to me that there are many really good things that have to happen for these Budget Estimates to become a reality.

I have to say that in looking at some of the projections and some of the assumptions, time will tell if this budget becomes reality. In saying that, I looked at last year's numbers. Last year, when the budget was tabled, we saw a deficit of \$278 million. Today, I picked up this glossy brochure and I saw that this number is now \$102 million. I thought to myself, wow, that's incredible progress.

But then you dig into the details and you see that that includes a \$107 million windfall, one-time adjustment from Ottawa, and another \$50 million surprise "good guy", to use an accounting technical term, that also came from the federal government for corporate taxes. You start to ask yourself, what did our government do to improve last year's \$278 million budget deficit to get it to \$102 million? The fact of the matter is, without the \$107 million and without the \$50 million, the deficit would have been \$259 million. Granted, that's versus \$278 million. This government shaved off \$22 million.

I make that point only to stress that we need to make sure that we understand what makes up the numbers we're looking at. That \$278 million down to \$102 million looks very impressive; \$278 million to \$259 million, not so much. Over the next few days and weeks, we will be looking at this year's budget estimate of a \$97 million deficit through that lens and we'll have much time and much discussion over what makes up that \$97 million. I will say that with just a little over three hours this morning to review the budget and its supporting documents - maybe 400 pages' worth of material - there were immediately things that make us curious.

We saw what happened with last year; now we look at the things this year. On the revenue side, the revenue for this year is forecast to increase. I have to tell you that going around my constituency and speaking to Nova Scotians, I don't actually know a lot of Nova Scotians who are bubbling with optimism that they will make more money this year and therefore pay more taxes and therefore spend more money to generate more HST income. I don't know where those Nova Scotians are, so when I look at the revenue increases, the

estimates going up, I ask myself, where will it come from? Which Nova Scotians are going to pay more in personal income tax?

Yet we see a \$157 million increase in expected revenue. I ask myself, why? Is it because of steps this government has taken to grow the economy? We do see innovation centres - and I do think that is a positive thing. I will say that, that's a positive thing. I'm encouraged by that. I'm interested to see how that plays out.

On the other hand, we see in the address where the government says that the best opportunities for renewed prosperity in rural Nova Scotia will come from the development of our natural resources. I absolutely believe that is a true statement, but I look at this budget and I ask myself, how will that happen? I'm open-minded and I want to believe, because rural Nova Scotia certainly needs leadership and prosperity.

But I ask myself, will that come from the creation of a new department? We look at what has happened in rural Nova Scotia over the last year. In many ways, we've seen rural Nova Scotia held back.

In coming in today I was optimistic that we would see something on aquaculture, that we would see something to help lobster fishermen, that we would see something to help the small mills around Nova Scotia that are closing, and the hardwood companies that are closing, and the flooring companies. I was hopeful that we would see something to help those people - and hopefully we will see it. Hopefully we will see movement on that. But today I wonder how creating a new department will help those rural Nova Scotia economies.

We look at the \$97 million deficit and we ask, how does that number come about? We focus on the revenues, and I see a \$30 million increase in tax revenue coming from a dividend tax credit change - \$30 million, Mr. Speaker. "Dividend tax credit change" - that sounds very fancy to me. It's a change to the non-eligible dividend tax credit. I can get all the explanations I need, but the only question I have is, who is going to pay the \$30 million?

The answer is small business owners. Small business owners will pay that \$30 million. That's exactly where it will come from. Putting more taxes on top of small business owners under a fancy name is still more taxes on small business owners. We'll see how that helps us grow our economy.

We have another \$30 million in tax revenue, and that's going to come from all of us. Nova Scotians will pay \$30 million more in taxes just due to bracket creep. That's money that will come right out of the pockets of Nova Scotians.

I ask myself, where is the real plan for sustainable growth? Where is the plan for revenue? I take the minister's point that a Film Tax Credit will remain, but it has changed.

The Film Tax Credit change will generate money for the government but what will it do to industry?

That's the question: what will it do to our industry here, with that tax credit change? There's no answer to that question today, Mr. Speaker. The minister did say in her briefing that the restructured tax credit keeps us in the game. Well, it may keep us in the game playing short-handed. We'll have to see how that plays out, because industry is the one that will decide whether or not we are in the game.

When I look at the departmental expenses, I see that departmental expenses are up by \$127 million over forecast. We've made the point many times that if the government would simply hold the line on spending, we'd have a surplus. We said it last year, we've said it over the past year, we'll say it again today, because departmental spending is up and it's up by \$127 million. If it wasn't up, we would have a surplus today.

In terms of expenses and managing expenses, the only way to really manage expenses is if you understand them. One of the things I would like to see from the government going forward is, I would like to see the government really try to understand the cost of the services it provides.

I say that, Mr. Speaker, in thinking about health care. It's a major expense of the government, yet we don't know the cost of individual procedures. Maybe if that's something we knew, it could help us control our costs better. You need information to make good decisions, and this is the type of information that we should be trying to make sure the government has. So over time I would like to see that as a goal of the government.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that there are some very good initiatives in here. Initiatives around education and young people, around orthopedic wait times, early intervention, and home support. Those are all things that every MLA in here and every Nova Scotian knows are important and we need to work towards those. I do see some good initiatives in here around those things and that's a good thing. But the question becomes, how do we manage these programs and how does the government fund these programs?

I am worried, Mr. Speaker. I am worried that the plan is to continue to depend on increasing tax revenue to fund government rather than finding sustainable ways to create jobs and promote private sector revenue. We can't just keep finding new ways, new fees, and new taxes to fund the government. We need to have a province that is welcoming and lets the economy grow.

As I look through this document over the next few days and through the estimates, that what I'm going to be looking for. It didn't jump off the page at me today, Mr. Speaker, I have to say. We look at next year, on the back of \$300 million increase in tax revenue, the government is projecting a surplus of \$22 million. If we look out one year past that, another \$200 million in tax revenue on top of that to generate a surplus of \$25 million.

Over the next couple of years, Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians can look forward to paying \$500 million more in taxes, \$500 million more for a surplus of \$50 million. Over the next few days and weeks, we will be analyzing those numbers and trying to understand that, because it doesn't sound like great value for money.

We need to work to really understand the plan for the province and with all the good initiatives that I acknowledged to be in here today, there is one line in the minister's address that gave me pause for thought, and the line says, some of the measures that are recommended need more careful analysis. Makes me wonder, Mr. Speaker, which ones of these might fall off the table after that careful analysis, or how they end up in this document being heralded today, when that's still out there.

So these are all questions we have. We need to find a way the government can get out of the way of business, yes we do, let businesses grow, but more so than that government needs to have its own plan on how it will fund itself, and hopefully that plan extends past just finding more fees for Nova Scotians to pay, extends past just finding more ways to tax Nova Scotians. That is what we'll be looking for, Mr. Speaker, over the next few days.

With those few words I would move that we adjourn debate on the budget process for today.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on the budget for today.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We'll now continue with the remainder of the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 1406

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

Whereas today marks the 98th Anniversary of the start to the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a battle which is widely considered a turning point in Canadian military history; and

Whereas more than 10,000 Canadian soldiers were wounded or killed in the battle; and

Whereas the 85th and the 106th Battalions from Nova Scotia played key roles in this battle, Mr. Speaker, which was one of the most significant victories over German forces and the battle that is regarded as the coming of age for Canada as a nation;

Therefore be it resolved that this House remember the brave sacrifices made at Vimy Ridge, and pay tribute to those who serve our country in the defence of freedom.

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****STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

VIMY RIDGE: CANADIANS - BRAVERY REMEMBER

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, 98 years ago today four Canadian Corps Divisions set out to capture Vimy Ridge. The battle raged until April 12, 1917, when the Canadian Army captured the Ridge in what is Canada's most celebrated military victory.

That victory quickly became a symbol, and has been described as the birth of our nation, because for the first time soldiers from every region in Canada fought together as a single force. It sparked a sense of national pride and confidence that endures to this day.

The victory at Vimy Ridge came at a terrible cost however, with more than 10,000 Canadians killed or wounded. Today let us remember the sacrifice and bravery of those Canadians who fought at Vimy Ridge, and give thanks to the many freedoms the victory brought our young country. Thank you.

[ORDERS OF THE DAY]

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

MR. SPEAKER: The time is now 2:17 p.m., we'll conclude at 3:07 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM. - SM. BUS. TAXES: INCREASES - REASONS

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, what a missed opportunity today for people in Nova Scotia. They had been told to expect real change to the way their government operates, and they have been let down today. In a province that relies on small businesses to create jobs and employ Nova Scotians, the government is once again relying on tax increases and projections of greater tax revenue to address its fiscal challenges, instead of making the real reforms that Nova Scotians have been told to brace for.

Mr. Speaker, for our small businesses today, they face a \$30 million increase in their taxes as a tax credit for them is being greatly reduced. I will ask the Premier, why did he decide to raise the taxes on small business by \$30 million today instead of making the major changes that he told Nova Scotians were coming?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we have not raised the tax on small business. As a matter of fact, we have not raised taxes on Nova Scotians or small businesses.

What has changed, Mr. Speaker, is those Nova Scotians who have incorporated themselves so that they can get around the tax system, so they can pay themselves through dividends to reduce their ability to pay tax, we've closed that gap like every other province has. When that small business tax lowers, so does that tax credit.

