



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Third Session

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017

Sixty-second General Assembly

Third Session

12:01 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Mr. Gordon Wilson, Mr. Keith Irving

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we begin the daily routine, the topic for late debate tonight as submitted by the honourable member for Pictou Centre is:

Therefore be it resolved that decisions to build new schools must once again be based on the needs of students, not on the needs of the Liberal Party.

The late debate at 5:30 p.m. today, brought to you by the honourable member for Pictou Centre.

We'll now 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**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS****NOTICES OF MOTION****STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

SCH. CONST. - DEPOLITICIZE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: For the past three years, the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board has put a new elementary school for Springhill at the top of its priority list for new construction. Deterioration at the two old schools has reached the point where program delivery is being affected, hence the recommendation by the school board for a new school.

Despite this prioritized need, the Liberal Government continues to skip over the needs of students in Springhill, preferring to build new schools in the constituencies of the Premier, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the member for Halifax Atlantic, even though none of those schools were prioritized by their own school boards. Playing politics with the education of our children is shameful - new school construction should be based on students' needs, not Liberal Party needs.

Nova Scotia is better than this; it's too bad this government is not.

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

PREM. - COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: As we prepare to settle in to yet another long night's sitting, it seems many of us in the House will have time to do a little soul-searching.

However, as I continue to listen to the Premier and his government ignore questions from the Opposition, I worry that I might find myself searching for answers to questions that I may not find. How is it that the current Premier could make such an explicit promise to respect the collective bargaining process and protect the rights of workers and then proceed to walk all over those same workers and the collective bargaining process that is their right?

I will continue soul-searching as this week goes on and report back on what I have and have not found.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.

SACKVILLE-BEDFORD MEALS ON WHEELS - THANK

HON. KELLY REGAN: I would like to mention a group that does excellent work in my riding and other ridings too.

The Sackville-Bedford Meals on Wheels makes fresh meals Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. These dedicated volunteers deliver meals to Bedford, Sackville, Hammonds Plains, Mount Uniacke, and Fall River, on each of these days. That service helps people who have difficulty preparing well-balanced meals but wish to keep their independence and remain in their own homes. They do this at a cost to recipients of \$7 a meal, which includes soup, roll, entrée, and dessert.

Imagine this - volunteers have made over 187,000 meals. That's a big impact in our communities. So, I want to thank the Sackville-Bedford Meals on Wheels and its volunteers past and present for providing this important service.

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

MCNEIL GOV'T. - LEGISLATION RECONSIDER

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: I rise today to tell the McNeil Government that my office has never received such a tsunami of emails and calls over this pending legislation before this House. It is clear that sober second thought is required by the government before insurmountable damage is inflicted on the education system of Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the government allows wisdom and reason to play a role in this momentous decision that is about to be made.

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

DONNELLY, KENZI/ MONCAYO-ADAMS, MANUEL: STUDENTS FOR TEACHERS - SPOKESPEOPLE

MS. LENORE ZANN: I would like to applaud the determination and passion of two high school students from Dartmouth. Kenzi Donnelly and Manuel Moncayo-Adams are the spokespeople for the relentless group, Students for Teachers.

This group was formed in defiance of this government's disrespectful and dictatorial approach to the handling of the education file. When this government refused to stand with parents and teachers across the province, these students stepped up. With over

2,500 members on their Facebook group, Kenzi and Manuel have spent the last two and a half months organizing rallies, meeting with caucuses, and championing their educators.

I'm proud to say I stand with Manuel and Kenzi in their fight for teachers. I know bright futures await them wherever they go. I just want to thank them for all they've done and that they continue to do. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DART. COMMUN. FOOD CTR.: AVIVA PRIZE - CONGRATS.

HON. JOANNE BERNARD: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand in this House and congratulate the Dartmouth Community Food Centre on receiving the Aviva Prize of \$100,000 which will go towards expanding and enhancing the existing services offered by this great organization in Dartmouth North. This contest was initiated by the Aviva Insurance Company that for the past seven years has been awarding money to deserving ideas all over Canada. Since awarding its first grant seven years ago, it has awarded over \$6.5 million to many groups nation-wide.

More than 37,000 people voted online over 18 days to support the Dartmouth North Food Centre's good market and café project. The weekly food market offers affordable produce every Saturday, fun activities, and is a great place to enjoy coffee with neighbours. The café serves lunches and offers healthy food cooking classes and other educational opportunities. As the MLA, I am thrilled with their achievements.

I would like all members of this House to join me in congratulating the members of the Dartmouth Food Centre on receiving this prize.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**CDN. HOME & SCH. FED./PC CAUCUS:
TEACHERS' CONTRIBUTIONS - RECOGNIZE**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, this week the Canadian Home and School Federation is celebrating Teacher Appreciation Week. It's an opportunity to show teachers and school staff from coast to coast that they are valuable, they are helping our children learn and grow.

It is a sad irony that the McNeil Government selected this week to impose a contract on teachers and ignore issues that would help teachers give our kids more productive classrooms and the best shot at success.

Tonight the Progressive Conservative caucus joins with the Canadian Home and School Federation in recognizing the many contributions of Nova Scotia teachers and thanking them for their important role in our children's lives.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

GOV'T. (N.S.) - FINANCIAL CHOICES

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, during yesterday's session, just a few hours ago, in response to a question regarding class caps, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development said that caps would be brought in for junior high and high school classes as funds allow.

Respectfully, funds do allow. The government makes choices all the time about how to spend taxpayers' money. It has chosen to replace J.L. Ilesley, despite \$2.5 million recently invested and a school board's considered decision to prioritize other schools. It has chosen to invest more than \$30 million in the Yarmouth ferry. It chose to recall the Legislature in haste, in advance of a snowstorm, and put MLAs up in hotels and it could also choose to run a deficit.

Today's high school students, some of whom are in classrooms with 40-plus students, not enough desks, not enough room for teachers to circulate and help them at their desks, will forever remember the choices of this government.

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

TEACHERS/GOV'T.: RELATIONSHIP - CONCERNS

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express both my support for reform in the province's classrooms, as well as my deep concern for the relationship between teachers and the government. Despite the fact that we have a number of passionate and willing professionals working within the system, they continue to be ill-equipped to meet the demands placed upon them.

Both students and staff are faced with a myriad of challenges that have repeatedly been put on the back burner by this government. Some of these challenges include overcrowded classrooms, limited resources to address a variety of learning differences, and the added pressures of administrative duties. These challenges are part of a cycle that negatively affect teachers and students alike. Thank you.

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

NDP CAUCUS: EDUC. SYSTEM STORIES - RESPONSES

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, our caucus has asked Nova Scotians to share their stories with us about their experiences with the education system. The response has been overwhelming. There are many stories of overcrowding, a lack of resources in classrooms, and teachers who are feeling burned out, especially with the overwhelming amount of data entries.

Mr. Speaker, the responses we received often speak from the heart about the need to address classroom conditions in particular. It is so unfair that this Liberal Government spends more time dividing people's hearts instead of mending them.

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

WOOD, JOHN: VOLUNTEERISM - THANK

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, for almost two decades John Wood, a former resident of the Sheet Harbour area, has volunteered tirelessly to nurture the Sheet Harbour and Area Historical Society and the MacPhee House Museum. John has over the years worked diligently to establish the MacPhee House Museum, setting up displays that depict the history of Sheet Harbour and the surrounding area. He painstakingly catalogued all artifacts that had been received either as a donation to the museum or on loan.

Once the museum was established, John attracted other members of the community to join and form the Sheet Harbour and Area Historical Society. The society took on the task of interviewing and recording interviews with elderly residents with their recollection of past historical events in the Eastern Shore.

Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie is fortunate to have these dedicated volunteers who have established and maintained this wonderful museum. They have done an excellent job in presenting the history of the Eastern Shore to the present residents and the tourists who visit every year. Thank you for making our communities and province a better place to live.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

MACKENZIE, FRED: SUPPORT - THANK

MR. TIM HOUSTON: I'd like to give a tip of the hat to Fred MacKenzie. Mr. MacKenzie teaches science at North Nova Education Centre and he is one of my daughter's favourite teachers. In fact, a couple of months ago, my daughter was having a tough time and when I went to sit with her, I found her clutching a note in her hand. It turned out to be

a note of encouragement from Mr. MacKenzie. When I asked her, she said she refers to it often whenever she needs a boost.

Today I'd like to say thank you, Mr. MacKenzie, and all the Mr. MacKenzies out there who do so much to support our children. It's support they need when they need it.

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

**PREM. - CONTRACT LEGISLATION:
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS - CONSIDER**

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, the Premier wants Nova Scotians to believe that when it comes to handling this dispute between the government and teachers he is simply out of options. However, this is simply not the case. The Premier could repeal Bill No. 148 - he will not. The Premier could return to the bargaining table - he will not. The Premier could replace the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development - he will not.

Mr. Speaker, legislating a contract is just one of the many options the Premier has available for trying to improve the current situation with teachers. Rather than say that he is out of options, it is time for the Premier to admit that he is simply choosing the options most favourable to his government.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

BEST, JIM: ACCOMPLISHMENTS - CONGRATS.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize New Minas resident and Berwick pharmacist Jim Best for his efforts in generating awareness of cystic fibrosis. In 2014, Mr. Best, who was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis as an infant, drove his motorcycle across the United States in an effort to raise funds and generate awareness of the disease. His quest covered 8,700 kilometres and took him a month to complete. Then in July 2015, Mr. Best spent 10 days biking around Ireland.

As a pharmacist, Mr. Best is aware that there has been a lot of breakthrough research into cystic fibrosis. Though it remains incurable, it is now a lot more manageable, at least in part due to his ongoing efforts.

On behalf of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, I congratulate Jim Best on his accomplishments and on his dedication and perseverance to his cause.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

EDUC.: CLASSROOMS - NORMALCY

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, Premier McNeil wants our classrooms to return to normal. Unfortunately, normal equals students being promoted, regardless of attendance. Normal equals a no-fail policy for students who refuse to do assigned work. Normal equals students sitting on the floor because there are more students than desks. Normal equals an increasing number of students living with school-based anxiety. Normal equals students with severe mental health and behavioural issues who suffer daily because their system does not have appropriate support in place to assist them.

Normal equals resource teachers with caseloads so large they can't possibly meet the needs of students with high needs. Normal equals teachers spending precious time entering data into an ancient computer instead of planning quality lessons for students. Normal equals school-based speech-language pathologists with a caseload of 130-plus students, more than double the recommended caseload. Normal equals no attendance policy and no plan to get students who missed time back in school.

Mr. Speaker, we have to do better than this.

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

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make an introduction.

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MS. ZANN: I'd like to introduce some people who are in the west gallery. We'd like to welcome Kenzi Donnelly, Jordan Wallace, Tony Tracy, Suzanne MacNeil, and our Leader, Mr. Gary Burrill. Please stand up and receive the welcome of the House.

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

HINES, NORMAN: CEC STUDENTS - HONOUR

MS. LENORE ZANN: Tonight, we come here to talk about teachers and what they mean to us. I would like to give a special shout-out to one particular teacher who helped me in my life a long time ago when I was in high school.

Mr. Norman Hines was our guidance counsellor. He's 85 years old now. He used to direct the shows and brought many of us together - the football teams, the musical people, kids who just didn't really fit in. He would bring us all together and make us feel like we were special, like we all had some talent that we could offer. That man has changed so many lives, including mine.

He's 85 now, as I said, and he will be coming to Truro very soon to see a musical that I'll be producing there for the CEC High School students off the campus. We're all going to be honouring him at the show.

Thank you very much to Mr. Norman Hines.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

NATL. FLAG DAY (02/15/17) - RECOGNIZE

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: I am proud to stand here to recognize February 15th as National Flag Day. On this date in 1965, the red-and-white Maple Leaf was raised on Parliament Hill for the very first time. Over 5,000 designs were submitted to the committee for consideration, and the red-and-white Maple Leaf, designed by George Stanley, was chosen.

Since then, Canadians have proudly displayed our national flag, waved miniature versions at parades, and worn lapel pins depicting the Maple Leaf particularly when travelling abroad. The distinctive red-and-white Maple Leaf has been hoisted during Olympic Games and enthusiastically displayed in the stands at world sporting events.

I am confident that all my colleagues join me in honouring the 52nd Anniversary of Canada's National Flag Day.

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

LIB. GOV'T. - MGT. INCOMPETENCE

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: This government is proving time and time again that it is incapable of competent management. Almost two years ago, they bungled the film tax credit, a once-major economic driver for the province. A year ago, they botched the Pharmacare changes, which resulted in a taxpayer-funded apology to Nova Scotians. In December, the government locked students out of classrooms and called the House to order only to call it off partway through the day. On Monday, everyone was thrown into turmoil about how this Legislature could sit with a well-predicted blizzard on its way. Like always with the Liberal Government, politics overrides common sense.

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

COADY, MICHAEL: HARBOURVIEW LODGE - DEDICATION

HON. LLOYD HINES: For well over a decade, Michael Coady, past chairperson and current director of the Harbourview Lodge Continuing Care Centre in Sheet Harbour,

has dedicated his time and expertise to the evolution of the Duncan MacMillan Nursing Home into the newly constructed Harbourview Lodge. Michael is a lifelong resident of Sheet Harbour, husband to Cecilia, father of four, and grandfather.

Harbourview Lodge is a 32-bed licensed continuing care facility which is divided into three individual houses containing a living room, dining room, and kitchen space, as well as private bedrooms. Michael was instrumental in the design, budgeting, and construction of Harbourview Lodge, which is a state-of-the-art facility that is able to offer 21st-Century care to its elders.

Today, Michael is still involved in the day-to-day activities of the residence, offering a weekly movie night complete with freshly popped popcorn. We are fortunate to have this dedicated volunteer and others like Michael Coady and the board of directors of Harbourview Lodge Continuing Care who offer tremendous support to local senior residents both present and future. They have enhanced the lives of so many.

Thank you for making our communities and province a better place to live.

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

EDUC.: STUDENTS' SUFFERING - RECOGNIZE

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: I rise today to bring to light that students' education in Nova Scotia has been suffering.

Teachers are tired of band-aid solutions, and the government has not been listening to front-line workers. Front-line workers are the experts in the field. They have simple solutions on how to improve classroom conditions and create an environment where teachers can teach and students can learn.

Teachers, with students and parents, are taking a firm stand on the education system in Nova Scotia. The current system is failing young Nova Scotians and is not adequately preparing them for their future.

Does this government realize the message they are sending to our students? I hope the department understands that their inaction will have deep-rooted consequences for these young people.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD MIN./PREM.: TEACHERS - OLIVE BRANCH IDEAS

MS. LISA ROBERTS: A number of teachers have suggested ways that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Premier could extend an olive

branch to teachers. These are steps that could be taken to demonstrate to teachers that the government is listening.

For example, the department could drop one of the three report cards currently issued each year. I made a member's statement in the Fall about those report cards, which take a great deal of time to prepare and which tell parents very little about how their children are really doing.

For example, the department could suspend data collection. I understand that a great deal of data is collected and very little is done with it.

For example, the department could make coding an optional program for teachers to adopt when and if they have sufficient tablets and access to wi-fi, and if they have some passion for and comfort with it.

I don't expect the government to change its course, but it could.

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

EDUC. ISSUES: GOV'T. - ADDRESS

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, it continues to be very puzzling that this government and the Premier refuse to address very serious issues that would not cost taxpayers any of their hard-earned dollars. There are several unsatisfactory issues that should have been addressed from the beginning. This would have been a good sign of faith that the government was actually listening to teachers.

Issues such as discipline policies, attendance policies, retention policy, enforceable deadlines, engaging classroom teachers when changes occur, and reduction in initiatives sent from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development - these changes would quickly make positive change in our classrooms at no cost to the government.

A reasonable government would quickly move to support this in our classrooms and not ignore them.

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

BLACKBURN, BETTY LOU - HRM VOL. AWARD

MR. BILL HORNE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Betty Lou Blackburn of Beaver Bank on receiving the HRM Volunteer Award. Betty Lou is a prolific volunteer at the Beaver Bank Kinsac Community Centre, where her caring and kind spirit is often seen at events supporting the youth of our community. Her willingness to help and her hard work are crucial to the success of the organization.

It is evident that this heart for volunteering has been passed down to Betty Lou's daughter, Lisa, who won the same award last year.

Please join me in congratulating Betty Lou on this well-deserved award.

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

PREM.: TEACHERS CONTRACT - RESULTS

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, this government is attempting to bring the legislative hammer down on teachers instead of putting in the hard work to make positive change in the province's classrooms. The Premier insists that the end result will be a return to normal for students and their parents, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The Premier claims that his soul searching led him to impose the contract. It seems more likely that his action was inspired by a dream, since it's pure fantasy to believe that a "return to normal" will result from this desperate action. The necessary classroom improvements will not be made, trust with teachers will not be restored, and the futures of Nova Scotia's students will not be improved. This is willful blindness of the first order.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

HUNTER, JAYNE: DART. NORTH COMMUN. CTR. - FAM. LITERACY DAY (01/28)

HON. JOANNE BERNARD: Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, January 28th, the Dartmouth North Community Centre was abuzz with people from the community coming in to choose from a selection of free books. The reason for this celebration was the annual Family Literacy Day, a national awareness initiative created by ABC Life Literacy Canada. It raises awareness of the importance of reading and other family activities to promote learning and togetherness.

Just 15 minutes of reading a day can improve a child's literacy skills tremendously. The books were suitable for readers from ages four to 12, including many Disney- and Pixar-themed books. I personally chose *The Haunted Mansion*, a ride that I have been on 33 times over my Disney career.

Literacy Nova Scotia planned four hours of activities surrounding the book giveaways, and it was my pleasure to join authors Sheree Fitch and Starr Dobson in Storybook Corner.

