



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Third Session

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016

Sixty-second General Assembly

Third Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Mr. Gordon Wilson, Mr. Keith Irving

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll begin 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 Minister of Business.

RESOLUTION NO. 143

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

Whereas Nova Scotia Crime Stoppers plays a significant role in providing authorities with the information needed to lay charges against those responsible for dealing contraband tobacco in our communities; and

Whereas efforts to safely remove contraband tobacco in our communities are made possible by the co-operation of Crime Stoppers and law enforcement; and

Whereas we encourage Nova Scotians to be vigilant and continue to offer anonymous tips to Crime Stoppers to ensure criminals are brought to justice;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House recognize the important role Nova Scotia Crime Stoppers plays in reducing crime, including organized crime, and working to remove contraband tobacco from our streets.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Immigration.

RESOLUTION NO. 144

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

Whereas the Syrian refugee effort is giving us the chance to do what we do best in Nova Scotia, extend a helping hand; and

Whereas hundreds of people, organizations, and community groups have stepped forward to help our new residents from Syria adapt to life in the province; and

Whereas Hope Blooms has played a key role in embracing our new Syrian families by sharing experiences, food, garden plots, and outdoor movies, with more than 110 newcomers living in the north end of Halifax;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize Jessie Jollymore and the Hope Blooms community for going out of their way to welcome our new residents.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. DIANA WHALEN: Mr. Speaker, before I read my Government Notice of Motion, I would like to do an introduction, with your permission.

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MS. WHALEN: I'd like to draw the attention of members of the House to the east gallery, where we're joined today by Chief Donald Hussler, chief of police of Westville and Stellarton and outgoing chair of the Fallen Peace Officers association. Chief Hussler is joined today by members of the Department of Justice, the Department of Justice Public Safety and Security Division, fellow members of the Fallen Peace Officers association, and chiefs and members of law enforcement from across the province.

We're here today to thank him for his 11 years as chair of that committee and the work he has done to help shape the annual event into something very significant.

I wonder if you would rise, chief. We'd like to give you the warm welcome of the House today. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

RESOLUTION NO. 145

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

Whereas Chief Donald Hussher, chief of police for Westville and Stellarton, has shown unwavering dedication and commitment as the chair of the Fallen Peace Officers association; and

Whereas in his role as chair, Chief Hussher has helped shape the Nova Scotia Fallen Peace Officers Memorial service into an important ceremony attended by hundreds of peace officers from across the province to honour the sacrifices of our fallen peace officers; and

Whereas after 11 years of devoted work as chair of the Fallen Peace Officers association, he is stepping down from that important role;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize and thank Chief Donald Hussher for his tireless dedication to ensuring that Nova Scotia's fallen peace officers are honoured and never forgotten.

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.

With the unanimous consent of the House, I'd like to revert to Tabling Reports, Regulations and Other Papers.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

MR. SPEAKER: In my capacity as Speaker, on behalf of the Offices of the Auditors General for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I., and Newfoundland and Labrador, I would like to table the Joint Audit of the Atlantic Lottery Corporation.

The report is tabled.

Also, at the top of the daily routine, I forgot to mention the topic for late debate this evening, as submitted by the member for Pictou Centre. It is as follows:

Therefore be it resolved that this Liberal Government has mismanaged the education system and brought our province to the brink of the first-ever teachers strike.

We'll now move on to Introduction of Bills.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 49 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 27 of the Acts of 2000. The Employment Support and Income Assistance Act. (Ms. Marian Mancini)

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

DENNY, CHIEF LEROY: ESKASONI FIRST NATION - RE-ELECTION

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Chief Leroy Denny on his recent re-election to his third term as chief of the Eskasoni First Nation. Chief Leroy Denny received 53 per cent of the vote. Eskasoni is Nova Scotia's largest Mi'kmaq community, with a population of about 3,500 people living on the reserve and another 500 people off reserve.

Chief Leroy Denny is dedicated to all his constituents and is a hard-working man who deeply loves his community.

I stand here today to congratulate Chief Leroy and wish him all the best as I know personally he will continue to work diligently for the community of Eskasoni.

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

COX, PAIGE - YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: I rise today to salute Paige Cox, a 20-year-old university student who did a placement as part of her course at the North Sydney Food Bank. She found her time there very rewarding and stayed on as a volunteer. Her experience managing the outdoor vegetable garden was so fulfilling that she convinced her 16-year-old brother to help out as well.

It's wonderful to see these young people giving their time to volunteer to make their community a better place to live. Thank you, Paige and Michael.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

OCEANA CAN. REPT.: MIN. - FOLLOW UP

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: A recent report commissioned by Oceana Canada tells a grim story of fish stock depletion in Canada. The report concludes that less than one-quarter of Canadian fish stocks are considered healthy. Furthermore, the status of 45 per cent of the stocks couldn't be determined due to an absence of basic current information. While more money is being made than ever before, the value is concentrated in a few species - the report concludes that this lack of diversification is not sustainable.

Fishers understand the importance of the science behind the catch; in this instance, the science is raising serious questions. I call on the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture to follow up on this report and work with his federal counterparts to attempt to remedy this situation.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

SAMSON, PAUL: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: The ROC Society in Port Hawkesbury is a community-based not-for-profit organization that helps people with disabilities work towards their hopes and dreams. Its mission is creating unity as we embrace our many abilities.

This year, one of the ROC Society's beloved clients and family members decided to retire. Paul Samson, from Louisdale, has been part of their family for 27 years, and his impact is still felt by clients and staff alike. Paul loved teasing the staff, and the jokester could often be found talking and giggling with them and his friends. A curious man, Mr. Samson has a love of learning about history and the world. He developed a large variety of skills and enjoyed putting them to good use. Over the years, he has been an active member of the woodworking department and recycling program. In recent years, Paul focused more on artistic pursuits - painting, writing, and making picture frames. Some of his creations ended up for sale in the ROC Society's storefront.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in wishing Paul a very healthy and happy retirement.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**LOCKHART, ERIC, MICHAEL & IAN:
KENTVILLE - COMMITMENT RECOGNIZE**

MR. JOHN LOHR: I would like to honour today a business in Kentville which has been an anchor in the downtown and is a third-generation business. R.D. Chisholm opened his stationery and toy store on June 9, 1925. Currently, his grandson, Eric Lockhart, runs the operation along with his two sons, Mike and Ian, who will eventually step up as operators. R.D. Chisholm's employs eight staff who greet and serve the public with a cheery disposition and are always willing to go the extra mile for customers. This company has been an active contributor to many local organizations, and their pride in community is infectious.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to recognize Eric Lockhart and his sons, Michael and Ian, for their long-time commitment to the Town of Kentville.

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

PREM.: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING - APPROACH RECONSIDER

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: I want to take a moment to express my frustration with the government's approach to collective bargaining.

Nurses, teachers, and health care workers have all felt the heavy hand of the Premier and his government, yet when challenged, the Premier does little more than pat himself on the back for all that his government has done. Nurses and health care workers have been angered and frustrated by this government, and teachers are on the cusp of their first strike in the history of the province. I think it is time for the Premier to take a good look in the mirror and admit that his approach to collective bargaining is just not working.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

BILLARD, ALLAN: *LIGHTHOUSES OF NOVA SCOTIA* - SUCCESS WISH

MR. BILL HORNE: Nova Scotia is known for its iconic lighthouses, and author Allan Billard, a Fall River resident, has included several of these classic light stations in his new book *Lighthouses of Nova Scotia*, launching today.

Each chapter has a different focus such as family life at the light, dangers at sea, rum running, and a modern-day revival of the structures. Also included are lesser-known lighthouses along the rugged coastline of Nova Scotia. The stunning locales have been captured by local photographers in this book. This is the third release of this Nova Scotia author and follows on from his bestseller that focused on waterfalls and the book last year, *Beaches of Nova Scotia*, which was on the bestseller list for 17 weeks.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in wishing Allan every success with his newest book, *Lighthouses of Nova Scotia*.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**THOMAS, ANTHONY
- NEW GLASGOW POLICE LONG SERV. AWARD (27 YRS.)**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, I rise in my place in this historic Legislature to recognize a New Glasgow police constable, Anthony Thomas. Anthony was awarded a police Long Service Award for his 27 years as a police officer, 26 of those spent in New Glasgow.

He received thanks from his community in 2013 when he received a bravery award after saving an individual experiencing trouble in the East River. Constable Thomas is well-known for his commitment and dedication to his role as one of the most popular officers in New Glasgow.

I would like all members of this Legislature to join me in thanking Anthony Thomas for his service with the New Glasgow Regional Police Force.

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

**TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM. REPT.:
PARENTING PROG. - CALL TO ACTION**

MS. LENORE ZANN: The fourth call to action from last year's national Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report that I'd like to highlight deals with parenting and families. Specifically this recommendation calls upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally-appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families.

The residential school system brought about so much damage and turmoil for First Nations families, thousands of children were forced from their homes and separated from their elders, their language and culture, often hundreds of miles away and sometimes into the United States. The legacy of their colonial experience continues to be present in First Nations communities today. As we continue to fight for these families in this Legislature, we must remind ourselves of the need to empower these families to reconciliation.

I look forward to hearing how the government intends to meet this specific call to action and more to come. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

**PORT HAWKESBURY - MEGHAN TRAINOR CONCERT:
ORGANIZERS - CONGRATS.**

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, September 1st, the rain held off just long enough so that 11,000 parents and adoring young fans were able to enjoy an amazing concert by Grammy-winning artist Meghan Trainor in Port Hawkesbury. The town earned the right to host the free concert through the Air Miles Detour Program, beating out larger cities and towns across Canada.

As a parent who accompanied an extremely excited daughter to the event, I can personally attest to how wonderfully organized everything was and to the fine job performed by all the volunteers. Fans from all across the Maritimes swelled the population of Port Hawkesbury for what was undoubtedly the concert of a lifetime for many.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating every single person who played a role in making the concert a reality and showing Port Hawkesbury's potential for future world-class events.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

BLACKWOOD, GARY: FILM CAREER - SUCCESS WISH

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge author Gary Blackwood's directorial film debut for his film *The Seer*. It will be wonderful for Pictou County residents to watch a film featuring our beautiful landscape. *The Seer* has been released and will be entered in various film festivals.

Mr. Speaker, the hard work, resourcefulness, and the ability of cast and crew to wear numerous hats resulted in this wonderful film coming to fruition. This group of dedicated and creative professionals is an inspiration and a shining example of how a community can come together in support of the arts and the film industry.

I look forward to viewing Mr. Blackwood's film and wish him continued success in his film career. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

WATTS, JENNIFER: HALIFAX NEEDHAM - SERV. THANK

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, this is Jennifer Watts's last full week as councillor for Halifax District 8. Last week I rose in the House to congratulate her successor. Today I want to thank Jennifer for her service to residents of Halifax Needham, as well as many residents of Halifax Chebucto, over eight years as a municipal councillor.

Jennifer performed a very challenging job with consistency, thoughtfulness and commitment. Her district email newsletters kept residents connected with everything from community events to important public consultations and her participatory budget process allowed grassroots projects to get important seed funds. Importantly, Jennifer took a series of principled stands, including to not accept donations from developers, and to not reoffer after two terms, helping to shape a conversation about needed election campaign reforms that I am confident will be in place before 2020.

Please join me in thanking Jennifer Watts and wishing her well.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

WEIRDOS: RELEASE - CONGRATS.

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge the recently-released film *Weirdos* and congratulate all those involved in its production. *Weirdos* is a feature-length film with many connections to Nova Scotia. It was written by Daniel MacIvor, a native Cape Bretoner and co-produced by Marc Almon, current president and CEO of Holdfast Pictures and former Chair of Screen Nova Scotia.

Weirdos is not only set but was filmed right here in Nova Scotia. It debuted at the Toronto International Film Festival last month to great critical acclaim. Set in 1976 *Weirdos* tells a story of a teenage boy, living with his father and grandmother in small-town Nova Scotia, who enlists the help of his girlfriend to run away and live with his mother.

Mr. Speaker, it is great to see that Nova Scotia film is indeed alive and well here. Congratulations to all those involved in *Weirdos* and I look forward to next year's films.

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

D'ENTREMONT, LE SOLDAT LUCIEN ELDRIDGE: MEDAILLES - UN CÉRÉMONIE DE FIN DE SERVICE

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Monsieur le président, une cérémonie a eu lieu au Musée des Acadiens de Pubnico le 20 Octobre, ou des médailles de la Première Guerre Mondiale seront de retour à la terre natale de son propriétaire, Lucien Eldridge d'Entremont.

Les médailles ont été acquises par la biais d'une vente aux enchères d'internet d'un marchand de souvenir militaires. L'acheteur proposé Gary Wolf de l'Oregon a fait des recherches en ligne et a trouvé un lien avec le village natal de Lucien d'Entremont. Avec ces recherches, M. Wolf a pu trouver le nom de Paul d'Entremont Marine Limite et a procédé à correspondre par courriel. La gérante Julie de cette entreprise rappel

l'importance de cette courriel et a contacté la centre recherche pour trouver la généalogie de ce homme.

Les médailles seront exposées au Musée des Acadiens pour les générations futures à voir et apprendre l'histoire de ses anciens combattants courageux.

Mr. Speaker, a ceremony marking the return of WWI medals of Middle West Pubnico native Private Lucien Eldridge d'Entremont was held on October 20th at the Musée des Acadiens de Pubnicos.

The medals were acquired by way of Internet auction of the military memorabilia dealer. The proposed buyer Gary Wolf from Oregon researched online and found a connection to Private d'Entremont's native village. Mr. Wolf proceeded to match the name online to Paul d'Entremont Marine Limited, the manager, Julie, recognized the significance of this discovery, and contacted the research centre to find out the genealogy.

The medals will be on display at the Musée des Acadiens for future generations to see and learn the history of its courageous veterans.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

KRONSTEIN, ALEX - NEURODIVECAST

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring the House's attention to Alex Kronstein, a Dartmouth man who was diagnosed with autism in 2012. Mr. Kronstein has recently launched the NeurodiveCast, a podcast about autism recorded in Dartmouth with listeners tuning in from as far away from Australia.

The podcast serves as a resource for autistic people and for parents with autistic children. Mr. Kronstein tells his own story as well as delving into terminology, blogs, and other mediums on the subject of autism. The podcast is recorded at community activist Charlene Gagnon's house - Charlene herself has two autistic children. She invited Alex to record the podcast after reading some of his Facebook posts.

Pulling from his experience as an activist and his radio and media studies at NSCC, Alex's podcast offers an autistic adult's perspective. I think it is a perspective that many will find helpful and insightful.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

HON. TERRY FARRELL: Mr. Speaker, would you please seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert to the order of business, Government Notices of Motion?

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

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

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce Mr. Ken Edwards if he could rise for a moment. He has a longstanding, very wonderful reputation with the Nova Scotia Denturist Society. He has a desire to retire but he is so good that they won't let him retire. I know that if he does, the bluegrass industry will hire him full time. Let us give him a warm welcome to Province House. (Applause)

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

RESOLUTION NO. 150

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

Whereas denturists provide a full range of services from the fabrication and fitting of complete and partial dentures to providing anti-snoring devices and mouth guards; and

Whereas there are many reasons Nova Scotians may need to enlist the professional services for dentures such as gum diseases, an accident, or other ailments; and

Whereas positive oral health, including properly fitted dentures, can have a major impact when it comes to a person's smile, the ability to eat, and overall health;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House acknowledge October as Denturist Awareness Month, and recognize the important role denturists play in the overall oral health and wellness of Nova Scotians.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville on an introduction.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, I would have all the members of the House direct their attention to the east gallery where we're joined today by the U13 Boys Hammonds Plains A's baseball team. As I read off their names, I'd invite them to stand: Ryan Adams, Leighton Carruthers, Nolan Cheesman, Ryan Fitzgerald, Jake Furlong, Logan Harvey, Kyle Hunt, Jacob Lawlor, Colton MacLaren, TJ Norris, Camden Rendell, Ryan Trenholm, and Seth Wright.

They're also joined today by a couple of their coaches: Mike Cheeseman - not here today, sorry guys - and Keegan Gaskell. Absent from the House today: Adam Gardner, Brett Hunt, Brad Lawlor, and Andrew Trenholm. Additionally, we have Holly LaPierre who is the president of the Hammonds Plains Baseball Association. Please, welcome them to the House. (Applause)

[STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

**HAMMONDS PLAINS A'S BASEBALL TEAM (U-13 BOYS):
CHAMPIONSHIPS - RECOGNIZE**

MR. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, today I want to congratulate the U13 Boys Hammonds Plains A's baseball team on an historic season. In September of this year, the team travelled to Atlantics in Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador, and after a successful tournament, won the gold medal, defeating P.E.I. handily 12-4 in the final game. Nova Scotia is neither the largest nor the richest in our great nation but continues to punch above its weight when it comes to sport. This Hammonds Plains A's ball team is no exception.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to recognize the U13 Hammonds Plains A's as the 2016 national Atlantic champions, and Baseball Nova Scotia's team of the year. (Applause)

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

DEVEAUX, COREY - TRIATHLON SUCCESSES

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Corey Deveaux of Sydney River for finishing third at the Rev3 Maine long-distance triathlon. Corey finished with a time of four hours, 15 minutes, and 28 seconds. Deveaux has had a successful season, winning the Ingonish triathlon; second at the Challenge St. Andrews long-distance triathlon; and was tops at the Melmerby triathlon, Bridgetown long-distance triathlon, and the Port Hood triathlon.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to congratulate Corey on all his success this past season and wish him the very best in the seasons to come. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

DOCTOR SHORTAGES - ELECTION PROMISES

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, the Premier promised a family doctor for every Nova Scotian during the 2013 election campaign. However last week, the member for Clare-Digby announced that that goal has possibly been pushed down the road until 2026. This trial balloon - or should I say lead balloon - is not going over well with Nova Scotians; 90,000 residents are without a family doctor. Perhaps the member for Yarmouth or Richmond may wish to clarify that statement made by the member for Clare-Digby. If not, this must result in a new Liberal slogan because 2026 is too long for 90,000 Nova Scotians to wait for a family doctor. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay on an introduction.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the House's attention to the east gallery where we have a former Page and a good Glace Bay girl, Kendra Wilcox. Kendra is home from Carleton University where she's studying a masters in political management. She's home for a week to study and she wanted to come by the Legislature to see all her old friends. So, please, welcome Kendra back to the Legislature. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

ELMSDALE LEGION: "CARE ACTORS" - THANK

HON. MARGARET MILLER: The Elmsdale Legion "Care Actors," established in 2007 (Interruptions)

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

MS. MILLER: The Elmsdale Legion "Care Actors," established in 2007, is a volunteer dinner theatre group that writes, produces, and performs to financially support charities in our community. The reason for the show productions has not changed since the beginning. The group's members identified a monetary need with various non-profit groups within the community, and this is how they decided they could help.