Lawyers who found a way around it, Mr. Speaker, today are being asked to contribute. (Interruption) Chartered accountants, those who know how to figure it out - we're asking them to contribute.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the fact is the previous NDP Government closed that gap when they reduced the threshold on small business in the budget a few years ago, something that the Premier then opposed. Now, whatever way you want to put it, the small businesses in Nova Scotia will pay \$30 million more in the upcoming year than they paid last year, and they are not the only ones. In a province where everyday working Nova Scotia families are already tapped-out, paying the highest income taxes in the country, they face a hidden tax increase through bracket creep of \$30 million more today.

Nova Scotians were told to brace for real reform. I will ask the Premier, why did he decide to dig \$30 million deeper into the pockets of everyday Nova Scotia working families instead of making the changes that he told Nova Scotians were coming?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party couldn't be further wrong in all his assumptions here; it is becoming commonplace in this House, though. The fact of the matter is that the small business rate has not changed in this province; if you were a small business owner in this province, the tax you were paying yesterday, you are paying today. The fact of the matter is we closed the loophole around the fact that there are people who have incorporated themselves to get around paying their fair share of taxes. Why does the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party believe that a small business in rural Nova Scotia employing four or five people should be treated differently than a lawyer in downtown Halifax who has figured out how to get around the tax system by incorporating himself and paying himself through dividends? Tell us why.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is becoming commonplace in this House is a Premier who doesn't answer the questions because my question was about the income taxes paid by Nova Scotia families and the hidden increase in their personal taxes. Of course, the other thing that is becoming commonplace in this House is that when we get to Budget Day, instead of making real changes in the way the government operates, this government, like many before, just reaches deeper into the pockets of Nova Scotians. That's the story of the budget today. What was all the hullabaloo about? What was all the tough talk about? What was all the bracing people for real change to the way government operates when all that's happening is they're digging deeper into their pockets. That's what the budget shows. So I'll ask the Premier, why did he pick tax increases over real change?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker. We have not chosen tax increases. What we've asked is that all Nova Scotians pay their fair share. Those who have figured out how to incorporate themselves, like chartered accountants, should pay their fair share of taxes. We believe in equity across the board. The fact of the matter is this is a budget that is dealing with the structural challenges facing this province. We've introduced one single health authority, treating our health system as one entity in this province, which will allow us to allow mobility of workers, allow us to maximize the value of the money being spent on that. Today we invested in young Nova Scotians and a public education system. For far too long the other two Parties believed you threw money at economic development. The fact

of the matter is we've cleared up the structural challenges inside of government and we're going to allow the private sector to drive job growth, just as it should be.

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

PREM.: HEALTH & WELLNESS FUNDING - ADEQUACY

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, over the past year we've seen quite a bit of turmoil in health care in this province. This government was busy picking fights with health care workers while home care wait-lists grew by 80 per cent. We have record high waits for long-term care, ICU beds have closed, nurses have to be flown in from out of province, ERs are overcrowded and closed. Well, this budget does nothing in terms of a prescription to address any of those problems. My question to the Premier is this, with less than 1 per cent funding increase for the Department of Health and Wellness, I want to ask the Premier what is he going to cut next to maintain this very unrealistic budget plan?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question and I want to congratulate the Minister of Health and Wellness for doing a tremendous job. In these most challenging times, the Minister of Health and Wellness continued to control his budget, unlike previous Ministers of Health. He's investing in orthopaedic surgeries wait-lists to ensure that more Nova Scotians get that surgery on time. He's putting more money in home support; he's allowing more money to ensure that Nova Scotians get an opportunity to stay in their house longer. Just imagine what this government could have done if that government hadn't capitulated and given away \$700 million in unrealistic wage increases. We could have \$200 million more to invest in health care and Nova Scotians.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is just being silly when he talks about giving away money - giving away money to health care providers who provide the care to patients in this province. This budget today shows an increase overall in health care spending of only 0.8 per cent, which means \$33 million. That government has invested more in the Yarmouth ferry than they're putting into the health care system in Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. I'll ask the honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party to get on with the question and also to retract the term "silly" in reference to the honourable Premier. That is an unparliamentary term. The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I certainly apologize for calling the Premier silly. I want to ask what it will take for this Premier and this government to understand what is really needed, realistically, to provide quality health care to the people of Nova Scotia where and when they need it.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, there isn't a single Nova Scotian who believes throwing more money at any of the problems facing this province is the solution. We have tried that for far too long. Let me be clear. We're being fair to everyone who works across government, everyone who delivers services to Nova Scotians. Every Nova Scotian is going to have to be part of this journey of getting our province back to fiscal health.

Just imagine if we had wage increases that kept pace to the growth in our economy instead of exceeding it at the rate the former government did. It would be \$200 million we could have in this House to invest in Nova Scotians, to provide the kind of tax breaks the other side of the House is looking for. It's about showing leadership and it's about following and spending the money that you have, not spending future growth until you earn it.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, from all the havoc Nova Scotians have had to put up with in the health care system since this government came to power, now with this budget, they will have to put up with a great deal more as they see patient care continuing to deteriorate. I want to ask the Premier, when will he admit his distraction with his non-health care plan has resulted in a crisis in health care in this province?

THE PREMIER: I couldn't disagree more with the Leader of the New Democratic Party. I want to remind her of the investments we paid in orthopaedic wait times. It was a \$2 million investment. I want to talk about the \$3.7 million that we are investing in home care, not to mention the supports that we are providing to keep people in their homes longer. We're continuing to invest in the things that matter to Nova Scotians in a sustainable way, one that lives within our means.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

FIN. & TREASURY BD.: NAT. RES. - REVENUE GENERATION

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. Nova Scotians want good jobs here in Nova Scotia. The Ivany report highlighted the importance of natural resources to the Nova Scotia economy. Today's budget appears to do nothing to encourage resource development in the province, so I'm left to ask the minister today, what role does the minister see for natural resources to generate government revenues?

HON. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to answer that question from the member opposite. There is tremendous news in today's budget about natural resources. The move to take inspection and enforcement activities out of the Department of Natural Resources, along with Agriculture and Fisheries and other departments, and centralize them will mean that the department will focus solely on the development of the industry, solely on supporting growth, helping to find innovation, helping those sectors to

grow and prosper and hire more people in this province. They will not have the policing side of that issue.

MR. HOUSTON: I thank the minister for that answer. I turn my attention to our natural gas revenues. The Ivany report calls on the government to put in place a comprehensive development plan by the end of this year - by the end of 2015. We know that the government banned onshore gas development, and today we know the dramatic drop in offshore royalty revenues from \$40 million down to \$19 million. We can see that significant drop.

My question for the minister is, what is the government's plan for sustainable resource development and the much-needed jobs that go with it?

MS. WHALEN: Turning to the Energy Department, essentially, is what you're asking about in the offshore oil development. I said in my speech there are two large commitments made here by two different groups of oil companies, \$1 billion each for exploration, seismic, and geoscience work. That will make a huge difference, exactly. BP and Shell are both committed to this province. (Applause)

We have to, of course, hope that that goes well. The decrease in revenue from this year is about our existing fields. They have taken a hit, but we have to look forward. We've got great things in the future.

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

PREM.: FILM/TV/MEDIA IND. - CUTS EXPLAIN

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, today, companies in the film, television, and digital media industry were hit with a 75 per cent tax increase. To make matters worse, the government also eliminated Film and Creative Industries Nova Scotia, an organization whose mandate was to promote and grow our film industry. As a result of these more than \$20 million in cuts to our creative community, over 2,000 jobs province-wide are now at risk.

My question for the Premier, could he please explain why he is risking Nova Scotia's successful film, television, and digital media industry?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I want to thank all members and those Nova Scotians who continue to give advice to government in the preparation for the budget. I am pleased to say that the Film Industry Tax Credit is in place in this province.

What has changed, Mr. Speaker, is that it was a refundable tax credit where they got 100 per cent of the money, whether they pay taxes in this province. What we've

changed is that 25 per cent of it is here. The fact of the matter is that the other 75 per cent is there if you pay taxes in this province. All we're asking for is to pay your taxes - we'd be more than happy to give you the credit.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, today following the minister's budget, Marc Almon, a very well-known film producer, said that a stake had been driven through the heart of the Nova Scotia film industry with this budget.

My question to the Premier is, why on Earth did he refuse to consult with the Nova Scotia film industry before making such a terrible decision that will put at risk many jobs in our province and cost us literally thousands - millions - of dollars?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question, and I want to thank all those Nova Scotians who continue to work in this province, continue to drive economic growth and continue to provide . . .

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: You're driving it away.

THE PREMIER: I'm looking forward to answering the question from the member for Chester-St. Margaret's when she gets up and asks me one, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking forward to that.

The fact of the matter is that tax credit is still in place. All we're asking is that you pay taxes in Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

ENVIRON. - NORTHERN PULP: DEPT. IA - CONSULTANT CONFIRM

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Environment. The deadline for Northern Pulp to file an appeal on the department's industrial approval has approached. Over the last couple of months, the minister has been unwilling to share with the mill the background information on which his department wrote the industrial approval, leaving the mill in the dark on how a number of requirements were reached. Many people in Pictou County are wondering why the department is being so secretive and questioning whether the department had the proper expertise to draft an industrial approval with the conditions it has.

My question for the minister is, did the minister hire a consultant to help draft the industrial approval? If so, how much did it cost?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. It's clear that the constituents, that for the people of Nova Scotia, particularly from his riding and the area of Pictou - this is a question of interest and concern.