I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating Literacy Nova Scotia's executive director Jayne Hunter on this wonderful event and for all the work that went into doing it.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

LIGHTFOOT, KAITLYN: TEACHERS - SUPPORT

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, Kaitlyn Lightfoot is an 18-year-old Grade 12 student at Central Kings Rural High School in Cambridge. Kaitlyn is supporting teachers, partly because of a specific teacher who has made a really big impact on her life and has done more for her than she ever can say thank you for. That teacher is Paul Hutten, music teacher.

Kaitlyn knows there are many problems in our province's education system right now, she lives it every day. There are special needs students placed in regular classes and they are supposed to have an EA - too often they don't have one; she thinks class sizes are way too big - she has been in classes with over 40 people. She says it's unreasonable to expect students to learn that way. Kaitlyn does not believe this is an emergency situation and cannot understand why the Legislature was called back.

The McNeil Government is claiming this will put teachers back to work, but in reality, according to Kaitlyn, they have never once left the classroom except for that one day in December when the government locked them out.

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

PORT HAWKESBURY FOOD BANK - VOLS./DONORS - THANK

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, the Port Hawkesbury Food Bank opened its doors in 1991 with the help of volunteers and board members like Annabel Butts and Mary Johnston, who have been there since its inception. The food bank serves Port Hawkesbury, Port Hastings, Mulgrave, Troy, Cregnish, Orangedale, Blues Mills, Marble Mountain, West Bay, and Dundee, fulfilling up to 40 food orders a week.

While Feed Nova Scotia provides much of the supplies, the food bank depends on donations from community organizations, schools, churches and individuals, including former clients.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking the board, the volunteers, and everyone who donates to the Port Hawkesbury Food Bank.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

PICTOU CO.: HEALTH CARE - IMPROVE

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, a lack of doctors has created a crisis in the health care service provided to the residents of Pictou County, with thousands still without a family doctor. As more time passes, the situation has become dire for many. Many are simply going without regular checkups and health care, only seeking care once they have fallen ill. Even residents who are seriously ill, with life-threatening illnesses like cancer, are being left without adequate follow-up due to the fact that even being sick with cancer does not get them a family doctor.

Mr. Speaker, I am frustrated and saddened with the calls from seriously ill constituents who reach out to me as a last resort to help them find a doctor who will take care of their medical needs. This government must take immediate action to improve the health care situation in Pictou County and the rest of the province.

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

**LONG, JUDE: BLUEPRINT 2020 NATL. STUDENT PAPER COMP.
- TOP PRIZE**

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, a student from Port Hawkesbury won the grand prize of a prestigious national essay competition. Jude Long was a second-year Masters of Public Administration student at Dalhousie University when he and co-author Salman Dostmohammad were awarded the top prize in a Blueprint 2020 National Student Paper Competition for their essay, Regulating the Sharing Economy: Applying the Process for Creative Destruction.

Blueprint 2020 is a project launched by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada with the mandate to promote innovation in the public service sector. Mr. Long's and Mr. Dostmohammad's essay also won the People's Choice Award, decided by public vote.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating Jude Long on this impressive competition and wishing him the best of luck in what surely will be a bright future.

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

ÉCOLE WEDGEPORT: CONST. LIST - CONSIDER

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: When the capital plan came out one of my communities was especially disappointed in the list of schools that were to be constructed. École Wedgeport has been the number one priority on the CSAP's list for the past, close to 10 years. When that community sees other schools being done on a political

decision and other communities being served, except for that one, they have to question whether the francophone rights of that area actually rate with this government.

École Wedgeport is an older school - it was constructed in the late 1950s or early 1960s - it has holes through the walls where it is rotting where it touches the ground, and the sewer system is all but non-functioning.

Mr. Speaker, my question, my want to the government is that we need to consider small schools like École Wedgeport so that the people of that area can have the services that they so deserve.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GOOD ROBOT BREWING CO. - *THE COAST* BEST OF HALIFAX AWARDS

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate Good Robot Brewing Company, a thriving craft brewery in Halifax Chebucto.

When *The Coast* announced the winners of the 2016 Best of Halifax awards as selected by readers, Good Robot Brewing Company cleaned house, winning gold in both the best brew pub and best craft brewery categories. This is a noble accomplishment given that it is only their second year in business and it shows how much they have been embraced by the Halifax community.

Good Robot has again been honoured with multiple awards at the Atlantic Canadian Beer Awards where they were held at the Stubborn Goat Gastropub. Their Leave Me Blue Kentucky Corn beer was awarded bronze in the North American style specialty ale and my favourite, the Damn Fine Coffee and Cherry Pie Ale, was awarded the silver in experimental beer category.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the craft brewery industry in Nova Scotia is thriving and I would like to again congratulate Good Robot Brewing on these honours and wish them continued success in the future.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

SOUL-SEARCHING - DEFINITION

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's revelation that he did considerable soul-searching piqued my curiosity so I did a bit of research on what soul-searching is. You might know it could be used as a noun, which means deep and anxious consideration of one's emotions and motives, or of the correctness of a course of action. It can also be used as an adjective which is involving or expressing deep consideration.

Mr. Speaker, I was left to thinking that after all this, after considerable soul-searching, the best the Premier could come up with was the bill before the House. I thought that's probably not good so I did a bit more research and did you know, there's a book you can buy on Amazon, called *The Soul Searcher's Handbook* and you can pick that up for under \$20. It is by Emma Mildon and I would suggest that maybe the members here put a little collection together and see if we can get the Premier's soul-searching to come up with something more fruitful next time for the people of the province.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**COUGLE, BETTY: KHALAF FAM. REUNION COMMUN. FUND
- GENEROSITY THANK**

HON. LENA DIAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the compassion of Halifax Armdale resident Betty Cogle. Last January, Talal and Fayrouz Khalaf came to Halifax with their children as government-assisted refugees. After enrolling their kids at Chebucto Heights Elementary, Talal met Betty, the chairwoman of the school's parent council. Betty was moved by the Khalafs' story and promised to help them adjust to life in Canada and worked towards bringing their two adult daughters from Jordan to Halifax. She reached out to friends, acquaintances and community members and with the help of the St. James United Church in Sambro, secured a job for Talal and began fundraising efforts to reunite the family.

Earlier this year the Khalaf Family Reunion Community Fund held a very successful benefit concert featuring well-known Celtic musicians Dennis Ryan and Tony Quinn at the church. As of February, the fund reached their minimum fundraising goal and is continuing to raise money and help the family navigate the application process.

I ask all to join me in thanking Betty and everyone involved with the fund for their tremendous generosity.

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

BORYS, JILL: BEACON HOUSE FOOD BANK - FUNDRAISING

MR. BILL HORNE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Fall River resident Jill Borys, a local business owner of Jill's Jewellery Box. Jill organized a social event at the Bedford Legion that was attended by 140 people, including 19 entrepreneurs and guests, several of whom were from Fall River.

Jill, along with the matching funds from Scotiabank, raised \$9,000 for Beacon House food bank. Currently Beacon House serves over 2,500 clients representing between 600 and 700 families per month. This donation will go directly to the purchase of food that

will help individuals in the Fall River area, Bedford, Sackville, and Hammonds Plains area. Congratulations to Jill Borys on using her skills to help others in her community.

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

EDUC. RESEARCH COMMN.: EECD MIN. - COSTS JUSTIFY

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents, teachers and students want to know if the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development feels it's necessary to spend money on a committee to research issues in education that are already known. Constituents, teachers and students want to know why this money is not directed towards the problems themselves.

Mr. Speaker, over 9,000 teachers, in addition to parents and students, can't be wrong - another lost opportunity. The definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over and expect a different outcome. Another committee is useless. Let's invest in our students and not another committee.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

ADVOCATE DIST. SCH.: PRINCIPAL/STAFF - THANK

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, this is Teacher Appreciation Week, and I would like to rise and say a big thank you to the principal and staff of Advocate District School in Advocate Harbour, Nova Scotia, in Cumberland County. The teachers there are led by Principal Don Gamblin.

Advocate District School is known for its small size, its remote location, and its consistently high academic achievement. That is because of the dedication and work of the teaching staff at Advocate District School.

I had the great honour of joining those teachers in their lounge last week. For many of us, the teachers' lounge was always a mystery. In this job, when you get a chance to actually go into the teachers' lounge and talk to teachers, it is a great honour, particularly when those teachers have done outstanding things in a small rural school.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for the work that they do.

MR. SPEAKER: Barring any more Members' Statements, the House will now stand recessed until 1:00 a.m.

[12:41 a.m. The House recessed.]

[1:00 a.m. The House reconvened.]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

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

TEACHERS CONTRACT - COURT CHALLENGE

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. This very session is an admission of failure by the Premier to work something out with teachers that will make our classrooms better. It will also prove to be a very expensive session for taxpayers, as the work that is before us will be challenged in the courts for years to come and cost millions. In fact, in a memo to teachers tonight, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union has said, and I quote: We will challenge this in the courts.

I'd like to ask the Premier, why is he condemning taxpayers to millions of dollars in legal fees instead of simply putting that money to work in our classrooms?

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I want to remind him that in every budget I've introduced in this House, I've continued to make more and more investments in public education. I'd also like to remind him that I negotiated three tentative agreements with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, with two different executives.

Teachers have obviously said that they oppose that. I want to remind the honourable member that even the teachers union lawyer has suggested that challenging this in court would be very difficult for the union, but they'll make their own decision. We'll stand by the decisions that we've made.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, it has to be said that the Premier has had exactly zero agreements with the teachers. He may have had tentative agreements, but they were never ratified, meaning he's still at zero in terms of agreements, and that's the problem. When you legislate a contract when you have zero agreements, it's going to be challenged in the courts.

The Premier likes to quote the union's lawyer. I hope he has his own legal ducks in a row. I'd like to ask him to table in this House, before the end of the day, any and all legal analysis and opinions he has to back up his claim.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. You're not able to ask the government to table legal opinions from their counsel.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on his final supplementary.

MR. BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers of Nova Scotia deserve to know exactly how much they're at risk for, and I do encourage the Premier to voluntarily provide them with the legal analysis he has hopefully done that he is relying on.

Without a doubt, every single taxpaying Nova Scotian would prefer that their money be spent in the classrooms and not on legal fees, but that's not going to happen. Whether you're quoting the teachers union lawyer or a government lawyer, it is going to be challenged in the courts, and no matter what's decided, millions of dollars are going to be spent on legal fees.

Why does the Premier prefer to spend that money on legal fees instead of in our classrooms in the first place?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to remind the honourable member that in every budget we've tabled in this House, we've invested more and more in public education. I want to remind him that we've had three tentative agreements with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, two different executives - we continue to move forward.

There's one thing that Nova Scotians expect our government, and any government, to do: to stand up and respect all taxpayers. We believe we have a fair offer on the table for teachers. We also believe we have an offer that allows us to invest in things like job creation. We've retained more young people per capita than any other Canadian province. We're seeing a huge growth in our export opportunities. Those are the kinds of investments we want to make, in great job opportunities here.

It's a balance that all governments have to do. Nova Scotians have trusted our government to make sure that we represent them fairly, and we're doing so.

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

PREM. - SPENDING PRIORITIES

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Premier. Back in the Fall, the Premier said we all have to do our part for the solution. He told teachers, the growth of your benefits has to slow down.

The truth is that the Premier has one set of rules for the inner circle and another set of rules for the rest of us. Will the Premier explain to the teachers why he has no money for the Public Service but had an extra \$23,000 for a friend, Marilla *Stephenson*?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. As he knows, that job was provided - there was a position there that was filled by the lady he's referring to. There was a salary associated with it.

The honourable member stands in this House and he recognizes that not too long ago he was asked by his Leader to be the Leader in the House, and an additional \$23,000 to \$25,000 came along with that. He accepted that as part of his contract. He's being paid for the job that he's doing in the House, just like every other public servant. But it's actually wrong for the honourable member to suggest that anyone has received an increase. What they're doing is being paid for the job that they're doing.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Parents, students, and teachers are trying to be heard, but this Premier says he can't afford to improve classroom conditions. This isn't about money. It's about priorities. Will the Premier explain to parents why he won't agree to hire enough teachers to limit class sizes but agreed to provide the RBC with \$22 million in payroll rebates?

THE PREMIER: I want to remind the honourable member that we continue to invest in public education every year, unlike a government and Executive Council he was part of that cut \$65 million out of public education. Continuing to go forward, there's one thing that parents and people know across this province: that education is a priority. We're going to continue (Interruptions)

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

THE PREMIER: Unlike the former government that he was a member of (Interruptions)

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

THE PREMIER: Unlike the former government that he was a member of the Executive Council of, which cut \$65 million out of public education, we've continued to invest in public education.

We've continued to listen to teachers. Teachers have made it very clear that their views weren't represented at the bargaining table. We have now set up a structure so that they can have their views heard directly. We will make the implementation teachers want us to make to improve learning and classroom environments.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Apparently I ran out of Snickers bars last session, so I guess maybe a Valentine heart would be appropriate now.

There's a clear pattern here. The Premier expects students, parents, and teachers to settle for less while he gives more and more money to those that need it the least: \$6.5

million to Lockheed Martin, \$528,000 to CNS Accounting Solutions in the Cayman Islands, and \$840,000 to Butterfield bank in Bermuda. Will the Premier explain to Nova Scotians why he thinks big business, banks, and people in his inner circle are more important than teachers and students?

THE PREMIER: Again, I want to thank all those teachers across the province who continue to show up and do work on behalf of students across this province. We continue to make investments in public education. There's \$20 million (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I made a comment yesterday about the heckling. I would really appreciate co-operation on that front in this particular session.

The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: We continue to make investments in classrooms. We have \$20 million that is part of this current bill that is before the House. We're looking forward to hearing from classroom teachers across this province on how best to spend that. There are other initiatives that are being brought forward. We're looking forward to working with classroom teachers to improve the learning environment and the working conditions in classrooms across this province.

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

PREM.: SCH. CONST. - SELECTION

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Taxpayers across this province expect that their money will be spent in a fair manner, particularly when it comes to our students and schools. That means that new schools should be selected on the basis of need, not on the basis of politics. That's why parents are so upset in places like Springhill, the Eastern Shore, and other places where their schools were passed over so that a new school could be built in the Premier's riding, in the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development's riding, and in the riding of Halifax Atlantic - even when their school boards didn't ask for them. How does the Premier justify overriding school board priorities and making Liberal Party priorities more important?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. It gives me a great opportunity to stand up and talk about the great schools in the constituency that I represent. I want to remind the honourable member that the school in Bridgetown that was committed to was actually done by the former government, the NDP. That was announced.

We're continuing to work forward to make sure that we provide that infrastructure for students across this province. Boards make their priority lists. We go through those priority lists looking at need and looking at geographical preferences. We continue to make

those investments, and we'll continue to do so to make sure that that infrastructure is there for students.

MR. BAILLIE: The fact is, the Cabinet goes through those school board priorities and then ignores them. That's why the Auditor General actually scolded the Premier and his government for the way that they ignore the recommendations of engineers and of school construction specialists and instead rely on their own political needs. That's what's wrong.

That's what the Auditor General blew the whistle on this government for. In fact, he said he is at a loss to understand why schools in the Premier's riding and the riding of the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development were approved even though there was no evidence of need while there are lots of communities where there's real evidence of need and they got skipped over and that is not fair.

How can the Premier expect teachers and students and their families to trust him to make better deals in their classrooms when he makes political deals with new schools?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the honourable member to do what I encouraged the Auditor General to do - pick up the phone and call the school board, they made the priorities. (Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, what I went through, I actually stood with my school board members, ever since I've been elected, in community halls across my riding. They laid out priorities and every one of their priorities was done long before the school in Bridgetown, which was committed to by the former government.

It's unfortunate that the honourable member does not know where his own riding is and won't stand with the people in his riding to make sure they're being heard.

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

PREM.: CAP. INVESTMENT LIST - HRSB RECOMMENDATIONS

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier, and I have a school board that did not have a school on the list.

The Halifax Regional School Board was asked to provide the government with a list of priorities for capital investment. The board voted to support requests for a replacement school for Highland Park Junior High and a major alteration and repair of St. Joseph's A. McKay School. A motion to add a request for a new school or major alteration for J.L. Ilsley was voted down by the board. However, the government proudly announced a new building . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Does the member have a question?

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is, and that question is, can the Premier explain why his government chose not to follow the recommendations of the Halifax Regional School Board?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. She knows school boards send in capital infrastructure across the province. The board, as she would know as a former member of Executive Council, has a certain amount of capital infrastructure. The decisions are made based on geographical issues, need, and all those things that are associated.

There's always more work to do than there's money to do it, Mr. Speaker. We're continuing to make sure that we improve the school infrastructure across our province and will continue to do so in the years to come.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development continually always says in this House that it's not up to her, it's up to the school board, so why is it different this time?

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, has this just been a reward for the member for Halifax Atlantic to vote for Bill No. 75?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how the honourable member and her former Premier conducted themselves, but her motive - and I know the honourable member and I know someone wrote that question for her because I know there's no way she would say that in this House.

I do want to say that the honourable member who represents Halifax Atlantic, Mr. Speaker, continues to be proud of his community of Spryfield, and he has continued to defend and build on the legacy. Bill Estabrooks, who was in here talking about that school, when former members were in this House talking about that particular school and the need for replacement, continue to make that voice being heard.

I want to again tell the honourable member, we go through the issue of making sure that school infrastructure is brought in by school boards all across the province. We need to look at geographical issues, all those things associated with that. Decisions are made, and I realize not every community is happy, but we'll continue to work with communities to make sure we deal with that infrastructure.

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

EECD: FRENCH/ENGLISH SCHOOLS - COMBINING

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

During a scrum a few weeks ago and then reported on Radio Canada, the minister told reporters her department was looking, because of the overcrowding at CSAP metro schools, at mixing French and English schools, maybe combining them.