The group works with each charity organization in the promotion, sales, planning, and implementation of each of their performances and the dinner. There have been many non-profit groups that have benefited from shows over the years, including the group's host

supporter, the Elmsdale Royal Canadian Legion Branch 48. Over the past 10 years, their efforts have raised over \$150,000 that's used to support our community.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Care Actors for their dedication and commitment to East Hants.

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

SYDNEY MINES: TOWN HALL - CONVERSION

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: I rise today to applaud the decision to convert the former town hall in Sydney Mines to the new headquarters of the Cape Breton Regional Police North Division. The heritage building is the last of its kind on the Northside and dates back to 1903. It is not only an icon in the community but a genuine piece of heritage for all Nova Scotia.

I would like to thank Mayor Cecil Clarke and council for their insight into giving this classical structure a new purpose.

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

GOV'T. N.S. - ELECTORAL POLITICS

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: This government is all about kicking issues down the road past the next election.

They have tried to kick electricity rate increases to 2020; they have asked for more time on P3 school decisions; they tell us they will replace the VG years from now; and now the member for Clare-Digby has informed the House that the Liberal promise of a doctor for every Nova Scotian could take up to five to ten years. Nova Scotians are getting tired of watching this government play electoral politics on critical issues facing Nova Scotians today.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie.

ROBERTS, HAROLD: YOUTH - COMMITMENT THANK

HON. LLOYD HINES: I rise today to recognize a man who has dedicated over three decades to inspiring the youth in his community. Harold Roberts joined as a leader in 1985 with the intention of staying just one week to help out, which has turned into a 30-plus-year involvement as a Scout Leader in Canso.

Scouts learn to work in groups, co-operate with each other, and acquire and use outdoor skills such as making shelter and fire. They also learn the value of giving back to the community and the environment. The Canso Scout troop has planted over 18,000 trees over the years. The Canso Scouts have a 45-year legacy and have become such an integral part of the community because of great people like Harold Roberts.

Thank you, Harold, for your unwavering commitment to the youth of your community. Truly, you are an inspiration.

MR. SPEAKER: I'd just like to remind all members just before we continue not to speak directly to constituents if at all possible.

The honourable member for Pictou West.

SIMMONS, MIKE - MIN. VETERANS AFFS. COMMENDATION

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: I am honoured to rise today to recognize Mr. Mike Simmons for receiving the Minister of Veterans Affairs Commendation. Mr. Simmons is a Canadian Armed Forces veteran with 28 years of service. Currently, he is the chaplain of the Royal Canadian Legion Pictou. His duties include support for veterans, providing worship services, and invaluable end-of-life care.

Mr. Simmons' Commendation describes his work as an essential service to the veterans who reside in the Northumberland Veterans Unit at the Sutherland Harris Memorial Hospital in Pictou. I wholeheartedly agree with this assessment as I have witnessed Mr. Simmons' dedication to the veterans and their loved ones.

I wish to thank Mr. Simmons for his spiritual guidance, and I congratulate him on his commendation.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: MIN. EDUC. - REFORM CONSIDER

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Since it implemented huge education reforms 40 years ago, Finland's school system has consistently been at the top of international rankings for education systems. How do they do it? By going against much of the evaluation-driven centralized model that many in the western world use.

In Finland, students write one standardized test during their final year. In Finland, teachers are given the autonomy and respect to do what they do best - teach. It seems we are at a point where teachers are calling on the Education and Early Childhood Minister to start thinking outside the box about education reform.

I call on the minister to look at what other jurisdictions have done successfully to improve the plight of teachers and students here in Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

CHAUVIN, DR. GUY - BIRTHDAY (80th)

HON. LENA DIAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the recent 80th birthday of a dear constituent, Dr. Guy Chauvin. Though Dr. Chauvin has been retired for 10 years now, he taught for 40 years at my alma mater, Saint Mary's University. In fact, I was lucky enough to have had Dr. Chauvin's wisdom as one of my political science professors at SMU.

I was thrilled when I reconnected with Dr. Chauvin during the 2013 election campaign and this summer while touring the HMCS Sackville. His unique role aboard the ship is that of undertaker, where he ensures that ashes scattered at sea are properly and respectfully released. He also serves on the executive of the Nova Scotia Naval Officers Association and is responsible for their bursary trust. The trust awards bursaries to deserving Nova Scotian students, many of them sea cadets.

It was a pleasure to catch up with Dr. Chauvin and his wife, Peggy, and I ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in wishing him a healthy and happy 80th birthday.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

**HOPEWELL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIBLE SCH.:
ORGANIZERS - CONGRATS.**

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, this summer the children of Hopewell Presbyterian Church enjoyed a week of Bible School that wrapped up with an evening of entertainment. There were nearly 40 children enrolled from the ages of 3 to 12, with some of the older ones taking on a teaching leadership role. The Friday night finale featured up to 30 of the students. The songs and performances, as well as the attire, all fell under the theme of "Joseph's Journey to Egypt."

It was a great week for all the attendees, and for those who made it happen, I congratulate them.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PREM.: TEACHERS STRIKE - AVOID

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: I received an email from a constituent this morning concerned about a potential teachers' strike. My constituent is a mother who runs a before- and after-school childcare program - if schools close, so does her business. She expressed frustration hearing news stories about government seeking to take away rights from its employees, and undermining the work that previous generations have fought long and hard to achieve.

This government needs to focus on what the teachers are asking for: more in-classroom resources to better facilitate their primary objective, the education of our children. I say to the Premier of Nova Scotia, on behalf of my constituent, cool heads need to prevail so that we avoid an historic strike that will have a negative impact on all Nova Scotians.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Portland Valley.

FLINT, CLINTON: AQUACULTURE - SUSTAINABILITY

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and commend the entrepreneurial spirit of my constituent Clifton Flint. With some guidance, while relying on his own proactive attitude, and completing a successful application to the self-employment benefits program through CBDC Blue Water, Cliff is now well on his way to owning his own business.

Using a holistic approach that will include educational, distribution, and consultative platforms he hopes to develop, implement, and support sustainable methods in aquaculture. His goal is that these innovative alternatives will advance and strengthen Nova Scotia's fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating Cliff on a job well done.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MACEACHERN, BLAISE - SOVEREIGN'S MEDAL FOR VOLS.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Let us acknowledge Blaise MacEachern of Judique who received the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers from Governor General David Johnston earlier this year. This award is given for exceptional dedication to service, and Blaise is certainly worthy.

Since 1999, he has worked for the Trans Canada Trail organization, developing 92 kilometres of trails in Inverness County. This trail is loved by local residents, but it is also a signature attraction for visitors to Cape Breton Island. He has mobilized governments,

the Armed Forces, and volunteers to create something of lasting importance to our province and our country.

It is because of people like Blaise MacEachern that the Trans Canada Trail will link our nation together for Canada's 150th Birthday.

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

**BOWLES, CORY:
DIRECTORS GUILD OF CAN. AWARD - NOMINATION**

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Truro's own Cory Bowles for being nominated for the Directors Guild of Canada's Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in a Comedy Series. The nomination was for an episode of the highly successful Trailer Park Boys, which is shot in Bible Hill, also in my constituency, and of course Cory Bowles is also known as director of the CBC series Studio Black, which is created and filmed here in Nova Scotia, featuring an all-Black cast.

Nominations to the DGC Awards are greatly coveted. Only three other individuals were nominated for this award in 2016. The nomination is a great honour, and it speaks to the value and importance of the Nova Scotia film and television industry.

I want to warmly congratulate Cory Bowles, and I hope the rest of the House does as well in acknowledging the work of all who contribute to the film and television industry of Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

**RAMOS, DR. HOWARD/CRAGO, DR. MARTHA:
REFUGEE CRISIS - WORK COMMEND**

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge two Dalhousie University professors who recently attended the first-ever United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants. Dr. Howard Ramos and Dr. Martha Crago are working with the Canadian Refugee Child, Youth and Family Research Coalition to help young refugees settle into Canada. The UN summit they attended was an opportunity to begin crafting an international response to a crisis that has displaced millions of people.

Dr. Ramos' and Dr. Crago's work is centred on reaching out to foreign colleagues in a collaborative effort to develop a strategy for refugee youth. I would like to commend Dr. Ramos and Dr. Crago for their notable work with the refugee crisis and for lending their expertise to this vital UN summit.

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

**SCAMMELL, JULIA:
IIHF WOMEN'S HIGH-PERFORMANCE HOCKEY - CONGRATS.**

MR. LARRY HARRISON: This past July a Murray Siding teenager earned herself quite an honour. Julia Scammell was the only Nova Scotian selected to partake in the 2016 IIHF Women's High-Performance Cup in Finland from July 9th to July 16th. Canada was one of 16 countries participating in the camp. Julia was one of the eight Canadians sent to vie for a spot on Canada's National Women's Under-18 team. Although she didn't make the team, she was part of the wonderful experience created to grow and develop women's hockey worldwide. The athletes participated in sessions and seminars and had opportunities for on-ice activities to boost their skill sets.

I'm certain Julia Scammell learned some valuable insights, honed and developed her skills, and created wonderful memories from the experience. I wish to congratulate her on this amazing opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

HEBBS CROSS VOL. FD - ANNIV. (50th)

HON. JOANNE BERNARD: Mr. Speaker, I'm reading this on behalf of the honourable member for Lunenburg West.

September 24th marked the 50th Anniversary of the Hebbs Cross volunteer fire department. I was happy to have been invited to share with them a celebration of 50 years' worth of volunteers and stories and many laughs.

For many rural Nova Scotia communities, the local fire department is really the core of that community. Community leadership can usually be said to begin at the local fire departments. They are the volunteer firefighters and auxiliary members who keep the department going. Breakfasts, auctions, suppers, dances, wedding receptions, and a variety show are just a few of the events that the Hebbs Cross fire department has had over the years, creating a lot of wonderful memories.

Congratulations to the Hebbs Cross fire department, its current and past volunteers, and the community it serves.

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

DARVESH, DR. KATHY - TOP CHEMISTRY EDUCATOR AWARD

MS. PATRICIA ARAB: I would like to recognize Dr. Kathy Darvesh, who is a professor at Mount Saint Vincent University. Dr. Darvesh, who is specifically teaching in the Chemistry and Physics Department at MSVU, has been named the top chemistry educator in Canada by College Chemistry Canada.

This award recognizes outstanding contributions to university- and college-level chemical education, celebrating educators who are consistently improving the level of education that is given to their students. Dr. Darvesh is feeling very humble after winning her award and is going to try her hardest to maintain her high level of teaching and continue to make chemistry fun and easy to understand for students.

I would like the members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Dr. Darvesh on achieving this award and wish her continued success in her teaching career.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

LUN. MUN. DIST./PROV. N.S.: LAHAVE RIVER CLEANUP - MOU

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: It is always encouraging to see multiple levels of government working together. This past summer, I was proud to witness such co-operation when the Province of Nova Scotia and the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the cleanup of a portion of the LaHave River.

Under the MOU, the province and the municipality will partner on a graduated compliance program that includes increasing awareness about environmental damage from straight pipes, developing a replacement program, and identifying properties with straight pipes. A funding application was also made to the federal government under the Building Canada Fund.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize the co-operation between the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg and the Province of Nova Scotia in signing this memorandum of understanding.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

HARRISON, MATTHEW & FAM. - WOODLOT OWNER OF YR. (2016)

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: I rise today to congratulate Matthew Harrison and his family - Bonnie, Catherine, and Donald - of Lynn Mountain, who were named Woodlot Owner of the Year for 2016. Mr. Harrison and his family manage a 1,000-acre woodland.

They focus on improving the woodlot through careful harvesting, selection management, and developing the land for recreation. They also have a blueberry production facility and a maple sugar business.

I'm proud to offer my congratulations to the Harrison family on their hard work and dedication to the community through conservation and economic activity. I know all MLAs will join me in wishing them continued success in the future.

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

**MACKENZIE, ALLAN/MILES, STEPHANIE:
BADDECK DUATHLON - CONGRATS.**

MS. PAM EYKING: I rise today to congratulate Allan MacKenzie and Stephanie Myles on taking first place in the men's and women's divisions at the inaugural Baddeck Duathlon in August.

A total of 41 athletes took part in the event, which consisted of a five-kilometre run to start, followed by a 23-kilometre bike ride, and ended with a 2.5-kilometre run. Mr. MacKenzie won the men's race with a time of one hour, five minutes, and 17 seconds. Ms. Myles captured the women's race with a time of one hour, 18 minutes, and four seconds.

I wish to congratulate both Mr. MacKenzie and Ms. Myles on their fine performance and wish them both continued success and best of luck in the future.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

MORROW, JIM: ORDER OF N.S. - CONGRATS.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate Jim Morrow of Avonport on his investiture on October 12th into the Order of Nova Scotia. Mr. Morrow has been the artistic director of Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia since 1991, first in Wolfville and more recently in Windsor.

A graduate of Acadia University, Mr. Morrow began his professional theatre career in 1978, touring as a performer with Mermaid. He has performed throughout North America, the United Kingdom, and Japan. In 1987, he studied the art of puppetry with the late Jim Henson. His contributions both as artist and mentor have earned him many accolades, including the Portia White Award and an honorary doctorate of humanities degree from Acadia University in 2007.

On behalf of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, I wish to congratulate Jim Morrow for his accomplishments, his recent investiture to the Order of Nova Scotia, and his lifelong dedication to arts and culture in Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Beaver Bank.

SACKVILLE HEIGHTS ELEM. SCH.: SOCKTOBER - THANK

MR. STEPHEN GOUGH: I would like to take this opportunity to commend the students and staff at the Sackville Heights Elementary School, who have an annual event entitled Socktober. This event runs for the whole month of October in which they collect new socks from each class. The collected socks are delivered to people at various homeless shelters across HRM.

This year is Sackville Heights Elementary School's second year of Socktober. The school estimates that there are over 1,700 people who rely on shelters in Halifax alone. Last year, they collected and delivered over 960 pairs of new socks for people in need at six local shelters.

I would like to thank Sackville Heights Elementary School for taking steps in helping to make others more comfortable.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

HARTLEN PT. LADIES GOLF FORE HOPE - ANNIV. (10th)

MS. JOYCE TREEN: I rise today to tell you about the Hartlen Point Ladies Golf Fore Hope. It is a golf tournament made up of some amazing ladies. The ladies celebrated their 10th Anniversary doing the event in support of breast cancer. This year, \$3,448 was pledged, and \$581.70 was raised through a 50-50 draw for a total of \$4,229.70. This brings their 10-year donations total to \$43,065.37.

I ask all members of this House of Assembly to congratulate these women for their generosity over the years and future support for a very important cause that affects so many women.

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

PAUL, CHIEF TERRY/COUNCIL MEMBERS: ELECTION - CONGRATS.

MR. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate Chief Terry Paul and all members of the Membertou Council who were recently elected in the election this past summer. This represents 33 years as Chief for Chief Terry Paul and as leader of the Membertou community.

Membertou has become a great story told all across Canada and one of our greatest economic drivers in the CBRM. I stand in my place today to congratulate Chief Paul on

his 33 years of leadership for the community of Membertou and congratulate him and all the newly-elected councillors from the election this past summer.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

WESTVILLE: TOWN BANNER/SIGNS - DESIGN

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, as the only town in my constituency and the location of my office, I am pleased to see that Westville has approved a design for a new town banner. The banner has been in the planning stages for about a year and the decision was made to have something that showed what Westville stands for, rather than using only the town crest. Incorporating the town's mining history, its Canada Day celebrations and the spirit of the community, the artwork was created by Stephen MacDonald Art and Design. This will lead to new signs for the town and for a highway sign featuring the artwork. Having a banner that tells their story at a glance is a great marketing tool. Hats off to Westville for their colourful, modern banner.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare-Digby.

OUTHOUSE, LAURENCE: LONG ISLAND - LAND DONATIONS

MR. GORDON WILSON: Every so often we are lucky to meet visionaries like Laurence Outhouse. These visionaries are people who focus on what could be instead of what is. Laurence, who had grown up on Long Island, retired to the area. On his return he started working to ensure that the places he had enjoyed as a child would forever be enjoyed by everyone.

Apart from being a visionary, Laurence could also be very determined and convincing. He convinced the Althouse family to donate 7.8 acres, Althouse Lookoff, to the Municipality of Digby. He then leased his adjoining 10-acre lot to the municipality for 25 years. With the addition of these two lots to the Boar's Head Lighthouse lot and the lot owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, his vision is now a reality. Now we can all take a hike to his favourite spot overlooking Petit Passage.

Unfortunately it is no longer possible to meet Laurence there and to listen to his stories but you can sit on a bench with the inscription, "In memory of Laurence Outhouse, a passionate supporter of this beautiful place." Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ROACH, PEYTON: ACCOMPLISHMENTS - CONGRATS.

MR. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Peyton Roach, a student at Ridgecliff Middle School, a community activist for accessibility and a budding

young actor. I am full of admiration for Peyton's energy and enthusiasm since I've gotten to know him. Peyton has a big heart and a "can do" attitude toward life. Not one to let anything slow him down, Peyton was pleased and proud to make it on to the cast of Mr. D, the wacky sitcom filmed in Halifax.

Peyton is a fine young man who is growing up fast and I'm sure he will make a name for himself in years to come. Please join me in congratulating Peyton for another accomplishment. We'll all be watching Peyton on Mr. D in the next season. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Just before we move on to the next Member's Statement, if I could have everyone's attention drawn towards the Speaker's Gallery. This gives me great pleasure to introduce a special guest today who is hoping to be one of our newest Nova Scotia residents. We have visiting with us today Father Fabian Ihunegbo who is originally from Nigeria and serves as the parish priest in my constituency for Saint Genevieve's in East Chezzetcook and St. Philip Neri parish in Musquodoboit Harbour.

I'd ask all members of the House to please give Father Fabian a warm welcome to the House of Assembly. (Applause) And of course my Executive Assistant Jim Colford, as well.

Barring other Statements by Members, we'll prepare for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, which will commence momentarily on this cool, crisp day of October 26th.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

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

PREM. - TEACHERS UNION: STANDOFF - RESOLUTION

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, parents woke up this morning to the news that a 96 per cent strike vote has been taken by teachers. What a colossal mess this government has made of their negotiations with teachers. For the first time in our province's history we may well face a province-wide strike.

Governments are expected to work these things out at the table, Mr. Speaker, and yet for the first time we have a government that has not been able to do that. I'd like to ask the Premier, what is the plan to resolve this standoff now?

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. We, as a government, have negotiated two separate

agreements with two different NSTU executives - they were both rejected by their membership.

Yesterday their membership gave a strong mandate to the union for a strike vote. We will continue to monitor the situation, Mr. Speaker, but we're also going to continue to focus on what we've been doing, which is the classroom. We're going to continue to make those investments, working with classroom teachers across this province to continue, we believe, to improve the classroom and learning environment.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, no wonder parents and students and teachers are so worried, the Premier has just said they plan to do nothing - that's what monitoring the situation really means, nothing. In fact yesterday, last night, he and his Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development said it's up to the union now what to do.