I guess the first thing is, I am struggling with the premise of the first question, suggesting that I've been unwilling or secretive in some form in engaging with the mill or the general public with respect to how we came to the position that we did with the industrial approval that went out the door. I'm struggling with that because this was the most open and transparent process. Staff engaged, as well as senior members, deputy, with mill officials and the public in creating this IA. Thank you.

MR. HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, the minister need not struggle with the question of transparency when he is asked a simple question of whether or not he hired a consultant. You heard his answer - nothing to do with whether or not he hired a consultant.

I'll ask another question for the minister today. Though the minister has been largely silent on this issue, it will fall back in his hands to decide whether or not any appeal that is launched goes forward. It will be hard for those involved not to wonder if the minister has a conflict of interest in making the decision, after his department issued the document to begin with.

My question for the minister is, does the minister really feel that going through a lengthy appeal process is a better option than sitting down with the mill and sharing the background information to come up with a solution?

MR. DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the member opposite that I didn't get to answer the question in advance but I believe the members from the other side of the House raised previous points of order with respect to the length of time we take to answer our questions. I'm trying to adhere to the Rules of the House.

To answer that question - no, I didn't hire a consultant, but we did rely on information from various sources including consultants, including the mill and the general public, and the expertise that exists within the Department of Environment. With respect to the second portion of the question, with the work we're doing, it has been very open and transparent and if the member opposite is wondering whether we should go through, I'm certainly happy to hear from the member opposite what he wants to do in this situation.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

**HEALTH & WELLNESS: CONTINUING CARE PLAN
- DENTAL ASSOC. RECOMMENDATIONS**

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, poor oral health care drastically affects a senior's quality of life and their overall health. This issue is particularly troublesome given the challenges of delivering oral health care to those living in long-term care facilities. The Canadian Dental Association has released a number of recommendations to help seniors maintain good oral health. They recommend an oral

health screening be performed upon admission, annual examinations by dentists, and suitable infrastructure to support the appropriate delivery of needed dental care.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is, will the recommendations by the dental association be included in the minister's soon-to-be updated continuing care plan and in the service standards for long-term care delivery?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, a former Minister of Health and Wellness, asks an excellent question around seniors' dental care. We will now move on to Phase II of a provincial strategy as well as in the continuing care update. This is one of those areas that will most likely be addressed in a comprehensive provincial strategy around oral health care.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I forgot to table the recommendations from the dental association. Oral health challenges are a sign of the times as a growing percentage of our senior population has kept more of their natural teeth than in the past. Not only is this a challenge in long-term care facilities, it's also a growing issue for seniors to remain in their homes. As we know, dental care can be very expensive and sometimes unattainable for those folks.

The dental association recommends that caregivers be trained to recognize the role that oral health care plays in their overall health. My question again is, does the minister consider this a priority and has he made sure that care policies reflect the need to address oral health in seniors?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, this is a very significant area both for the young members of our population as well as our seniors. If the previous government had consulted with the dental association, we would have been well underway with a comprehensive oral program in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

AGRIC.: AGRI-RECOVERY PROCESS - UPDATE

MR. CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, my question through you will be to the Minister of Agriculture. The minister would be aware, as would many others, that last summer there was a significant tropical storm, Arthur, which caused considerable damage in the apple industry. I know the minister has been contacted, as have other levels of government, to initiate a process of AgriRecovery. I wonder if the minister could update us this afternoon on where that stands.

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important topic for the apple producers in the province, and fire blight has been introduced to the province as a result of the hurricane last year. On February 2015 we approached the AgriRecovery program and

did start to work with the federal government and take another step so far to address this issue in the industry.

MR. PORTER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that answer. I would just follow that up with a comment around knowing the timing being very important, that the apple industry is an important piece of our economic development and so on in this province.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Hants West has the floor.

MR. PORTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the minister, I would ask the time frame for the process to be initiated - if he could speak to that based on the importance of this industry and the fact that the apple industry is already well underway and working toward this year's production.

MR. COLWELL: To give the honourable member a more accurate update - indeed we did have a survey that's going to go out, but it had to be previewed by Ottawa and that has already been completed. As of yesterday, Perennia has held some programs around how you treat and deal with fire blight, and later this month we're going to have a mitigation sheet provided to the industry by Perennia. And we've had close to - between two workshops we've had on this we've had over 105 participants, so we're well on the way to addressing this issue. It is a serious issue, but indeed we have to help the industry in every way we can.

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

LAE: TUITION CAP - REMOVAL

HON. MAUREEN MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

Patients, health care providers, film industry folks are not the only casualties in this budget. Nova Scotia students learned today the 3 per cent cap on tuition increases has been removed for this year. Administration in universities is now free to raise tuition to whatever level they decide, and students will have to shoulder that burden.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, how is this particular measure in the budget acceptable?

HON. KELLY REGAN: I would like to thank the honourable member for the question. I know that students and families who are struggling with the cost of education, for them any increase is stressful, and it wasn't a decision made lightly. When tuition was frozen a number of years ago some of the universities were charging far more than others

for certain programs and the result is every year, when there was a 3 per cent increase, that disparity was exacerbated. This change will be brought in to assist those universities that have in fact seen a greater disparity over the number of years.

MS. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, with the astronomical increase in administration in universities over the past number of years, with the large six-figure salaries one would have thought the universities should have first been asked to look at their own administration, like has been done in the health care system, but apparently that's not the case.

This government is looking to the students who already carry a disproportionate level of debt as they go out into the labour force and is one of the reasons why we end up saying farewell to Nova Scotia to so many of our students.

I want to ask the minister, will she tell this House where in the consultation that she did around the province this was recommended as one of the measures that the government should take with respect to university tuition?

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to let the honourable member know that in the recent, Canadian Postsecondary Performance: Impact 2015, report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Nova Scotia was ranked number one in the country for its access to higher education - and I'll table the report.

And if the former minister was so concerned about the astronomical salaries at university administration of course she could have done something to deal with it then. I can guarantee, in fact (Interruption) I'm sorry, does the member for Chester-St. Margaret's have something she'd like to say?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education has the floor.

MS. REGAN: I would like to remind the honourable member that I will be bringing in accountability legislation for universities later this session.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

ENERGY - SUPPLY CHAIN: OPPORTUNITIES - DETAILS

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy. Deep Panuke has provided Nova Scotians millions of person hours of employment over the life of the project. It has been a great source of employment for people in the energy industry supply chain. Now, with project production slowing, these employment opportunities are in jeopardy.

Bearing in mind that full-scale production for the BP and Shell project is years away, my question for the minister is, what is the minister doing to secure new opportunities for the province's energy supply chain?

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the department, as is done on an almost annual basis, puts out calls for bids for some of the parcels on our offshore. That will be done. As well, we encourage companies that want to come and explore in Nova Scotia.

As the member indicated, we're very excited by the opportunities with Shell beginning their exploratory work this summer, and certainly look forward to seeing the results of that.

Mr. Speaker, as always, the Department of Energy strives to promote our offshore industry and to encourage private companies to come and make investments in our province.

MR. HOUSTON: One way to ease the negative employment pressures from Deep Panuke's slowdown is to try to find new ways to create jobs in the short term for the energy industry. I have an idea for the minister: developing our onshore resources might just be the way to do that.

My question for the minister is, can we expect the minister to review his ban on fracking that was put in place on onshore natural gas development, and when can we expect that review to happen?

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, part of the success we've had in our offshore has been with the work that was done by previous governments and with their support - the Play Fairway Analysis that was done. We are doing the same thing with our onshore and trying to see exactly where the potential deposits or potential opportunities for energy work to be done on our onshore are.

It's very important that we be able to have the science behind us to share with all interested parties as to where these hydrocarbons or others may be located in our province. I know that the Leader of the Official Opposition believes in the Jed Clampett approach of trying to find hydrocarbons in our province. We'd rather rely on science.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

EECD - EQUITY EDUC. PROG.: GAELIC - OMISSION EXPLAIN

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Id-wowersht. Tha sinn uile a' tuigsinn gu bheil luach anns gach cànan agus dualchas 's a' mhór-roinn seo agus gu bheil iad gu buannachd nan Ùr-Albannach uile.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that all languages and cultures in this province have value and that they greatly benefit Nova Scotians.

My question to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is, in January the minister released an action plan. One of the stated goals is to encourage more cultural diversity in our schools, and that included a teacher recruitment campaign to attract Acadian, African Nova Scotian, and Mi'kmaq teachers.

There is no mention of Gaelic teachers. Mr. Speaker, there's also no mention of Gaelic in the equity education program. Why was Gaelic not included?

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I will be checking Hansard to ensure that the member was not speaking ill of the minister as he first got up. (Laughter)

It is true that in our action plan we did acknowledge the importance of the language, culture, and history of African Nova Scotian, Gaelic, Acadian, and Mi'kmaq communities in our province and of the peoples we have here. When we looked at the recruitment, as I have indicated, we looked at identifying three of those - an omission. The Gaelic should have been there. No problem.

MR. MACMASTER: Fhir-labhairt, I can tell the minister that I would never speak ill of her.

The report highlights the need to encourage cultural awareness, and I appreciate the minister's comments in our school system. One school I've heard of recently that makes me very proud is in Whycomagh. They are actually teaching four languages under one roof there, Mr. Speaker. Nach eil sinn uamhasach math?