In *Doucet-Boudreau versus Nova Scotia*, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of Monsieur Arthur LeBlanc of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court who ordered the province to speed up its plans to build French-language high schools or to convert mixed-language schools to French only - and I can table that information.

It is unconstitutional to mix French-speaking schools with English ones. My question to the minister is, will she admit that she made a mistake in suggesting that we mix French and English schools?

HON. KAREN CASEY: Any decision about where the students from CSAP would go would be a decision of the CSAP board.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Well, as I said, during a scrum the minister made this statement and it was reported on the CBC. The minister made the statement that in order to try to alleviate some of the overcrowding in some of the CSAP schools, that maybe there would be a way to mix these schools into English ones. The minister knows full well that this is unconstitutional.

In 2003, Acadian parents fought hard to ensure children's rights were being protected. Section 24 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms requires governments to ensure compliance with minority language education rights by Section 23 of the Charter. The Supreme Court Judge found the province in violation of Section 23, and perhaps the Minister of Acadian Affairs could counsel the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development on the rights of Acadians.

My question to the minister is, does the minister understand the expensive consequences of statements like mixing French and English schools?

MS. CASEY: I certainly remember the conversation; I know exactly what I said. There were certainly opportunities with two different boards to work together to try to resolve some of the overcrowding and need for school spaces in communities where the French schools and the English schools were close by.

I asked my deputy to speak to the superintendents of both of those boards to see if there was any interest in working together. I have said and I will say again: any decision

that CSAP board would make would be their decision, but the conversation needed to be had and I am awaiting the results of that.

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

EECD - NO-FAIL POLICY

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Teachers told the government many times they would like to see changes made to the practice of not failing students. As things stand now, too many children are moving forward who do not meet the expected learning outcomes of their current grade level. Parents ultimately have the final say, and nine times out of 10 they make the decision to keep their child with their age-appropriate group rather than their skill level. I'll table that document.

My question to the minister is, why did the minister wait until today to address this long-standing problem?

HON. KAREN CASEY: I'm not sure what the member means by a long-standing problem. There has been a belief in the province that there was a no-fail policy. There was never a no-fail policy. The decision about placement and retention of students is made at the school level in consultation with the parent, the classroom teacher, and the principal.

When people were using this as perhaps a way to deflect the responsibility to somebody else, we needed to make sure that everybody understood it - there is no no-fail policy.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, it's common sense that students must meet all expected learning outcomes of the grade they're in, to be considered for the next grade level. With this change, there would be fewer students who struggle, who would require extra help and tailored learning programs. Teachers should have the authority to determine if a student should pass or fail.

In her comments today the minister said the principal has the final say in who passes and fails. Will the minister guarantee that teachers will be empowered to make these decisions?

MS. CASEY: Teachers, parents, and the principal are all involved in any decisions about placement or retention of students. There is no change. That has always been and that will continue.

The statement that there was no no-fail policy was to try to dispel the myth that some people have that there is one, and there is not. The responsibility is still with the parent, the teacher, and the principal.

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

**EECD: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING PROCESS ABANDONMENT
- MIN. EXPLAIN**

MS. LENORE ZANN: Yesterday in the technical briefing on Bill No. 75 the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development asked, how long do you have to continue negotiating? Well I would think that the answer to that would be obvious: you continue negotiating until you've reached an agreement. You don't take your toys and go home. Can the minister please explain to Nova Scotians why she abandoned the collective bargaining process?

HON. KAREN CASEY: I think it's been made very clear on many occasions that the two sides worked very hard. Both sides brought ideas and solutions to the table. I commend the negotiating teams on both sides. They worked for over 15 months. They came up with three tentative agreements - all approved and supported by the provincial executive and recommended by the executive that the membership would support them. They did not. After the third tentative deal was not ratified by the membership, the decision was made that there would be very little opportunity for any further tentative deals to be reached.

MS. ZANN: The minister has said that 40 per cent of teachers accepted the first tentative agreement. Forty per cent is less than 60 per cent, and it's certainly not a majority. Perhaps she could explain why she thinks it's reasonable to impose a contract on teachers that they've already firmly rejected.

MS. CASEY: I can repeat what I just said, or I can say that we had three tentative deals all recommended for ratification by the membership. In all those cases, the membership said no. After 15 months and no resolution, it appeared that the disruption that was happening in our schools with work-to-rule needed to be put to an end, and that's why we're here today.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

EECD: CODE OF CONDUCT - DETAILS

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Earlier this evening, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development talked about a code of conduct that she felt should allow teachers to deal with cases of violence against students and teachers across the province. Yet guidance counsellor Judy Hutchison writes that every day in this province, there are teachers who are hit, spit on, kicked, punched, and have things thrown at them by students, often with no consequences.

The question for the minister is, if the code of conduct is such a great solution, then why is it not being enforced or implemented in the way she thinks it should be?

HON. KAREN CASEY: When we were hearing from different schools and different school boards about the way that inappropriate behaviour was being addressed, it became obvious that each board had their own code of conduct, and some schools had their own. In order to bring some consistency, we put together a provincial code of conduct which brings that consistency. It is out in all school boards; it is to be implemented. There certainly are provisions in that to deal with the situations that the member is raising.

MR. YOUNGER: The issue appears to be that it's not. As well, Section 70 of the Education Act, which makes it an offence to be threatening or abusive or even swear in classrooms, is also not being enforced.

This year in a Yarmouth-area school, a teacher eight months pregnant was kicked in the stomach and missed two and a half days of school, yet the student was back in class that afternoon. Last week teacher assistants in another school in the Yarmouth area were told to wear shin guards because students were kicking them. At a CSAP school in Dartmouth, a class there is emptied on a regular basis at least once a week because of a violent student, yet the student remains, and the students and teacher suffer with no consequences.

The minister has seen these and many other examples because she's been copied on the emails . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Does the member have a question?

MR. YOUNGER: Why is the code of conduct not solving these issues, and why are they still happening?

MS. CASEY: I would say that any of the situations that the member has raised are certainly unacceptable. That's not something that we would ever want happening in our schools. The code of conduct was designed to protect and to ensure the safety of all the students and all the workers, employees, in a school. There certainly was an opportunity in the code of conduct. We extended the amount of time that a principal could suspend a student from five days to 10. Principals were asking for that, and they now have the tools that they need to try to address the actions that the member describes.

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

JUSTICE: LAW AMENDMENTS COMM. - UNLIMITED ACCESS ALLOW

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is for the Minister of Justice. Teachers, students, parents, and others interested in Nova Scotia's

education system want to voice their opinions about the bill introduced by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development last night. Our system allows them to do that at the Standing Committee on Law Amendments.

My question to the minister is quite simple: will the minister, as Chair of the Law Amendments Committee, guarantee that everyone who asks to be heard by the committee will have their say?

HON. DIANA WHALEN: I appreciate the opportunity to answer a question and speak to you today. I don't think any of the other ministers expected to be asked one today, so it's a nice break.

The Law Amendments Committee, as the member has pointed out, is an essential and very important part of our process. We have Law Amendments Committee each time a bill goes through and we certainly are looking into the arrangements for this particular bill as it moves through the Legislature.

MR. MACLEOD: I want to thank the minister for that answer. Recently the government did the right thing by offering many options to Nova Scotians to express their opinions about Bill No. 59. Providing video conferencing on bills allows Nova Scotians from all across our province to take part in the democratic process that we hold so dear.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is, will the minister be providing the same access to the Law Amendments Committee for Bill No. 75 as she did for Bill No. 59?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm going to disallow that question and the previous question. As the Clerk so aptly pointed out and confirmed my thought, we're not allowed to ask information about proceedings of a committee that has not yet made its report to the House.

MR. MACLEOD: Well she answered the first part, she might as well answer the second part. (Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER: I realize that but I was thinking about it, giving you the benefit of the doubt.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

LAE: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING - GOV'T. RECORD

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. In 2013, while in Opposition, the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education took issue with the NDP Government's record on collective bargaining. She

introduced a resolution in the House saying that the NDP's imposition of a contract should require them to strike their collective bargaining record from their list of accomplishments.

Does the minister still feel so passionately about touting collective bargaining successes as an accomplishment, and what does she say about her own government's record now that she is the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education?

HON. KELLY REGAN: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. It's interesting that we are all looking back on the things that we held so dear and I would point out that as Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, I don't comment on what either side does in any negotiation.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, at the time the minister made these comments to the House, the Liberal caucus was singing a very different tune about labour relations and the right to fair negotiations. That quickly went out the window and the people that the government has made the most negative impact on has been our students.

My question is, as the minister for not only labour but advanced education, has she spoken up on behalf of the students with her Cabinet colleagues?

MS. REGAN: As the honourable member probably knows because I've made it quite clear, when this particular issue is discussed in Cabinet, I do not participate, I leave the room.

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

EECD - SCH. SHUTDOWN: DECISION - TIME FRAME

MS. LENORE ZANN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Throughout the negotiation process, the NSTU has kept parents informed and given them time to plan. On the other hand, the government seems to have been quite happy to create chaos and let parents pay the price. Documents obtained by the NDP caucus through a freedom of information request show that the department was preparing for a province-wide shutdown as early as November 28th of their schools, but gave parents less than 48 hours notice.

Would the minister please explain to Nova Scotians when the decision was made to close the schools?

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be safe to say that this government and this department and this minister care about the kids in our schools, and when we understand that we're in negotiations and there is the potential for that delivery of program to be interrupted, we do have to be prepared.

MS. ZANN: When the government chose to close schools for the day parents were left scrambling for child care. Emails show that the department was not willing to provide additional funding to child care centres for the anticipated closure and was well aware that any extra funding would come from parents' fees, not grants.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister apologize to parents for making them pay for the government's mistakes?

MS. CASEY: I think in fairness to the department, we certainly wanted to make sure that parents had advance notice if there was going to be a time when their students would not be in the schools. We gave them that advance notice and I respect that decision made at the department and I support it.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

EECD: ADHD/CHALLENGES - ADDRESS

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. A number of emails I've received from teachers have mentioned the difficulty of teaching students diagnosed with ADHD. One email, which I will table, is from a mother whose daughter teaches Grade 3. Five of the students in the class have been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, one undiagnosed ADD, one autistic student, two with behavioural issues. That in a class of 26.

My question for the minister is, what is her department doing to address ADHD and other types of learning challenges that teachers face every day?

HON. KAREN CASEY: We recognize there are many different challenges that students have in the classrooms. The complexity in the classroom is one of the things that teachers have asked us to consider and to look at.

When we were meeting with teachers and when teachers were writing to me we recognized that that is something that has to be addressed. We know there are children who bring issues to the classroom that need support and we are working with the Department of Health and Wellness - in particular, Dr. Stan Kutcher - in order to provide the right resources so that teachers have the professional development they need and the resources that will allow them to respond to those children's needs.

MR. LOHR: I thank the minister for that answer. Teachers tell me that things have really gotten worse in the last three or four years. One change seems to be there are less EAs available in class. In fact, one teacher told me that even severely developmentally-delayed students will not have an EA if they are non-violent.

Given that it is clear that having an EA in a classroom can make a huge difference, can the minister tell this House what plans she has to address this EA shortage?

MS. CASEY: There's no question that there are more children requiring more supports in our schools in our classrooms. The boards are given their funding through the special education funding grant. Out of that they do provide supports through EAs. They also look at where those needs are, how they can best respond to those needs, and the schools certainly let their central office staff know that they have a need and a need for an EA.

Are there ever enough? I don't believe there ever are enough but that's certainly something that when we're looking at our report by the commission on inclusion, we may find that that is the best response. However, I think it's folly to put money into EAs if that's not the best solution.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

BUS. - TRENTON PLANT: ACTION - DETAILS

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Business. There's a large plant empty in the Town of Trenton in Pictou County. Recently, a few weeks ago, the minister notified interested parties that there was some action being taken, there was a bid accepted by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Would the minister give the House an update with regard to what is happening now since that, a few weeks ago, with regard to lease-to-own, to operate, et cetera?

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I've had discussions in the past with my colleague relative to the status of the DSTN facility in Trenton. As he shared with the House, there is presently a conditional bid on the property. That process is presently in the hands of the receiver and we are awaiting feedback from the receiver on the development in negotiations with that particular proponent.

MR. DUNN: Mr. Speaker, my next question to the minister is with regard to the type of operation that may end up in this particular plant and the projection for the number of employees in the first year of operation.

MR. FUREY: Those circumstances aren't part of public discussion at this time. The proponent has asked that those circumstances remain confidential during the negotiation period. The proponent is more than prepared, once the receivership sale is approved by the courts, to share with the community what their objectives are and the specific focus they have in mind.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

JUSTICE: TEACHERS CONTRACT LEGISLATION - FIN. EFFECTS

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Justice. There are undoubtedly many Nova Scotians concerned that the government's attempts to end this dispute with teachers will result in lengthy litigation that will drive an even greater wedge between teachers and the government and also cost taxpayers a substantial amount of money.

I ask the minister, what assurances can she give Nova Scotians that this bill will not result in a long, drawn-out court battle that pits the teachers of this province against their own government?

HON. DIANA WHALEN: I do appreciate the question from the honourable member. In terms of assurances about what will happen, none of us can say what will happen. I can assure the members opposite that the drafting of this bill was done with great care and that we believe it is legal and will stand the test of time but, as I say, only the future will tell us for sure.

MS. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, in November last year the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation after a lengthy battle with the B.C. Government that lasted over a decade. At issue in that case was whether a provincial government can legislate away parts of the collective agreement it signed with public sector unions.

That precedent does not seem to bode well for this government's current approach to ending this dispute. I ask the minister, why does she think this government's decision to impose an agreement on teachers in Nova Scotia will not suffer the same fate as the actions of the Government of British Columbia?

MS. WHALEN: I would just say to the member opposite that they are two very different issues. There is nothing in this current bill that legislates away current - nothing that is in a contract is being taken away, let me put it that way.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

EECD - EAST. SHORE DIST. HS: SCH. BD. LIST - OMISSION EXPLAIN

MR. TIM HOUSTON: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. When the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board announced that a new school to replace J.L. Ilesley had been approved, parents and students on the Eastern Shore were shocked. The Eastern Shore District High School has no potable water, contains asbestos and has serious sewage problems. That school, built in 1965, was listed by the Halifax Regional School Board as a priority for a new school or an addition or alteration.

It was not lost on the Eastern Shore parents that J.L. Iisley was not on the school board list. I ask the minister, what does the minister say to the parents of the Eastern Shore about why a school with no drinking water and with asbestos got passed over, but a school not recommended by the school board will be built in Halifax Atlantic?

HON. KAREN CASEY: There are a number of factors considered when decisions are made about where schools will be built and they certainly include the needs of the students, the recommendations from the school board, the capital money that's available during that particular year, the amount of money that has already been invested in a school, the concerns about the needs of the school. There is a whole host of things considered and the same consideration will be given for Eastern Shore as was given to J.L. Iisley, as given to any new school.

MR. HOUSTON: No potable water, serious sewage issues - I would think that health and safety of students would be a consideration but yet the school board itself didn't ask for a school for J.L. Iisley. They pointed to this school over here and said, this is where we want the new school, this is where we need one. This Cabinet overruled that and said well, we'll stick one in Halifax Atlantic, we might as well put one in the Premier's area too, and maybe the minister's as well.

We're looking at a situation - it costs about \$50,000 a year to have drinking water trucked to the Eastern Shore District High School. That's probably why the Halifax Regional School Board wanted a school there. My question for the minister is, in 2017 is it acceptable for one school not to have drinking water while a school that was not determined to be needed by a school board is built anyway?

MS. CASEY: The issue of water is certainly an issue in that particular school. The safety of the students and the safety of the staff is a priority. That's why they are bringing water in, so that it is safe for that school. As we would do in any school, we want to make sure that every student and every user of that school - whether it's a teacher, parent or any other adult - is safe, so the issue with the water is certainly something the board is looking after.

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

HEALTH & WELLNESS - SENIORS' PHARMACARE: CHANGES - CONSULTATION

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness was looking a little too at ease here so I thought I'd ask him a question and keep him up this late hour. It has been a year, or a little over a year actually, since the government promised to consult with seniors about their bungled Seniors' Pharmacare changes. They promised the consultations would be starting months and months ago, and yet there has been no word.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could ask him the question, when will the consultations begin and where will they be held?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: I thank the honourable member for the question. This is a very important file for our seniors and getting it done right and making sure that the comprehensive approach is used both in terms of survey, direct consultation with seniors, and input obviously from the Group of IX, and that work is now in progress.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: What I heard there, Mr. Speaker, was soon, very soon - not too sure. Aside from the unfair increases of last year's program, another concern for seniors at the time was the lack of time to plan for those changes. So yet again many seniors have already mapped out their budgets for the year and would like two things from government: to be consulted and maybe to be warned of any changes coming up. Will changes to the Pharmacare plan be included in the 2017-18 budget?

MR. GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that for the fiscal year 2017-18 there will be no changes to Seniors' Pharmacare and consultations are certainly going to be a robust part of making sure that this is right, not just for next year but for the next decade.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**PREM. - CLASSROOM LOCKOUTS:
STUDENTS' NEEDS - PRIORITIZATION**

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, this government wants people to believe they are concerned about the welfare of students. It was this government that locked students out of classrooms when teachers were ready to teach. The actions of this government caused the largest student walkout this province has seen.

Mr. Speaker, was the Premier prioritizing student needs when he locked them out of their classrooms?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. If we go back to the Friday before, Mr. Speaker, eight superintendents from across the province said they could not guarantee kids' safety. If I had not acted, that honourable member would have stood in her place and accused me of not protecting kids.

What we did is we went to the union, and the union would not guarantee us, Mr. Speaker. We announced what we would be doing and on that Monday the union sent a directive and told the principals they expect them to ensure the places are safe. We were fine with that and here we are today.