That's not leadership, Mr. Speaker, and this province needs leadership. It's the government that messed this up, it's the government that can show leadership and get this back on track. Even spokespeople for the union say they don't want to strike, they want to work on classroom improvement.

I will quote from Wally Fiander, a teachers' spokesperson, who said ". . . let's go back to the table and they'll talk seriously with us, instead of just giving us lip service."

Will the Premier now get back to the table and put serious classroom reforms on that table, instead of just giving the union lip service?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. The union asked to have reduced class sizes - we have hired over 500 teachers to reduce class sizes across the entire elementary schools. We were asked to reduce outcomes - we brought teachers in from across the province to work with them to reduce those outcomes. We're continuing to hire more math mentors, and we've hired more mental health clinicians in schools.

We have said all along we're willing to continue to work to improve the classroom environment. We've said we're prepared to sit down and talk to teachers about that. As a matter of fact, the minister has asked teachers to come and join her, along with school board members, to continue to improve the learning environment. But it doesn't help, Mr. Speaker, when the Leader of the Official Opposition continues to fear-monger in this House day after day after day. He is never right with his predictions, fortunately, for Nova Scotians.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, I know that when the Premier is flustered and when he is frustrated he tries to lash out at others, but that is not the leadership that Nova Scotians want.

That is not what they expect of their Premier. Instead of showing Nova Scotians a way out of the mess, he resorts to his usual talking points which no one is believing any more. He says he is listening to teachers - well 96 per cent of them said last night that they are not being heard. The parents and students who rely on those classrooms to be functional and working are not going to get any comfort from what this Premier just said.

I would like to ask him, why should parents and students and teachers trust him now, after he created this mess in the first place, and refuses to go back to the table and put real classroom improvements back in play?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we have said all along we are continuing to talk with teachers, talk with the union to improve the classroom environment. What has become very clear, what the union executive has proposed as solutions that they believe classroom teachers - obviously that wasn't accurate. We've responded to everything that has been brought to us. We'll continue to work with classroom teachers across this province to make sure that we improve the learning environment.

Of all of the challenges that this province has been facing and the government has had to deal with, the one place we continue to invest has been in education across this province and we will continue to invest in education.

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

PREM.: TEACHERS - NEGOTIATE

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, my question is also to the Premier. Yesterday was an historic day: 9,300 members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike mandate, a statement that the union said no teacher wants a strike, but teachers are willing to fight to deliver the best education for Nova Scotia's students - and I'll table this document.

Mr. Speaker, there has never been a province-wide teachers strike in the history of this province, but the actions of this government has brought us to the brink. Will the Premier agree to go back to the table to negotiate in good faith with the teachers?

THE PREMIER: What has brought us to this point is the previous government cut \$65 million out of education. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: What has brought us to this point is the previous government cut \$65 million out of education. What we've done over the last three years is continue to reinvest that \$65 million back into education. We reinstated Reading Recovery, a program that they cut. We know there's more work to do, and we're continuing, and wanting to work with classroom teachers. That's why the minister has reached out to the union, and the union has accepted, and school board members. They'll sit down and look at how they can continue to improve the classroom. We presented a case to the union. We're waiting to hear back from them.

MR. BELLIVEAU: This Premier is stuck in the past. It's about the future for our children. The Premier keeps telling us about the steps this government has taken to address the issues in education. Well, I think it's pretty clear that the government's plan is not working. Yesterday, the NSTU president again said that teachers have not been consulted on the changes that the government has made. I ask the Premier, does he agree to listen to the teachers and start working together to resolve these issues?

THE PREMIER: We've continued to listen to teachers across the province, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, and the honourable member should know. The vehicle to listen to teachers is the NSTU. When we've tried to reach out directly to teachers, the NSTU has called the minister before the labour board, saying we've circumvented the union. We would love nothing more than to have a town hall with teachers across this province and continue to work with them. We're going to continue to make sure that we focus on the classrooms across this province.

MR. BELLIVEAU: It's time for this Premier to take responsibility for the situation he has created. The main issue in this dispute is poor working conditions, and an attempt to negotiate under the dark cloud of Bill No. 148. So far, neither the Premier nor any minister has ruled out (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Leader in the House of the New Democratic Party has the floor.

MR. BELLIVEAU: It's time for this Premier to take responsibility for the situation he has created. The main issue in this dispute is poor working conditions, and an attempt to negotiate under the dark cloud of Bill No. 148. So far, neither the Premier nor the minister has ruled out using this heavy-handed legislation to dictate a contract for the teachers. Will the Premier please tell Nova Scotians if he plans to enact this legislation or if this government is, in fact, willing to negotiate in good faith?

THE PREMIER: Bill No. 148 actually responds to arbitrations, and teachers do not have arbitration at this point. The honourable member should know that. He's absolutely right: we've continued to work with classroom teachers to make investments in classrooms across the province. We're going to continue to listen to teachers to make sure we make those investments. We're going to continue to work with citizens across this province to

make sure that our children get the proper beginning in education to give them the opportunities all of us have had. It's plain and simple. We watched the previous government cut their way in education. We knew that wasn't the way to go. We've taken a new path, and we're going to continue to work with teachers.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

EECD - TEACHERS: INCREASES - CONTEXT

HON. PAT DUNN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Mr. Speaker, 96 per cent of Nova Scotia teachers have sent a clear message to the government: the classroom supports have not caught up to classroom demands. I've heard from classroom teachers, and they feel that talking points that are being used by the Premier and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development are not all entirely factual. They do not tell the complete story.

The Premier has said in this House, and in the media, that 500 teachers have been hired since 2013. That fact may be accurate, however, I wonder what the net increase is. My question to the minister is, can the minister put that number into meaningful context and tell this House how many teachers have actually retired since 2013?

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad the member opposite has raised that question, because people are misunderstanding what a replacement teacher and what a retirement teacher really means, and when boards do their staffing, they do it based on their enrolment.

When we cap the class sizes we go in and say, how many more teachers do you need to implement the cap? They tell us and we fund it. So it is absolutely in addition to any other staffing that the boards would have made prior to implementing the cap.

MR. DUNN: An updated report of the Nova Scotia Public Education Teacher Supply and Demand from August 2012, more specifically, Appendix 3, outlines the retirement and disability assumptions for the teachers' pension plan - I'll table that. It lays out the number of teachers who are eligible to retire, with or without an unreduced pension. For 2013 to 2016 it totals 1,291 teachers. If they have all retired, then Nova Scotia is actually facing a 791 teacher deficit under this Premier's mandate.

The question, will the minister please tell the House how many more teachers must be hired in order to just break even with 2013, when this government took power, keeping in mind the decrease in student enrolment?

MS. CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I guess if we're talking new math, that probably is a first version of that. However, I will repeat that when the classes in our schools were capped, the numbers of teachers that were needed to do that were identified by the boards,

and when those numbers came to the department the total number of positions needed to implement the cap were funded above and beyond the funding formula that had already been applied.

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

EECD - MIN.: DECISION MAKING - NSTU INCLUDE

MS. LENORE ZANN: My question today is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. When teachers voted yesterday, they spoke with one voice. Teachers are united in their concerns about the learning and teaching environment in schools across this province. They're buried under the weight of entering data into cumbersome systems and they want more quality time with students, to get to know their strengths, and learn how to support their needs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hearing from teachers that the minister's Action Plan has failed to improve the situation in classrooms right across this province. Is she willing to take a step back from her ill-advised Action Plan and start including the Nova Scotia Teachers Union in her decision making?

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I would remind all members of the House that there have been attempts made from my office to teachers to find out what their real concerns were, and twice those attempts have been blocked.

If I could, Mr. Speaker, I will read to you a letter that I received from the Teachers Union when we wanted to have focus groups of teachers to let them tell us what their concerns were, and the answer back was, "I respectfully request that you cancel the focus groups scheduled for teachers", signed by the President of the Teachers Union. I will table that.

MS. ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very disappointed to hear that because what I am hearing from teachers is that they feel this government is not listening to them, and this minister is not listening to them, and they ask, when was the last time she taught in a classroom?

The minister says she capped classes, well, teachers say the classrooms are still overcrowded. She says she hired teachers, teachers say that schools are still underfunded and understaffed. She says she increased support, teachers say they are not able to service the number of IPPs and adaptations in the classrooms. Mr. Speaker, I'll table some of the stories teachers have been sharing with me.

The minister is asking teachers to do more with less, so my question today is, what is this minister going to bring to the table today to show the teachers that this government respects the contributions they're making in the classrooms right across this province?

MS. CASEY: I guess in response to that, I do want to say that teachers have legitimate concerns. We have tried to provide an opportunity for the teachers' voices to be heard. We have learned, unfortunately, that the Teachers Union does not speak for the teachers. We went out to teachers and asked them, what are your needs for professional development? We developed a survey for teachers so they could tell us what their needs were. The answer back from the union, and I will read it, was:

“... the NSTU asks for a commitment that the Department will not rely upon the results of the survey with respect to . . . professional development and will destroy all results collected. The NSTU further asks that teachers who have not yet completed the survey will not be asked to do so.”

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

EECD - TEACHERS: RETIREMENT (POST 2013) - NUMBERS

HON. PAT DUNN: My question is for (Interruptions)

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

MR. DUNN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. How many teachers have retired since 2013?

HON. KAREN CASEY: I would be glad to get that information for the member.

MR. DUNN: The teachers that I've been talking to have been getting conflicting messages. On one hand, the minister is saying we want to talk to you, and we'll provide the resources and funding for your classrooms; come to our table, and we'll handle it. On the other hand, the Premier is saying there will be no more funding. Would the minister clarify that?

MS. CASEY: I have no idea what the member said, but perhaps the Premier could answer it.

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question because in every budget that I've introduced in this House, I'm very proud of the fact that I put more money in classrooms across this province. What I said, and I want to be clear, is that

we will treat every public servant the same. When it comes to the benefit package, all the money that we have is on the table.

If they identify the issues in the classroom, I would be happy to invest more money over and above what we've already invested in classrooms across this province because I believe in teachers, and I want to give children the right start in life.

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

PREM.: NURSING HOMES - FUNDING RESTORE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: The Continuing Care Council went public this week to say that our nursing home providers across the province are struggling with the 1-per cent cuts that the Premier has imposed on their budgets. The Continuing Care Council represents 90 per cent of the licensed nursing homes in Nova Scotia. They wanted to make it clear that the cuts that they are forced to make are, in fact, impacting the residents who live there, our seniors. I would like to ask the Premier, is he going to stick to his usual talking points about how his cuts are not impacting residents, or will he now finally take the words of the people who actually provide care to our seniors in nursing homes, and work with them to restore the funding?

THE PREMIER: As I said, if the honourable member had been here, four executive directors who were in the House this day said it was not impacting patient care.

MR. BAILLIE: Once again, I have to say that is not what they said. Nobody comes here to say everything is fine. The Premier must know that by now; he's been here a long time.

The organization representing 90 per cent of the nursing homes of this province says it's unreasonable to expect them to take another 1 per cent out of their entire budget when the amount of costs they can actually cut is limited to a very few things like food quality. Will the Premier admit once and for all that his cuts are impacting the quality of care, including food, in our nursing homes and reverse those cuts?

THE PREMIER: I thank the honourable member, who continually comes to this House to spread fear, Mr. Speaker. I was grateful for the fact that we had four executive directors come to this House to dispute what he was saying; they said it was not impacting food quality. That was from the very people who are running four of our institutions across this province.

What we have said to them, if there are other issues associated with delivering services, the Minister of Health and Wellness has reached out. What they were speaking to, and I listened to them - they were talking about future budgets. The minister continued

to work with them. They talked about emergency repairs; we've talked about that with the minister.

We're continuing to work with our partners. But it does not help when the Leader of the Official Opposition continually comes to this House day after day, and does nothing but stir up fear among our citizens.

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

PREM. - NURSING HOMES: UPGRADE - REFUSAL EXPLAIN

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: I know when the Premier gets confused, he lashes out at others who bring facts to this House that disagree with his talking points, but that is no way to make sure that our seniors get the help they need.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, beyond the 1 per cent cut, the people who actually run our nursing homes have said that his government has turned down every single request for even the most modest capital improvements to the nursing homes of the province.

I'd like to ask the Premier, why is he refusing to upgrade the province's nursing homes even at the most basic level, when it affects our seniors so obviously?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. Again, I want to thank those workers across the province who continue to look after our seniors, the four executive directors who came into this House and talked about the fact that there are challenging times but that the fact of the 1 per cent cut was not affecting patient care, nor was it affecting food quality.

We've continued to reach out. The minister, through the department, has reached out if there are issues around investments that are required in their facilities. It's an ongoing process that happens. We're in the process of looking at budgets for next year, and I know the minister will be engaging those developers.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, nursing home operators are speaking up. They say they can't handle the 1 per cent cut because it's forced them to cut things like the quality of food. They say they can't handle no funding for even the most modest improvements to the nursing homes themselves. When they bring those concerns forward, like Northwood did, rather than listen to them, the Premier sends the auditors. It's an attempt to silence our nursing home operators, who are trying to do the right thing for their residents.

I'd like to ask the Premier, when he's confronted with obvious needs, why does he try to silence them by sending in the auditors to those who speak up, instead of listening to the voices of the nursing home operators across this province who are trying to provide decent care for our seniors?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, the honourable member is spreading misinformation and fear in the Province of Nova Scotia. It's completely inaccurate. The very people who run those nursing homes - four of them were here. They said the changes have not impacted food quality.

He continues to stand up to spread fear among our citizens. It's completely unacceptable for someone who's trying to aspire to be the Premier, that he thinks the only way to get there is to spread fear and inaccurate information. The fact of the matter is, the four people who were in this House said it did not affect food quality, and the ones we've reached out to said it has not impacted food quality.

Are there things we need to continue to do? Of course. I want to go further, Mr. Speaker. The honourable member raised the issue of the auditor, which was agreed to by both facilities. One is a not-for-profit nursing home, and the other is a for-profit facility. We gave them a different number. We agreed on someone to come in to look at it and come to what would be the proper conclusion. That's what a good government should do: listen to people, find solutions, and find common ground.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

PREM.: STUDENTS' CONCERNS - RESPONSE

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The uncertainty created by last night's teachers' vote is particularly concerning to students at the province's schools. Many of these students have written to MLAs to express their support for teachers and concern for their own education.

Regardless of who the government thinks is right in this dispute, no one can deny that students have been caught as innocent bystanders in this escalating war. How does the Premier respond to the concerns stated by students?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. As he would know, teachers are standing in front of students today. I believe they want to continue to stand in front of students. We want them to stand in front of students, to continue to stay there. We've come back to the table to see how we can continue to improve the classroom environment. We believe there's a solution there that will help us come to a resolution to this issue.

Students across this province, and families across this province, know that teachers want to be in front of their students, and they are in front of their students.

MR. YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, Dartmouth East resident Kenzi Donnelly was the primary author of the letter MLAs received recently, and she's with us today. I know her as a passionate and caring young woman, and I assure this House that her concerns are

genuine and from the heart. She feels teachers' concerns about the classroom issues are real, but she and many other Grade 12 students are also concerned about the uncertainty that has now been created in impacting their academic year, whether that's because of a strike, work to rule, or just not knowing what will happen.

What does the Premier say in response to students like Kenzi who are now worried about the uncertainty that might impact their education for this year?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I want to welcome the Grade 12 student from Dartmouth to the House of Assembly. I, too, share the concerns that she had about the classrooms across this province. That's why, from the very beginning, of all the difficult challenges I have made as the Premier of this province, I continue to invest in classrooms whether it's class caps, whether it's Reading Recovery, hiring more math mentors, hiring mental health clinicians. We know there's more work to do.

I want to send a message back, through her, to her classroom teacher to tell her how much I appreciate the work that he or she may be doing on behalf of her class and the citizens. We want to work with our classroom teachers to make sure that we provide them with the supports to make that their learning environment is there, because there are young people just like the student that is in this gallery who will lead this province to continue to move forward. The least we can do is invest in that.

Of all the things I've done - I want to say this again - I have continued to invest in public education. Have we gotten it all right? Obviously not. We will continue to work with teachers to improve that environment because I fundamentally believe that is our responsibility to give the next generation of Nova Scotians the proper start in life and I want to support the teachers doing it. (Applause)

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

LAE - UNIV./COLLEGES: STUDENT SUPPORTS - ACCESS

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. In 2015, the Dalhousie Student Union organized and established a volunteer-run sexual assault and harassment phone line. The phone line was a confidential, anonymous, peer-support service for anyone who had been affected by sexualized or gender-based violence. This year, the phone line had to reduce the number of hours it's operating because the funding offered by the university administration was insufficient.

I would like to ask, what is the minister doing to make sure university and college students across Nova Scotia have access to the supports they need on campuses?

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question. I did want to let him know that in fact now the 211 and 811 lines for the government are, in fact, offering services to people who have been sexually assaulted, to make sure that they get the assistance that they need. We also have struck a committee over at Labour and Advanced Education, with representation from students, to deal with this particular issue on campus. My colleague, the Minister Responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act has instituted prevention grants, and I would, in fact, like to get the message out there to young people and old people alike that if they have any idea around preventing sexual violence, we're looking at funding those right now, so please apply. Thank you.

MR. WILSON: One of the concerns is that with the university line at Dalhousie it was a peer-support opportunity for those students who are on campus, and that helps immensely when you're dealing with sexualized violence. It's estimated, unfortunately, that between 15 per cent and 25 per cent of North American college- and university-aged women will experience some form of sexual assault during their academic career, and that's a sad statistic.

Nova Scotia is now lagging behind other provinces in Canada around legislation to improve campus safety, so I'm wondering if the minister would agree to bring forward legislation requiring university and college campuses to have sexual policies, student support, and public reporting like their Liberal counterparts have done in other provinces like Ontario and British Columbia.

MS. REGAN: I want to thank the honourable member for the question, Mr. Speaker. I want to let him know that the counsellors who are responding on 211 and 811 are nurses and they are now trauma-informed, so I think that will assist people who are calling those lines because of sexual violence. I do want to also let the honourable member know that the MOU that we've signed with the universities does, in fact, require universities to have sexual-assault policies easily accessible to young people and, most important, we're tying increases in funding to making sure that those universities actually deal with sexual assault, that they have those particular policies in place.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**MUN. AFFS. - LIBERAL PARTY:
ILLEGAL CONTRIBUTIONS - DETAILS**

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs about illegal political contributions by Richmond County councillors. The minister deflected with what I consider unfair allegations about our Party. Page 18 of the forensic audit by Grant Thornton says that - verbatim - "a political party expense made by Councillors relating to a Liberal party event was claimed." - and I can table that.

No political Party, aside from the Liberals, is implicated in this forensic investigation.