This cannot be done if we leave out cultures that are important to our province. The minister has agreed, I think, to revisit this omission, so in recognizing that we've achieved the goal here, I'm not going to ask a further question.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's.

PREM. - CHILDREN'S DENTAL COVERAGE PROG.: SUSPENSION - DETAILS

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said that his government was not cutting the dental coverage program for children up to age 17, as he committed in the election, along with a lot of other things that have not been done. Immediately after Question Period the Health and Wellness Minister revealed to reporters that he had in fact suspended the program of extending coverage to children up to age 17.

Certainly he did not seem to have informed the Premier of this decision. Can the Premier explain why his minister didn't inform him that he cut a program that he made a commitment and a promise to the people of Nova Scotia during the election?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable member for the question. Yesterday I said in this House, and answered the question, that we have not cut the dental program, Mr. Speaker, March 31st in this province every young Nova Scotian who was covered by that program is covered by it today.

What the minister talked about is an expansion of that program, and I want to explain the difference between a cut and expansion. A cut is what they did to Nova Scotia classrooms in last four years; an expansion is the investment we're making in the now.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I should talk to the Premier about the difference between a broken promise and a commitment over and over and over again in the election that it's going to be expanded to 17 years of age.

Yesterday when the Minister of Health and Wellness announced that he had cut the youth dental care program, he also announced that he had struck a secret review committee to look at the program. I find it interesting, with this most open and transparent government that they have this secret review committee.

Can the Premier tell Nova Scotians when his Minister of Health and Wellness struck this secret review panel, what the secret review panel is doing, and who sits on the secret review panel?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, a commitment is reinvesting the \$65 million back into education that we said we were going to do. (Applause)

A commitment is restructuring health care under one board like we said we would do; a commitment is continuing to get government out of the way and let the private sector grow the economy; and, Mr. Speaker, a broken promise is raising the HST from 13 to 15 per cent. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

TIR - PAVING: REMOTE REGION IDENTIFICATION - MIN. STANCE

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. Northern Inverness County was identified by the previous government as a remote region for paving. Each year they would pick three areas, they would spend about \$3 million in each area, the goal to pave about 30 kilometres in those remote regions.

The plant that was established by the previous government was based on an identified need in remote areas. Does the minister still believe that that need exists?

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: First and foremost I certainly still believe that we made the right decision to scrap the government paving plant that wasn't in the best interest of Nova Scotia taxpayers, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

Secondly, the member and I - and many members in this House - have had conversations about rural Nova Scotia and all regions of Nova Scotia, but the reality is that we simply have an infrastructure deficit. The amount of money we spend is significant, but it's nowhere near enough to cover the replenishing and the replacement and the rebuilding of the 23,000 kilometres that we have in this province. Certainly in rural Nova Scotia, Inverness, and northern Cape Breton, no exception - there are needs, Mr. Speaker. We have our processes, we have our staff on the group who do assessments, set priorities, and we do the best to fill those on an annual basis.

MR. MACMASTER: I guess I'm hearing from the minister that he does believe that the need exists.

Mr. Speaker, the only paving in Inverness in the five-year plan that is put out by government each year is on main routes like Highway No. 105 and Route 19, Route 395, and there is a section on the Strathlorne-Scottsville Road, but largely there is nothing planned for secondary roads.

Can the minister tell us what this government's plan is for people in Inverness County who are driving on these roads that have been established, in the past, as having a need to be paved in an area that is considered remote, that being northern Inverness County?

MR. MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I have the sense that I'm going to get the invitation for the annual Inverness road tour; I'm sure the member and I will look forward to that. But the reality is that the member has a very good working relationship with our staff on the ground, with Steve MacDonald and the other officials there with TIR. At the end of the day, we look at what is required, obviously volumes, the amount of commercial activity, those important tourism routes which certainly exist in Inverness and in many areas in the province.

The member would know those priorities are set locally. It's not just about those capital plan investments and items that are listed, it is also about the local road which is in the RIM budget and other budgets. I know the member will continue to work closely with Steve and we'll have conversations about what that member's priorities are for the people he represents. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

NAT. RES.: ENDANGERED SPECIES - SUSTAINABILITY ENSURE

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. A report co-authored by Dal Law students shows that the department is not fulfilling its legal obligations with respect to protecting endangered species in Nova Scotia. I'll table that. Recovery plans are passed, too, for more than 20 endangered species. Some of these recovery plans are 13 years late. Recovery plans that have been completed are required to be evaluated every five years and DNR has yet to evaluate the moose recovery plan since releasing it in 2007. Nova Scotia had enough moose to support a hunt on the mainland until 1981. Bob Bancroft, a wildlife biologist, wrote in *The Chronicle Herald*, "Moose management and protection are provincial government responsibilities that have failed." I will table that.

My question to the minister is, will the minister commit to fulfilling his department's lawful requirement to ensure future sustainability of endangered species?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, absolutely.

MR. DUNN: Mr. Speaker, I'd love to say when but I'm still waiting for a walk along Melmerby Beach that he promised me a couple of years ago.

The report states if there's some reason that the law should be changed, that's one thing, but to simply not fulfill their legal obligation is obviously not acceptable for a government. The Department of Natural Resources estimates that the mainland moose population has declined more than 85 per cent. Hunting and wildlife organizations have been doing their part to combat poaching but the department needs to show more leadership by addressing the other factors associated with the population decline.

A spokesperson for the department said response to the report would be drafted once it was reviewed and nearly two months have passed. My question to the minister is, has the minister completed his response and will the minister table it in the House today?

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protection of our mainland moose, it is a priority for our department. Our policies across the board when it comes to forestry, economic development on any of our Crown lands, the policies we have in place are there to support our moose as best we can. There are set backs and we work closely with our wildlife biologists to ensure we are doing our very best. Thank you.

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

**HEALTH & WELLNESS: MALPRACTICE INSURANCE PMTS.
- GOV'T. PERCENTAGE**

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, last week medical specialists in Nova Scotia were informed their malpractice insurance won't be covered by the government this year in the same way it has been covered in the past. This has many specialists across our province, especially in rural communities, worried they won't be able to afford to continue working in Nova Scotia. We've received some mixed messages from the minister on this issue so I'd like to ask the minister to clarify, what percentage of medical malpractice fees does the government plan to cover this year?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, in this area of the CMPA fees, they have been at 90 per cent. We are currently in negotiations and members of the obstetric-gynecology area in particular who pay some of the highest malpractice fees in the province know that there would also be coverage from the start of this particular year through, once the agreement is signed.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping what the minister is saying is that he will continue to cover the malpractice insurance. Just to be very clear, we're seeing fees going from about \$21,000 to over \$50,000 for these specialists and many of them live in rural communities and provide care in rural communities.

We know that there's a negotiation going on, but that could take some time, probably over a year, to come to an agreement. Will the minister commit today that these specialists will continue to get the support until the end of an agreement that is made with the government?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken with a number of the obstetricians/gynecologists in the province. When you get fees that increase that dramatically, especially for those who work part-time and for our GPs, it is indeed of great concern. I know it is an issue that Doctors Nova Scotia as well will be dealing with in the next day or two. We hope to get a full resolution to this issue.

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

LAE - OH&S REGS.: DRAFTING - CONSULTATIONS

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. In February, the department decided to stop pushing through Phase II of the Workplace Health and Safety Regulations. Small business and employers throughout Nova Scotia told the department loudly and clearly that these regulations are too complicated and would not work, something raised by my colleague from Pictou Centre last year in the Legislature. The way the department has bungled the process has created

significant delays and shows how out-of-touch the government is with small businesses in the province.

The department produced this large and complicated set of regulations and then proceeded to consult employers after the fact. Why didn't the department work with employers in drafting these regulations in the first place?

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this was produced in consultation. The Workplace Safety Strategy was part of a large consultation. I do appreciate the work that was done by the member for Pictou Centre in bringing the matter to my attention. Thank you.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, we just heard the kind of limited resources that are in government. The department should allocate resources to the best possible use to achieve the best possible outcomes to the province. During this process, the department created significant confusion and apprehension for employees and employers of the province. Now we appear to be back to square one.

My question to the minister, how long did it take the department to draft the flawed Phase II regulations? Could the minister provide the cost to the taxpayers of Nova Scotia of the department's mismanagement of this file?

MS. REGAN: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the comments by the honourable member, I do reject his characterization of those particular regulations. I will endeavour to get him an accurate figure on that. I believe it was in the \$60,000 range.

What we heard from business was that they felt that we were moving too quickly on this particular issue. We listened to business, and I view that as a success. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

FIN. & TREASURY BD. - FILM & TV TAX CREDIT: CUTS - DECISION TIME FRAME

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, my first question today is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board regarding the film and television tax credits. We've now heard what the government is planning to do. I have to say that in talking with my peers in the industry, everybody is devastated by this decision of this government. They thought it was going to be bad, but they didn't know how bad. They feel that they were lied to by the government, who promised they would keep the television tax credit for the next five years.

My question for the minister is, when did they decide they were going to gut the film and television tax credit as they have done? Was it lately or did they know this all along?

HON. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important that we start by stating the fact that the film credit remains, the criteria remain. The maximum amount you could ask for is 65 per cent of labour, if you are eligible. None of those criteria have changed. The difference is how it will be paid out. That's the one difference.

We're asking that the industry look at this, move forward with us, and find ways to remain vibrant and here in the province.