MS. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, on December 5th when the government closed schools and threatened to bring in legislation, the MLA for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank told reporters he didn't like the way things were going.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier confident that the MLA for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank feels better about how things are going now?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I would hope the honourable member across the way would want to make sure the kids were safe in schools. No wonder he was uneasy about it, as we were as well. When the issue became clarified we moved back to where teachers began to do the work-to-rule. We were back at the bargaining table looking for an agreement the third time. We had an agreement with the executive of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. That was rejected and we now know this work-to-rule is impacting the education. That's why we're here today.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

HEALTH & WELLNESS: PHYSICIAN PROVISION POLICY - EXPLAIN

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. During the Fall session I stood up and I spoke about a constituent of mine, a young lady who was battling cancer. It was a heartfelt story and the minister stood up and indicated that she would have a doctor and I was thrilled. In fact, later that day, during late debate, I said good things happen here, something good happened here today.

The minister has promised this individual a doctor and she still does not have a doctor. After about a dozen calls with the department, she still does not have a doctor. I wonder, could the minister tell me what happened?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Certainly we reached out as well to the constituent and we have been working to red flag, if you wish, to have a doctor for her. We have to put that operational matter in the hands of the Health Authority, we have to rely on them to expedite that when asked. It is unfortunate that it has not been accomplished to date.

MS. MACFARLANE: Thanks to the minister for his answer. What I would like to see happen is a phone call made to her to apologize, maybe even a press release, to tell all Nova Scotians that it doesn't matter if you're dying, you cannot get a doctor because the Department of Health and Wellness cannot dictate to any doctor, by law, that they have to take on a patient. So it's up to us as MLAs to beg, ask for favours from our doctor friends to take these patients on.

I want to know, what will the minister do? I want a promise that he will call her and apologize and I would like a press release saying the department cannot help you find a doctor, end of story.

MR. GLAVINE: Actually within the question is the answer in the sense that no doctor can be told to take on a particular patient or how many patients, how many hours. That is all within their prerogative, but certainly we will continue to work on behalf of her and all Nova Scotians to provide doctors.

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

PREM. - EDUC. CUT (\$65M): PROOF - TABLE

MS. LENORE ZANN: The Premier seems to like regurgitating the same mantra, that his government negotiated three tentative agreements with two NSTU executives, that 40 per cent of teachers accepted the first tentative agreement. Then he likes to throw the NDP under the same bus as the union and teachers by saying that we cut \$65 million from education.

Mr. Speaker, I would love the Premier to please table the proof of that \$65 million cut, where it was. I'd also like him to table the \$65 million he keeps claiming that he has put back into the Education Department. Thank you.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want the honourable member to go to classrooms across this province, she'll see the proof of the cuts that we've been restoring for the last three years.

MS. ZANN: Teachers are telling me that they don't see where this \$65 million is going and we know that it was cost pressures added to a \$13 million cut. That is not an actual cut, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to see the proof of that instead of keeping hearing the hyperbole over and over again - the propaganda, the fake news, the alternative facts.

Mr. Speaker, I would like him to table that tomorrow. Thank you very much and also the proof of the \$65 million being put back into the system. We know that \$44 million of it came from the Early Years being sent to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. She couldn't read our budget any better than she could read the NDP budget, Mr. Speaker. That's why she quietly sat on this side of the House while they took \$65 million out of classrooms from one end of this province to the other.

I want to tell the honourable member that I've heard from teachers as well who said they're having a hard time understanding where that funding has gone into their classrooms, Mr. Speaker. There's class caps, we realize there's still more issues. That's why we have \$20 million on the table. It's why teachers have said their voices were not heard and why they rejected the current agreements. They want to be at the table.

We have places for nine teachers across this province. I hope the honourable member will support this piece of legislation so that teachers can get to the table and tell us exactly what it is they want in their classrooms.

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I thought I'd ask about Wedgeport.

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: 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 Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 76.

Bill No. 76 - Education Act.

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, when we tabled this bill yesterday, we had no idea the importance that it would take on by this time this morning. The bill in its simplest form requires that a student must meet all expected learning outcomes appropriate to that student's grade level, and meet acceptable behavioural standards in order to be considered for promotion to the next grade level.

This is in direct response to the no-fail policy. We've now heard the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development several times say that there is no such thing

as a no-fail policy. Well, respectfully 9,300 practising teachers disagree, making this bill necessary.

The fact is that every teacher in this province has felt the pressure to pass through all their students to the next grade level every year. If the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development wants to play games with words, then that's fine, but it won't help. Whether it's a no-fail policy or whether it's a pass-through policy or whether it's the established practice of school boards, it does exist. It happens. Every child goes through.

This bill makes sure, whether in practice or in policy, that students are held to the standards of behaviour and of curriculum learning that is expected of them before they move on to the next grade level.

This is an area for where there should be very little disagreement. Teachers themselves have been raising this issue for some time and only yesterday did the government attempt to address it - first by denying it was a problem and then by writing a letter to address a problem they deny exists. That's not good enough for the teachers of today or their students.

First of all, for teachers who we entrust with the judgment to decide when a student should get a passing grade or a failing grade - we have to get back to that sense of trust that teachers should have. To do otherwise, to have a school board, a principal, a department step into the place of teachers and decide everyone must pass - it is unfair to teachers.

It's also unfair to students. It does not do a young child in our school system any good to be passed through from year to year, eventually graduating from high school and going out into the real world not having truly met the curriculum outcome requirements of each year along the way. It's time to not just have a conversation about this stuff - it's time to actually act on these things.

It's time to act on these things firstly because they are right for our students, but it's also time to act on them because this is the key to getting a truly agreed-upon agreement with teachers that allows us to move forward without the kind of mean-spirited legislation that we see before this House from the government in this session.

We would not be here in this session if the government had truly listened to these points - not made by us in Opposition, but made by teachers themselves and parents who see this practice every day, of passing students through from year to year. If that had been dealt with some time in the last three months, along with some other meaningful reforms, there would be an agreement and no need to force one through.

This is why we're here with this particular bill. The government has given up on actually bringing forward meaningful classroom reform. They do have their Bill No. 75, which will force a collective agreement. We oppose that. We have an opportunity while

we're here in this House to actually do something positive and make real reforms today. That's what this bill is all about.

If members on both sides of this House agree that students should be held accountable for meeting the curriculum outcome in their year before they are passed, then they can vote for this bill. Even if they don't believe this is a problem, they can still vote for this bill, and we can send a signal to the teachers of Nova Scotia that we're actually acting on some of the things that they have been talking about - without forming a committee, without coming up with some magical number of dollars, without any idea of where it will be spent. This bill costs nothing. This bill actually moves the education system forward without costing any more money.

I will say that when a student does not pass, when they are held back, I would be in favour of making sure the resources are there to help them meet those outcomes the next year and then legitimately move up through our system, and that would cost some amount of money. We acknowledge that, but the payback in having graduates who actually earned it, learning important lessons along the way about personal responsibility and the importance of education, who will become productive members of our society - that is a payback that is many times the cost.

But that doesn't get to happen if instead of showing students that we mean it, that actually grading is important - if that does not happen, then the cost is enormous. It's the cost of neglect. It's the cost of having someone go through our school system and graduate without (a) having learned the lessons that are in the curriculum, and (b) not having learned that they have to take some responsibility for their own education if they are going to grade.

There has been a lot of talk over the last few days about what's normal in our schools and I want to address that on the issue of passing students through this no-fail policy. The fact of the matter is that our school boards have programs that ensure that students pass whether they have earned it or not.

Credit recovery is an example of such a program, where a student who even at a 40 per cent level - well short of graduating - is moved up to 50 per cent so they can pass through. That's not fair to the teacher. That's not fair to the student. That's not fair to the taxpayer who is paying to have people actually meet the curriculum.

How will we even identify students that need the extra help if we're passing them through using programs like credit insurance. Another one is credit recovery, which basically means if you're close to 50 per cent, you're put over 50 per cent. Well, that's made up. That is how you end up with a no-fail policy in everything but name.

Why would we allow these things to go on in our schools or hide behind the fact that they're not called exactly no-fail, even if the result is that no one fails? This is what's happening in the schools today. This is what's normal today. In each case, responsibility

for actually earning a passing grade is taking from the student and put into the hands of public servants at the school board. It's time to listen to teachers who want to actually teach students some personal responsibility for grading, and this bill does that. It absolutely shows teachers that we trust them to make good grading decisions, and that we will stand by them when they decide a student should be held back for their own good.

You know, there has been some talk yesterday about alternative facts - not going to repeat it - or fake news - not going to repeat it. I will say this. When a Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development stands in this House or stands in the foyer and speaks to the public media and says there is no such thing as a no-fail policy, well that minister is very out of touch with what's going on in our classrooms today and that is a huge problem. For that minister to put her opinion ahead of the 9,300 teachers who see it themselves, who have felt the pressure to pass students that they know in their hearts should not pass, that is a big, big problem. It actually informs us all about why the government is bringing in their Bill No. 75 to just force a settled contract instead of actually making the reforms that teachers have been asking for.

Now, the Premier says he wants to get back to normal. I presume that means he wants to bring back the systems of credit recovery and credit insurance of passing through students whether they have earned it or not. Well, we do not want that normal. We should be here in this House spending this time trying to make things better - better than the old normal. We want a new normal where teachers actually pass students that deserve it and hold back students that don't. I tell you, this is not meant to be punitive. Students in 2017 need to meet the curriculum outcomes every year if they're going to compete and win in the modern economy, and it's only when we hold some back that we know who needs extra help, that we know who we need to put more resources into to push them legitimately on to higher learning.

I'll ask you this, Mr. Speaker - if there is no no-fail policy, why is it that so few fail? Why is it that just about everyone passes? The proof is in the pudding as they say. The evidence is there. Students are pushed through. The graduation rates year after year prove it, and every teacher has watched students march across the stage at graduation that they know should not be doing that. Those graduates are going to go out in the real world and they're going to be in for a rude surprise when they actually graduate into a workforce where you're expected to fulfill all the duties assigned to you or you'll fall flat on your face. At that moment, the cruelty of the no-fail policy becomes evident to all. We can actually stop that now.

In my remaining time, I do want to speak about something that's very important to us in the PC caucus, and that is mental health in our schools. Teacher after teacher has drawn a straight line between the no-fail policy and the growing incidence of mental health challenges and mental illness in our classrooms, and here's why. If you have students who are falling further and further behind, if they're being passed through from grade to grade but they're actually two or three or four years behind their peers, inevitably they'll act out

in frustration. Inevitably, they will develop behavioural challenges as they know they're not keeping up. That moves on to real mental illness where there's depression or anxiety. We have induced those mental illnesses in students by virtue of passing them along year after year without getting them the help they need. That's how cruel this is.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come to stand up for all students whether they're high achievers or whether they're struggling and get rid of the no-fail policy.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MR. TERRY FARRELL: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise this evening to speak on this point. I guess I want to start out by referring to the language of the legislation and the language that I've heard being thrown around with respect to this issue, and that's the notion of failure.

I know when I was a student quite some time ago - my high-school years go all the way back to the 1970s - you passed or you failed. There was certainly a stigma attached to failure and it's not something that I think was a useful or a helpful concept to have in the school system. So when the Opposition introduces a bill that I think the language wants to bring us back to the stone age of education possibly if you will - because I am quite a relic - I don't think that's a very helpful thing. Nonetheless, there is a debate surrounding how students are accredited and how they're advanced through the system and whether or not this is being done in an appropriate fashion.

I know I've listened to the minister myself. I think she's a person of great credibility and she has assured us that there is no such thing in the province as a set-in-stone, no-failure policy where students must be advanced and where students can't be retained back. I accept that as the reality in this situation but unfortunately sometimes, the perception overtakes the reality. I also accept that there is a perception throughout the educational community both with educators and parents that somewhere there is a policy that says that students must be advanced whether or not they meet the requirements of a particular level or a particular course or whatever the required achievement is at that stage.

Mr. Speaker, I think what we're dealing with here is an opportunity that the minister has, through the process we're going through now, to ensure that it is clearly understood throughout the educational community across the province - communicated by the deputy to the superintendents of the various boards around the province who will then be charged with passing that on to the various educators under their charge - that there simply is not a no-fail policy in the Province of Nova Scotia. I do agree with my colleague, the member for Cumberland South, when he says that that is a good, helpful, useful thing that can be done and that it is done at a very low cost.

So, if we're moving forward with that, it's very clear in the materials that the minister released today and in the discussion that's been had since then that Bill No. 76 is

an unnecessary bit of legislation. It promotes an archaic concept of failure among students, and it is introduced to solve a problem that doesn't really exist. I think sometimes the Opposition is quite adept at causing the perception that a problem exists where it doesn't really exist.

I don't think that what teachers want to do is promote failure among students. I think what they want to do is put students in appropriate learning environments and make sure that they are adequately achieving the outcomes that are needed for success. That's what teachers are there for, and I have a great deal of confidence that the teachers throughout the province are there to do that.

I guess to move forward in time a little bit, my wife Nancy and I have three sons who all worked their way through the primary and secondary education system in Nova Scotia. During that time we've dealt with literally dozens of teachers. We've been to - well, I guess dozens, probably not quite hundreds of parent-teacher meetings. We've always been quite involved in our children's educations. Both of us have served on home and school. I've certainly served on school advisory council. I was a charter member of the school advisory council at the St. Charles School in Amherst at the time when my children were attending there. That's when school advisory councils were first formed, if I remember correctly, and I was the first chairman of that council.

In all of that educational experience with our own children, we have been faced with - and I'll preface this by saying that they all completed their education quite successfully and they were all advanced at each level. But they didn't always do that without question and without some discussion being had around that.

I remember one time in particular when there was a discussion around one of our boys - whether he was going to advance into the next grade or not. There was no notion at that point that there was a policy that said he couldn't be retained back, but there was a broad and open discussion around what his level of achievement was, how he was doing in his particular courses of reading, writing and arithmetic - he was in Grade 2 or 3 at the time. When the notion came up that he might be held back, that he might not be advanced, we were part of that discussion. It wasn't an adversarial conversation, but the particular teacher who over time did teach all of our boys and she was one of the more highly respected teachers at that school - she didn't feel that this guy in particular was comprehending his reading exercises and felt that he could benefit from repeating those particular courses or those particular exercises.

I remember this like it was yesterday because we were sitting around a desk - one of the student desks, I think, the three of us, Nancy and I and the teacher in the St. Charles School and we're talking about how the boy was doing in reading - I don't want to single one of them out because it was just one of them. The teacher said, we did this story in class and it was a story about a bunny and about something else and he didn't appear to be comprehending the nature of the story. Nancy spoke up and said, well of course he didn't,

he doesn't care anything about bunnies - if the story had been about hockey he would have been all over it.

So it wasn't a question about his comprehension or his reading because we read to him every night and we read with him every night and we knew that he was able to comprehend the stories. A light went on for the teacher at the same time as it did for us, and she said, okay, that's fine. We talked our way through it and we all agreed that he would advance even though he appeared to be weak in that one area, and by doing that we were able to help the teacher in making a decision. She was able to be comfortable that she wasn't doing the child a disservice by moving him forward and all was well that ended well. He moved forward and his comprehension was fine, his reading skills were fine and it had a very happy ending.

That is my understanding of how the policy works in the schools and I don't think there is any difference now than there was then - that might have been 15 or so years ago. I think it's an opportunity for teachers to interact with parents and to explain the situation and to bring parents in and to make a healthy decision that's in the best interests of the children.

As I say, around that particular situation, there was no discussion around there being a policy that said that child had to advance. It was about a meaningful discussion with the teacher and us about what was best for him at that time and, as I say, I think that's the way it's done in Nova Scotia.

It's unfortunate if there's a perception that it's done differently or that those types of discussions aren't part of the regular course of education and that there is a perception that there is a no-fail policy or a no-retention policy, whatever you want to call it. But I think we can all be assured, Mr. Speaker, that after this week - after the bill before the House moves forward and the collateral business surrounding that moves forward, including the letters that are going to go out from the deputy to the superintendents - we will have a very, very clear understanding that that is how things should work.

I think there are certainly a number of other things that are important to look at with respect to the education situation in the province as well including the investments that have been made over the last three years. I can understand how teachers working in the system are under a lot of pressure and they do have stresses, and they may not notice the incremental improvements that are being made as a result of the increased spending that we've made in the system over the last three years.

I can see how they may not necessarily be seeing these things on a day-to-day basis, but I can assure you that the process is there and it is working. It is working towards an educational system where we can afford to provide the best-quality education to our children, and we hope to do that by working with teachers, and I think the council to improve classroom conditions is an excellent start in order to do that. It brings teachers

themselves into the process. It asks teachers how they feel the education system in the province can be improved.

A couple of other things that I think are profound and very, very important in terms of helping students to achieve greater outcomes throughout their school years came very early on in our mandate with respect to the additional resources that were put into the early intervention system. Those are things that you're not going to see immediate results from. Those kinds of things are so significant and profound. They are aimed at identifying learning issues that children have and learning disabilities that children have at a very, very early age so that they can be dealt with and that we can just change the direction, the trajectory of that child's education. It may be just a small way at the beginning, but as they progress through the system, their achievement is going to grow and grow and grow over time.

The additional resources that have been put into early intervention are monumental if you will then that's going to make some very, very dramatic changes. The Early Years Centres are another great success that will have the same type of effect on children throughout their educational careers. They will benefit the most vulnerable children. They will give them resources and direction at an earlier age to help them progress through the system and make a small change to their trajectory at that point, but the effect of that will grow and grow and grow over time, and we'll see much greater outcomes as they progress through the primary and secondary education system.

The reinstatement of Reading Recovery in schools is something that I've heard about on a fairly regular basis in my area and something that is helping the most vulnerable children in the system and benefiting them to achieve higher levels.