Mr. Speaker, having had 24 hours to consider his words, is the minister now willing to share which of his colleagues benefited from illegal contributions?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I know I speak on behalf of our Party, and every Party - when donations are accepted there is the full expectation that those donations are in line with the laws of the province. That is our expectation as a Party; that is the Elections Nova Scotia's expectation of us.

What I was speaking about yesterday was when it comes to expenses, all of us in this Chamber meet with our municipal officials in our various ridings, we meet with various stakeholder communities. I know that when there are expenses related to those meetings, we would expect that the rules be followed to a T. I know I speak on behalf of the member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg, who participated in the meeting with Richmond that was expensed. I know I speak on behalf of the member for Northside-Westmount, who participated in the meeting at the Red Stag that was expensed. I know I speak on behalf of the member for Argyle-Barrington who participated in a meeting that cost about \$1,200 in Houston.

Mr. Speaker, I know I speak on behalf of all of us when I say there is an expectation that the rules of the land are followed to a T. Nova Scotians demand that and expect no less.

MS. MACFARLANE: I appreciate the minister's comments, but I'm trying to stay focused on one particular forensic investigation. I'm not talking about meals; I'm talking about donations. The forensic auditors uncovered seven instances where Richmond councillors were reimbursed for political contributions or tickets to political events and I've already tabled that, so please, will the minister stay focused on this subject matter and tell taxpayers today that any contributions to Liberal politicians or Liberal political events will be returned to the people of Richmond County, like it should be?

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that that forensic audit happened because of the actions taken by this government and the recommendations that came forward. Our department has been very involved in the situation in that municipal unit.

When it comes to any donations that had been received, obviously the expectation of everybody is that those donations come from individuals. In this particular case council decided to reimburse themselves for those donations. That is not allowed; that is against their policies, as I understand them. Those are against the laws of Elections Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker, so obviously that situation needs to be dealt with and our expectation is that those laws always be followed.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**JUSTICE - AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIANS/ABORIGINAL PEOPLE:
CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES - OVERREPRESENTATION**

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Our caucus learned through a freedom of information request that the African Nova Scotians and Aboriginal people are overrepresented in provincial correctional facilities. I will table that.

I'm certain that no one in this House wants to see either overrepresented, in terms of time spent in segregation. However, I am concerned that the department's lack of data may make it impossible to tell, so I ask the minister, what assurances can she give this House that African Nova Scotians and Aboriginal people are not overrepresented in terms of time spent in segregation?

HON. DIANA WHALEN: I appreciate the question. We have had some discussions earlier here in the House about segregation and last week the member opposite brought up the issue around the veracity of the data we have and whether or not it's sufficient. Our own staff said it's not.

We've looked at it. The individuals are tracked and we can tell you individually how much time is spent in segregation, but it's not collated properly, and so we don't have accurate information. In response to that, we are changing it, and I would say by the New Year, we will be able to track and keep accurate information to respond to the member's question.

MS. MANCINI: When I asked the minister last week about the use of segregation in correctional facilities, she said, "We're certainly very aware of it in terms of mental health concerns." I'll table that. Yet the letter from her department that I tabled last week stated that they do not track the total time inmates spent in segregation. I submit that this is not acceptable. People have recently spoken out in a number of provinces about the apparent lack of oversight regarding the use of segregation in correctional facilities. It is good that the minister has agreed to correct this problem, but I would like to ask this question: why was there such a lack of fundamental administrative tracking which has not happened, until it may happen now?

MS. WHALEN: As Minister of Justice, I certainly do take responsibility for the work of our department, but some things have been let slide over many years. When we find out about them, when we realize that's not something we're tracking, we're taking steps to correct it. It really was not something I was aware of, that we couldn't account for that, until just recently. I think even our staff, everybody in the department realizes it needs to change. The focus, as well, on the issue about overrepresentation of African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal - I would like to just mention that under the inquiry into the Home

for Colored Children, which is restorative in nature, they are looking at all of our institutions and the overrepresentation within our systems and how we can do better in future.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

MUN. AFFS: EXPENSES - DEPT. ACTION

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Page 32 of the Grant Thornton forensic audit reveals some disturbing expenses, and I'll table this page. It shows that on May 8, 2013, expenses of \$546 were claimed for a reception and meal at 11 o'clock in an adult entertainment venue in Houston, Texas, called Treasures. It's unbelievable, but this isn't the end of it. That same night, a receipt for \$35 was submitted. The CAO originally said it was for a taxi, but the auditor found it was for an adult entertainment establishment. How outrageous do these expenses have to be before it's time for this minister and his department to take action?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Obviously, I am disgusted by the expenses that were made. I think I speak on behalf of everybody here in expressing shock and dismay that these expenses were made. The issue at hand here is that individuals within a certain council, which is independent and autonomous, broke their own rules when it came to expenses. That, of course, is unacceptable. It has led to a forensic audit that was pushed for by our department. It was flagged in a previous audit, and it has led to an RCMP investigation. Obviously these matters are being taken very seriously. It is incumbent upon all of us to allow the investigators to proceed, to see what the final findings are of that particular case.

MS. MACFARLANE: It's just that we've been hearing from so many constituents in that area, and I think they felt that there should have been action taken sooner. Treasures is an upscale gentleman's club in Houston, Texas, and it offers a range of corporate packages. The Silver VIP package costs \$500 plus taxes and fees, and includes 370 millilitres of premium liquor, five free admissions to the club, reserved seating on the main floor, and a VIP waitress. Has this minister investigated to make sure taxpayer money was not used to purchase a VIP corporate package in a Houston strip club?

MR. CHURCHILL: Obviously, to expense any of that is absolutely ridiculous. It is against the rules of that municipal unit, and it should not have happened. It was in terrible taste, Mr. Speaker. The situation is so severe that the RCMP has been brought in to invest this. We would not have had these findings if it was not for the red flags that came in on an audit that all municipalities are forced to give Municipal Affairs every year, there were issues flagged there. That led to our department to push for a forensic audit, which happened, and citizens applied directly to the Ombudsman's Office to take a look at this.

Obviously these are problems and the appropriate officials are looking at it, and investigations are happening, Mr. Speaker. There were rules broken, I think we all need to recognize that. It's not because of anybody in this room that those rules were broken. At the end of the day we have to let this investigation proceed and come up with its conclusions and if there's any information that comes from that that suggests we should act, of course we will.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MUN. AFFS. - RICHMOND COUN. AUDIT: SUPERVISION - DETAILS

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Yesterday, and twice today, the minister said it was a recommendation sent by this government to the municipal council in Richmond that led to a forensic audit which revealed inappropriate spending practices, but is it true that the minister allowed the audit to proceed, under the supervision of the CAO and a councillor, who is an employee of the Liberal caucus, two of the individuals found responsible for the very inappropriate expenses that were being investigated?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the member opposite is questioning the validity of the findings within that audit. They were consistent with the finding of the Ombudsman's Office. I think that is a good thing that both investigations came up with very similar conclusions. Rules were broken by individuals and there's further recommendations in both those reports to inform the Richmond council on how to better improve their own rules around expenses.

Mr. Speaker, we are also taking this matter so seriously that it is helping us inform the broader conversation we're having with our municipal partners on expenses in general, and you will probably see some changes coming forward in the Spring around municipal expenses. Thank you.

MR. MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I'm not questioning the findings but I am saying that there could be more. The individuals who were supervising the audit - to me, that's clearly inappropriate.

Taxpayers in Richmond County are not satisfied. This government knew what was going on, an employee in their own caucus office is one of the councillors involved. Does the minister expect the taxpayers of Richmond County to be satisfied with the lack of support they received from this government in getting to the bottom of what was going on?

MR. CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, that forensic audit was conducted by Grant Thornton, a reputable company that does these things for businesses, for governments across North America and beyond. I have not been provided any information from that member or anybody else, to question of findings of that report.

This is an issue of individuals choosing to break the rules that council had established for themselves. It's unacceptable. Every member of this Chamber holds themselves to the highest standards when it comes to transparency and accountability with our expenses. I know the public demands and expects all elected officials to do the same, Mr. Speaker.

If we need to change the laws of this land to ensure that that is happening and everybody is brought up to the standard that Nova Scotians expect and demand, we will do that, Mr. Speaker.

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

**HEALTH & WELLNESS:
LONG-TERM CARE FEE CHANGES - NOTIFICATION**

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, last week the member for Dartmouth South asked the Minister of Health and Wellness about the fees clients pay for long-term care. The Department of Health and Wellness is supposed to provide a 30-day notice for increases in fees to clients in long-term care. New rates are expected to go up on November 1st. However, that didn't take place this year, they were given much shorter notice, so I'm wondering if the minister could indicate why the department chose not to follow the 30-day notice for increases in long-term care fees?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I know there was a delay from the department, perhaps part of it was due to the fact that there are no increases in rates for the next year.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, some clients will see an increase. Last week the minister said there would be no general increases as he just mentioned, but the constituent that the member for Dartmouth South brought forward will see a fee increase and wasn't given that 30-days' notice. However, that person's only source of income is the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS, and it's a benefit through the federal government for low-income seniors. Is it the case that when the federal government increases GIS rates for low-income seniors, this government is going to claw that back through increased fees for those living in long-term care?

MR. GLAVINE: I thank the member for the question. We know there can be changes in assessment of any individual because of a new source of income that they may get during a year and that can, indeed, change.

In terms of the accommodation rate, with no change being made there was no need to in fact inform the members in our long-term facilities that there was no change, they did not actually have to be informed.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

GAMING: ALC MINISTERS SUMMITS - ATTENDANCE CONFIRM

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy. The province is a shareholder in the Atlantic Lottery Corporation and the minister is responsible for overseeing that investment on behalf of taxpayers. Today the Auditor General released a report that highlighted a number of control weaknesses, and the Atlantic Lottery Corporation is known to host an annual ministers' summit for ministers from the shareholder provinces. This is essentially a meeting where shareholders can ask questions and raise concerns.

I'd like to ask the minister, has he ever attended one of the Atlantic Lottery Corporation's ministers' summits?

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to attend two of those summits. Last year we hosted here in Halifax and this Fall it was held in Moncton at the offices of the Atlantic Lottery Corporation. We take very seriously the recommendations that came from the Auditor General's Report. A lot of those predate my time as minister, but regardless of that we certainly want to make sure that the proper safeguards and transparency and accountability are in place for Atlantic Lotto, as we expect from all our government entities.

MR. HOUSTON: Well having been to two of the ministers' summits, I'm curious as to what the minister was doing in his capacity there to protect the shareholders and their investment. Obviously the Auditor General released a bunch of findings today about skyrocketing salaries there, a bunch of inappropriate investments, so I'd like to ask the minister - he was there in his capacity to protect the shareholders, which are the taxpayers of this province - what was he doing at these meetings? Was he looking at documents? Was he looking at the shareholder agreement? Was he asking any questions about what was happening?

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, we have representatives who sit on the board; in fact, the CEO of the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation sits on the ALC board, along with another member representing the interests of Nova Scotians. Obviously we have seen what the Auditor General has identified. If the member looks, most of those concerns predate my time as minister, but we take those very seriously.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that was asked today as well is regarding entertainment by Atlantic Lottery. I certainly acknowledged to the press when I received tickets from Atlantic Lottery - I'm wondering if the honourable is willing to do the same for both himself, his colleagues, and even his political staff.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

GAMING: ALC - MIN. OVERSIGHT

MR. TIM HOUSTON: I thank the minister for that answer, but what we're trying to talk about is what was the minister doing in his capacity to oversee this file? Today we learned that the Auditor General in his joint audit with the auditors from the other provinces found significant issues around a lack of government oversight and a lack of direction. In fact, the Auditor General found that the Atlantic Lottery Corporation had, without the government support, without shareholders' support, proceeded with an \$8 million investment in a start-up company based in the U.K., which resulted in an \$8 million loss.

I'd like to ask the minister, when did he first learn about this investment? At which one of the ministers' summits did he learn about it and what action did he suggest to the Atlantic Lottery Corporation at that time to make sure that this didn't happen again?

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member is quick to ask questions; apparently he is not so quick to answer questions, as I gave him ample opportunity there to be able to indicate whether he had received any hospitality from Atlantic Lottery Corporation, or his colleagues, or even his political staff. Apparently transparency only goes so far with that member.

The points he is raising predate our government, to start off with. He may want to ask his colleagues over to the left on that, but the specific investment he is referring to was one that was made by both New Brunswick and P.E.I. Nova Scotia was not involved in it. To the credit of the previous administration, they did not commit Nova Scotia to that specific initiative of Atlantic Lotto, so the losses he is referring to were . . .

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

With the consent of the House, we will revert to the order of business, Tabling Reports, Regulations and Other Papers.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Yesterday, the Leader of the Official Opposition raised a serious issue in the House around mental health in Cumberland County. I want to table a letter I sent to CEO Janet Knox, expecting that they move on finding a better way to manage wait-lists, particularly around mental health and addictions services. I want to thank the

honourable member for bringing it to the House. We will make sure that those Nova Scotians who are looking for mental health supports are treated in the way that I believe they should be, and this wasn't it.

MR. SPEAKER: The letter is tabled.

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 46.

Bill No. 46 - Community Colleges Act.

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

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: This is an opportunity to talk about Bill No. 46, the Community Colleges Act. I know that in Nova Scotia, our Party, the NDP, is determined to eliminate the tuition for all students enrolled at Nova Scotia Community College. This policy certainly would assist 11,000 full-time students and over 11,000 part-time students right across our province, and captures 13 campuses representing Nova Scotia Community College. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Leader in the House of the New Democratic Party has the floor.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know everybody is excited to hear what I have to say. I am glad to have their attention.

The time has come to eliminate tuition fees at community colleges. By investing in Nova Scotia Community College students, we can now open the doors of opportunities that have largely been shut for a generation. This is the first step toward making post-secondary education more affordable for Nova Scotians. While the Liberal Governments in Ontario and New Brunswick have taken concrete steps to make college and university tuition fees for more and more students affordable, this government has allowed tuition fees in Nova Scotia to increase by as much as 37 per cent in some colleges and universities. This is

simply unacceptable for my colleagues in this Party. The present Liberal Government has remained silent on the specific issue of tuition fees at our community colleges.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, CCPA, estimates that for every dollar Nova Scotia spends providing a student with a community college education, there is a public return of \$7.20 over the life of this student. To me that is considerable investment. Again I want to point out that our Party, the NDP of Nova Scotia, is calling for the elimination of tuition fees at community colleges.

Mr. Speaker, I have a number of guests in the gallery. If I could move away from my notes, could I have an opportunity and time to introduce those individuals?

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Today in our west gallery, we have with us Matthew Ross, President of Nova Scotia Community College Waterfront Campus Student Association, and also Charlotte Kiddell, Nova Scotia Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students. I ask my colleagues to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

Thank you very much for your guidance there, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to have these young students in the gallery to witness this debate here tonight in the House.

Education is something I've raised a number of times. I haven't had the fortune that a number of my colleagues in this House have had. I know the importance of education. It is simply a building block for the future of all Nova Scotians, and certainly for the future of the individuals. This building block is something that I want to talk about later on or during this speech: the foundation that the NDP, this particular Party, is suggesting is the building block for the future of our youth in Nova Scotia.

It's interesting to note the burden of debt - I'm amazed at the amount of money young students have to endure to put themselves through education in our present education system. To me, knowing that 11,000 full-time students and 11,000 part-time students in the Nova Scotia Community College can benefit from this particular bill is something to recognize.

I don't want to duck and run away from this. I know that every time you introduce a bill or a budget line, there is cost involved. I know, coming from a hard-working family, it's all about priorities. Mr. Speaker, what I'm about to say in the next few minutes is about priorities. Whether you're a hard-working family right across our beautiful province, or if you're fortunate enough to be the sitting government leaders, it's about making priorities and managing money.

This particular cost - our Party is suggesting \$30 million for this particular program to affect students and the benefits of education in community colleges. I'll use an example,

Mr. Speaker, of our government setting priorities. One of the examples I'll use - and I'm not hesitating in doing this - previously this sitting government used \$50 million to fund the Yarmouth ferry.

Now, you say, this particular member is throwing caution in the wind and talking about this issue that is sensitive right across Nova Scotia. I do this because \$50 million on a ferry system that does not have commercial traffic on it is questionable - of concern for me. The other concern is when you do not have financial contribution on that particular ferry from our federal counterparts. I'm just using this as an example, Mr. Speaker. Bear with me.

Mr. Speaker, \$50 million is a considerable amount of money for myself, and I agree that it's an international link or highway. But just suppose you had a portion of that money to put in a \$30 million program for education. You can see where I'm going. The \$50 million ferry this year was half full. Now, if we were to have free tuition right across our 13 campuses across Nova Scotia, I'm suggesting that they're not going to be half full. They're going to be full. There's the point. It's a very good investment.

When the NDP was in office, we brought in a program to try to retain and educate our young people. To my memory, it was called the Graduate Retention Rebate - a long title. It was a rebate, and it basically cost the government of the day \$40 million. The first thing this present government did when elected was to scuttle that program. They did away with it. To me, that is not a positive step. I can tell you that one thing I'm proud of, of this Party, is not only that we were talking about eliminating tuition fees at Nova Scotia Community College but that we're here and we're making sure that we look after people in our health care system and also in our education.

One of the things I've really noticed, and I'll spend the remaining few minutes of my speech on this - is that at the Nova Scotia Community College there are a number of trade applications. One of the things I know - I come from a small community, and I can tell you there is a great demand for these skills in our community. Carpentry, diesel repairs, electrician, construction, heavy equipment operators, ocean resource technologies, welding certification, plumbing.

These are just a few of the jobs that I know personally that people, especially in southwestern Nova Scotia, and I'm confident right across our province - I'll use the boatbuilding industry for instance. When I walk into a welding machine shop, the individuals say to me, can you get me 15 welders, can you get me some electricians? The boatbuilding industry is in a boom state, and it takes a number of individuals. The superstructure is welded together from aluminum and different types of metals, electricians can spend months in there wiring these individual boats. It's a lot of work, and there are a lot of small jobs. I can speak from a personal level about my own home, and we all know that whether you're a farmer, a fisherman, or just a homeowner, there is maintenance to go into that home.

Again, I can use personal experience: if you want a plumber, you're going to have to go out and wait up to a year, Mr. Speaker, to get an individual to come to your home to look at that particular job. An electrician is similar, and I can go on and on. Some of the references I made earlier in my speech is to these individuals, and they're in great demand across our province. To me, this is a win-win situation for all individuals. It will help stimulate the economy whether it's boatbuilding or other different jobs across our province.

Maybe the best example, Mr. Speaker, I have saved for last. We're talking about experience in small business, and all I have to do is look across the aisle to our Premier - I mean this in a very complimentary way. If we were to hit the reset button to 15 years ago, our Premier, to my understanding, was a small appliance repair person. I mean that in all due respect - that job was important to that individual at that time is important to the community. Whether you're a small repairman for appliances or you're a welder, heavy equipment operator, or electronics engineer, these jobs are high-quality, paid jobs in the community, and our community is desperate for these individuals as we speak.