MS. ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her answer. I know it's very difficult being a minister in a government, especially a majority government where you need to toe the line and do whatever you are told to do. However, I also know she understands the importance of this industry to Nova Scotia. What I don't think she understands is that this is going to devastate the industry.

My next question is for the Premier. That is, does the Premier actually understand why the Film Industry Tax Credit is set up the way it is? Because right now, Nova Scotia is again at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to film tax credits in Canada. Ontario, for instance, has a 35 per cent tax credit plus stackables on top of that. We are now at the bottom of the list and that means our productions are going to go elsewhere.

How does the Premier suggest they're going to actually grow our creative economy in this environment?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I again want to echo what the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board says. The criteria for the Film Industry Tax Credit have not changed. You're still eligible for a 50 per cent tax credit and 65 per cent in certain conditions.

The fact of the matter is, in this province, how it's delivered has changed. Twenty-five per cent of it is - it's like the former government used to say, a forgivable loan; we used to call those grants. This is not a tax credit; it's a non-refundable tax credit. We put it out the door without anyone paying taxes. Do they actually think that we provide services to Nova Scotia without taxable income? What do they tell to autistic children? We don't have any money to invest in you because we're giving non-forgivable grants? What do they tell people on wait-lists? We don't have any money because we're giving non-forgivable grants? The fact of the matter is, we've continued to invest in these tax credits (Interruptions)

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

THE PREMIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is the Film Industry Tax Credit still exists in this province. We're going to continue to move forward. I'm very proud of the fact that we've created another fund for the creative economy that will be broader.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers has expired.

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During Question Period today, the Minister of Energy referred to our policy on onshore gas development as the Jed Clampett approach. That actually does raise a very important question of order, because as you well know, Jed Clampett was a very rich man who lived in a big mansion and he had a "cement pond", as you may recall. Had Jed Clampett lived in the Province of Nova Scotia under that minister and this government, he would be poor indeed because his source of income would be banned. I ask the minister to retract his remarks.

MR. SPEAKER: That's not a point of order. That's a disagreement of television facts.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. In the east gallery today we are joined by former MLA for Timberlea-Prospect and former Cabinet Minister, the Honourable Bruce Holland. I ask that the House join me in giving him a warm welcome. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The House will now take a two-minute recess.

[3:08 p.m. The House recessed.]

[3:12 p.m. The House reconvened.]

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

[GOVERNMENT BUSINESS]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 80.

Bill No. 80 - House of Assembly Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 80, the House of Assembly Act, be now read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 80. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 82.

Bill No. 82 - Change of Name Act and Vital Statistics Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia.

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 82, an Act to Amend Chapter 66 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Change of Name Act, and Chapter 494 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Vital Statistics Act, be read for a second time.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to these amendments. In last Fall's House session a petition signed by over 600 Nova Scotians who want to see a change to the Nova Scotia Vital Statistics Act was tabled in the Legislature by my colleague, the member for Halifax Chebucto. I want to thank him for his efforts and support on this particular bill.

The Act currently requires you to confirm that you had sex reassignment surgery in order to change the sex on a birth certificate. Last Fall I made a commitment to eliminate this requirement and today I am delivering on that promise.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce amendments to the Vital Statistics Act that remove the requirement for Nova Scotians to have sex reassignment surgery to change the sex designation on the birth certificate. I'm also introducing an amendment to the Change of Name Act to eliminate the requirement for parental consent for minors who are 16 to 18, to align with the changes to the Vital Statistics Act.

As Nova Scotians we respect human dignity and we expect to be treated in a respectful, non-judgmental manner when we shop, go to the movies, show our driver's licence to a police officer, or present ID to enter a drinking establishment. Constantly proving one's status is not something that many Nova Scotians have to face on a daily basis; every day transgender individuals have to open themselves up to the judgment of others in a way that most of us cannot understand. Imagine if you entered a store, just like all of us do every day, and you had to present an identification to make a purchase. Now, imagine you're an individual who identifies with a gender that is different than what's stated on your ID card.

The act is routine to us, yet transgender individuals may experience panic, fear, vulnerability at what the store owner may think or how they might react to the difference. Anxiety that their IDs don't match who they are is a reality for transgender Nova Scotians. Some people do not identify with any or all of the aspects of genders assigned to them at birth.

These amendments won't just change the sex on a birth certificate, this will provide needed peace of mind and confidence to transgender Nova Scotians. We take gender equity seriously and we're taking steps to ensure this is reflected in our laws. During my policing career I often worked with vulnerable youth. As we all know, because we've all been teenagers, life is full of challenges for our youth. I've seen first-hand the challenges that transgender youth can face, and how these can make them vulnerable and at serious risk. That is why anything we can do as a government to ensure this doesn't happen is so important. We need to do what we can to remove the challenges and empower our youth to reach their full potential.

These amendments aren't just helping youth, they're helping transgender Nova Scotians of all ages. Transgender people are still disadvantaged as a demographic. They are likely to experience harassment because of their gender status, and we need to make sure that all Nova Scotians are free from discrimination, and this change is a step in the right direction. (Applause)

Amendments to the Vital Statistics Act include: eliminating the requirement for sex reassignment surgery to change the sex designation on a birth certificate; requiring a self-declaration from the applicant stating they have assumed identity with and intend to live in a gender identity that corresponds with the desired sex designation; requiring a letter of support from a person with a professional designation, as defined in regulations, such as a doctor, a nurse, a social worker, or a psychologist; and requiring minors under 16 to have parental consent. The letter of support must be from a doctor or psychologist who has treated or evaluated the applicant and must include a professional opinion that the minor has the capacity to understand the impacts of the decision. The amendment under the Change of Name Act will reduce the age requirement for parental consent to age 15, to align with the Vital Statistics Act.

Most importantly, these amendments respond to concerns raised by the transgender community. Having a government-issued ID that doesn't reflect the person's true gender leaves them vulnerable to harassment and discrimination, be that when they travel, go to a bar or a movie. We are removing a significant barrier for the transgender community. I'm taking this action because it is the right thing to do to ensure that transgender Nova Scotians feel safe, secure, and proud of their identity and proud of their community. Transgender Nova Scotians can feel disrespect, discrimination, and violence most of us cannot understand, and if we can alleviate some of this risk by making these simple changes, then it is the right thing to do.

With that, I conclude my comments and look forward to listening to the comments of other members in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

MS. LENORE ZANN: It gives me pleasure to rise to my feet today to discuss this bill. I am very much in favour of it. I think it's a great bill and it's following along in what we set in motion as the NDP Government several years ago when we made it possible for amendments to the Human Rights Act that protect transgender people from discrimination. We did that in 2012, and we approved covering the cost for reassignment surgeries, also in 2012. I think it's great that now guidelines are being developed for schools and school boards to create a culture that is safe, respectful, and supportive of transgender and gender nonconforming students. I am very glad that we are committed to bring forward amendments for these new requirements to change the sex on a birth certificate during our session right now, our Spring session.

Mr. Speaker, when I first became an MLA in Truro, one of my first assignments was when a couple of people came into my office who needed to have their birth certificates found and they also needed their names changed. One young woman had been moved around from foster home to foster home and she basically lost her identity. She was having terrible trouble with some drugs and alcohol problems, and also abuse suffered in foster homes. She was a really lost soul. She didn't have any proof of who she was. She had no ID, and so I took it upon myself and my staff to help her try to find her identity, basically, and to help her get her life straightened out.

As an MLA in this House, I think these are the types of jobs and types of projects that really make us feel good about what we're doing. You know, when you can help make one person's life a little easier and a little better, and make them feel good about themselves, and especially being a woman and caring about women's issues and other women who are having trouble out there in the world, having trouble getting jobs, having troubles with their lives.

Again, identity is a very important thing for everybody. I managed to help this young woman get her life together. It took a long time. We even managed to get her name changed. She wanted to have her name changed because she had several different last names from all the different homes she had been in and she wanted to choose which name she wanted to go with for the rest of her life, and I helped her to do that.

However, then I had another person come into my office who was a gentleman who wanted to be a woman and felt that he is a woman. In fact she wanted a name change and was told by the Community Services Department that in fact it was impossible. She did not fit the requirements and could not have her name changed, but she felt that she was a woman. She dressed like a woman; she was waiting for surgery and wanted to be assigned and so I felt that there was a discrepancy here and some injustice was being done, also that it was discriminatory in the attitude between one person versus the other. Who deserves to have their name change paid for when they are income assistance and who doesn't?

Again we fought long and hard and we managed to get permission to change this person's name and now she has a female name and is really proud of herself because she can actually have the name that she identifies with.

Again these are the types of things that I think are new for some people in not just Nova Scotia but around the world. Here in Nova Scotia I think it's new, the whole idea of gender being on a whole - a line, that there are many different types of genders and a mixture of genders. In fact for most people, you have your mother and your father inside of you and so some people can identify more with one than the other, and some people have both.

One of the things that I am the most proud of doing in my six years in government is helping people like this to find themselves.

My other experience with this first began when I was a young actor coming up the ranks, living in Toronto, partly because there was no film work or television work in Nova Scotia, so I had to go to Toronto. One of my very first friends - one of my very first best friends - in the industry was a person named Craig Russell.

People in the industry would remember him, but his name has - he is not talked about as much anymore. He was a female impersonator, and he did a movie called *Outrageous*. Then he did a second movie called *Too Outrageous*. Craig always prided himself, because he was a man, but he said he had 16 different women trapped inside him. So he never wanted to have a sex-change operation, but he said, you try living with 16 different women trapped inside you and see how you do in society.