I think what we have in Nova Scotia are good teachers making good decisions and we will make it clear to them that the decision about how a child's education is managed is going to be their decision to be made along with parents and that they can make those decisions, and we trust them to do that.

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

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill No. 76, an Act to Amend Chapter 1 of the Acts of 1995-96, the Education Act, Respecting Expectations of Student Performance.

I have to say that I agree with the MLA for Cumberland North and I do believe that looking at children through a lens of failure versus success is, in fact, as he said, an archaic way of looking at it.

As a daughter of two educators, one who was a teacher of junior high school students for many years and one who was a professor of modern methods of education back in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, around our table at home the talk was oftentimes about how we need to support students, find out what they're interested in, find out what their special skills are - not everybody is the same, not everybody has the same sets of skills and where some children were labelled as dummies or put in classes of a, b, and c with the top kids in one class and then other kids going down into the b's and c's, it was not actually beneficial for learning. It wasn't beneficial for the students or the teachers. So I have to say that I find that this particular bill is not something that I would support and, in fact, our NDP caucus would not support this bill.

I do believe that there is no school board in the province that has a no-fail policy. However, rather than thinking and talking about discipline and failing children, I think perhaps we should instead be thinking about ways to invest in a generation of children and supporting them to succeed, helping them to succeed.

There are many reasons why students struggle in the classroom, possibly many times because of classroom over-crowding. Teachers are unable to meet the needs of all learners. Sometimes because of the lack of appropriate supports like enough educational assistants, because of the lack of access to mental health supports in communities, and also, children have various different learning disabilities that sometimes aren't discovered until much later.

I feel that all of these reasons are things that we need to think about and instead of - as the honourable member for Cumberland North said - instead of going backwards we need to move forwards.

I do find that this is a rather conservative bill - it's a big "C" and a small "c" conservative bill - and I'm not of the mind to be locking people up in more jails and more boots on the streets and let's fail kids, let's discipline them. That's sort of not something that I can really get behind.

I feel that there are a number of students who are living in poverty in Nova Scotia. As we know, one in four students on the mainland in Nova Scotia live in poverty. My sister, who is a guidance counsellor, often tells me how difficult it is to deal with seeing the poverty in the children and having to have guidance counsellors and other teachers have to really try to mentor and help these kids learn how to live because they're not getting it at home. In fact, this is something that ties in with teachers and why they are so hard done by these days - how much extra time they have to put into teaching kids because they're being their parents, they're being their psychiatrists, they're being their counsellors. They're being many things to children these days and many of these reasons that are holding kids back are why, in fact, we need to take the time and have more EAs and more teachers looking at helping these children.

There are many children who are living in homes where there is not enough nutritious food and kids are coming to school hungry, so one would imagine behavioural problems will erupt because a hungry belly knows no law, as the saying goes. Children, if they're cooped up too long, if they're not allowed to run around and get some exercise, that too will have an effect on children and on students.

Some of my teacher friends who are gym teachers say that they are sent between three and four schools and the kids only have one hour of gym per week. That's not enough, Mr. Speaker. No wonder there would be any kind of behavioural problems. An hour of movement is just not enough for growing children.

I know how hard it is for us as adults sitting here for hours upon hours in this room and we get antsy and we get angry and we get biting at each other. Imagine all those hormones going on at the same time with children, it would be very difficult. So we have to take all of these things into consideration when we think about what creates a learning environment that will help a child to succeed or what, in fact, is failure.

These are all things that we can address as a government. We can address these rather than thinking of new ways to punish children who are struggling. That sounds to me a rather Trumpian idea. Instead, we should talk about what we can do. We can put class caps in place across all grade levels. We can provide teachers with the supports they need to do what they do best, which is to teach. We can hire more educational assistants, and we can also hire more specialists - more teachers who specialize in special needs kids and give the kids that extra time and that extra personal touch that they need in order to meet their level of growth and their level of interest and their capabilities.

We also need to provide better access to health care. So many families don't have a family doctor right now. In the United States, I know many children actually go deaf because the parents can't afford Medicare there and they don't take the child to the doctor when they get an ear infection and children go deaf. I wonder sometimes how many children here in Nova Scotia or Canada perhaps suffer from the same thing just because parents might not know or have the time or have the desire to take the time out of their day to get the kids to a doctor or to a clinic. Maybe they don't even have the mobility to do so. So health care is another major factor.

We also need to make investments to ensure that all children in the province do have healthy food to eat, and in fact, we had introduced a bill about grocery security - being able to get children and families who are living on income assistance healthy food from grocery stores instead of having to go to food banks. I think that these are all things that we can do that wouldn't cost too much, but would definitely help the children and the students of Nova Scotia.

When my mother was first teaching at the junior high school in Truro when we first moved to Nova Scotia - that was in 1969 - she was 30 years old and she was given the job

of teaching in these sort of barracks that were at the back of the school. They were trailers that were not part of the main school, but these trailers were in the back parking lot. The kids in the Truro Junior High School at the time, and the teachers too actually, called the kids that were in these trailers and that my mother had to teach - in the trailers with barely any warmth in those trailers in the wintertime, and really hot in June - they called these kids the nuts from the huts. They called them the nuts from the huts because they were thrown away. These were kids that they felt had failed.

Many of these kids were older individuals, teenagers who in fact had failed Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7. They had failed so many grades that they were much older - they smoked, they drank, and they swore.

One of them had mental problems - and she was a science teacher too, and she had little mice that she brought in to teach them about animals and biology. Every day she'd come in and another little mouse would have a broken arm or a broken leg. She found out it was one of the kids doing it, and she had to try to get this kid help. But you know, again, these were throw-away children who she said had not been given a chance right from day one. From day one, they'd been struggling in their families.

Some kids were Black, some kids were First Nations, or some kids were just kids that the teachers didn't want to be bothered teaching. She said another teacher back then would look at the roll of kids that would be coming that particular year into Grade 7 and would look at the names and say: oh, Sylliboy; oh, Glode; oh, Borden and Jones - well, I can see where I'm going to have my troubles this year, and that teacher had already written them off. The principals and other school board officials, too, had a similar attitude because, of course, racism was quite prevalent then. Racism was a huge issue here in Nova Scotia, and still is.

My mother would take kids under her wing, and some of the kids had gone to St. Mary's school where they were trained and taught by nuns and they said the nuns were very racist as well. They taught the kids, how do you spell arithmetic, a Red Indian, blah, blah, blah, and these kids are First Nations - they're getting caned, they're getting strapped, and they're getting told that they're dumb, and it was really sad.

My mom said that she would just take them under her wing and say, why did you not get a chance to finish your homework today, Johnny? Johnny would have spaghetti all over his homework, and she'd say, why is there spaghetti on your homework. He'd say - because they grew to trust her - well my mom had a boyfriend over last night; they got drinking, they got crazy, then there were knives and screaming and yelling, and I ran into the bedroom. I took my brothers and sisters and we hid under the bed. We were in the middle of supper and it went all over my homework. We were hiding all night and I didn't get my homework done.

Taking that extra time to find out what is going on in a child's life - these are the lifelines for our children in this province and across Canada. These are the things we need our teachers and our EAs to do, to find out exactly the level where the child is and help them.

Many of the people that my mom taught over the years have become really wonderful people in society. They've become councillors, and some of them have come up to me and told me these stories too about my mother and saying how she changed their lives. They said she would come in and she'd bring these history books into their class and say I'm supposed to teach you history today, but I'm going to tell you where the history books belong - clink, in the garbage can they went. She said I refuse to teach you from these history books because they're racist. They are misinformed, they are misleading, and they tell you terrible things about our beautiful First Nations people, our Black community, and our French community - there was a lot of racism and discrimination against the French at that time - and she said I refuse to teach this. She would go to the archives and she would learn about the history herself. She talked to different elders in the different communities, and she'd bring them in also to meet the kids and talk to the kids.

This is the extra and over-and-above time that many teachers will do in order to create a thriving, successful environment for kids - and the kids will thrive. It's like a little flower that's withering that doesn't have enough water. If you water that little flower and you put it in the sun and you talk to it - and my grandmother used to talk to the plants, and I swear, she had a green thumb. These are the sorts of things we should be focusing on instead of punishing kids and keeping them behind.

The other thing is I think we need more guidance counsellors. We need to hire more music, art and drama teachers. We need more professional artists coming into the schools to encourage our children to play and to use their imaginations and to dream of what they can do and what they can be. I think these are the things we should do, rather than considering failing and discipline and putting children in the dark in a basement with nowhere to grow.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in my place to speak to Bill No. 76, an Act to Amend Chapter 1 of the Acts of 1995-96, the Education Act, Respecting Expectations for Student Performance.

I would just like to point out the title - I like the title. I like the word "expectations" because we should have expectations. The key word here though is respecting those expectations. We're not all made the same, and I appreciate the comments from the two previous colleagues, but I think they're perhaps taking the bill a little bit too far. This bill simply requires students to meet expected learning outcomes appropriate to the student's

grade level and meet acceptable behaviour standards and permits teachers to fail students who do not do so.

We have expectations. I feel listening to some of these comments I'm starting to think, oh my gosh, I'm a really bad parent because I do have expectations, and the expectations that I have for my son and daughter are not the same because they both have different intellectual abilities. They both have different talents.

I read somewhere that the Nova Scotia education system is the perfect storm right now, and we have to figure out a way to get out of this perfect storm. There is a lot to be fixed and this Bill No. 76 simply gives more permission to our teachers, the principals and the parents to have a more open dialogue with regard to the students and whether or not they're considering they should be held back or not.

I know everyone in this Chamber has spoken to a lot of teachers over the last couple of months and one of the things I had heard was, we pass them, we have to pass them along, push them forward and I'm like, why? Well, that's just what we do nowadays, and I'm like, why? Well, you know, we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. It's like playing hockey or soccer now - the first number of years they don't keep score because everyone is equal. Well, you know, the harsh reality is that we're not all equal. We're not.

One of my colleagues mentioned something about going back to the stone ages. Well, what's so wrong in going back to the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s? When I went to school, if someone had failed a class - let's say they failed math - they went to summer school. Why aren't we bringing back summer school for these people? It's not a matter of the child failing the whole grade. It might be just one subject. Why push them forward if they're not meeting the outcomes?

We have to teach our children to be able to tolerate failure and success. We want them to be able to know what it feels like when they're successful at something, as well as when they fail at something. I know I try my hardest to always instill confidence and truth into my children, but I'm not going to sugar-coat anything for them.

In fact, this goes back to our Party as well wanting to bring back vocational schools into the school system. I agree not every child is equipped to finish Grade 12. They need assistance and bringing back the vocational schools is one way of doing that.

I also heard one of my colleagues say something about, we shouldn't discipline and fail. What do you mean we shouldn't discipline? We all, even at our age and in here, we have to have discipline. (Interruption) Absolutely, we have to have discipline. I mean kids thrive on routine and discipline - they're hungry for that; they thrive on that. And, as it stands right now, too many children are moving forward who do not meet the expected learning outcomes for their current grade level and, to me, that is resulting in very real and devastating consequences to the students who are pushed ahead to their future.

We're not doing anything for them, and I'm going to share a little story. You know my daughter started university in September in Calgary, and she works extremely, extremely hard. She worked extremely hard to get 80s in high school and would ask why do I have to study so hard to get these grades and my other friends are not even taking books home and they're getting 100s. And her younger brother to the point, he's going to have a rude awakening one of these days. But my son doesn't open a book in Grade 9 and does great, does great. But he's going to have a very rude awakening because he doesn't have those study skills that his sister has.

She did, I think, exceptionally well for her capabilities. She ended up with all Bs and a couple of As at Christmas. I get a text from her the other day. She's upset because she failed a mid-term and she's devastated, and she said this is the first time I've failed something. Yeah, so what are you going to do about it? You're going to go back and you're going to find out what you did wrong. You're going to get extra help and you're going to try again - and if it means that we have to pay for you to take summer courses or whatever, you'll do it.

It may take longer, but what's wrong with that? That's what's real - we're building them to live a life in reality and not in false hope, not in feeling like I'm like you. It just doesn't work that way and, as I said, I think there are some real, devastating consequences in the future if we do not help these students now. I always say you're only as happy as your saddest child. You're only as happy as your saddest child, and I would rather deal with heartache and a little bit of disappointment, and let them learn how to tolerate that because through our whole life we're going to be faced with lots of disappointments and lots of successes and happy moments.

I believe the teachers provide that balanced perspective, that sort of unbiased opinion of our children. I think a lot of parents sometimes are living through the lives of their own children. And, you know, it hurts; it hurts when you don't think perhaps your child is as good as the other kids or you know you're wanting them to live up to these expectations that perhaps you wanted to live up to but never had the opportunity or the chance. I would like to see us put more responsibility into the hands of the teachers to make these important decisions.

I think that we have to - you know one of my concerns is this myth of a no-fail policy, I'm more concerned about where that myth came from, why was there this breakdown of communication between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the teachers? Why were they thinking that they had to put kids through?

In my son's high school, there are over 900 students. I asked, how many kids failed last year? Two - two failed out of 900 and some. I mean, there's something wrong there. We have to give more responsibility to the teachers. They know whether or not these students are meeting the outcomes and, simply, this is what this bill, Bill No. 76, will do. Nine thousand and three hundred teachers

AN HON. MEMBER: 9,300 teachers were wrong.

MS. MACFARLANE: Yes, 9,300 teachers were wrong. It's impossible. That can't be.

To change the no-fail policy to one that has students moving to the next level only after having mastered the outcomes of the previous grade, as the policy stands now, schools have to receive parental consent to retain a child, and only following careful consideration and many meetings to determine the course of action. The parent ultimately has the final say and nine times out of 10 makes the choice to keep their child with his or her appropriate peers rather than skill level.

I had a friend that I sat with this summer at the baseball field that was struggling because she knew her son should not be going into the next grade, but the teacher sort of endorsed her and told her, I think we should just let him go, see what happens next year. Are you kidding me? Why? See what happens next year? I said to her, if you were feeling this adamant about him not moving into the next grade and you have the final say, you need to go back and you need to tell the principal and the teacher you want to hold him back.

She did, and I'm really proud of her for doing that because it was a lot of heartache between her and her son - a lot of heartache. But he's still playing on the same hockey team, he's still playing on the same baseball team as his peers, and yes, there is probably that rude kid out there that has bullied him a little bit and said, you didn't pass this year. It's too bad that child is doing that, but as we stand here in this House today she has said this has been the best thing. He's doing really well. His confidence has built. He has accepted that he will not be with his original classmates. He's in Grade 5. He has a lot of time to heal. I would rather that individual heal at that age than be 35 and incapable. Then all those other issues around mental health and everything else starts building - you have no confidence, your network of friends has changed.

This bill simply just enables the teacher to have more flexibility. I think it gives them more permission and clarifies whatever this myth has been around the province. That's what we want for our teachers. We want them to know that we trust them to make the best decisions in the best interests of our students. We don't want our children going out into the real world and, you know, they're fired from their first job.

As I said about my daughter, having a professor say I'm sorry you've failed - you just failed. Well I've never failed before - well I'm sorry honey, you failed - that's just the way it is.

I think we have to really give some consideration to this bill. Today I just feel that too many children are moving forward, creating that large gap in reading and math levels, and making it so much more difficult for the teacher to teach the courses that they're

supposed to be teaching. I do believe that these decisions should be left to the teaching professionals. I definitely recognize there are many special needs students to whom this policy change would not apply. I don't think it would apply to everyone, but once again, I go back to the individual students that perhaps maybe they just failed one course.

Maybe there are in other areas of the province - I know they stopped summer school many years ago where I live and I wish they would bring it back because I knew a lot of kids that had to take summer math or summer English and it was a wonderful opportunity for them, and that's perhaps all they need. So this bill is really just opening up another door to be flexible and address the issues, and not sugar-coat and move children ahead and create more heartache and confusion later on in their lives.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I hope that everyone will have a second thought of this bill and thanks for allowing me to speak this evening.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, that's a great discussion especially at this time of the morning. Everybody stuck to their times; it doesn't happen very often in this House the last few years.

Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 77.

Bill No. 77 - Education Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, it's great to have the opportunity to stand here at this particular time of the day and speak about discipline in our schools. It's been a rough night with the Toronto Maple Leafs winning 7-1; however, we'll move on from there.

It certainly doesn't take a lot of research to tell us that discipline in schools is certainly different today than previous years and previous decades in Nova Scotia, and across the country for that matter. It's just the reality of today's schools that things are different. However, I think the underlying thing besides it being an ongoing challenge every day for teachers in our classrooms, for administrators that are enforcing discipline in our schools, that safety of students is the key, safety of students is number one.

I did have the opportunity for a lot of years to look after discipline in junior and senior high schools. I can recall back a number of years ago being responsible for discipline in a Grades 7, 8, and 9 junior high school and the difference between the discipline and the respect in that school at that time and what I see today are sometimes night and day. I don't blame it on any one particular thing. I think the erosion in society that has occurred, family issues, family problems, family breakups, and so on, there's all kinds of different things

that have caused an erosion of discipline and what is expected of students that are at our schools.

This particular Bill No. 77, an Act to Amend Chapter 1 of the Acts of 1995-96, the Education Act, Respecting Discipline, is basically talking about enforcing a discipline policy. Of course, all our schools have discipline policies and I can recall being on a number of committees over the years, where on a discipline committee looking at policies dealing with discipline at a school level, at a board level and again, back a number of years ago, they appeared to be reasonably effective. Again, in today's climate, it is a very difficult thing for teachers and administrators to uphold in their buildings because I feel that sometimes the support mechanisms are not there when push comes to shove. So, there may be a provincial code of discipline given to the school boards and passed down to the schools; however, often the schools are left on their own when they're dealing with some very difficult situations.