When I walk into the boatbuilding industry and ask, how's everything going? They're going flat out, Mr. Speaker, and I know you're very familiar with that term. When they're going flat out, the next question I ask is, what does your order book look like? And they'll say, well, maybe five years down the road. To me, that is a lot of work that can be generated in that community. Now, if we were to speed up that process, thinking about how many are actually waiting to get on that order book, how much we could stimulate the economy by having people filling our Nova Scotia Community Colleges. I've made reference that the Yarmouth ferry was half full with a \$50 million investment.

Now, I'm willing to say we invest \$30 million in education, and we're going to have the classrooms across Nova Scotia, and our 13 colleges, they're not going to be half full - they're going to be full and our communities will benefit from it. Like you say to me, there are good paying jobs, and I know some of the money that these welders make. Again, it is amazing how much money that these individuals can make, and I wish them well, don't get me wrong.

The other one I know from personal experience is when I go to a construction zone and the heavy equipment driver - and you notice the large machinery sitting there, and I say, well, why are we waiting? They have to have the qualification and the licences for that individual to drive it, and usually, there are only one or two on a job site.

So, I can tell you in ending, that the Nova Scotia Community College - this is right on the money, this is in the right direction, and Nova Scotians will benefit from this. I can tell you that it will keep a lot of people in our communities, especially in rural Nova Scotia. I think this is right on the money and I look forward to especially the Official Opposition, my Party, the governing Party, on their comments on this particular bill and I thank you for the time.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Immigration on an introduction.

HON. LENA DIAB: Mr. Speaker, I ask members of the House to look at the east gallery. With us this afternoon, I'm pleased to say we have an Armdale resident, Mr. Bert Walker, who is celebrating his 85th birthday today, along with his son Michael, who has travelled from Ontario to be with him these few days in preparation of a birthday celebration they held yesterday - which I was pleasantly surprised to have been invited to. I would like everybody to please give them the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill No. 46, the Community Colleges Act.

This government is working very hard to make our province stronger by creating opportunities for young Nova Scotians. I must say I'm a proud parent of graduates of NSCC. My oldest son took business administration and also masonry in community college, and my second son is a heritage carpentry graduate, and just last week my youngest son, who is attending Saint Mary's University in the Human Resources program, registered on their free registration event during their open house to apply for their Human Resources Management Program next year at the Dartmouth Campus. So my family is very familiar with the community colleges program.

I also have members who have graduated through the practical nurses program and other programs for the last number of years. I do want to say that they are wonderful programs and supports that are at the community colleges and go well beyond the expectations I think many parents have about a secondary and post-high school institution.

Mr. Speaker, this government is keeping post-secondary education affordable in Nova Scotia and it is a priority of this government. Nova Scotia Community College is known for offering quality and affordable programs that have helped thousands of students connect to good and well-paying jobs upon graduation. Taxpayers already contribute millions of dollars towards post-secondary education. Free Nova Scotia community college tuition would cost taxpayers another \$30 million a year, every year, not just this year.

Mr. Speaker, we have a debt of over \$15 billion. Our top expenditure is Health and Wellness, then we have Education and Early Childhood Development, followed by Community Services. The fourth largest expense of this government is paying interest on the debt. Over \$800 million a year is paid on the interest alone on the debt that we are paying here in Nova Scotia, \$3.2 billion of that was added during the last government and every year we keep spending more and more money servicing our debt. We need to follow some kind of restraint and we do understand that we contribute a great deal of money.

The Nova Scotia Community College has enrolled 11,000 students this year. As of the end of September, already they were receiving an operating grant funding for \$137 million. That's quite a lot of money, Mr. Speaker, and it is given very willingly from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education because we know how important the community college system is and we are already supporting the community college system. Their tuitions are very comparable to other colleges in Canada, and their graduates have very high employment rates, Mr. Speaker: 86 per cent are employed in their field of study, usually one year after graduating and that is something to be proud of.

Nova Scotia has a great student assistance program; 40 per cent of the assistance is in the form of grants. Students never have to repay their grant, and that is a good thing. I can tell you, some of the technology grants that are offered through the community college program for people with disabilities really help with assistive technology for students who otherwise would probably not be successful in these programs. They can apply for these grants for a laptop, if you're in carpentry and you need a special calculator for measurements, you can apply for grant money for those. All those aids come through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, Mr. Speaker.

That's not all we're doing for our youth. We're really working strong in this government, and we are creating opportunities for young Nova Scotians. We are doing this by providing working with businesses to help new grads get their first jobs with the Graduate to Opportunity program. We are providing young and less experienced workers opportunities to get employment in the Public Service. We are modernizing the apprenticeship system and investing in trades education, and we are working with our universities, researchers, and students by investing in research, so that we can drive economic growth here in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education we registered more than 6,250 apprentices in the past year. That is an increase of 5.6 per cent, and many of the people who are in the apprenticeship program go into these programs following their education at a community college here in Nova Scotia. So we're not just assisting during the years that they are in community college through the grants, but we are also helping them with the apprenticeship programs that we offer.

We have enrolled more than 1,380 new apprentices-in-training just this year alone, and we have certified 780 Nova Scotians who completed their apprenticeships last year, becoming full qualified journeypeople - and those programs are challenging. My son has done the apprenticeship program for brick layers and masonry. And he has finished the four units that are required to get his red seal and that involves studying, it involves going back to school, and sometimes when you're working in a job, Mr. Speaker, and you're making money, it's pretty darn hard to go back school and sit in a classroom for another 6 weeks to take your unit, or your block, as they call it. You do get EI over that period of time in support, but it's not the same as getting your regular paycheque.

That's a really big thing. I know people who go into the surveying program in Lawrencetown - it's a two-year program - they finish their first year and they never come back to complete the program in the second year, because they've gotten a job through the summer months, and they figure, well, I'm making money, and they don't go back and complete the second year of the program. They are somewhat qualified, but they can't be certified.

Mr. Speaker, we've done something very unique during this term in government, we signed a national mobility agreement with pre-apprenticeship programs and apprentice's technical training and work experiences. This is recognized all across the country, so that if you graduate from a program here at NSCC and you go out West or to New Brunswick or wherever, you can add your apprenticeship hours and come back here, and have those hours completed and do your testing, or you can do your testing out there, and it's accepted right across the country. That's a really good program, Mr. Speaker, and it's about time we did that.

We've launched a pilot program with TIR to encourage the hiring of apprentices for publicly funded construction projects. That was put into use greatly this summer. I know a few people who have taken up that opportunity. Even more, Mr. Speaker, our youth apprenticeship programs enrolled more than 115 youth apprentices in the past year. The Workit grant contributed almost \$400,000 to support school boards in promoting the skilled trades.

Mr. Speaker I don't know if you know about of the STEP program, but on Fridays, a group of students goes over to the Community College. They have hands-on experiences with different trades. It's often the tool that inspires these students to stay in school and get the education they need so they can move on to community college and invest their time and money into these programs and learn a skilled trade.

Through summer youth programs like TestDrive, Building Futures for Youth, and Serve It Up!, over 100 students gained hands-on trades experience and skills through paid summer internships in just the last summer. These programs have provided more than 650 students with paid summer employment and hands-on trade experience. That's a good thing. It's always great when students are doing work in the summertime in jobs that they like and jobs that will give them hands-on experience with a trade that may lead to future employment and a career. The government has invested more than \$1.3 million into those programs since they were launched. Talk about building blocks. The member opposite talked about building blocks and education. This government is really building blocks.

Mr. Speaker, he also said that it's time to eliminate tuition fees, but when he was in government, why didn't they take away tuition fees then? Why didn't the government absorb tuition fees back when the NDP were in government? They had four years, almost five. They had the opportunity to introduce this bill back then. They had a majority government. They could have had this go through. Why now is it important to them when

it wasn't a few years ago? I think he knew that it would just add to the debt, and he also knew that the government was already contributing a great deal of money to the Nova Scotia Community College through the grant programs.

I have to say that this government has made education a priority. Post-secondary education is a priority here in Nova Scotia. As a parent of people who have gone to the community colleges and have come out with trades, I'm so pleased that my sons are gainfully employed. It's never easy for students to get employment, and I must say my sons have been very fortunate. The skills that they have acquired through the Nova Scotia Community College program, the support, the leadership in the community colleges - their instructors and the support workers that are there are very dedicated to providing opportunities that maximize the skills of all the students whether you come with a disability or you come with gifts. Many students are gifted who go into the Community College program.

I know many adults who are looking to change their careers mid-life, and they have really embraced the Community College system. So it's not just our youth who are going in. We have single mothers, and we have mid-life adults who have been laid off of their job or have taken early retirement. Many of them are going to community colleges. They're paying fees to attend, they're coming out, and they're starting new careers.

We have good programs also in Labour and Advanced Education like Nova Scotia Works, who really sits down with these individuals and helps them seek funding, to seek resources if they need child care, if they need some kind of guidance financially with their budgeting, if they need to talk to a guidance person, and provides them with opportunities to explore all there is out there that will help them achieve a new career.

It's very scary for adults. If we think it's scary for young people to go into a new education program, well when you're 50 years old and you are changing careers and you are back with all these young students in the classroom, Mr. Speaker, it can be quite a challenge to go back and go in a classroom, and the Community College system is supporting them as well, and so are programs from Labour and Advanced Education, through the Nova Scotia Works. I want to say again that this government fully supports the Nova Scotia Community College programs, every year . . .

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

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise to speak to this bill this evening, an Act to Amend Chapter 4 of the Acts of 1995-96, the Community Colleges Act. A very short bill, but a bill that goes right to the point - the college may not charge students a tuition fee for Nova Scotia Community Colleges. Plain and simple, very easy and straightforward.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill was to become law, if the Liberal Government would decide to call this bill and bring it forward, I would hope they would amend it to include some of the private career colleges that are out there as well. Some of the local communities that don't have access to community colleges would also benefit from the private career college having the same type of law, bill, applied to it.

I know in my area I have a few career colleges that are local, that last year we had a little bit of difficulty with people accessing the colleges that were involved with Community Services that had an education plan attached to their income and they weren't allowed to go to the private college - they were almost mandated to go to the career college, or the Nova Scotia Community College at a cost that would have been higher to the government than sending them to a - and I know we worked with the Minister of Community Services and I think we had that problem resolved, so I would hope that if this bill was to come forward that it would include private career colleges as well to go on top of it.

Mr. Speaker, we know in theory that we'd love to have this. It would really be the Utopia of education and then we would start to look at other forms of education as well. I'm told that the cost would be about \$30 million yearly, a cost that seems to be a high cost but, as the previous speaker, the member for Queens-Shelburne said, if we look at the money spent over the last three years on ferries in this province, the Nova Scotia ferry, the ferry that goes from Yarmouth to Portland, three years' worth, the money that has been spent on the *Bluenose II*, an icon here in the province that's great for tourism, the money that has been spent on some of the local ferries, that \$30 million doesn't seem like a lot of money.

If the monies that are spent on those ferries brings back a great return on our investments and allowed passengers and trucks and freight and stuff to be carried from Portland to Yarmouth and reverse, that would be a great investment. But we've seen this year that those numbers are down. We didn't carry freight. The people in southwestern Nova Scotia who had goods and services to be delivered to the United States couldn't use that mode of transportation.

Yes, there's a ferry in Digby, some of our trucks won't fit on that ferry so they had to drive around again. So we've got to look at wise investments to see what money we're going to spend and how we're going to spend it.

The previous speaker talked about \$30 million a year, year over year. Well this government took a Graduate Retention Rebate and took it off the table. At the time they took away the interest portion, the Nova Scotia portion of the Canada Student Loan, the Nova Scotia Student Loan, which amounted to about \$800 over a four-year program. The other \$30-some million would have been something they could have used this for. So, to find the money would be one thing, to put it in place would be another thing, but to cancel a program and not use that money for something like this would be something else. We

have to be realists, Mr. Speaker, and adjust the conversation to focus on our education system from Primary to Grade 12. We have to focus on our weak economy and vocational training.

Our Primary to Grade 12 education system is not where it needs to be, and we know this. We see this now in what's going on with our teachers in the province. Our teachers are up in arms because of the classroom conditions that they have to teach in, and we hear the same rhetoric day after day in this House - we're listening, we're listening, we're listening. We've brought in changes - we hear the same statements over, and over, and over, but teachers still voted 96 per cent; 100-and-some per cent of the teachers voted. We know there are problems, so let's focus on those problems as well as our post-secondary problems, to make sure kids have the tools to go to these community colleges, to go to our universities.

My young fellow himself went to Community College and he got an education there for a year - there are these one- to two-year programs, and when he came out, he had to write Department of Labour and Advanced Education exams in order to continue. Twenty of the 25 students in that class didn't pass the Department of Labour and Advanced Education exams, and didn't move on in their career. So, to have a free education, they were not matching the needs of the labour market. It's not a good thing. We know our economy is stagnant, and we know we have a weakened labour market.

Yesterday, in this House, the attention was brought to the reality of the BMO report, and what it said about our labour market. It said our labour market will continue to underperform, with employment down from year-to-year goal levels through August, and private sector employment down about 6 per cent from peak levels in 2012 with a participation rate also falling, even for prime-age workers. If the labour market is not matching up with our job forces, then what's the point of having that education? We have to meet the demands of the labour market, and there are people out there that can predict demands in the labour market.

We've seen it with the shipbuilding contract. We knew we were going to need numerous, numerous, numerous welders, so we put some welding programs in our high schools, and what did we do? We now have enough welders to meet the demand of that market. Do we continue that demand and ship our children outside the province to go to work, or do we try to predict what's going to be needed in the next five years, and produce those children?

Now, in my area, I have a high school. It's the only composite high school in the province, and, I believe, it's one of the only composite high schools in the Atlantic Provinces. Now, that high school allows children to participate in an electrical program where they can get, over the three-year period, their high school education, and an electrical, one-year block, the same as if they went to Community College. They come out with what they have as their first year. They go to work and get some hours, and they go

back to the Community College. Not everybody in our education system is going to come out and be a university student. Not everyone qualifies to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or, as myself, a physiotherapist. Some people, they don't want to be - they want to work with their hands. So, we want to promote that. Again, I'll go back to Memorial University of Newfoundland, they have a plumbing program, they have a shipping and receiving program, they have a welding program, they have auto mechanics, heavy-duty mechanics, and carpentry, all trades that we're going to need in this province if we're to move forward.

I heard one of the former speakers talk about how we all have a home that will need repairs from time to time. The ideal world would allow every student that goes to high school to take the introductory to those programs as their elective in high school, so that the first year you would learn a little bit about electricity, enough to understand the things that you can and can't do with it, and when to get the professionals in to do the job. The same as plumbing - you get a leak in a pipe that's in your basement, and you can get at it to fix it, there are ways to do that. Wouldn't it be nice if all children who came out of high school had basic knowledge of a little bit of carpentry, a little bit of plumbing, and a little bit of electrical?

I remember a story, Mr. Speaker. A couple of years back I was in Glace Bay at the Habitat for Humanity project, and I had the pleasure of working with the member for Glace Bay on helping to build a home over there. I had to teach him how to shingle that house, because he didn't get that opportunity in high school.

If we could have that kind of program coming out of our high schools, that would allow every individual in the province to have some basic back knowledge of the trades. Some people would want to do that. Some people would want to make sure that that was the trade they went to, that they could know what they were looking forward to.

We want to keep our talented, hard-working young tradespeople here in our province. If we over-train, the abundance of over-trained people leave. If we under-train, we have a shortage. When we have a shortage, we lose industry, or we lose the ability to attract industry. So hopefully in the future we will look at somebody who'll go down the road and try to determine what our needs are going to be, and when we determine that, bring these programs forward - be it in university, be it in community college, be it in private career colleges, or heaven forbid we start something in our high schools or something like a vocational type of training.

What have we done so far? We've begun the consultation process with students, parents, teachers, industry, labour, and community colleges to put vocational training back in our public schools. We don't want to see this as competition for any one of these industries, these colleges, or these programs. We want to see it as an adjunct to those programs.

It would be nice, Mr. Speaker, if someone who comes out of high school with the first block of their electrical program went to work and got their - I believe it's 1,000 hours - and could go back to school to these high schools, these vocational schools, these community colleges in the evenings, could continue to work instead of having to take any time off and go back to school and lose four or five months of pay. They could go in the evenings, and if it took three months instead of six months, or six months instead of three months, and they could get that education while they're working, what a great thing that would be for our province, if we could put out enough tradespeople to handle what we need here in the province.

We recognize the value of vocational training. We believe that doing more to our students, we can offer them credits or apprenticeship hours and completion of their studies, which will better prepare them for the workforce ahead of them.

Mr. Speaker, I can believe there would be nothing worse than coming out of school with a program and realizing that you don't like that program. It would be something to have to go to work every day and not enjoy what you're doing.

Students coming out of university today carry an awful burden of debt. People with debt don't go out and buy the new homes, the new cars, so they don't contribute to our economy as well. We have to find ways to make sure that debt is under control for our students in this province, be it up-front grants, be it free tuition, be it whatever would work to keep our province moving forward.

We realize that too many of our young people are coming out of university and community college and the opportunities that they trained for are simply not there. We want to make sure that those opportunities are there - grow our economy, have these children - these young adults, I will say, because they're not children anymore - paying taxes.

With that, we'd have money to put into our health care system. We'd have money to put into our education system. We would have money to make sure that our education system would be the best in the country. We wouldn't be nickel-and-diming about 1 per cent here and 2 per cent there to any of our Public Service employees. We wouldn't have to worry about how our infrastructure would be maintained. We'd have that. We could pave roads. We could repair hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that without that, without that base, we don't have that excess money. So what do we get into? We get into the mess we're in right now with our public school teachers.

Our teachers are the backbone of our economy, Mr. Speaker. They train our kids to move forward in life. We need a long-term plan to fix our economy, not something that is going to happen tomorrow or next week, we've got to look into the future. How do we

secure our medical professionals? How do we secure our teachers? We want to make sure the maximum economic benefit for this province and I think the importance of vocational training is that and that's how we do pay for the services we require in this province.

I think a renewed focus on vocational training in our schools is the key to making sure our economy is ready to support what we need in the province. It will be able to support - like we could help rebuild the film industry, we can look at achieving the Ivany goals, and we can make sure that our young Nova Scotians see real options here in our province and stay here and be valuable contributors to make sure the province remains great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

MS. MARIAN MANCINI: In the 21st Century, post-secondary education can really be equated with what a high school diploma was 50 years ago. It is really difficult for anyone to get meaningful employment today without some sort of post-secondary education.

When we talk about our Nova Scotia community colleges, of which we can all be proud, it's interesting to recognize that maybe 50 years - I use the term, that time frame, 50 years ago, maybe not even that long, but there was a time when people would leave school and would go out and work, whether it would be with their father or their uncle or whatever and go into and learn the trade. The idea of actually having to attend and formally get your papers or whatever wasn't an obstacle.