He used it to his advantage because he became - he was a hairstylist in Toronto, but he loved many famous women, including Mae West. Mae West was his hero, and he became the president of the Mae West fan club of Canada. He was 19 years old at the time,

and he wrote to Mae West in Hollywood and kept her abreast of what he was doing for her, all the meetings he was having, and things like this in her honour. He finally asked her - he would love to be able to work for her.

Mae West, after a year or two of hearing from this young man, Craig Russell, said, well, if I put you on a bus, if I send you a bus ticket to Hollywood and you get on the bus, we'll be waiting for you at the end, and I'll give you a job as my personal assistant. So young Craig Russell from Toronto, Ontario, got on a Greyhound bus and ended up in Hollywood for the first time, where he was Mae West's personal assistant. He got to talk to people like Marlene Dietrich, all kinds of people on the phone who would call her and come to visit her.

At the time she was older, and she had a stable of young men who were very handsome, who came and went around her pool and used her pool. She just encouraged them to come around. It helped her image, I am sure, and it also was part of who she was. She identified herself as one of the first early sex symbols, really, of North America, and the gay community loved her because she got it. She really got it at a time when a lot of people didn't. She was a Vaudeville star. She worked with many different types of people on the circuit, and she was welcoming. She was like the Liz Taylor of her day, where she welcomed and accepted and encouraged people to be themselves.

Young Craig Russell actually learned how to impersonate Mae. She was one of his first impersonations. Then he went on from there to learn how to do Marlene Dietrich, he did Barbra Streisand, he did Janis Joplin, he did Liza Minnelli, he did a whole lot of them. By the time I met him, he was already a movie star and he had done shows at the Lincoln Center. He was one of the first people in Canada who got the name out for transgender people, for female impersonators, to start to give them some dignity and to make them proud of themselves and proud of who they were and proud of coming out on Gay Pride Day and shouting out and saying, I am who I am and I am proud of it.

I met him when I was 20. I had just done the Marilyn Monroe musical *Hey Marilyn* that I starred in in Edmonton, and I had done my first film, *Hounds of Notre Dame*, in Wilcox, Saskatchewan. I met him at the Toronto ACTRA film awards, where he had been hired to play Judy Garland - that was one of his characters. He was playing Judy Garland at this awards ceremony, and they had asked me to come in and play Marilyn Monroe.

At the very first rehearsal that we did for the awards ceremony, I showed up, and they announced that I was there. I heard this voice from the front of the house going, where is she? Let me see this girl who can play Marilyn Monroe. She's my competition and I want to look her in the eyes.

Up came Craig, and he had a feather boa on and he had a bunch of different things on, I think he had his Mae West wig on and he had his nails and some dark glasses in the

theatre, very eccentric and wonderful. So I said, hi, I'm Lenore and I play Marilyn. I don't dress like Marilyn, I don't put the makeup on in my real life, but yes, I play Marilyn.

So we met, we sat down together, and he said I want to talk to you. I looked at him and I said, take your dark glasses off, I want to see your eyes. And he goes, why? And I said, well, Craig, I want to see your eyes because I want to know who you are. I don't want to meet Mae West. I don't want to meet Judy Garland. I don't want to meet any of your 16 women who are trapped inside you. I want to meet you, because you're the one that's important.

He took off his glasses, very tentatively, timidly, and he looked me in the eyes. And he had these beautiful blue eyes. I said, oh my God, you have the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. He said, really? I said, yeah, you're beautiful. You're a handsome man and you're a beautiful woman, and you've got the best legs I've ever seen.

He changed. He became softer. He became himself and he felt totally accepted by me. We became best friends from then on. He actually said he was never going to play Marilyn Monroe ever again because he felt that I played her better - and he never did touch Marilyn Monroe ever again. But he had me to his shows and he had me come and visit him in Los Angeles, and then my first visit to Hollywood was to visit him.

As I was taken to all the different clubs and shows in Hollywood where he was - I mean, he was a star. He had a limousine. He had fur coats, mink coats. He had coats made for me and for him and we'd go to these different things. I mean, it was really fun for a young Nova Scotian woman to be feted and introduced to Hollywood in this way.

He also took me to the underbelly of Hollywood, where the gay clubs were just rife with life and pulsating with energy and enthusiasm and all kinds of young men and young women who were just starting to really appreciate who were they were and not be afraid to come out and talk about it.

One night, he did a show - and this relates to this bill, Mr. Speaker, because again, it talks about who people really are and their identity and how important this is. I saw the show. He was so good that night. People loved him. They threw roses on the stage. Backstage, he got buckets of roses sent. All kinds of people lined up wanting to see him, to tell him what a wonderful star he was, but he wouldn't come out of his dressing room.

I knocked on the door, and he went, who is it? I said, oh, it's Lenore, and he went, oh okay, well, come in. I came in and he had tears streaming down his face, black mascara all over the place, just in a mess. Then he threw himself at his dressing table and he said, oh my God, I can't do it anymore. I said, well, Craig, what's wrong? They love you out there. What's the problem? He went, they don't love me. They love them. They love her. They don't love me.

I said, no, Craig, you are each of these people. You are the essence of these people. You are underneath these people. The people out there who are clapping, they're clapping for you. They're not clapping for Barbra Streisand or Mae West or any of these people. They love you, and I love you. You are a special and unique and talented human being and you need to start to love yourself.

I know I've talked about this theme in this House before when it comes to mental health issues, things like this, but I think that that is really important for our society as a whole, for people who are struggling with their identity, for people who are struggling with mental health issues, for people who are struggling with substance abuse issues. Until we learn that we can't fill the gaping hole inside of ourselves with outside things, with drugs or alcohol or the attention of others or fame or fortune or money or power - it doesn't make any difference. You can fill it up with all that stuff, and it will still be a black hole that is empty, that will never be filled.

The only thing that will fill it is your own self-acceptance, self-love, and stopping looking for approval from others. That was my lesson for him. Here I was, 20 years old; he was 36 or something. But the one thing that I've always had is an inner compass - what my colleague, the member for Queens-Shelburne would call a dead reckoning. It's a nautical term, but I relate to it, because without that dead reckoning, you're adrift at sea. You have nothing. You're just floating around, looking for what? Looking for yourself, looking for the purpose of life, looking for what?

I think we all need to realize that that dead reckoning is so important for each and every individual in our society, including ourselves here in this room.

I would just like to end on the note that helping our constituents and the people of Nova Scotia find their own identity and accept themselves, and for us to embrace them and celebrate them and give them all the encouragement we can to not be afraid to come out and be who they are and do it in the schools, do it right from day one, from Primary on, and encourage them to find out who they are - and to pass these kinds of laws that help them. That's what I'm here for, and that's why I'm proud of being an MLA in this government. With that I will take my place, and I do thank the government for this bill. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

MS. PATRICIA ARAB: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real honour to stand here today and speak on these extremely important amendments - amendments that may seem like simple and straightforward changes to a piece of legislation, but that are quite possibly some that I am the most proud of.

As you know, I'm a teacher. However, for the past eight years I've also been a guidance counsellor, working in mental health awareness and preventive measures, first

with elementary-age children, and then, for the last five years before entering politics, with high schoolers. I would help, or try to help, with every sort of problem imaginable, some simple and some more complex than I could ever comprehend. The one common thread that connected each of these many children, however, was the desire to just fit in, to be “normal.”

Any teen that doesn't fit the cultural mould we as a society subconsciously create for them faces unimaginable stress, anxiety, and even deep despair. Transgender children and youth are some of the most vulnerable of this group. That's why I'm so proud of these amendments. We as a province have an obligation to ease some of the burdens felt by these individuals. We as a society, though, also have to start changing how we define the mould for each other. We as a government cannot eliminate the harassment and discrimination felt and suffered by transgender people in our society, but we can certainly do our part to lessen them.

These amendments also address an issue that is faced by a much larger portion of our province, and that is the issue of accessibility - most specifically, the amendment that adds social workers to the list of professionals able to write a letter of support for transgender people. School is a constant in what can be the very unstable lives of young people, and unfortunately, it's still not always a guarantee. Social workers come into our schools. They are able to counsel our children on a regular basis, and sometimes they are the only professionals our young people have regular access to. This may seem like a minor detail, but it is really so very vital.

As a whole, these amendments return dignity to our transgender community. They remove one of the challenges faced by our youth. They ensure gender equity is reflected in our laws, and they strive to help empower them and, as my colleague has stated, allow them to reach their full potential.

Our transgender population is greater than the 600 names listed on the petition delivered to my colleague. I firmly believe that these changes will bring awareness to our province on the rights of this community, will help change our narrative on what we perceive to be “normal,” and most importantly, will give all of our transgender community hope. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, at the request of a transgender lady from Halifax Chebucto, Jessica Dempsey, I signed a petition calling on the province to make it easier for transgender Nova Scotians to change the sex designation on their birth certificate.

I have to say that when I first met Jessica, I had no idea what the meeting was about. As I sat and listened to her stories of trying to be self-identified, and listening to her

describe trying to go into a bar being herself with the wrong identification on the birth certificate, I couldn't believe this kind of discrimination was still in existence. I have to say that when I had this opportunity to bring this petition forward, I was honoured.