Mr. Speaker, there's no single formula that is going to make any discipline effective. I believe the solution should be grounded in research trying to stay away from as much punitive measures as possible. Depending on who you talk to, there are some people who think we should have zero-tolerance policies in our schools. Again, I certainly do not support that type of thing; I find it too far to the left or right with regard to being that concise.

As I mentioned earlier, we have to keep our schools safe, and that's the main focus in our schools when we have behavioural problems. We lose learning time, educational time, in the classrooms; we lose opportunity to provide support to students who need it; and a lot of times the teachers in the classrooms who are dealing with inappropriate behaviours - especially if they're types of children who are very disruptive - they need regular assistance through educational assistants, perhaps, who would be responsible for them or whatever. There is a lot of educational instruction that goes missing because of these types of things happening in our classrooms.

We need to build positive school climates and to prevent this type of misbehaviour. Again, there are so many different types of behaviours in our classrooms today. A lot of students arriving to school suffer from trauma, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

I can remember towards the last few years of my teaching career as an administrator of high school, having to report to a school discipline committee because of a very serious offence by a student and I felt very strongly, along with the staff, that we provided every possible intervention, every bit of help we could give this particular student to help him survive in our school climate, in our school system, but he was the type of student that was making it very unsafe for other students. So he was brought forward before the discipline committee and the result of that particular visit to the school committee was to no avail. The principal had the right at that particular time to suspend the student - five days out of

school. I believe it's 10 now, but at that time it was five. To increase that particular penalty, if you wish to call it that, you would have to go in front of the discipline committee and present your case.

At this particular time the committee at the discipline board level decided that student should remain in the school, so as a result of that we continued to have some very serious problems besides the continued interventions, besides psychologically testing, guidance counsellors, counselling, teachers going completely out of their way to improve the student's climate.

Again, it was a student who was having a lot of difficulty dealing with a lot of issues. The negative side of that, it was affecting a lot of other students in the classroom, where they were losing a lot of instructional time. Also, some of them being very afraid of this particular person, due to his very disruptive behaviour and his potential for hurting someone.

Acting out behaviour is a symptom of underlying issues that the students are dealing with, and they're often dealing with these at home, perhaps in the community. Some of them are in school and, if not, they're bringing them to school with them. Therein lies the problem - problems like vandalism, and today we have cyberbullying that's occurring fairly frequently. Dress-code violations cause a lot of school personnel headaches, substance use as I mentioned before, occasionally violence. The bottom line, Mr. Speaker, is that we must hold students accountable regardless if it was what we just finished talking about in the previous bill, where a person should meet the outcomes in order to progress to the next grade level. Well, students have to be held accountable for their behaviour in school.

There are all kinds of examples. If you go out and talk to teachers across the province, elementary, middle, or high school, it's very common to hear a teacher say in the elementary-grade levels where they have been kicked, where a student has spit on them, where a student has thrown something at them - even an item as large as a chair - or where a teacher has had personal clothing ripped by students.

Again, I continue to speak to a lot of teachers and students across the province and I find it very difficult to grasp what's happening in the classrooms. Compared to when I was there, we did have a lot of respect.

Students need the structure. They are very smart and they can understand what they can and cannot get away with. Someone mentioned earlier during Question Period about an expectant teacher being kicked in the stomach and having to go to the hospital, and the youngster who did that was back in the classroom that afternoon. Well, there's more than one case where that has happened and again, there are no consequences for it.

I strongly believe that we have to shift the emphasis somewhat to the parents of children that are misbehaving in our schools. Again, I'm not saying that we decrease any

of the interventions or the work that we have to do as educators to help these students. We need staff training, we need to engage families to help students develop the resolution skills that are needed to have them behave better and to work with others in the classes in our schools. Discipline policy should give schools clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences.

Consistency is the key to a good discipline policy, but it seemed throughout the years your school would have a certain discipline policy and you would go to perhaps another school in even your own district and they would have a different one. There would be some similarities, but certainly there would be different things in it. There was never that consistency throughout the district. A good, consistent policy is needed to prevent and to address misbehaviour.

Now some people will say there are many reasons for kids acting up. I can remember a teacher saying that it's because of this no-retention or what we call social promotion; everyone moves through. You're not allowed to fail and what we've been hearing today is that there's no such thing. Well, Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you there is such a thing. I've been hearing it for years, and years, and years. It may not be written down but it was passed on verbally, something that I could never understand and I could never agree on why that would be implemented.

Anyway, schools need assistance to provide different levels of support in interventions to students based on their needs. Students want and need clear boundaries, structure, and consistency. They need to feel safe, cared for, and respected. Expectations should be set high for students, just like they are in academic terms for their behaviour and conduct. Mental health professionals need to be placed in our schools, Mr. Speaker. Discipline problems can be handled through mediation, counselling, parent-teacher meetings, and other interventions.

We need additional help in schools with educational assistance to make sure that students do not harm themselves and others.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

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

MR. BILL HORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to discuss Bill No. 77 as the Opposition has put forward.

First of all, I'd like to suggest that providing for the education of the province's children is one of the most important jobs that we have as a government. We share that responsibility with thousands of teachers, principals, administrators, and support staff. Our government is absolutely committed to improving student achievement, particularly in

math and literacy. That goal is best achieved when students attend school regularly and on time.

Research shows that the quality of teaching is the main influence on student learning, and our students are fortunate to have teachers who are second to none. We want our young people to benefit from all that their teachers offer to them every day. Yet, attendance rates show that 28 per cent of students miss 16 or more days of school. That is why we developed a discussion paper last year to shape a new policy. The paper, called *Be There*, was released last June. We also consulted the Nova Scotia Teachers Union who echoed the concerns of their members and endorsed the need for an attendance policy. Based on the above, as well as input from parents and students themselves, we have drafted the attendance policy. The draft is ready for final input for teachers, principals, and other stakeholders.

One of the improvements with the proposed bill by our government, Bill No. 75, will be a council to improve classroom conditions. Within 14 days of the bill being passed, a council to improve classroom conditions will be appointed. The council will have \$20 million over two years to address issues in the classroom. The council will have the following compositions: three teachers from elementary schools; three teachers from middle school; three teachers from high school; three government-appointed representatives; one co-chair appointed by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union; and one co-chair appointed by government. The council has several priority areas that will be reported on April 30, 2017 - data collection, assessment, and evaluation of attendance policies, timing of administrative days relative to report card preparation, technology and work processes including PowerSchool and TIENET. A letter will be sent from the deputy minister to the school board superintendents notifying them of the plan to proceed with engagement and implementation of draft attendance policies.

We will begin the work as soon as council has established the attendance policy which will be in place before the next school year begins.

It will not be designed to simply address policy ends. The discussion paper grounded the policy in four fundamental principles: student success and achievement; equity and fairness; shared responsibilities, recognizing that improving attendance must not be left to the teachers alone; and most significantly, flexibility allowing teachers and principals to use their professional judgment on what works for their students.

Our policy will also increase accountability and include consequences. To quote one teacher: set clear expectations and follow through with real consequences. Students no longer feel there are consequences for their actions, and realistically, there have been none. If we continue to teach children that there are no consequences for poor decisions, we are encouraging them to believe that fiction outside of school. We are hurting their chances of being successful in the future.

A letter will be sent to the deputy ministers of school boards and superintendents notifying them of the plan to proceed with engagement and implication of draft attendance policies.

Simply, we have a code of conduct in Nova Scotia. These codes can be found in the Education Act under Section 141(1)(ja): “establish a Provincial school code of conduct policy with respect to promoting school and student safety that includes Provincial school code of conduct and provisions regarding student conduct and consequences for unacceptable behaviour . . .” Also, under another section of the Education Act, which is Section 64(2)(t): “establish a policy for the protection of students and employees from harassment and abuse . . .”

In conclusion, Bill No. 77 is redundant and weak and already exists in the Education Act, in several sections quoted earlier. So, from that, it would seem that Bill No. 77 is not adequate to be carried too much further by this government. With that, I’ll take my seat. Thank you.

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

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to rise tonight to speak to Bill No. 77, an Act to Amend Chapter 1 of the Acts of 1995-96, the Education Act, Respecting Discipline. Basically, it appears that this bill requires school boards to adopt comprehensive discipline policies, and gives principals and teachers the ability to enforce them. I have to say I am of two minds about this particular one.

There is a provincial school code of conduct policy already which defines establishing a safe and inclusive learning environment:

“Nova Scotia’s provincial school code of conduct policy establishes standards of behaviour for all schools and is built on the following expectations:

- Unacceptable behaviour will be responded to immediately.
- Schools will use proactive and preventative approaches to reduce the occurrence of unacceptable behaviour and maintain environments that are conducive to teaching and learning.
- When responding to unacceptable behaviour, schools will
 - give first consideration to the safety and security of students, staff, and other members of the school community

-
- assist students with developing new behaviours and strategies to reduce the reoccurrence of unacceptable behaviour . . .” That sounds like something I would definitely support.
 - “address consequences in a fair manner that does not disproportionately impact students based on race, culture, ethnicity, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability or mental disability, mental illness, age, national or aboriginal origin, socio-economic status, or appearance.” Again, that’s something that I would definitely believe in.
 - “use restorative strategies, when appropriate” - very good. That sort of thing is something that we definitely need to do more of in our society as well as in schools. That’s great.
 - “consider the impact the consequences may have on the student(s) adversely affected by the unacceptable behaviour, such as
 - > decisions regarding the appropriate placement within the school or school board of the person initiating the harm
 - > allowing the person harmed the opportunity to provide a statement in cases where consequences result in a suspension appeal process
 - remove students from class only after acceptable strategies have been implemented to support a change in behaviour or as necessary to maintain a safe learning environment and ensure the student’s return to their regular class when it is safe to do so.
 - provide academic support when a student is removed from class or suspended from school for up to 10 days and take into consideration the use of in-school suspensions provided that the student can continue their work in a classroom designated by the principal for in-school suspensions, a teacher or principal is present to supervise the students, and the principal notifies the student and the student’s parents of the reasons for the in-school suspension, as soon as is reasonably possible.
 - formalize community partnerships that enhance community and school-based supports to students and families.”

I have to say that all of that sounds very good. I'd like to know exactly how much of it is actually done, how it works, if it's adhered to. On that note, I know that a number of the stories that I've been told by both teachers, education assistants and, in fact, the same woman that we spoke about earlier today who was pregnant and was kicked by a student - and I think a desk was thrown as well - and she was very upset by this. The student was taken out, but was then brought back in later, but I don't believe it was into her classroom. I believe that the student came back to the school, but I don't believe it was back into her classroom.

However, that said, many EAs are also telling me that they're being bitten, scratched, kicked and what have you. These are things that we definitely don't want to happen in our schools. I do believe that it's very difficult for teachers these days to be able to have a type of discipline when, for instance, taking a cellphone from a child would be considered a breach, and also where human rights have to be taken into consideration or other laws have to be taken into consideration. This particular bill, Bill No. 77, makes it sound pretty simple, "This bill requires school boards to adopt comprehensive discipline policies and gives principals and teachers the ability to enforce them."

That rolls off the tongue, but again there are so many other things to take into consideration like the laws of the land, which I'm told are very difficult now. A lot of kids know their rights. They can say, well, you are abusing me, this is physical abuse, or whatever. Some of them can be pretty clever about that, I'm told. In that sense, I think that there's a lot more to the story than meets the eye.

If indeed Bill No. 75 goes through, there is a piece in that which says that the council that will be formed will actually be looking at student discipline policies. The particular council I'm talking about, the council to improve classroom conditions, has several priority areas to report on by April 30, 2017: data collection; assessment and evaluation; attendance policies; timing of administrative days relative to report card preparation; technology and work processes, including PowerSchool and TIENET; scope of practice for teachers; planning for student success; complex classrooms; class sizes, all levels; and student discipline policies.

All of this sounds pretty simple and straightforward, but we know that many, many things go into creating the reasons why there are behavioural problems in the schools. As I had mentioned in my last speech, about Bill No. 76, many of these go back to the origin of the child, to the family, to the parents, to issues of poverty, or to issues of mental health. The bullying that goes on in schools, many times you scratch the surface of a bully, and you find a child who has been bullied. That's why restorative practices are so good to try and really peel the onion to find out what is going on beneath the surface. In fact, you are probably going to find a kid, a child, a student, who is deeply wounded themselves and acting out.

I say that I am of two minds because I do hear all of these stories from teachers and education assistants who are concerned about the fact that they cannot discipline children as much as they would like to be able to. Again, there are so many different things to take into consideration, like the laws of the land, what is considered abuse, what is considered too heavy of a practice - these days, even taking hold of somebody. It's very difficult for the teachers to have the kind of discipline that they used to have. However, I certainly don't agree with the methods that used to be used: the ruler, the strap, and physical force.

Again, I look to our colleagues down in the United States. I look to the woman who's going to be in charge of education there and her response about having somebody with a gun in school to deal with the grizzly bears. Things like that, I think, are taking it a bit far. I'm glad we live in Canada, where we have gun control.

But I do know that being safe in the school environment is a very, very important thing for all of our students and the teachers. I think that this is something that will be looked into. I look forward to hearing more from teachers and educational assistants. I welcome them to send me any stories or any of their feelings about what needs to be done and what they find is missing, and also suggestions about what we can do to change the system to make it better.

With that, I will take my seat.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

MR. JOHN LOHR: It's my pleasure to rise and say a few words about this bill, Bill No. 77. I realize that it is a short bill and maybe short on specifics, and I do recognize some of the comments of my colleagues in the other Parties about the daunting challenges facing our schools. Just to say that we can write a few words, and we can make a bill and change things is not to minimize the challenges teachers face, with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder and all of the many other mental health issues. They're daunting challenges.

One thing all three parties have said is that there are just enormous challenges in our schools with violent behaviour and the many different types of acting out and, there's challenge there in our school system to get this all under control. Some schools are more successful than others, but it is a daunting challenge. I find it interesting that this bill and the previous bill we discussed in some ways fit together in my mind. In my opinion, there are two profoundly important aspects to discipline in schools that are just sort of fundamental to the whole process - one is the idea of a pass/fail, and, the other is attendance. If you're a student and you're trying to learn, did you really learn that material or not? That's sort of the question, and that is sort of really fundamental to the whole process of what's happening there. Did you learn that, or are you learning, and do you want to learn, and are you motivated to learn, and is there a consequence if you don't learn?

I believe that I do understand, I do respect the fact that the government has said there's nothing in writing on pass/fail policy, and, in some ways, I find that more troubling than the fact that de facto there is in reality a pass-everybody policy out there for sure. Every teacher we talked to refers to it. The fact that it's not in writing is almost more troubling than if it was in writing. If it was in writing, we would at least be able to look at it and modify it and say, what are the circumstances and conditions. I think if we all admit there is a de facto policy of passing everybody, well, that needs to be put in writing. We need to analyze it. Obviously, there's a very small percentage of students not passing so, there are some exemptions but this is an issue in our schools, and, I think it's something that needs to be addressed.

I know that on a personal level we ran up against this sort of pass the kids along. When my oldest son was in Grade 5 or Grade 6, I think it was Grade 6, we suddenly realized he didn't know how to read. He had gone through Grade 3 and Grade 4 without really picking that skill up and had been passed along, and, we really hadn't been alerted to that. There was a very memorable moment one evening when we had a huge meltdown in our home, realized this boy didn't know how to read. It was because of my wife really buckling down to spend a lot of work with him that he did learn how to read, became a voracious reader, but essentially missed the grammar I would say - the grammar remains atrocious. I don't think he'd mind me telling you that, but, my feeling on that is when he was learning to read, basically the other kids were getting grammar because he was a couple of grades late.

If we hadn't figured that out, he would have just been moved along and somewhere back then - and he's 28 now - in that time or before, there was a theory, and this is my analysis of the situation, and I stand to be corrected, but what happened was a theory spread throughout North America that the self-esteem of a child was more damaged by failing than by not knowing the material. So, in other words, the thought was, well, we'll pass them and next year they'll catch up. So there was the belief that that was better for the child than the stigma of failing, and that is a sort of a head-scratching thought. You have to think about that. It may be true if they do, in fact, catch up in the next year or the year after, as it was in our case, but that catching up only happened because of a very, very aggressive intervention on our part. Not every child has that same type of support, obviously, in their home that can make that happen and because of that policy which we adopted en masse and I would say, suggest to you that North America adopted that policy en masse.

Where did that come from? Where was the scientific paper that wrote out that theory? I would like to see that if that exists. Where is the study that said this is, in fact, better? I would love to see that if that existed. Maybe somebody can point that out to me, but, in fact, that is, in my opinion, what happened. I think in any system an idea can be like a virus and spread very easily, and, this idea, like a virus, spread that this was the case.

In fact, I would suggest to you initially it was true, but, because a relatively small number of kids are going through to the next grade without really knowing their material,

the teachers could deal with it and maybe parents like us dealt with it. So it sort of gets dealt with, and initially, the consequences of that aren't really seen.

But what we've seen now, being 20-odd years in on this policy of no-fail, is that we have a situation where there are many, many kids on IPPs in our schools - independent personalized education programs - so much so that teachers are facing six, seven, eight, nine different - they're teaching, say, Grade 8 English, but really maybe one kid is at a Grade 1 level in that class. This is an actual example. I had a teacher tell me this. She had four or five kids at Grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 level, and some at Grade 8 level, and she could count the small number of kids who were actually fully functioning at that Grade 8 level in her Grade 8 English class.

Although the policy initially worked when there were only a very few kids who were in that situation, what happens is we have a very large number of kids now who have been passed who didn't really learn the material, and it becomes a daunting challenge. The idea that a child's self-esteem would be less challenged by passing though they didn't know the material than by failing is debatable, and I'll tell you why it's debatable. It's because when they get to Grade 7, 8, or 9, they've figured out: I don't know how to do the material, I don't know how to do the work; all my classmates can do this work, but I can't. They figure it out. What happens then is, that's a huge attack on their self-esteem.