Today is a different world, and with good reason. Our society has become more complex because we've become a very regulated society, and that is a good thing, because when we do get people graduating from our colleges, we know they have the expertise to do the job. They know as well that they could be liable for any imperfections in the work they do so they have concerns as well about doing a good job, so they need the best education they can get. I believe our schools, as they stand now, do provide that.

I would suggest that ideally our province should be moving not just in the direction of community college free tuition but really post-secondary education, and hopefully within the next 20 years we will see this happen as we've certainly seen it happen in other countries more socially progressive, in Scandinavian countries, in Europe, France for example and, as well, in Australia. Post-secondary tuition is treated as something you are - it's like Medicare, it's not something you have to pay for, it's an expectation that you will have the privilege of attending and improving your education.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I just ask that the chatter be kept down a bit, to a minimum in the House.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South has the floor.

MS. MANCINI: Mr. Speaker, our students though, unlike students in the countries I've referred to, remain challenged by debt loads, and that is for all our post-secondary students, but I believe for our NSCC students it can be an even greater debt. The tuition rates at NSCC have risen beyond inflation rates in the past three years.

Of the 13 campuses that we have, the main campus - I consider it the main campus - in Dartmouth is an amazing facility. It's the Waterfront Campus and I'm sure most of you have had an opportunity to be there. As an aside, I am really suggesting that when they do host their open house each winter, it's well worthwhile attending to see the vast array of trades, culinary arts, film studies that are being provided to the students, and the energy and enthusiasm that comes from the pride in what they had been achieving is really something to see.

We cannot in any way undervalue the role that NSCC and the regional campuses, the way that it has been structured throughout this province that does afford an equality of access to people throughout the province. I think it is something that we can be proud of. Again, though, Mr. Speaker, the drag for the student is the level of debt. My friend referred to the fact that at one point we, as an NDP Government, attempted to assist students in alleviating their debt. It was a two-fold purpose - alleviate the debt, but stay in the province. The Graduate Retention Rebate program that was available has been eliminated and I have heard it said, when I am on doorsteps, from students that it was greatly missed, that that program provided such a significant benefit to them.

Mr. Speaker, as the cost of living and inflation continue to increase faster than wages, it is becoming harder and harder for families to support their loved ones who wish to pursue a post-secondary education. For those individuals already out on their own, trying to make ends meet, that pursuit is also becoming less and less affordable.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the government's decision to take the cap off tuitions, students in Nova Scotia are facing the largest fee increases in over a decade. Stats Canada data shows that tuition fees in this province are increasing more rapidly than anywhere else in the country.

Career success continues to become more and more tied to a post-secondary education. We need to work to remove those barriers, the barriers that prevent students from pursuing an education beyond high school. We, the NDP, believe an important first step to making post-secondary education more affordable and accessible is to eliminate tuition at NSCC campuses across the province - this would assist 11,000 full-time students and over 11,000 part-time students.

The NSCC, as I already indicated, has 13 campuses and 6 community learning centres, offering over 120 programs. From training apprentices to continuing education students the NSCC helps students pursue life goals and meaningful employment. However, Mr. Speaker, there are rising costs associated with attending NSCC and this creates barriers

to students' accessibility. In 2016 there was a 3 per cent increase in NSCC tuition for most programs, considerably exceeding the rate of inflation.

According to Students Nova Scotia, tuition fees at NSCC have been rising considerably faster than at Nova Scotia's universities, for most students. Think of that. This is partly because college tuition fees have not benefited from past freezes or rebate programs or caps on student debt.

Mr. Speaker, the NSCC has a positive impact on students who have been fortunate enough to afford to go there. In 2014 the employment of over 1,500 former NSCC students equated to roughly \$141 million in wages. In 2015, NSCC had an 86 per cent employment rate, with the majority finding work in their field of study within one year of graduating.

Mr. Speaker, students at the NSCC have also had a positive impact on Nova Scotia's finances, contributing \$1.4 billion to the provincial economy in 2014. My friend has spoken to this and referred to it, but I think it bears repeating - that the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates that for every dollar Nova Scotia spends on providing a student with a community college education, there is a return to the province of more than \$7 over the life of that student.

Mr. Speaker, we can do better. Imagine what an incentive this would be to our young people, an incentive to stay here in Nova Scotia. It is time that the province makes a necessary investment in order to provide all Nova Scotians with the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education. So let's take the first step and eliminate tuition at the NSCC. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

HON. TERRY FARRELL: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to be able rise to speak to this very important topic. I do want to mention that I have a long history with the community college, going back to before it was the community college, in fact. In the 1970's, when I was in the midst of my high school career, I decided that perhaps a vocational type of education might be more suitable for me, so I embarked on a one-year program at what was then the Cumberland Regional Vocational School, and I studied welding. At the end of that, I successfully received the diploma and the ticket from the Canadian Welding Bureau, which qualified me to perform a certain type of welding - in the flat position only - and as a result of that, I returned to high school.

I decided that I would further my academic career even further, so I can say from the vocational training point of view - which is one of the very important functions that the community college carries on - I have that particular first-hand experience.

Even though it was all those years ago, I certainly haven't forgotten the particular attention that I encountered there from all the professionals in that system, the excellence

in teaching that I encountered, the wonderful administrators who certainly cared a great deal about the students in their care at that time, and the important lessons that were learned. To this day, I could probably name for you most of the teachers and administrators who were in the Cumberland Regional Vocational School at that time, and I still see many of them on a regular basis. I know that they have done a lot in their particular way and in their own time, to contribute to the strength of the province in that way that it is today, and the strength of the Nova Scotia community college system the way that it exists today.

My next experience with the current community college, as it exists, would have been my role of practising law in the town of Amherst. I was there, Mr. Speaker, practising law when the current paralegal program at the Nova Scotia Community College was brought in - first at the Springhill site of the Cumberland campus, and currently at the Amherst site of the Cumberland campus. It's a very high-level program, where they give an excellent quality of training to the paralegal students who come out of there.

I think that for that particular program at that particular location, we owe the majority of that to a woman by the name of Gail Murphy, who continues to be a practising member of the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, and who has trained hundreds of paralegals over the course of those years in a very fine way in a high-quality education. I have employed many of those people over the years, many of those people have gone on to further their studies and actually become lawyers themselves, are practising law in the province now, and performing many other functions. Many are performing very well as paralegals, and many of them have taken the skills that they have learned and gone on to other careers around Nova Scotia and beyond.

It's a program of excellence, I have to say, and I am very proud to say that I've mentored a number of those students in my practice and actually after that, I had the opportunity to become a part-time faculty member in that very program. There was an opportunity that came up probably about 10 years ago, Mr. Speaker. There was a need for someone to teach the paralegals in that program, the property law section, for just one term, from the beginning of the year up until Christmas. I had the opportunity to do that. I was very pleased.

I also have two sons who graduated from the community college: Brendan, who I had the pleasure of introducing last week in the House, and Andrew, who is a graduate of the carpentry program. They're both doing quite well as a result of the quality of education. I'm just here to speak on behalf of the current structure of the community college and the wonderful institution that it is, to say that I think we're doing a good job with that system, and that is something that I hope will carry on.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 16.

Bill No. 16 - Fair Drug Pricing Act.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: I'm pleased to stand for a few moments to talk about Bill No. 16. There are a number of reasons why legislation is introduced on the floor of this Chamber. Throughout my career over the last 13 and a half years, I've brought a number of pieces to be tabled and to be debated. Some actually were passed - not an easy task when you spend the bulk of your career in Opposition. It's very tough achievement to crack, but I have been able to do that.

I want to remind Nova Scotians why Bill No. 16 is in front of us and why as a caucus we reintroduced this. Of course, it was introduced last Spring, in the last session of the Legislature. We just had the House of Assembly prorogued, which cleans the slate on the order paper of what legislation is on the books or pending, even government legislation but also Opposition legislation. The reason we brought this back to reintroduce this is because when we introduced it last session, the intent of this was to try to make sure the government understood the impact that the Liberal Government had at the time when they proposed changes to the Seniors' Pharmacare program.

When the government came out last Spring with the intent to change that program, I heard from a lot of Nova Scotians. I heard from a lot of constituents, seniors in my riding who were very, very concerned about the direction the government was going to take around the cost of the Pharmacare program.

Over the years, I've found myself often counselling seniors and those who were approaching the age of 65. Their main question was, should I enter the Seniors' Pharmacare program? There's a cost there, of course, and seniors recognize that. Many seniors, though, had the question because they're in good health at the time. They're 64 years old, and they're in good health. They don't take many medications for illness. They might not have a chronic illness.

Their concern is that they will enter a program that will cost them money. There's a co-pay. There's a formula that is worked out based on what your income is and how high of a co-pay that you pay for Seniors' Pharmacare. Often seniors are very good about trying to manage their money, and they're concerned about what's left at the end of the day to pay rent, to buy food, maybe to take a trip, or for a number of things. I try not to tell seniors that this is the only thing they should do, to enter the Seniors' Pharmacare program.

But I have to say I do encourage them. I use the analogy of buying insurance for your vehicle. Of course you need PLPD, but the additional replacement insurance and all that, it's something you have to think about. But I try to get them to understand that if they have a clean driving record and they have no accidents, you don't go without insurance. You don't wait until you have an accident to buy insurance.

Seniors' Pharmacare is the same, Mr. Speaker. You don't wait until you're sick or on a number of medications to say, oh, I want to join the Seniors' Pharmacare program now. There are penalties in place so that if a senior does not join at 65, there is an increased cost for a number of years - it might even be five years. I can't remember.

I try to encourage them that it's precautionary. You don't know what your health will be in a year or two, three, four, or five years down the road. They'll be pushing 70 years old, potentially, if they waited to pay for that.

I encourage many of them to make sure that they join. There are a number of options that they have. They can pay it all up front, they can co-pay, or they can pay per prescription. Once you meet your responsibility, then the prescriptions are free for the rest of the year.

I heard from a lot of seniors in Sackville-Cobequid and from communities that other MLAs represent - that government MLAs represent. They were very, very concerned about the information that the government provided at the time, that this was going to be a good thing for seniors, that these changes they proposed were going to be a good thing.

The reality was that more than 14,000 low-income seniors who received the Guaranteed Income Supplement would have to pay for Pharmacare premiums for the very first time. What we saw the government attempt to do was limit the information or the impact that the proposed changes were going to have. This came after - I think it was a year prior - a question from myself, directed to the Minister of Health and Wellness - we pulled the tape on it, Mr. Speaker. We pulled the Hansard. The minister said there would be no increases in Seniors' Pharmacare.

Mr. Speaker, he wanted to increase Seniors' Pharmacare. The government wanted to increase Seniors' Pharmacare. The Premier wanted to increase Pharmacare. But I have to tell you, because of the action of the seniors and their reaction and their pushback, they realized, wait a minute, we can't do this to seniors, this is wrong. I would hope that's what they thought: this was wrong, we shouldn't have done that, we should've done better consultation, we should've engaged seniors more.

Many of these seniors live on fixed income, and any increase would disrupt how they manage their day-to-day lives and how they manage their monthly expenses. Most of the seniors on Seniors' Pharmacare get a pension or get some kind of GIS payment from the government once a month, and everything revolves around that payment. They pay their bills, they pay their rent, they pay their mortgage, they pay insurance or anything that they have.

So when we really, truly found out what was happening with Seniors' Pharmacare, we realized that the government, I believe, didn't do the work that a government should do when we see those types of increases paraded out. Not all the information was relayed to

the seniors, or the direct impact that it would have. We know that they were concerned that the consultation wasn't wide, and at the time, I'll give this much credit - very tiny credit - the government did hear the seniors and their concerns loud and clear, and they pulled back. They pulled back.

But that doesn't give any reassurance for the Opposition members, and it sure doesn't give reassurance to seniors that they won't go through the same thing in the next budget cycle. That's why we introduced this legislation. This piece of legislation would require that any changes in eligibility, premiums, deductions, or co-payments in the Seniors' Pharmacare program must be approved by the House of Assembly.

It's not that we as Opposition members want the authority to say, yeah, we want the authority to increase Seniors' Pharmacare. The reason this bill was brought forward was to allow seniors to have a say when the government doesn't do proper consultation. Because of the process of legislation, how legislation is approved, if the government had to come to the House of Assembly for approval on that, it would go through the normal process. Once a bill is introduced and passed second reading, it would go to Law Amendments, which allows the public to have a say, which is very important in our system that we have here in Nova Scotia for the good or bad.

You have a good piece of legislation that you introduce as a government; the public has a say in it. They can come to the Red Room and put on record that they support this legislation, but they also can come to the Legislature and come to the Red Room and say we don't support this. This will have an impact; there are broader ramifications around the changes government is proposing.

That's why we introduced that legislation in the Spring, and that's why we introduced it again about a week ago I believe, Mr. Speaker. After the retreat happened with the government and they backed away from these changes, they indicated that they would do widespread consultation.

Well, that hasn't happened yet, and here we are almost at the end of October - November is right around the corner and budget preparations are happening right now. If not, they're well into being worked on in the department and in the minister's department. So, if proposed changes are coming in the next budget, the government is working on that now and there has been no wide consultation with seniors. And that's the other aspect here of this legislation, to ensure that seniors have a say in the direction government will take, and when government makes decisions like potentially increasing Seniors' Pharmacare fees, there's an opportunity for seniors to have that say.

It's not just them calling their MLA, it's not them just calling the radio stations and the talk radio, and it's not them just writing articles or opinion pieces. They'll have an ability to come to this Chamber or this building - not this Chamber because you're not allowed in the Chamber - but this building and go through a process that is open, that is

recorded, that gives the ability for these individuals to come forward and say, wait a minute, maybe government didn't realize the true impact that an increase in the Seniors' Pharmacare co-pay would have on an individual's life and in the lives of their - if they're still married for example, of a couple. And I know first-hand that seniors make a decision sometimes not to fill a prescription because of the cost.

I know full well not only as an MLA but as a former paramedic here in this province where I've gone to a call where I know the person, because I picked them up frequently. They have a chronic disease, they have diabetes or whatever it is, and you ask them how did you end up maybe with low blood sugar or in circumstances that they're in. And they're very honest with you - I stopped taking my medication, it's too expensive this month; I'll maybe pick up next month. You know, I had to buy some food; I had to pay the rent; I had to pay power, heat, lights.

They make those decisions on a regular basis, and we can't put blinders on and think that that does not happen in this province - it does unfortunately. It does happen, and that has huge ramifications on that individual if they make those decisions, if they decide to cut a pill in half for example and just take half the dose. You know, the reason they're given a certain dosage is to try to improve their health, to try to manage a chronic disease, try to maybe get them over an illness so that they're not relying on the health care system because they're ill, they feel sick, they go to the emergency department or the physician's office or the walk-in clinic.

So, that's what's behind Bill No. 16. I would think it's a fair request. It's not a partisan issue where one Party will benefit greatly from passing Bill No. 16. It would help every single senior who is on Seniors' Pharmacare in every community in this province, so that MLAs can stand up and say you know what? Maybe down the road there is a reason why we may need to increase Seniors' Pharmacare. At least, this would give them an opportunity to have their say, to make sure that government, whoever it is - the Liberals aren't going to be in power forever, some of them might think they are, but they won't be in power forever, Mr. Speaker, and they know that very well. They could be a one-term government, they could be a two-term government, a three-term government, but they'll be over on this side sometime in the future. (Interruption) Some of them will, some of them might not.

I think what is important is the essence of this bill. It's allowing for seniors to have a say when a decision is made to maybe change a program that is so important. I think it would be well-received by seniors who are represented by MLAs who are Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, Independent, or NDP, Mr. Speaker, and I would hope the government would consider this. It's not taking a lot of responsibility off them, it's just taking an opportunity to allow seniors to have a say in this province. Thank you.

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

HON. LEO GLAVINE: I'm very pleased today to join the debate on Bill No. 16, the Fair Drug Pricing Act. When we talk about drug programs in our province, I feel overall, that I need to state from the very beginning, that we are in a very good place with having Family Pharmacare, and Seniors' Pharmacare programs. In fact, in just recent months, in talking with colleague ministers from across the country as recently as a couple of weeks ago - medications, their cost, new ones that are coming on the market, especially biologics, which are very expensive - we are in a very good place overall, because we have just two programs to accommodate all of Nova Scotians, especially those who have no benefits from a private plan that's associated with their work.

We know there are programs, in fact, that are very generous, and very comprehensive, and they are very fortunate. But as government, we need to make sure that all Nova Scotians can have the benefit of getting medications, access to them, and as inexpensive as possible.

I referenced us being in a good place because some provinces have a myriad of programs, they have 10, up to 15 programs in some provinces, and accessing the right one for them can be a very long, and sometimes arduous process.

I know this bill was brought forward by the NDP as a result of what was taking place around proposed changes for Seniors' Pharmacare, just last year, around February. What we need to realize is that every month now we have over 1,000 Nova Scotians who become seniors - senior here means they are over the age of 65. It's projected that by 2030 we'll have about 260,000 Nova Scotians who will be of senior age. So we know that we have to look at sustainability of the program, and because this program has benefited from, I think, a couple of very strong decisions, one that we would sign an MOU with PCMP, that we would become part of the Canadian Drug Pricing Alliance and Drug Price Review. This has helped us immensely because 18 high-volume medications move from brand to generic, and this allowed - for almost a decade - to have a pretty steady price for premiums, co-pay, that whole area around senior programs, and it impacted our Family Pharmacare as well, so that that program would not be out of reach for many Nova Scotians.

So while that demographic is often seen as a challenge, I do not look upon seniors from the point of view and the perspective of the burden of disease and the cost factor.

One of the realities is that no matter what age, if a person has serious decline in their health. It can be 50 years of age, 60 years, and we know that in the last 18 months of life is when extraordinary expenses and costs in fact are there in the health care system.

I want to speak in terms of our seniors and the positive contribution they have made to our province, and continue to make as seniors and the influence they do have on our communities. As we look, however, at seniors and their life in our province we need to make sure we do support them in the greatest way possible.

What we have started to, first and foremost, take a look at is working together as Atlantic Provinces. I believe this is an area that we have not explored and advanced anywhere near the possibility that can be derived. Over the last couple of years we have seen, for example, in May when we signed an agreement to procure medical equipment, the investment that we made as an Atlantic Province in terms of coming together with an Atlantic order gave us great financial benefits.

Now we're starting to take a look at, and what may well be a lead into what I would hope someday will be national Pharmacare. I believe national Pharmacare is indeed one of the areas no matter who is in government in our provinces and who is there federally, this must be the next area I think where we can again make an enormous investment in the health of Canadians. We know there are medications, there are drugs that are extraordinarily expensive and if we even started with 10 or, as Dr. Danielle Martin proposed, that if we took 20 high-volume medications families would not go without medications.