As an MLA, we don't get an opportunity sometimes to see an issue and see that issue all the way through, and that's what I have to commend my government on because we brought this issue to the table and right away it was dealt with. It's a pretty amazing thing to watch that process but also watch the transgender community and our government work together to draft this legislation so that everybody worked together to come at the end to an agreement where social workers are now part of this discussion, parents are now part of this discussion and creating a way safer environment for transgender folks in Nova Scotia. That, to me, is one of the most amazing things as being an MLA, to watch that process and be part of that process.

When we bring this bill forward and standing here today to discuss it, it's a huge honour because we're making great change for Nova Scotians and for people who have that right to be identified as who they want to be. You know those are things that are pretty amazing and I am honoured to be part of a Party that has done that.

The ability for a child who is under 16 who is struggling with their identity to have an ability and outlet, through their education process, through a social worker, is also pretty neat because sometimes their safe environment may not be at home where they have a home environment where they don't understand, where this child can self-identify as a transgender and go to the school and ask for help and they can get help, that's pretty special.

By that we become one of the leaders in Canada in this kind of legislation and that's even cooler because that shows that Nova Scotia is ahead of the game on these issues. To me, that is so instrumental in making Nova Scotia thrive and become a better place of equality.

The amendment and the change of the name of the Act will reduce the age requirement and I just spoke a bit about that. I guess I need to address that again because when I spoke to the minister about this and there was some discussion about why, where are children most vulnerable - well when they are under the age of 16. At that age, when they are sitting there talking and trying to figure themselves, society has a lot of strains on them. There is cyberbullying, there is all these things that we can't really understand because we're not in their situation and not in their place, in their shoes, so having the ability to access a social worker is amazing.

When I got to deliver that petition, the operating clause, the petition is to make it easier for transgender citizens of Nova Scotia to change their legal sex designation on birth certificates, I was honoured to put my name to that. With that I am going to take my place because I want to keep it short but I wanted to acknowledge that this is the right thing for Nova Scotians.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. JOANNE BERNARD: Mr. Speaker, one of my assistants had prepared notes for me to speak to this but this is something that is personal to me. It's personal to me as an MLA, it's personal to me as a minister but most importantly it's personal to me because I have experienced and still do experience homophobia very much in society.

I don't get attacked for the decisions I make. I don't get attacked for the fact that I am a woman. What I do get attacked for, in my constituency office, at my caucus office, outside in the Legislature as late as last week, with vile comments about something that is very personal to me is the fact that I am married to a woman and I am openly gay.

When this legislation came forward, I experienced homophobia but of course comfortable in my gender, comfortable in my sexual orientation, I've never experienced transphobia but I have many people in my life who have. The fact that we are moving incrementally forward - and I commend the previous government for the gains they made, they were the right thing to do. It didn't involve politics and I'm very proud to be a member of this Legislature for that.

I am so pleased that this legislation is going through because I know young people who have been kicked out because of their sexual orientation, because of their gender identity, not supported by families, who become extraordinarily vulnerable to all kinds of predators and individuals and circumstances in society. I am hopeful that this piece of legislation will move those young people forward in claiming what is very personal to most of us - our gender, our sexual identity, our sexual orientation.

I applaud my colleague, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who has been a staunch supporter, and my caucus colleagues and other members of the other two political Parties for the gains that have been made over the years. We will continue to make them because quite frankly, it's a human rights issue. We're all elected here to make sure that everybody has the same rights in this province. (Applause)

With those few words, I'll take my leave. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia.

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 82, An Act to Amend Chapter 66 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Change of Name Act, and Chapter 494 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Vital Statistics Act. I do want to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for their comments and their support for this piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 83.

Bill No. 83 - Elections Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. LENA DIAB: I move that Bill No. 83, amendments to the Nova Scotia Elections Act, be now read a second time. Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to rise in this House and to speak to some of the important amendments that are being introduced in this bill.

These changes are all about maintaining the integrity of our elections while improving access to voting for electors, improving the electoral process, and making practical amendments. These changes focus on improving accessibility to electoral processes for voters, allowing Elections Nova Scotia to make changes to improve and modernize administration and election processes, and to further ensure that elections in Nova Scotia are transparent and impartial.

I'm very pleased to say these amendments include extending advance voting opportunities from two to seven days, permitting constituents to vote at any returning office or advance voting location in the province, and improving ballots as the reliance on write-in ballots has resulted in ballot error in the past. With increased voting opportunities which allow voters to cast their ballot anywhere in the province, the on-demand printing of ballots will be used in an effort to reduce ballot error. This means that when voters go to cast their vote, the ballot will be printed on-demand to ensure the proper candidate's name and their Party are listed.

The close of nominations will be earlier. It will be moved back from the 14th to the 20th day before election day. This will help Elections Nova Scotia be better prepared with minimal impact on candidates.

I'm pleased to say that we are adapting to the increasing use of technology, Mr. Speaker. Voters will now be able to register online. Agents, which will now be called scrutineers, will also be able to receive and provide information via texting and email to their campaign colleagues without leaving the poll or disrupting voting. This allows

scrutineers to efficiently communicate with their campaign headquarters. In keeping with modern forms of advertising, including social media and websites, the ban on advertising on election day will be lifted.

We are all familiar with the increasing use of social media. During the past provincial election, photos were taken of marked ballots and posted to social media. There was much debate in the media about the practice and the lack of clarity in the legislation. To protect the sanctity of the secret ballot, changes to the Act will strictly prohibit the use of communications and recording devices to photograph marked ballots. A secret ballot is a very important part of a well-functioning democracy; in fact, I've heard it said that it's the cornerstone of democracy.

The members of the House and future candidates listening at home will also be pleased to learn that these changes include improved provisions for candidates and their campaigns. All candidates may continue to receive employment remuneration during an election period. The \$200 deposit will also be returned to all candidates, based on financial reporting by the candidate's official agent.

These amendments are based on the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer following the provincial general election held in October 2013. These recommendations were made by Elections Nova Scotia in consultation with the Election Commission and the caucuses of the Parties with representation in the House of Assembly among others. This bill represents the positive step forward for Nova Scotians as voting opportunities are extended, ballots are improved, and accessibility for candidates has been enhanced.

I believe these amendments provide Nova Scotia with much-needed, practical amendments that are responsive to the needs of a modern electorate, given the rapid changes in technology and the increasing mobility of voters.

With that I now conclude my remarks and look forward to listening to comments from other members in the House. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support, in principle, this bill. I know that Elections Nova Scotia in their report and their recommendations they offered to government, most of them are being put forward here.

There are a couple of items that I will comment on. I can think of one thing - I think all of us who were incumbents in the last election will appreciate us not having to hang a blanket or some other object over our signs for our constituency office. I remember that was something that came on pretty much at the start of the campaign, and I remember trying to get up on the back of a pickup truck to put something over the front of my sign.

It was certainly inconvenient in terms of trying to be running in the middle of a campaign and also people were questioning, well, you're still the MLA, why are you covering up the sign to your office? I think that is a good change; it's one that serves a good, practical purpose. I think it's a good change.

One of the other issues mentioned was the requirement that candidates be nominated 20 days before the election, which is going to be an earlier date. This does give a bit of an advantage to the government because the government will know when the election will happen. I will say that I think all political Parties, and anybody who is contemplating running in an election, should have an idea that they're going to run well in advance. There's no question, Mr. Speaker, I think every political Party in the province has faced, at least at one time or another, they may not have a candidate ready to run when the election is called. The government has the advantage.

If we are not going to have fixed election dates, the government does have the advantage to be able to know when the election call is going to happen to make sure their candidates are ready. Opposition Parties, or Independents who are running don't, or Independents who plan to run don't. That is something that I can understand may provide ease of administration for Elections Nova Scotia, but it does add a measure of unfairness I think for Parties that are running, going into an election in Opposition status.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to say too much further at this point. I look forward to hearing if anybody does come forward in the Committee on Law Amendments, and I look forward to hearing other comments by the members here in the Legislature. Thank you.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I have just a few brief comments on Bill No. 83. I think it is important to recognize that once we go through a general election, there may be some issues that arise due to rules that are in place. I think the minister mentioned a number of them that I recognize, and our Party recognized in the last general election, that had an effect on the overall running of that election. It is important that we continue to update our Elections Act and ensure that we modernize and keep up with what the trends are. I think some of them were referred to around social media and the use of electronics, as all of us here and those who might choose to run in the next election and those candidates who will seek nomination will do.

With any changes, of course - we received this bill just a few days ago - there is quite a bit of information in there. Like many Parties I would assume we go and seek input from our caucus, our members in our Party, those who have much more knowledge than maybe some of us around some of the legalities of hosting elections and changing rules and what impact that has. We are taking part in that now, Mr. Speaker.

We do want to see this piece of legislation move through the process, not at the speed of light, for which I've been given some assurance from the Government House Leader that this will be called for Law Amendments Committee on Monday, which hopefully will give us some time to seek out some of that advice that we are looking for.

At this time we do reserve our support on Bill No. 83 but by no means do we want to see it blocked through the process so we do look forward to Law Amendments Committee. To those in our communities across the province who have a deep interest in this in changes with the Elections Act, I'm sure that all our caucuses will hear from those members and we'll see how that transpires as we move this along. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate - oh, the honourable member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg.

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my comments will be short but I feel that it is important to voice one of the things that I feel is missing from this piece of legislation, and that of course is the whole issue of fixed election dates, something that the Premier had mentioned many times when he was in Opposition, something that he said he would do when he was running his campaign.