One of the things we need to do in life, a goal of parenting - there are two goals you have in parenting. You have the goal of teaching your children to love, and the goal of teaching your children to work. Those are the two primary goals of parenting. One of the ways you teach your children to work is by giving them work to do and allowing them to have rewards for success, and moments of failure too. The idea in parenting, of course, is to allow your children to have small failures, to allow them to go through that so that they learn from their mistakes.

I've been through teaching my sons to drive, and many of you have probably had this experience too. After they've done that driver's ed. course and think they know way more than Dad, and they believe they know every possible situation that can arise - that little fender-bender that they walk away from, where they realize how fast things can go wrong when you're driving, is not a bad thing to have happen.

Those little mistakes - as they go through life, they have to have these little moments of crisis where they go through something that didn't quite turn out right and they realize what their mistake was, what they didn't do. They didn't study or they didn't look at the material or whatever. We need to have our children have those moments on a sort of progressively increasing scale, until they're ready to really handle all the things that we handle as adults in the adult world. If the system has taken that away from them - we've taken out a primary discipline in the system, and I think that's unfortunate. I think the idea that passing them because this was better for their self-esteem, that they would stay in their cohort, is a false idea. They figure it out.

What we see is a huge dropout rate and truancy rate in our schools. I would really like to know what the data on this is. The teachers all tell me this is going on, that kids are not going to school. Even as young as Grade 3, I had one teacher email me a comment that she had a couple of kids who, every week, in Grade 3, missed one to three days per week. Grades 3 and 4 are pretty critical years to learn how to read. How is that child going to learn how to read if we have that sort of truancy going on?

I notice that we do have a provincial school code of conduct policy, and my colleague for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River read a fair chunk of it - not a fair chunk of it, but a significant portion, and some pretty significant aspects of it, I will admit. I don't want to diminish the code of conduct policy at all. I do want to point out one issue I will take umbrage with in the code of conduct policy, and it's in virtually the last page - Responses Specifically Forbidden. The one is course program withdrawal by the principal for non-attendance, or poor attendance is specifically forbidden. So the principal cannot do that - in brackets - (pending the development of the ministerial attendance policy). Well I couldn't find a ministerial attendance policy online, so obviously the pending of the ministerial attendance policy, I presume, this attendance policy hasn't been developed.

I said in the beginning that I believe there were two fundamental aspects to discipline in our schools. One is sort of - did you really learn the material - pass/fail, and the other is attendance. If you don't show up, that is sort of the most basic, fundamental level of not being disciplined by the school - you're not learning the discipline if you're not there.

We see a huge rate of what I would call "truancy" in our schools. To me, this is the single most fundamental aspect to discipline - that there be a requirement to show up. There always was in the past when most of us went to school - all of us with gray hair anyway. There was a Truancy Act; there was a requirement to go to school. If you missed a certain number of days, you were going to fail the year. But we don't have an attendance policy right now. So if there is no attendance policy, there are no statistics being produced, as far as I know, and if there are no statistics being produced, what is the rate? We only have sort of the anecdotal accounts of teachers who tell us this is a big problem.

I had a teacher tell me - a member of the vice-principal/principal - I don't want to identify too closely, but she said for a month she picked a child up every morning on her way to school to get that child to school. I had other teachers tell me the same thing - or not exactly that or maybe they made a phone call every morning - hey, are you coming to school today? They actually made that phone call every morning.

So the effort is there in our system. Our teachers are making that effort and our staff - the principals and vice-principals - are making that effort to get kids to school because they know how important this is, but we don't have an organized response.

I was talking to a friend from Manitoba recently and she was shocked that there was no sort of organized effort that happened. When a kid missed a certain number of days in school in Manitoba, social services is going to show up at the door with someone from the school. We need to have a similar program here, but if we don't have an attendance policy, it follows that there is no truancy policy because there was no attendance policy. How can there be a truancy policy if there is no attendance policy to identify these kids? So if these kids are missing school in this way, they're not going to be learning the material and the requirement to go to school has to be sort of embedded in an attendance policy and imbedded into a consequence policy so that the parents who are sometimes complicit with this - the parent or parents are sometimes on board with this. Sometimes they're keeping their kids home.

I would suggest social services, the police, and someone from the school needs to show up at that door and find out what's going on. Sometimes - and I would suggest to you that sometimes it would be nothing to do with what's going on in school - it may well be something going on at home. We have a huge number of social problems.

I think the fact that we don't have these two types of policies . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The member's time has elapsed.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand here in this House and debate the bills that are in front of the Legislature. I appreciate the comments from the members opposite on this particular matter. I do know that the nature of these bills that have been brought forward by the Opposition derives from the broader conversation that government is having with teachers and with the broader public in relation to the education system. I know it does come from the impasse that we've been dealing with in this current labour negotiation for quite some time. I do think it's appropriate to be able to speak to those broader issues that have resulted in these pieces of legislation that we have before us today.

A very difficult thing for me as a member that has come to pass here is this perception that this is a government-versus-teachers situation. I know that when you are in a conflict with the union, that is a very easy, very simple way to understand these things. That narrative, because it's simple and easy to understand, spreads very quickly and doesn't necessarily take into the equation the broader complexities and viewpoints that lead to some of these conflicts. In this particular case, this conflict is not an issue of government not wanting to listen to teachers or move on a lot of the policy initiatives that they've identified as priorities.

The fundamental issue here is of financial capacity and our ability to pay for the bills that have been presented to governments for a long time now. That's really what's at

the heart of the disagreement here. When you consider the nature of our financial position, which the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has so eloquently pointed out numerous times, and you consider the fact that 50 per cent of every dollar that comes in to government in taxes goes out in labour, it is very difficult to deal with the financial challenges without addressing the cost of labour. That's the mathematical problem that this government faces.

That is a mathematical problem that the NDP faced when it was in government. They had to pay the bills too. They did sign what I believe to be fair and generous wage contracts with the unions. What they did on the other side was cut money from the classroom to be able to afford that. They raised taxes. They cut the ferry in Yarmouth, which had an impact on the tourism industry across the province. So no matter what government is actually sitting on this side of the House, they will have to deal with this fundamental challenge because this is about kids.

This is about the future of our province, the debt that the next generation will assume, and government's ability to pay for services that people expect and demand of government. We've been faced with the reality that, for the last 20 to 30 years, our economy has grown by about 1 per cent. All governments have tried to do a better job growing that economy. The fact is that it's largely outside of the control of anybody who sits in this House. Particularly in our rural areas, the economy is driven by exports. That means the American exchange rate. That means markets in other parts of the world. We in this House have no control over that.

We're also facing a very serious situation with demographics in this province. We have had a declining population until a recent blip due to immigration policies that this government has brought in. That affects the tax base. That affects the revenue into the province. So we've had this pattern in the province of costs and bills associated with the collective agreements that have been signed going up like this, at the same time that revenues have been going down.

This gap that you find between cost and revenues is creating a systemic challenge that affects all Nova Scotians. I know it's not easy to make the connection of the provincial debt to the daily lives of people, the delivery of services, et cetera, but they are intrinsically linked. Government's ability to provide health care, to pay for new drugs that come into the market for cancer treatments, and to invest in our education system in the areas that teachers want us to invest in is contingent on our ability to pay for that.

As we've seen with past governments that have made decisions on labour contracts, it is so much easier - my God, we have learned it's so much easier - just to say yes and just to sign the cheques. But we have seen where cuts have had to be made in other areas that impact people's lives on a daily basis. We experienced that in my area and, I know, in the area the member for Argyle-Barrington comes from when that service was cut. We experienced it when taxes went up. We experienced it when there weren't further investments in health care.

This is the fundamental challenge here that government is trying to face that the Premier has a responsibility to deal with, and unfortunately, it does create tension with our unions. But it is coming from a very real place. It's coming from a necessity to deal with this broader issue in order to preserve the integrity of our finances and the integrity of our service delivery in programs that Nova Scotians depend on and need. I think people need to understand that and challenge themselves to have a broader perspective in these particular instances.

Related to the current situation with teachers, I had a conversation yesterday with a friend of mine who is a teacher, and it's become very clear that teachers are feeling underappreciated right now. I know that this situation has created toxicity online and in our schools, and that is problematic in many ways. I asked my friend yesterday, since I've been the MLA for over six years, how come none of these issues have ever been brought to me before this collective agreement? The answer I received was, well, we were told that we weren't able to express ourselves by certain people. That was surprising to me, and I know that's surprising to the other members of Cabinet to hear that. I think the fact that teachers have not felt they have had the ability to express their opinions on these matters has led to this kind of pot that's been boiling for a long time. I know right now this government is a target, but I think these problems have been systemic for at least 10 years, maybe more.

Teachers at home that I've met with have identified policy priorities. They're saying in my area - and the Tri-County Regional School Board, by the way, a school board that had voted in favour of two of these three collective agreements, the majority of teachers in the area I represent did vote in favour of two of these. According to teachers at home, this is not about money, this is not about the wage, and this is not about the long service award. This is primarily about working conditions in the classroom and a feeling that they have had an inability to impact public policy in relation to education.

What I see in the bill that the minister has brought forward, which I do support, I see a systemic attack on a lot of those issues and changes that will come from a policy perspective. I see an attendance policy; I see a policy priority on disciplinary matters; and for the first time in a long time I see a government having the courage to take on the big elephant in the room that one's wanted to talk about, and that's inclusion. That's happening now, and that is the silver lining in all of this.

This has been a very difficult time for everybody on this side of the House and for teachers, but when you look at the language of the bill that's been brought forward by the minister, when you look at the fact the makeup of the working conditions committee, the majority is going to be teachers. A big concern that I heard from teachers at home was that we're going to have another committee, there's going to be more consultants, and we're still not going to have a voice. That will change fundamentally as a result of this minister's work.

When I look at what I've heard at home and I look at the bill that's been brought forward here by government to deal with this situation, I see a lot of common ground there. I think one of the tragic ironies of this collective agreement stalemate which is primarily about finances - and the president of the union said that the union's membership voted down the most recent contract because of the province's reluctance to budge and keep points of contention like wage increases and the long service award.

When I think of what teachers are telling me at home, this is reflective of what they've asked for, and I think moving forward we will be able to address a lot of these policy concerns once we are through the stalemate which I do think is a tragic irony that this stalemate has actually been preventing us from moving forward on a lot of the changes that teachers and government want to move forward with together.

With that, I'll take my seat, and I do appreciate the House's time.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham on an introduction.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the members of this House to the gallery above me where we are joined tonight by four members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union executive: Marc Breough, Angela Deagle, Damian Hall, and Keri Butler. Please give them the warm welcome of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the final bill today, which is Bill No. 23.

Bill No. 23 - Healthier Schools Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HON. PAT DUNN: It's a pleasure to be able to rise in my place to talk about the Healthier Schools Act, Bill No. 23. Perhaps I'll start off with being a teacher today in our schools is certainly not easy. I think we would all agree with that, especially in today's rapidly changing world.

Mental disorders in young people are now becoming increasingly recognized, which is a really positive thing. Educators are being asked to address those needs in the classroom and beyond. Having had the opportunity to visit a lot of schools and talk to a lot of teachers, student services personnel, and administrators, I often ask the question, what is one of the biggest problems that you face in your schools today? Often the answer is students suffering from mental issues: anxiety, depression, and so on. They also continue to say that they do not have enough support to address the issues that occur in these schools and in these classrooms.

We have a program called the SchoolsPlus program. It's a very good program. It has really helped a lot of students in some of our schools in the province. However, people working within the jurisdiction of these programs cannot meet the needs of all the students who are crying for help. Their caseloads are often full, and I have been told that, in some cases, the remaining students have to report to the hospital for further assistance or help.

Again, having additional help in our schools addressing these mental health issues certainly would make the school environment a much safer learning environment with regard to people who are falling behind in their schoolwork, in their attendance, and in their behaviour - if we had the personnel who could intervene and help these students. We're looking at where we need positive mental health promotion and prevention in our schools. I believe schools are an excellent place to build the skills, the attitudes, the knowledge, and the habits that support mental well-being for all of the students. The need is there, and the school needs the help.

When students are mentally healthy, they feel happy, safe, and cared for. Above all, they are ready to learn. All students benefit when they develop skills that help them navigate life's challenges and opportunities. The school can make a difference in this. Without proper support, these students are likely to struggle with school performance, social relationships, and future opportunities.

Schools have the opportunity to identify the students. Students spend a tremendous amount of time during a week, a month, and a year in our school system, so it seems like the right place to provide these interventions to help the adolescents, so the schools have the opportunity to identify the students who are at risk early and provide extra support to help them along the way. I believe schools have a critical role in student mental health and well-being, and that should be a key pillar in our school curriculum and education.

As teachers, we're often asked what you can do to make a difference. The stats regarding youth mental health are beginning to stagger - they are on the increase. As I mentioned earlier, that is one of the major problems in our schools today, regardless of whether it's elementary, middle school, or high school. Teachers will tell you that a lot of students are coming to school suffering with mental issues. Often these teachers are not trained to identify or to intervene and help these students.

School student services and administrators continue to worry over these problems. Approximately 20 per cent of young people are suffering from some form of mental disorder across our country, and this probably translates to one to five students in the average classroom in our province. The mental health of students in schools is often overlooked, but it's an extremely relevant issue for today's educator. Many students arrive at school suffering from a mental disorder. Some students will come forward, sometimes despite stigma, and come to student services and request help.

My understanding from teachers is that most students will not do that. They need more encouragement, and they need more support programs in our schools, like the SchoolsPlus program, and they need more trained individuals who are able to intervene and help them cope with their problems.

There's a need as well - how to refer these young people suffering from mental health problems to health professionals for treatment. Educators have a unique opportunity in our schools to play an important role in the health and well-being of these students because of all the time the students spend in our schools. It seems like it's a unique place to be able to intervene and help these students when they need help the most.

Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that someone in each school is equipped with the practical tools and knowledge required to recognize and intervene appropriately in situations where mental illness may be a concern. Perhaps our guidance counsellors could be trained through PD - professional development - days, where they are trained to alleviate some of the problems we are having in our schools with regard to students suffering from mental illness.

As we know, during adolescence, the brain undergoes a significant period of growth and development that continues well into their 20s. A closer look at secondary school students - students experience new behaviours, including changes in attention and motivation and risk-taking behaviour. Mental disorders affect a student's ability to learn. They often have difficulty meeting academic standards. By being aware of these factors, teachers can better meet the needs of students to help them learn most effectively. A number of youth attending post-secondary education drop out before finishing their program, often for reasons relating to their mental illness.

Again, schools are certainly an important location for identifying and providing intervention, combatting stigma associated with mental illness, and possibly providing interventions and ongoing care for the students who need it. Awareness of the importance of mental health in all aspects of life has advanced considerably in the past 10 years. So we need the support to the development of policies and plans that recognize the importance of integration of mental health into our schools to support the application of a mental health curriculum, and to support the development and implementation of appropriate professional mental health training programs for teachers and other educators to help these students who are arriving at our schools. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in my place, I guess in what is now getting to be the early hours of the morning to speak about this very, very important issue - and I speak about it from the perspective of a former teacher, administrator, and now the Minister of Health and Wellness.

I know in this Chamber all members are concerned about what we're hearing in terms of mental health issues that our students - and from the very early years, not just in the adolescent years when some of our symptoms of psychosis will start to emerge, but in our elementary years as well. We know very well that there are students who present with anxieties, depression, the problems of home life and, fortunately, teachers are being trained to help those students in the early years, the Go-to Educator Training program that Dr. Stan Kutcher has brought to the school system, and a number of our teachers have been trained to assist from those early years on.

In particular, I would say that I've learned a lot as well, I guess, in sort of updating over the last couple of months, meeting with teacher leaders in Kings County, one in particular that I would mention tonight is Bev Roy who is now in her 35th year as a guidance counsellor, and she was able to track and present to me very clearly what she has seen emerge perhaps in the last decade and what a different world our teenagers, our adolescents in particular, are experiencing daily - a fast-paced, online, high-stress environment that many then will have those behavioural problems and disassociation that emerge and create challenges both in the formal setting of the classroom and within the school environment itself.

So it is a very, very difficult time that both our teachers and students, and all associated with the developmental years, are now experiencing those challenges. But, also, like my colleague who spoke first on this issue, we're not standing still. We are trying to bring programs into our school system that in fact will bring about positive results.

When Dr. Jana Davidson came into the province about five years ago to take a look at adolescent mental health, she certainly identified the SchoolsPlus program as a leading practice across Canada. It's just that, again, with the resources to build this across the entire 383 schools in our system does take some time, but we are approaching about 200 schools, 28 SchoolsPlus sites, 29 practitioners working in that program, and I feel very strongly that with the targeted money for mental health that will come through the health accord, this should be a program that we will be able to expand and continue to move across the system. I know last year there were three additional hub areas in the Halifax Regional School Board, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, and the Tri-County Regional School Board, as well as CSAP schools.

What I did recently was ask Dave Jones, from the central office staff of the Valley district, to give me an anecdotal account as well as some analysis of what SchoolsPlus has been able to do in their school system. It certainly has an overwhelmingly positive impact because it's embracing the school, other agencies, and home life. That connectedness is indeed bringing about some very, very good results.

The other area that I would like to speak to that I believe is a very positive development in our schools is that, as part of the Together We Can strategy, we are now training with family doctors, who on those front lines are able to deal with children who

are experiencing mental health issues. Many of them did not have training coming through med school, but under a program developed by Dr. Stan Kutcher, our GPs have been trained to work especially with our young children when they start to first present.

The other area that we've expanded to a number of schools is the Gender Sexuality Alliances, which help create supportive welcoming school environments for our students.