I believe at some point in fact with the current government there is now a working group, a federal-provincial working group - on the provincial side, the lead is Ontario, so they're starting to map out how we could move forward because I believe ultimately this is what will, in fact, help the sustainability of our provincial programs.

In a first instance we're looking at as an Atlantic Region where we may take 10 high-volume medications and purchase as Atlantic Canadians. This again would be another thrust towards making sure that this stays on the national agenda. The federal minister, Dr. Jane Philpott, wants to see Canada move up with countries like Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. in terms of national purchasing power.

We know, for example, there are generic medications that are in those countries that I've just mentioned that we pay four times, even as a generic, the costs that are in those countries. I wanted to address those, I think, bigger pieces that can really help on the sustainability because that was really the drive that we were taking a look at - what is going to be that cost and that sustainable requirement for the next 10 years. We have used up a lot of the mileage on the generics that came on and there's only two more right now that are before us that we can gain some economic benefits from. But as other medications go off-brand and generics come on - and even biologics, now, are moving into the generic area, although they're known as "similar," of course, in terms of biologics - we know there will be some gains that can be obtained, but again, we need to look at the very nature of our program.

The pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance has given us at least some holding power not to have to raise premiums, not to have to raise co-pay and the overall cost of our drugs in the province, and I think they will continue to bring us some needed benefits.

We have said to Nova Scotians that we will do a deep and considerable consultation. The two former Ministers of Health in the House are reminding me that the clock may be winding down, but what I can tell them today, and all Nova Scotians - and I think our Premier has also stated this - is that for the fiscal year 2017-18, there will be no rise in the premium of drugs in the Province of Nova Scotia. (Applause)

We know that over the next two or three months we will consult with Nova Scotians and see how we can map out a plan for the next number of years. We know the kind of pressure that is there.

I will just bring to the House today's experience. I know that the former ministers sitting opposite had this as well. When that moment comes and you sit at your desk - today I was asked to approve a drug - one individual, \$650,000 for one year. That's the cost of a drug that will be a life-saving medication, or at least give them quality of life for a number of years.

Last year, when we were looking at - and certainly against what I had said here in the House about not raising premiums - I would have loved, last year, to have the money for every senior in this province who has hepatitis C - there is now a cure for hepatitis C. Last year I would have loved to be able to offer every senior Nova Scotian - every Nova Scotian - with hepatitis C that cure. The drug, Harvoni, which we are using in our province, brings about a cure. In fact, as minister, two or three of the most satisfying calls that I had just before Christmas last year were from two who had Harvoni, who said, "You've given me the best Christmas present. I am free of hepatitis C."

But it's a costly endeavour. Each treatment is about \$50,000. That's an expensive medication for the numbers who have hepatitis C.

Those are the challenges around our programs. But what I want to say - and I don't think I have a lot of time here - is that we have a huge demographic shift on the go in our province. It's well under way now. I thank the member for Sackville-Cobequid for bringing up the importance of every senior joining the program. This will also allow us to reduce, in any way, future premiums as we look down the road.

Every Nova Scotian who has an MSI card can join the program. Full stop. If every Nova Scotian would join this program, I think we can build in sustainability for the future. That's the goal of any Minister of Health and any government that has to deal with this very important issue.

We're at that point now, as we start to go out to consultations. Our goal is not a resolve for next year, and we know that we need a lot of lead time to be able to make any changes, so we'll take two or three months to consult, and we'll put before Nova Scotians a plan for a minimum of five years. I would like to see one for 10 years so that Nova Scotians really know what is actually in front of them.

I would, first of all, encourage every Nova Scotian to join Seniors' Pharmacare. Today, a Nova Scotian at 65 can be very healthy and on no medications, and then a year later, they are at a point where they need a very expensive medication perhaps for cancer or any other condition that they may have. I want to leave it at that and thank the member opposite for bringing the bill forward.

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today and speak to this bill brought forward by the NDP, Bill No. 16, an Act to Amend Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2011, the Fair Drug Pricing Act.

I want to thank both members who just spoke, who made very good presentations, put some great ideas on the floor, some great issues that I'm sure when people are thinking about pharmaceuticals, that people don't look at directly, to understand the true implications of what fair drug pricing really is.

I want to start off by simply saying that many times we look at drug costs as being a cost driver that we need to find ways to keep that cost down, when, quite honestly, we need to be looking at it from a different direction. We need to be looking at it as a cost containment issue, where we need to be able to make sure that Nova Scotians get the drugs that they need to keep them well, to keep their therapies up to snuff, so that they do not impact the health care system on the other side.

Many people who have chronic diseases - and Nova Scotia is full of chronic disease and has high rates of chronic disease - and depending on the ones that you have, all of these require drug therapies. Diabetes tends to be the one I think about the most these days. Someone who does not follow their regimen, does not receive the insulin that they require, or does not receive the medications that they require, end up going low, end up calling on a paramedic, end up in hospital for X-amount of days, at a cost to our system that far outweighs, or far out-paces, the cost of the drugs that are available to them.

The minister just spoke about hepatitis C and the whole issue around now having a true cure for hepatitis C. I think the name of the drug that's being done is Harvoni - I know there are probably two drugs out there today, different costs, different levels, and different ways of doing it.

For the cost of \$50,000, though - and here is my different view of this issue - at \$50,000, we're curing that patient of a very debilitating disease, and stopping them from having to impart upon, or access, the health care system later on in the seriousness of that illness. Hepatitis C has a breakdown of internal organs, especially that of the liver. Most patients who have hepatitis C end up in a situation where they are not very well at all and do require a liver transplant.

I would say to the minister, \$50,000 to get the hepatitis C medication versus what it would cost to actually get your liver replaced, or re-sectioned, or whatever they do to it these days, would be far more expensive than that. I don't know what the cost of a liver transplant would be these days, but I'm going to guess it's pretty darn close to \$1 million. Far cheaper to look at a drug therapy like this to make sure that it is available to Nova Scotians when they need it.

That's not what we're really talking about today, quite honestly. We are talking about the Seniors' Pharmacare program. We all remember the disaster that we faced with the Seniors' Pharmacare program just about a year ago when, quite unbeknownst to us and unbeknownst to many, seniors started getting their notifications of increases to their Pharmacare plans.

We know that at that time some seniors, not a majority - I think it was a third of seniors who were in the Seniors' Pharmacare program - would have been receiving increases that could add up to \$1,200. Some who were only paying \$424 and in some cases weren't paying much at all were, all of a sudden, facing \$1,200 per person, and of course, when you have a household of two people who are 65 years of age or more, that would be \$2,400. It's a very substantial increase to those seniors who are, for the most part, on fixed incomes in this province. Regardless of what your total household income is, we do need to appreciate that these are fixed incomes, and there's not a lot of wiggle room in what they're actually going to be paying for into the future.

What brings us here today to discuss this is that after that failed attempt, or the bad advice that the minister got from the department - I don't know which one it was; I'm guessing it was the latter, but I'm not positive - seniors' groups stood up for themselves. When the seniors' groups stood up for themselves, I think that's where government had to reassess what was going on because I don't think they realized the full scope of what was going to be happening in this particular case.

With the Seniors' Pharmacare program, if we remember the original model, there was always going to be a share between the government and seniors themselves. That has ranged over the years. It might have been 50-50 originally, depending on the costs of pharmaceuticals. That has changed during our time in government. I think it was agreed upon to be about 75-25. I believe when the NDP got into government, they took away the 75-25 but did try to keep it at a reasonable ratio between that (Interruption) Yes, it was about 3 per cent above what that was. I think it ranged almost up to 80 per cent in some particular cases.

That being said, all of that had to happen in consultation with seniors' groups. We talk a lot about the Group of IX, those nine seniors' organizations that represent seniors across the province who don't necessarily have veto power but should be consulted during any year on what the cost of pharmaceuticals is going to be for them this year, the cost to get into the Pharmacare program, what the premium is going to be, what the co-pay is going

to be, how the co-pay is going to be paid. There's been lots of changes to the system over the last number of years.

Last year, I think it was just the problem with consultation. I don't know if it's this government or whether it was the bureaucracy that missed a step, but the Group of IX, who should have been consulted upon this, did not get the full scope of what the changes were going to be. If you look back at our discussions, if you look back at the press releases and discussions that had been had with the Group of IX, it was talked about at the meetings, but they weren't quite given the full details. So they were quite surprised at the excessiveness, they felt, of the increases that they were going to be receiving in that year.

That brings us here today to the bill that's before us to ensure that these steps don't get missed, that when the government is looking at an increase or even to hold it steady - the minister has committed that there will be no increase in Pharmacare premiums this year. Great. I'll take his word for it. I've heard it before, and we sort of got into little messes the year after that. What I think the NDP is trying to do here is provide at least one more stop in there so that sober second thought can happen, so that we can all have it discussed on the floor of this House of Assembly, and so that we can actually be aware of what's happening to our seniors who we're so happy to represent in our communities. It only requires a resolution of this House, which could be brought to a discussion at some point during that House sitting.

We know what will happen here. For the most part, governments in this Legislature have always been majority governments, and the government will get that resolution passed through its majority vote. There's really no way of stopping an increase, but we know full well that by having the discussion on this House of Assembly's floor, at least everybody will be aware of it and we'll make sure that people have a way to present to it and that we can have a fulsome discussion. I think that was what was missing in the last go-around, that seniors felt a little put off.

I'd like to talk a little further about the letter that went out of "you had better pay for it now or you are going to be cut off completely," which I think was another bureaucratic misstep not caught in time by the minister and the Premier. I think the intention of this House of Assembly is to make sure that all seniors are able to get the pharmaceuticals they require to keep them healthy, to keep them out of the hospital, where costs tend to go a little out of whack. We know at our hospital system right now we spend \$4 billion on health care, and I think the pharmaceutical side of things is actually pretty small, compared to that \$4 billion, yet it continues to grow.

Now, the minister talked about a couple of other issues which I hope do come to fruition, that there is continued movement with the provinces and the federal government when it comes to the issue of a national pharmaceutical strategy. That has been talked about since I was minister in 2005, I believe, when we as provinces were ready to talk about a national pharmaceutical strategy, when a number of provinces backed out of it and the

federal government wasn't going to be listening to us. It ended up staying pretty much a document on a website until just recently, when the provinces did start talking about it again.

I hope that through negotiation, through discussion between the minister and the federal minister and the new government in Ottawa, that discussion can continue. It's a very complicated thing, and the federal government is not going to come easily to this discussion, but a national pharmaceutical strategy is one that I think we need. But we also need to have provinces that are ready to accept it or to be able to work with the system.

It does create some problems in how we interact with drug companies. It changes the way we interact with pharmacies and pharmacists, and how that trickles down on the availability of drugs to Canadians in this particular case.

The pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance is another good step forward, an idea that came through the provinces to try to put together the buying power of Canadian provinces. We do buy a fair amount of drugs, as provinces, whether we're the hospital system, the long-term care system, or the Pharmacare programs that we do support, so why not put together? We as Nova Scotia are a bit of a blip, but if we add ourselves to New Brunswick and to P.E.I. and to Quebec and Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador and going across Canada, we buy a substantial amount of drugs together.

Whether we look at those 20 top molecules and continue to expand on those availabilities, then we do keep the costs of the total plan down, but we also have to be ready to work as provinces to make sure that those drugs are available.

Mr. Speaker, in my last couple of minutes I want to say that I do support this bill by the NDP. It does increase the transparency and accountability of how this is decided by government. It does allow, I would say, a sober second thought on how things happen, to allow how increases or decreases might happen to the pharmaceutical programs that we have in this province - Seniors' Pharmacare, Family Pharmacare. Those are all very important to Nova Scotians. I think there's an opportunity here to expand upon the transparency of it.

I don't think it would cost us any money to do it. If you brought it in in the Fall session, we know that letters don't go out until after January, to the different people that receive the Seniors' Pharmacare or Family Pharmacare, so there is plenty of time to have that discussion. We know right now if the minister can say today that there is not increase in it, we know that data today, that would be available to him at any time.

So, with those few words, I do say, that we will be keep the minister to account to his words here today, that will be no increase seniors, and God forbid that he goes back on that one, because he knows how hard it was to get through the last fiasco that was brought

forward in senior's Pharmacare. With those few words, thank you very much for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 16 is a very important bill brought forward by the NDP, because we do need to have our seniors have the opportunity to speak and to be consulted, and that has not been done by this government.

When those changes were announced in January 2016, of course the seniors were up in arms. There was no lead-in to that change, or discussion whatsoever. It is mind-boggling, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that we continually hear this talk about how important our seniors are - they deserve respect and they deserve to have the opportunity to speak on their own behalf.

Many seniors realize that there are cost pressures when it comes to Pharmacare and the price of drugs. Many of them said that they were willing to pay a bit more if it was necessary to do so, but they needed to be able to have that opportunity to talk about it, and unfortunately while the government continually says that they are transparent and they will consult, it doesn't happen. They're just words that have been said many times over.

So, we need Bill No. 16, because we need to have that accountability and we have to ensure that through law, any government is responsible to follow that legislation, and just cannot go forward on their own merry way and come up with a fiasco like what happened in the New Year. I certainly remember the number of calls and emails that my office received from seniors who were very frightened over these changes, and I think there needs to be a realization of how many seniors are on a fixed income, and how difficult one increase of this nature can be - the difference between if they have money to feed themselves, or heat their homes. I don't think that this was taken into consideration whatsoever.

Although the minister has said that there are not going to be any increases, we know those words come out now that we are looking at a pending election. Many different things come out when it is in the election year, talking about promises and what the government is going to offer. But people do know, because they've already seen how those promises are broken when they become government. There is a long list that would take me more time than I am allotted if I were to read off those promises that were made in the 2013 election that were certainly not kept.

Mr. Speaker, every one of us will live to become a senior if we are lucky enough, so why are we not taking the opportunity to protect our seniors, and to ensure our seniors do not have increased drug prices? I know it is difficult and challenging in government

because, as the minister said, there's many different illnesses, and there's many different costs to those drugs.

I was astonished in my journey with MS to learn that the IV drug I get once a month is \$45,000, a year. Can you imagine if I was not fortunate enough to have coverage at this point in my life? But I don't know what will happen in the future. How would I ever be able to pay that amount of money? Along with that, I take about 30 pills a day right now. So can you imagine what the cost would be?

I know it's really, absolutely challenging for the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's very difficult when people go to the minister and tell the minister personally that they have a particular disease and that the cost for medication is \$50,000 a year or \$100,000 a year. I do realize that it tears you apart because you're looking at a person, and that's their life. Any one of us will fight as hard as possible to live as long as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I know of a young lady in my constituency - I know her quite well - who is actually battling lung cancer and brain cancer right now. She's only 31, and she has a five-year-old little girl who is the cutest thing you'd ever want to see. I recently saw a YouTube video of her singing with her dad in the car, giving her mother a message of not giving up. Her mother is in Arizona right now getting treatment because she can't get it paid for here in our province because it's a new treatment. This poor, young lady actually four or five years ago was struck down with breast cancer, and they had thought that she had been cured. Then she got the call that there were some spots in her lungs, and about three weeks later, she got the call that she also had brain cancer.

Mr. Speaker, it's been incredible to see the community in the Chester area come together to try to raise \$300,000 in order to pay for her care in Arizona right now. Believe it or not, they had one event at this young lady's former school that she went to, called Forest Heights Community School. In one day, they raised over \$50,000 in our small community. That is huge but so difficult (Applause) Myself, being diagnosed with MS, I really think I have no reason to complain when this beautiful, young lady is facing what she is facing. You can go on Facebook and YouTube, and she's continually smiling and giving us updates on how her care is progressing in Arizona.

We're talking about real lives here. Often, we lose that perspective when we're in the House because numbers are thrown out, and we talk about things that are on paper. We kind of lose that whole perspective that we're talking about human beings. That's why we in the NDP believe in this particular bill, Bill No. 16. We really hope that the Liberal Government will support us in this bill. It offers the opportunity for seniors to talk to our members of government. That's what we're here for, Mr. Speaker. We're here because of those people, when we knocked on their doors so that we could tell them what we would do if we got into this House.

I'm sure every one of us told people that we would work as hard as we could to do the best job that we could, although we yell back and forth at each other in this House. I'm glad when we get out of here because we become more human beings when we walk out of those doors, whether it's when the House rises or at the end of the day. It's just too bad that the political system puts us in that position of Opposition and not sitting together in a circle, like our Aboriginal friends do, to discuss the issues together and come up with solutions together. Now wouldn't that be a great thing, if that would happen? (Applause)

AN HON. MEMBER: Let's change the desks around.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: I agree. The minister says, "Let's change the desks around." I don't want to get off the bill, but I would love to see that. I don't mind having two Tories on one side and two Liberals on the other side. I really do think it would bring us off our high horses, right? I think that's what it would do, and it would allow us to reach out to each other to try to resolve those issues.

I know this House is a place of tradition, but I think that's a tradition that we really need to break and to bring us together in a circle so that we can discuss these issues. That's what I think Bill No. 16 does, in the sense of it's bringing the seniors together to be able to talk to the minister. No matter if the minister is a Liberal minister or an NDP minister or a Progressive Conservative minister, we are ensuring that seniors in the future will have that opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, you know yourself that what people really want is to have the opportunity to voice their opinion. That is so empowering to people. I have found in my job that even when you cannot resolve that issue right away for a person, or if it's an issue where there is no resolution, there's a great appreciation for the fact that you sat and listened to that person and you tried to provide some comfort and you tried to provide some very solid, good information.

I hope the Liberal Government, when it comes time to support Bill No. 16, will come together and say, we do agree with the fact that we need to have accountability. No matter who is sitting in the government chairs, we need to make sure that our seniors, who have given us so much, and have enabled us to be here today, for all the work and what they've done in our province and throughout the country - and that's why it's good to hear the minister talking about the future of coming together, but we also have to be concerned about the present.

We have to ensure that we do not see an increase in Pharmacare, not just this year but the next year. It's very difficult, because of the money situation in our province, but I do believe that, given the opportunity, those seniors would say to whoever is the minister, we do understand the financial difficulties. Maybe we can do some increases, but we will do it on a slow, step-by-step increase and we would look at all the other factors that may help seniors. Maybe we would come up with a program to help those who are most

vulnerable and those who face fixed incomes. That's only going to happen if the doors are open in this House to welcome seniors to come and discuss that with our Leaders.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. It's personal for me, too, not only because of my health journey in life but because I have senior parents who I love dearly and who are in the same situation as many other seniors. If the costs increase in Pharmacare, it would really put a lot of pressures on them, and I know there are many seniors in Nova Scotia who are in the same situation.

Mr. Speaker, let's finally make some changes in this House. Let's bring people together and let's listen to their voices. Those voices are the ones who put us here today.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Opposition business for today.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. TERRY FARRELL: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. At that time, we'll call Public Bills for Second Reading, Bill No. 44; Private Bills for Second Reading, Bill No. 47; Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne; and such other government business as may arise.