I believe that this piece of legislation is an important piece of legislation and the fact that it makes it easier for anyone in Nova Scotia to have an opportunity to exercise their right to vote is very important. I also heard a government that said they were open and transparent and part of that openness and transparency would be if you had a fixed election date.

The person responsible for Elections Nova Scotia has said on several occasions that a fixed election date would allow him to better manage his resources and the number of dollars that it costs for the operation of his organization. I can't help but wonder, with such an important piece of legislation coming forward, with a government that says they are so open and transparent, with an issue that could save the taxpayers money, which seems to be the vein and the vent of what was being said here all along today, why, indeed, the government would leave out something as important as a fixed election date. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. LENA DIAB: Mr. Speaker, I will just address the couple of points that were raised today. Then when I conclude, obviously, this is going to Law Amendments Committee so we look forward to hearing any other comments raised from the public and from both Oppositions at that point in time and certainly willing to talk about anything else they would like to talk about.

The two points I will raise right now are, the earlier close of nominations which has been recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, to move it back six days from the 14th day to the 20th day. The recommendation received tells us that the 2013 experience - the impact of that change on political Parties was very minimal. Virtually all of the nomination meetings had occurred in advance of this date. Of the 176 candidates who ran, only 34 completed the process after day 20 and of those, 24 were within the next three days.

According to the Chief Electoral Officer on the stats that they have, they believe that is certainly doable and not only that, it would increase the use of the on-demand printing of ballots with both the candidate's names and their party affiliation. I, like everyone else in this House, ran last time and I know the complications. For anyone who attended the media briefing with the electoral officer, he described the number of ballots that had to be voided due to the fact that people who came in to vote, either wrote the name of the adjoining constituency, candidate, or they wrote the wrong party name or anything like that, so they are really trying to fix that for the election.

The final point that I will speak on is this fixed election date. My comments that were made at the briefing - I'm not sure how much was picked up or not and I don't know how many of you were there - but I can tell you that we carefully considered all the recommendations. We certainly considered the fixed election recommendation. We examined all the pros and cons of legislating an election date. Quite frankly, you don't need to look too far to our neighboring province, Prince Edward Island, what happened last week. They are into an election, should have been months and months away. If you look at Alberta, my understanding, two days ago they just called an election for May.

They should be a year away. The way we view it is if you want to legislate fixed date election then again, these are the facts. What I can also tell you, Robert Ghiz in his very last interview that he made as the Premier in December of 2014, the paper in P.E.I., *The Guardian*, has a very big bold letter saying, my biggest mistake, fixed election dates by Robert Ghiz.

It's something that he wanted very much in 2006. Whether he campaigned on that or not, he brought it in and he determined that that was the biggest mistake that Prince Edward Island made and I'd be happy to give you that document. So research has been done on that. There was Chantal Hébert, who is a well-known reporter, who did a nice report in January 2015 on fixed date election law, "No Gift" and her final comment on that report was, "When all is said and done the side effects of the remedy of a fixed-date election law are turning out to be more harmful to sound policy-making than the ills it was meant to cure."

So again, there's never a perfect answer. Life is never perfect, law is not perfect. We're always looking to enhance what we have but at this particular time we have carefully examined the pros, the cons, the whatever and we are not going to be putting fixed election dates in this piece of legislation now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and with that I move to close debate of Bill No. 83, amendments to the Nova Scotia Elections Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: That concludes the government's business for today, Mr. Speaker. We shall meet tomorrow from the hour of 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., as was previously agreed to yesterday.

Tomorrow we will start the daily routine, and once the daily routine has ended, we will go to the Finance Critic for the Official Opposition to conclude his remarks on the budget and then go to the NDP caucus to give their remarks on the budget. At the conclusion of that we will go to Question Period.

Following the completion of Question Period, we will then move into Budget Estimates, here in the main Chamber and in the Red Room. I believe all members have been provided with a copy of which departments that will be, but for those who may not be aware, in the main Chamber the estimates of the Department of Agriculture will be up. In the Red Room, the estimates of the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage will be considered.

I can advise as well, Mr. Speaker, with the passage of the three bills today in second reading and previous bills that were passed, Law Amendments Committee will be meeting this coming Monday at 12:00 noon to consider all of the bills which have passed second reading and have been referred to Law Amendments Committee. For those watching or following our proceedings, Law Amendments Committee will be meeting Monday at 12:00 noon to consider all those bills.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now rise, to meet again tomorrow from the hour of 9:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to rise, to sit tomorrow, Friday, April 10th, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.

[The House rose at 4:07 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 1407**

By: Hon. Karen Casey (Education and Early Childhood Development)

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

Whereas Hannah Martin, a Grade 12 student from North Colchester High School in Tatamagouche, was chosen among the top 30 of 3,800 applicants for the Loran Scholarship; and

Whereas Hannah attended a social justice camp in Mexico where she continues to recruit host families, worked as a waitress and a tour guide, helped plan a church service and school assembly to share her Mi'kmaq culture and volunteers as a drum instructor; and

Whereas the Loran Scholarship provides an annual stipend of \$9,000 for four years with a matching tuition waiver, a summer program with funding up to \$8,500, a week-long orientation expedition in Algonquin Park in Ontario, one-on-one mentorship and participation in the Loran Scholarship Community;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Hannah Martin for being the only student from Nova Scotia to receive the Loran Scholarship this year and the first student from North Colchester High School to do so.

RESOLUTION NO. 1408

By: Hon. Karen Casey (Education and Early Childhood Development)

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

Whereas on February 26, 2015, the Colchester Historical Society celebrated Heritage Night to recognize people who made contributions to the preservation and promotion of the history of Colchester County; and

Whereas Judy Lewis of Bass River, Colchester North, received a 2015 Silver Maple Leaf Coin from the Royal Canadian Mint for her contributions to the Bass River Heritage Society Museum; and

Whereas being born and brought up in Bass River, Judy's interest in history and genealogy led her to helping the museum in diverse ways, completing extensive

genealogical research on local families, contributing to the collection of historic images and guiding tours for families looking for gravesites;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Judy Lewis for her dedication to heritage preservation and for ensuring that much of the history of the area and its residents will not be lost to future generations.

RESOLUTION NO. 1409

By: Hon. Karen Casey (Education and Early Childhood Development)

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

Whereas Mary MacLean from Valley, Colchester North, a Grade 11 student at the Cobequid Educational Centre in Truro, has received the Lieutenant Governor's Respectful Citizenship Award which recognizes students who demonstrate leadership and are committed to creating safe and inclusive spaces; and

Whereas Mary is a member of the Anti-Bullying Committee and Interact (volunteering) Club, volunteers weekly at the Colchester Food Bank, is co-president of the United Way's Youth Committee, and assists the Truro Homeless Outreach Society; and

Whereas through Operation Christmas Child Mary bought enough items to fill 20 shoeboxes, made a sock monkey and a friendship bracelet for each, as well as giving her friends printed pictures of the items that she had donated in their honour;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Mary MacLean for her commitment to improving the lives of others and for being an inspiration to all ages.

RESOLUTION NO. 1410

By: Hon. Karen Casey (Education and Early Childhood Development)

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

Whereas each year on Heritage Night the Colchester Historical Society celebrates contribution to the preservation and promotion of the history of Colchester County; and

Whereas this year 81-year-old Mary Brinkhurst of Tatamagouche was presented with a 2015 Silver Maple Leaf Coin from the Royal Canadian Mint; and

Whereas Mary was recognized for her volunteerism with the Margaret Fawcett Norrie Heritage Centre in Tatamagouche where she has been instrumental in developing educational activities, implementing a student volunteer program, assisting fundraising and special events and completing online exhibits;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Mary Brinkhurst for her commitment to the community and for promoting Colchester County history.

RESOLUTION NO. 1411

By: Mr. Chuck Porter (Hants West)

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

Whereas in March the 20th Annual Birthplace of Hockey Tournament was held in Windsor; and

Whereas over two weeks players from atom to midget played 122 games comprising of 67 Nova Scotia teams stretching from Yarmouth to Sydney; and

Whereas Debbie Francis, the organizer of the volunteer run tournament says the event gets bigger every year and helps bring revenue to the local area;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Birthplace of Hockey Tournament for celebrating their 20-year Anniversary and Debbie Francis for her commitment to such a great event, and wish them success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 1412

By: Mr. Chuck Porter (Hants West)

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

Whereas recently a West Hants municipal clerk Rhonda Brown was honoured for achievement; and

Whereas Rhonda has completed her certificate in local government financial administration, taking her two years to complete; and

Whereas Rhonda has been able to maintain her job as the administrative assistant for the Public Works Department, along with the duties of a municipal clerk while she completed her certificate program;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Rhonda Brown for her loyalty and dedication to the people of West Hants.

RESOLUTION NO. 1413

By: Mr. Chuck Porter (Hants West)

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

Whereas the 2015 Nova Scotia Karate Team was well represented at the Canadian National and Youth Karate Championships in Richmond, British Columbia, from January 30th to February 1st, 2015; and

Whereas three of the athletes of the provincial team were from the Windsor Karate Club, located in Three Mile Plains; and

Whereas Devin Sexton and Roland Smith, both of Windsor, finished an outstanding fourth in their weight class;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the 2015 Nova Scotia Karate Team on their success at this year's national event and wish them all the best in future competitions.