With that, I move that the House do now rise for today.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to adjourn to meet tomorrow, Thursday, October 27th, between the hours of 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.

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

The motion is carried.

We have reached the moment of interruption. The topic for late debate, as submitted by the honourable member for Pictou Centre, is:

“Therefore be it resolved that this Liberal Government has mismanaged the education system and brought our province to the brink of the first-ever teachers strike.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

EDUC. SYSTEM: TEACHERS STRIKE - LIBERAL MISMANAGEMENT

HON. PAT DUNN: I'm pleased to be able to take a few short minutes and talk about a few things, some concerns that are occurring in our classrooms today.

Some of these concerns that I will bring forth in the next seven or eight minutes are concerns from classroom teachers. They are not concerns coming from me or from a school board member or from a consultant or from an administrator. They are concerns that are coming from the grassroots, Mr. Speaker, from the classroom teachers.

I also realize that it's a very complex situation, our classrooms today. The ever-increasing demands on classroom teachers make it very difficult to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. When you look at a province like ours, with so many schools and so many classrooms and teachers, we can't solve all the problems overnight.

The complexities in today's classrooms have changed dramatically, as was mentioned in this House a number of times. What has happened over the past number of years is that teachers are swamped under mountains of clerical duties and taking care of standardized tests and assessments. Sometimes these assessments do not provide timely or useful feedback to improve student learning.

There are many, many concerns and I've talked to a great number of teachers at the grassroots, Mr. Speaker. I'll mention some of those concerns.

Teachers continue to tell me that they feel, over the past number of years, that they have not been involved in leading educational reform from the bottom up. Teachers continue to tell me that there's often top-heaviness coming from the top down. They arrive in school in the late days of August, the early days of September, and they're faced with many new initiatives which are added to the workload that they already have in the classroom.

Some have suggested that new money invested may have gone to the school boards but with numerous strings attached. Some have stated that a considerable amount of the money may have gone to consultants. However, this doesn't lower class sizes. It doesn't provide classroom support.

Class caps from Primary to Grade 6 are often ignored in our schools. When we talk about classes that are supposed to be capped, I would prefer that the government would say we are doing everything possible to cap classes across the province, we haven't reached that goal yet, but eventually we will, rather than to give the impression that all classes are capped. I was in a school just recently, and three of the classes that were supposedly to be capped at 20 had eight to 10 students in each of those three classes over the supposed cap.

Students in split-grade classes find out that caps are often optional when mixing grade levels from the same room.

So the grassroots teachers want and should be involved in classroom improvements, and I know they have answered surveys, they have had some opportunity at some levels to speak, to talk, and to give some suggestions. But in the overall picture, they feel left out, and it has become very difficult to meet the diverse needs of children given the working conditions, class sizes, lack of EA support, and all the new initiatives that continue to come down. In fact, one common thing that teachers will often say to me is will they please leave us alone, will they let us do what we should be doing, and that's teaching kids.

Speaking to high-school teachers, high-school teachers feel they do not have the allotted prep time. Clerical demands often consume this time. They need time to prepare to meet the diverse needs of students in the varied, varied types of assessments that we have in our schools today.

When we focus in on technology in the classroom, the consistent access to the Internet, we talk about coding - and I'll be the first to say that I was very pleased to see coding introduced into our school system; however, the reality of coding in our school system is such that many, many schools are not able to provide coding to their students simply because of where they are located in the Province of Nova Scotia, simply because a lot of their technology is old, a lot of their technology is slow, and also professional development for coding. But teaching students programming skills and computer science concepts certainly is a valued experience for all these students.

Numerous teachers feel there is a lack of policy supporting the educational process. One I'll mention is attendance. What can a Grade 10 biology teacher do when he has students who are not attending school? They tell me very little because there's really no attendance policy, and what was there, there's no teeth in any policy that's currently in the schools. So a student can end up coming in to write a test on a Thursday morning, write the test, and be gone for another two weeks, but prior to leaving they also have the right to ask the biology teacher for any handouts or notes that the other students were given.

A discipline policy, again, really doesn't exist in our schools. Recently, a teacher, a teacher actually in Grade 3, told me they were spit upon and kicked in the stomach. Well, there didn't seem to be any repercussions that occurred from the administration of that particular school, in the classroom, and that youngster still remains in the classroom, but because of the lack of support there is no one there to help this particular little student.

So we all know that our sense of community has been somewhat eroding over the years. Now, it seems the teachers feel they are responsible for everything from academic to social welfare with no support or training. There's a lot of things teachers are actually responsible for that they are not really trained for, especially the mental health issues in our school, which they face in the classroom every day. In fact, if there's one thing that teachers

from P to 12 tell me is their number one issue in school, it's the mental health issues that they face.

I know we have the SchoolsPlus programs in our school, which is a wonderful thing. I hope that we can continue increasing this program throughout the schools because the people involved in this program are certainly helping as many students as possible. But there are so many other students who are not able to obtain this help because of the lack of these professionals.

Teachers will also say there's a lack of professional development supporting teachers as these new initiatives are introduced. Someone from the school is sent to a departmental PD training session and is expected to come back and teach the other teachers in the school. Sometimes that's not possible because of all the duties that a teacher has because these types of training must happen after school, and there's so many other things happening in the classroom.

Ten minutes isn't enough time to bring them all up. But it was a great opportunity to speak about a few.

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

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. KAREN CASEY: I'm just taking some direction from the House Leader from the PC Party, who told me I was up next. For that reason, I am.

It's certainly an opportunity to stand in my place and to look at education as we see it, through the eyes of a student, and of course, through the eyes of the teachers. It is important, as we all know, that students in our classrooms and in our schools are the priority of any government.

Unfortunately, we sat in Opposition for four years, and we recognized that the enrolment in the province has been declining; it has been for many years. But we also recognized that if you look at basing your budget on declining enrolment, you are certainly not doing anything to improve the programming that you provide for students. So the rationale for the four years of the NDP was that because we have declining enrolment, it seemed to justify, for them, cuts to grants to school boards.

It was difficult, it was sad, and it was frustrating to watch that happen. As an educator, it's important; it's part of your being. That's who you are. You're a teacher. You will always be a teacher. When you saw things that were taking opportunities away from little kids in our schools because someone felt they needed to balance the budget, it was heartbreaking, and in fact, it was quite shameful.

During that time, we saw the elimination of the Reading Recovery program, a program which many people in this Legislature have recognized - either through their children, their grandchildren, their neighbours, or their teacher friends - as an evidence-based and research-based program that provided one-on-one support for struggling readers in Grade 1. The lowest 20 per cent of the students in Grade 1 were eligible for Reading Recovery. We had so many testimonies from parents and from teachers who were pleading with the government not to eliminate Reading Recovery.

In Opposition with a majority government, we were helpless. The minister of the day did not seem to listen to what those parents were saying. So, for four years, we had the lowest 20 per cent in Grade 1, who were struggling to learn to read, we had them denied an opportunity to learn to read, to build a good foundation so they could go on into the other grades, and be successful. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there were boards who came forward and said, let us find the money somewhere within our budget, because we value that program so much, and they were told no by the government of the minister of the day.

When we campaigned in 2013, one of the things that our Premier, then the Leader, said would be a priority for a government that he formed would be education. He has demonstrated that every year since we have been elected. It is demonstrated in the budget growth that we have had during that time.

Since we formed government, the budget that the NDP had in 2013-14 was \$1.1 billion. We are now at \$1.279 billion, and that is with declining enrollment. The reason declining enrollment should not dictate a budget is because there are so many costly programs that we want our students to be able to enjoy.

There was a time when we had vocational schools in this province, and they provided an opportunity for students who were perhaps not as academically inclined, but very bright, and very willing to learn a trade. That disappeared, and what we have attempted to do and build on - I will give the previous government credit, for introducing some of the skilled trades programs. That was a good program, so what we wanted to do was to build on that.

Those programs are costly: the lab, the shop that has to be provided for those students requires expensive equipment, so it is costly to introduce and implement a skilled trades program, but it does meet the need of a certain population that we have in our schools, and therefore, regardless of the declining enrollment, the cost to deliver that program had to go up. I think that's a good example of why and how declining enrollment is a poor way to determine what the budget for schools will be.

I want to just speak a little bit about the concern we have before us - that is the concern that teachers believe that no one is listening. I would say to everyone in the House - I've said it publicly - that we have engaged teachers. We have listened to teachers, when the union didn't put a stop to us listening to teachers, because we value them. We know

they are the experts, and we know there may be others in this Chamber who are teachers, but they are not teachers in the classroom, and they are not the experts who are in the classroom right now. Those are the people that we need to listen to.

One of the things that we did, because we value the teachers and their expertise, is when teachers said the curriculum is too broad, it's not manageable, I need to have fewer outcomes - it wasn't the staff at the department that decided what those new outcomes would be, it was a group of teachers. I insisted on that being done by teachers from the classroom, where were excited and proud to come into the department and work side-by-side with department staff, to identify what they thought were the most important outcomes. It was all Grade Primary up to Grade 6, and we did that straight through.

Teachers appreciated that, and we appreciated that because they knew the curriculum best. We engaged them, they were proud of the work they did, and when it went back to the classrooms, it wasn't someone from the department told us we had to do this, or somebody from the board told us. It was their colleagues, others in the same school, others at the same grade level, when they meet at principals' meetings or at staff meetings. These were teachers who are employed in the classroom, who know the curriculum best, and who came into the department to work with us. I think that is an indication that we understand and we respect and we appreciate teachers.

We recognize that they have concerns. We have made many opportunities available for them to tell us that. We are visiting classrooms. We are meeting with teachers, because the next investment we make in education needs to reflect their needs. The ones we made were the needs that the union told us were their needs. Apparently that didn't satisfy the teachers. We want to hear directly from them.

I'm not suggesting that we have to have a focus group or that we have to have something that the union will deem to be not legitimate. We are hearing, and we are getting a stack this high of concerns from teachers. That's what we will respond to. We know that their learning environment in the classroom is what will make it better for our students. If there ever was a government that valued education - we didn't sit on our hands and do nothing. We started doing something to try to repair and replace the devastation to the public school system when the last four years had passed.

To hear some people talk about a newfound interest in education, I'm not sure where that newfound interest was from 2009 to 2013, but it has become quite important now. When it should have been important was when budgets were being passed that were cutting and slashing money from classrooms, from the very kids who we are now trying to protect. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for her remarks. She may be surprised to hear that I actually agree with her that budgets should not be cut based on declining enrolment. I certainly agree with that.

In fact, I have to say I'm very proud to stand here as the NDP Education Critic today and say that when we were in government I was one of the people around that table who said we must not make any cuts to education, because we are the NDP and we believe in investment in education.

Coming from a family of teachers - my mom and my dad, both teachers - my dad taught at the teachers college for 30 years, and my sister is a teacher. I am the only black sheep of the family - a politician and a former actor - so I come by my love and my respect for teachers and the great art of teaching honestly.

What a lot of people don't realize is that teachers today have to take on so much, so many more aspects than they used to back when many of us were in school. People sat in a classroom 20 or 30 years ago, and the teacher was at the front and she wrote with chalk on a chalkboard or broke you up into little groups and you did little projects. But things have changed - and in a good way, in the fact that people now realize that everybody has a timing of learning, that not everybody is on the same page.

Unfortunately, a lot of kids come into the system and they hadn't been taught their reading, writing, and arithmetic;. A lot of them don't know their colours or they don't know very many words. A lot of that has to do with poverty; a lot of that has to do with lack of education of their parents.

I look at education the way my dad taught me, which is that you have to look at the whole child. You have to look at it from a holistic perspective. Testing and even homework do not necessarily prove the mettle of a child and how much they are learning and how much they know. My dad always said, what do tests really prove? They just prove how well somebody can memorize something overnight and then regurgitate it the next day.

Some people are better at that than others, Mr. Speaker. Some people just can't do it. Some people are dyslexic. There are many issues and problems that are facing the classroom today, and our teachers are the receptacle of all those problems, all those issues, those challenges.

We have inclusion now in the classrooms today, which is a very good thing - if the teachers have enough support to look after all the children who need the help. I'm hearing from teachers who are saying that they just can't do it anymore. They have classrooms made up of children with nine or 10 different IPPs, different learning programs. They spend six to seven hours getting those programs ready for all of those kids. Then they have to take meetings after school with all of their departments, making sure that everything is all

in place for all of the different kids who are learning so many different things. Then they have to come in and put them all into action in the classroom.

Sometimes, they don't have enough help, Mr. Speaker. They don't have enough education assistants there helping them, and their classroom becomes unruly. Sometimes, kids will be violent, as one of my colleagues from the PC caucus mentioned. The teacher's day is really a long one, and it's a stressful one.

In the course of one day, a teacher can go through so many emotions and so many different aspects. If you're a guidance counsellor, even more so. We have suicide attempts. We have children who are depressed, who are anxious, who are bullied, or who are bullying. If you look at a bully, you just have to scratch the surface and realize that child has problems and that that child needs help as well, as well as the children who are being bullied.

I have to agree with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development that cutting education and cutting the funding to education is not the answer. So we're here today as the NDP to say we believe in education. We believe in investing in education. We believe in the teachers of this province. We believe that the teachers know best. There was an old TV show *Father Knows Best*. Well, we believe the teacher knows best. I believe that teachers have been ignored and neglected for far too long. If you want to know what's really going on, you ask a teacher. If you want to know what the education system really needs, ask a teacher.

They feel that they have been silenced and that they have been neglected for too long. I noticed that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development had responded to one of my questions earlier today with a couple of letters that she said proved that the Teachers Union had actually stopped the teachers from being spoken to and getting involved in some of the consultations. In fact, I asked for a copy of the letter she tabled. She didn't read the whole letter; she just read a part of it which said, "In the interim, the NSTU asks for a commitment that the department will not rely upon the results of the survey with respect to the timing of professional development and will destroy all such results collected. The NSTU further asks that teachers who have not yet completed the survey will not be asked to do so."

However, she neglected to read the paragraph before that, which says, "This direct communication with bargaining unit members," that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development had taken part in "is contrary to the duty to bargain in good faith in section 21 of the *Teachers' Collective Bargaining Act*, as well as a failure to recognize the NSTU as the exclusive bargaining agent of employees contrary to section 13(1). The NSTU therefore intends to file a complaint of unfair labour practice with the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education."

That was dated September 14, 2015, and I will actually table that and ask for another copy of it. That was one such letter. Then there was another one to the honourable minister from Shelley Morse, the previous president of the NSTU, saying that she needed to cancel a focus group scheduled for teachers, again, for the same reasons.

My point here is that education is one of the most important things that we can give to this Province of Nova Scotia, both public education and post-secondary education. I believe we need free post-secondary education. We don't need our kids coming out of school in debt, which is why we are also here on this side of the House, the NDP, pushing for a free Nova Scotia Community College education as a start. That would cost about \$30 million.

The other thing is I need to bring up the fact that the minister keeps repeating over and over a number of what I would call untruths or not exactly truthy. I can't think of a non-unparliamentary word for it (Interruption) Factual, thank you. They're not particularly factual. One is this whole instance about this \$65 million. I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker, this \$65 million business has got to stop because it's just not factual. The truth is that there was a \$13 million cut by the NDP Dexter Government, against my wishes and against what I suggested. They did cut \$13 million over four years. The Liberals decided that they were going to go with that as one of their main campaign rallying cries, and they've bumped it up to \$65 million by adding in future cost pressures, how much it would cost if you had to pay for this, this, this, and this. But the actual cut was \$13 million.

The amount that's actually being put back into the system is not \$65 million. In fact, we have done some homework and research on our side and discovered that \$44 million of it at least is a direct transfer of funds with a complete division of Early Years from the Department of Community Services to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Also, there are some programs from Labour and Advanced Education. In fact, if you do the math, you will find that it's not \$65 million, and we need to stop that spin, which is what this government is being labelled as now, spin doctors.

Mr. Speaker, just to end up, I have to say that I did not sit on my hands and watch my government as they cut \$13 million from education. I told my government, if you continue on this path, you will be handing over a nice tidy balanced budget to the next Liberal Government, and they did. I have to say to this government, keep on in this direction, and you're going to be handing it right back over to somebody on this side.

With that, I say, good on you, teachers. Keep up the good fight. We'll be standing with you all the way.

MR. SPEAKER: The time allotted for late debate has expired. The House now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

[The House rose at 5:22 p.m.]

NOTICE OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 146**

By: Hon. Kevin Murphy (The Speaker)

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

Whereas Sterling Bruce is a long-time resident of Head of Chezzetcook and has been active in his community in various volunteer roles; and

Whereas Sterling is a parishioner of St. Genevieve's Roman Catholic Parish and has assisted in various activities; and

Whereas over the years Sterling has been a member of the Chezzetcook and District Volunteer Fire Department and Eastern Shore minor sports organizations, having assisted in many community activities;

Therefore be it resolved that Members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Sterling Bruce for giving his time and talents for the betterment of residents of the Eastern Shore.

RESOLUTION NO. 147

By: Hon. Kevin Murphy (The Speaker)

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

Whereas Carol Diane Conrad, a native of Bay St. Lawrence, Cape Breton, is a graduate of Queen Elizabeth High School, Halifax, and Mount Allison University, New Brunswick; and

Whereas Carol enjoyed a long and fruitful career in the Nova Scotia Civil Service, starting in administration and finishing her service to our province as Deputy Minister of Policy and Planning; and

Whereas Carol is a devoted aunt to the Member for the Eastern Shore, providing him with much appreciated sage advice on a regular basis;

Therefore be it resolved that Members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Carol Diane Conrad for her many years of service to the Province of Nova Scotia.

RESOLUTION NO. 148

By: Hon. Kevin Murphy (The Speaker)

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

Whereas MacKenzie Atlantic Tool & Die Machining Ltd., located in Musquodoboit Harbour, Nova Scotia, has recently celebrated its 10-year Anniversary; and

Whereas McKenzie Atlantic offers top-quality products and customer service in CNC machining, welding, and fabrication and design; and

Whereas McKenzie Atlantic provides employment to those skilled tradespeople who want to work in an atmosphere that is innovative, collaborative, and where one can grow and try new things;

Therefore be it resolved that Members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating MacKenzie Atlantic Tool & Die Machining Ltd. for reaching its 10-year Anniversary and establishing a successful world-class business on the Eastern Shore.

RESOLUTION NO. 149

By: Hon. Kevin Murphy (The Speaker)

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

Whereas Mary Colford is a long-time resident of East Chezzetcook and has been an active volunteer in her community; and

Whereas Mary has a great love of music and has been a singer in many groups along the Eastern Shore, performing voluntarily for local charity events; and

Whereas Mary is a parishioner of St. Genevieve's Roman Catholic Church in East Chezzetcook, helping with various parish activities, including parish secretary, music director, altar society member, and liturgy member;

Therefore be it resolved that Members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Mary Colford for giving her time and talents for the people served by St. Genevieve's Parish and residents of the Eastern Shore.