One of the programs that I'm prone to speaking about across the country when I meet with my colleagues is the Strongest Families Institute. This is a program developed here in Nova Scotia, developed at the IWK. In the last few years in particular, it has really gained momentum across our province. We gave them a grant of \$148,000 so that more families whose children are experiencing both behavioural and mental health issues - generally moderate to lower challenges in the family dynamic - can go through a series of 10 sessions with a coach who is providing the family and the children with skills to work on and gain positive tools that will improve the mental well-being of the children in particular and all family members dealing with the behavioural difficulties and challenges.

Also, just in the last month, Bell Let's Talk grants have put \$2 million into the Atlantic Provinces. They matched the monies that our province has put forward to reach more families in the coming year. The Kids Help Phone received a grant of \$150,000, offering teens access to 1,600 more phone and online chats with a counsellor.

We know that mental health issues cannot be handled by the school alone. This is why these programs are very essential to broadening the community base of mental health support, along with our trained counsellors and our psychologists who are in the system. I think building community capacity is one of the ways of dealing with what I believe is, in many ways, an issue that is continuing to grow and being faced in our school system.

One of the benefits that we're starting to see is expanding on the 33 recommendations in the Together We Can strategy. Having all 33 of those now in different degrees of implementation available across the province is strengthening that community capacity.

We also wanted to reach some of our mental health leaders - like Dr. Stan Kutcher, Starr Dobson, and Dr. Todd Leader - and created a panel of eight members to give us some immediate recommendations - just three or four. They're starting as well with the school system, and I believe the recommendations are before me now to start to evaluate and see how quickly we can implement them in the school system will in fact be another plus and positive to support teachers and create, I think, a stronger sense of well-being within our school culture.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to address this bill respecting the improvement of mental health in adolescents.

Certainly, I would agree with my colleagues in the Opposition that schools are wonderful and natural hubs where it does make sense to locate mental health supports. Mental health and indeed mental illness is an issue throughout our society, and connecting those services with young people in the place where they are every day makes a great deal of sense. I would also agree with the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness; I know something about the SchoolsPlus program, and it has been a wonderful addition to the array of supports that are available to our families, to our young people, where that program has been able to roll out.

I think the reason that so many of us have strong memories of high school is because it is a place where one either experiences a strong sense of belonging or else the opposite of that, a strong sense of isolation and lack of belonging. Adolescence is such a challenging and tumultuous time for anyone really, and often even the people who appear to be the stars of the big teams or the popular kids are often also actually struggling with those senses of either belonging or isolation, and you can't necessarily tell from the outside what they're going through.

Some of the most touching stories I've heard during this kind of - well, my first term in office and during which I've initiated a number of small conversations with groups of teachers, and also I've received emails and received even a letter in the mail from a teacher, and some of the most touching stories have been of teachers who are really trying to build and maintain a sense of connection to the adolescents whom they are in daily contact with and for whom they care so much, and they have this sense that they are really essential to the mental health of those individuals who are in their classrooms.

I think teachers, themselves, are really important for the mental health of many young people and, again, it goes back to the same issues that we've heard about time and time again from classroom teachers about the demands of data collection and the time spent on report cards and the obligatory professional learning communities.

All these demands which have come with the rollout of one initiative after another initiative coming from the department may be well intentioned, certainly well intentioned, but nothing has ever been rolled back. It's all been rolled out and nothing has been rolled back. Some of the teachers I talked with you could - they were gesturing like they want to be connecting with the kids, but instead there's a laptop with them travelling around the classroom where they have to document how they are interacting with the kids. The kids need what kids need, which is face-to-face, eye-to-eye emotional connection - and that's actually what all of us need for our mental health.

While I certainly would love to see more mental health resources in our schools, I think it's important to recognize how interconnected all of this is.

The teachers I've spoken with are really feeling time starved - time starved because they've got maybe 30 or 40 kids who are their kids, and they're trying to put in the time to maintain the emotional connection with those kids. They're worrying about them.

Then, of course, we're in this age and stage of our society where students are often sleep starved. I love that we have two Students for Teachers still up in the gallery - hi, Kenzi. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. They're not showing a great example of getting a lot of sleep, but I appreciate that they're here for a cause. I think that's wonderful.

So often students are sleep starved because they're going to sleep but waking up and checking their social media and seeing who commented last on their social media post, and not giving themselves the time that they need to take care of their own mental health. It is really important that we are learning and sharing information about how our collective mental health is affected by our technology at this point, and how we can ensure that students have the information and knowledge and skills and practices that they need in order to maintain their mental health.

That's something else that I think - the sense I get from teachers is that if they had a little bit more time, they could really be implementing or having more of those conversations. But there are so many different demands, so many different discrete little bits of accountability, learning objectives, different indicators, different outcomes, different assessments, different bits of paper - which aren't necessarily paper, but you know, computer boxes to tick - that are in some ways robbing us, and robbing our youth, of some of the most important resources for them and for their mental health.

Again, I would support mental health training being available to teachers. I myself did the mental health first aid course that was offered by the community health team just last year. There was one teacher in the class, and other people who were working with youth on a regular basis.

But as with so many things in education, you can roll back. You can look back from adolescence, and who are the adolescents who are most in danger of having mental health crises in their adolescence? Well, probably the same children who are most at risk earlier in their school careers. There's an often-cited study that shows that your literacy in Grade 3 is one of the most powerful indicators of future criminal involvement or run-ins with the justice system. It all goes back to early.

I would love to see us really taking seriously the abundance of evidence that shows that investment in the early years and in supporting families and the learning and the good start that kids need - so that they come to school ready to be at school. That investment from ages three to five can pay off - would pay off - in the adolescent years as well.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill this morning. Imagine a teacher in the early grades talking about kids that are in the classrooms around them, kids who are cutting themselves, students who are threatening suicide, students who have been severely abused, abandoned, who have seen their parents or siblings murdered, overdosed or beaten by their partners. Imagine these children in your classroom, students who desperately need help but they can't get the help and the teachers can't get them the help they know they need.

The teachers are focusing on those children, desperately trying to help them. Those children are consuming their time, taking away from the other children in the class because they need the teacher to hold them, they need the teacher to love them and tell them that it will be okay, even when the teacher truly doesn't know if it will be okay. These are the things happening in our schools.

I hear the minister talking about the strides he's making, rolling out the SchoolsPlus and some of this stuff and I'm sure that's good, progress is good. Meanwhile, we have the whole other large percentage of the teachers and the kids who are being left behind.

When I'm out talking to teachers, like my colleague from Pictou Centre mentioned, he asked what's the big thing, this often comes up. It often comes up because the teachers can see it themselves, there are so many children who desperately need the help. They have so many pressures on them and anxieties for academic reasons or some of the things going on at home, the large classroom sizes can exacerbate things for certain kids.

The supports just don't exist and that's not good enough. That's why this piece of legislation is a good bill but something that can address the problem. We don't have time to wait and when you look at the priorities of a government, this government will be remembered for its priorities. We're just asking that this be a priority that this government act upon.

We know some of the other priorities and we can talk back and forth about some of the things that money can be found for. I think we should be finding money for this because mental health first aid training is something that all teachers should have. In fact, it's something that everyone who comes in contact with a student should have.

I did speak with a teacher who relayed the experience of talking a child off a ledge. This child was prepared to go down four storeys and this particular teacher is a lifesaver. This teacher had some non-violent crisis intervention training and did have some mental health first aid, and that helped through those situations. But here was a teacher in an instance where that training kicked in and helped them.

Meanwhile, once they talked about the situation afterwards, they came to find out that the student had been talking about doing this for pretty much the whole week. The student had been talking that this was the thought process. So with some training for some

of those colleagues who were hearing those discussions, who were hearing those thoughts from the child, it probably wouldn't have gotten to that stage. This teacher did say that quite some time has passed, and it's only now that they can talk about that whole experience.

When you think about the cost of something like that in terms of the training and you relate that to the cost to society of not having the training, to me it's not wise. So we need to focus on these types of things because the current system is not working; it's just not working for anyone. Even kids in the classroom who can say I have anxiety and the teacher will have to let them go to see the mental health worker - if they have a mental health worker at their school because the reality is most of them don't and certainly not most when they're needed.

The situations that happen in the classroom when somebody is suffering with a mental illness, a child can be threatening to the other children around, and we know the impact that that may have on the other kids in that classroom. They are trying to avoid them; they are probably hoping that a child doesn't show up at school that day. Now, imagine the anxiety on the other 27 kids in that classroom who are also wondering what's going to happen, and oftentimes those kids are moved around a lot. They might just show up in a classroom as a new student - we have a new student today, kids. I remember when I was a kid that was kind of an exciting thing when you had a new student come up. But it's not always that way because the teachers aren't hearing in advance of some of the challenges that the child has, and they're having to learn it firsthand with some kind of an episode.

So we can do better; we can do better. This is a real issue in our schools; it's a real issue in our society. And when we're talking about the youngest people in our society, they have the right to expect - and those families have the right to expect - that there will be help, there will be help when they need it. That's all we're trying to do with this piece of legislation: We're trying to put this piece of legislation on the floor and have a discussion, and we did here. I did appreciate that the minister stayed until this hour and spoke to this bill, but there's always a little bit more we can do.

We'll talk a lot over the next couple of days about things that are happening in the classrooms for sure - and things that are not happening in the classrooms. But this is one that would certainly go into the category of, in my mind, has to happen. I think there's a lot of nice to happen, and we'll hear the government talk about how something will ultimately happen in the fullness of time. But this, to me, is one that, this is something that should be happening.

It's important to our caucus, and I know it's important to, I'd say, at least most of the members in this House. It's important to teachers, and if we're looking for an opportunity to kind of build a bridge back to teachers and show teachers some respect, this would be a good place to start, I think, because it's something they're struggling with and

they're taking it home to their own families, and they're losing sleep about it. They're trying to figure out how they can reach that child and help that child - and they're not being properly supported, and they're not being properly prepared.

So, I would urge the members opposite to give this bill some thought. Don't be too dismissive of this bill. It's a well-intentioned bill and it's a useful bill.

I thank you for your time this morning, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I thought I did pretty good here. We're a minute short of where I wanted it. So I'd say that all of this is great.

Mr. Speaker, if you would, where the Opposition's business is done for today, I'll pass it on to the Deputy Government House Leader to call the business for the rest of the day.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. TERRY FARRELL: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

MR. TERRY FARRELL: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 75.

Bill No. 75 - Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements (2017) Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 75 be now read for a second time.

It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to the second reading. Mr. Speaker, this bill is designed specifically to improve the teaching and learning environment for students and teachers in our public schools.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge everyone who has been directly impacted by the current labour situation with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. It has been a very

challenging and a very difficult time for parents and for students. It's been hard on teachers and principals. It's been challenging for school board staff and many others who have been working to manage the impact of the NSTU job action on student learning.

We have been through 16 months of collective bargaining and two months of job action, and both the union and province have argued that they were representing the views of students. Right now, no one is being hurt more than our students. We reached three tentative agreements. All three agreements were recommended by the union. All three times, the tentative agreements were rejected by the membership. It was clear that we were at an impasse.

Our belief now is that, with the tabling of Bill No. 75, we are setting the path for a new way forward. This bill will create a four-year agreement for the members of the NSTU. The elements contained within it represent the hard work of both parties.

The bill will establish the council to improve classroom conditions. For the first time, classroom teachers will sit on a council alongside representatives from the union and the government to talk about classroom improvements. The views of teachers from elementary school, middle school, and high school will all be represented, as will geographic regions within the province. Within 14 days of the bill being passed, the council will be appointed, and they will have \$20 million over two years to address issues in the classroom and the solutions that they want. Mr. Speaker, this means classroom teachers will have, for the first time, a direct say in how that \$20 million gets invested in their classrooms.

I have met with many teachers and heard from many teachers who have very clearly articulated what those concerns are. In response to what we are hearing, the council will have several priority areas to report on by April 30, 2017. Those priority areas, which were brought to us by the teachers, include data collection, assessment and evaluation, attendance policies, and PowerSchool and TIENET. The council will address other issues including the scope of practice for teachers and complex classrooms. But they must address those ones I've just mentioned and report by April 30th. In addition, Mr. Speaker, there is a commitment to maintain current class caps for Primary to Grade 6, and we will continue to respond to class sizes in junior and senior high. Class sizes at all levels will also be addressed by the council.

A three-person commission on inclusive education will be established. Two experts in the field of inclusive education will be appointed, one by the government and one by the union. A nationally recognized independent chair will be jointly appointed by those two. The commission will be launched within 30 days of the bill being passed, and it must return with an interim report by June 30th to allow for initial implementation in the upcoming school year.

The bill provides a wage pattern for teachers which remains at a 3 per cent increase over four years, consistent with what has been accepted by 10 other employee groups and a wage this province can afford. Retirement bonuses will be frozen and based on the salary a teacher makes upon retirement as per the three tentative agreements. The Department of Finance and Treasury Board will immediately begin to work to create a program to provide employees with the option to access the Public Service award earlier than their retirement.

We know teachers have always had the best interest of their students as a priority, and going forward, this legislation will ensure that students remain the priority of both students and government. Teaching today is not easy. The complexities in the classroom are many. It is our responsibility as government to work with our teachers so that they can leave the classroom every day with a sense of satisfaction.

As a government, we recognize how important it is to work co-operatively to ensure students are given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

We are confident that the Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements (2017) Act is the best way forward. It sets a new direction for working together with teachers and a solid path to improved classroom working conditions and provide quality education. Teachers should see their fingerprints on the bill. It brings classroom teachers into the decision-making realm about what those changes will be and how they will be funded.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, again it's looking to the opportunity to speak to Bill No. 75, the Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements (2017) Act. Again, there are so many things that one can talk about this particular bill and I'm hoping that when the dust has settled that there will be some great improvements in our school system and there will be less pressure on the system as it stands right now because the education system needs an overhaul.

What is happening in our classrooms is not working or meeting the needs of students. The face-to-face teaching time has decreased. Inclusion is not working because there is a lack of human resources to make it work. Inclusion without adequate support will not work, and many parents are agreeing with this and I'm certain the teachers are.

Mr. Speaker, we certainly have overwhelming challenges in today's classrooms. We have a real smorgasbord of students who have meltdowns, aggression, students with panic attacks, students and teachers being kicked and pushed, spit upon. There's a lot of things happening that are not being properly addressed.

Students with several grade levels apart in a classroom, several grade levels apart in academic skills. Needless to say, I'm disappointed in a lot of things that are happening in our classrooms today, Mr. Speaker.

Everyone has an opinion on education. During my 30-year career as a classroom teacher, resource coordinator, administrator responsible for special needs students, I have witnessed many changes in our education system from within and, in recent years, as an outsider. I'm proud to say that I've remained close to the school environment through numerous friends who are still teaching in our school system and through countless visits and conversations with teachers, student services, and administrators in our school system across the province.

Mr. Speaker, increased demands have been steadily arriving on teachers' desks from the department over the past many years. Unfortunately, teachers continue to tell me that the supports for these initiatives were usually not available. What has occurred in our education system are things that have become unmanageable in the classroom. Of course, we mentioned a few minutes ago inclusion, the inclusive environment which we all want but it's not working. Teachers will tell you that it's not working, parents will tell you that it's not working because this environment was created but the support system wasn't put in place to make it work and that has to happen.

Changes in our classrooms can be positive; however, it has to be reasonable, supported, and manageable. It continues to be very puzzling by this government and the Premier refused to address very serious issues that would not cost taxpayers any of their hard-earned dollars. Several unsatisfactory issues, like the following, should have been taken care of in the beginning. This would have shown a sign of faith that the government was actually listening to teachers.

Some of these things I'm referring to - one would be the discipline policy. We need a very firm discipline policy in our schools. We not only need a firm discipline policy in our schools but one that's going to be enforced, one that's going to be supported, not only by the local board but by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. A lot of administrators in the province feel that they're left dangling on a clothesline, because when push comes to shove, they find that they don't have the support they need to enact parts of that discipline policy.

Another particular area that the government could have looked at very easily prior to the 18 months that we've been talking about for the last couple of days is an attendance policy - and again, an attendance policy with some teeth in it. It's very difficult to force a student to attend class these days. Can you imagine teaching a Grade 12 biology class and not seeing a student for a couple of weeks, and then he shows up to write a test on a Friday morning? Well, that student has a right to write that test. That student also has a right to see the teacher at the end of class and say, I want the notes that you passed out to the students over the past two weeks, and you should give the student those notes.

However, if you don't, I'm sure that that afternoon a parent will probably be in the school talking to the administrator and the administrator will be at your door requesting those notes.

There are all kinds of examples where teachers will meet students in hallways, cafeterias, or music rooms during times when they should be in an instructional class. They'll request that they go back to class, and often the answer is either silence, or I'm not going. It has reached a point where it is more than ridiculous with how attendance is handled in our schools, because the policy is really not there. There are no teeth in it. Schools feel that they're not being supported.

Another factor they could have looked at 18 months ago is the retention policy, where everyone passes. Again, we've heard varying degrees of whether there is one or isn't one, but all the teachers and administrators and student services I've talked to will tell me that it does exist. If it doesn't exist on paper, it certainly has been passed on verbally to the schools, because people move on, and again, later I will mention students who are entering our school system at a very young age - age four. Some of them are not prepared to enter the school system at that particular age, and very quickly others will continue to fall behind. They are moved on to another grade level, and another grade level, and very quickly some of these students are having difficulty reading or writing, or their math skills are a couple of grade levels below. The problems start to multiply as they continue to move up the line.

Another problem in our school system is enforceable deadlines, which are essential for student accountability. A high school student really doesn't have to pass that assignment or project in on time - hard to believe. A teacher teaching a Grade 11 history course has an assignment due on Monday morning, and 10 students do not pass that assignment in. It is my understanding that that student cannot receive a zero. That student cannot receive demerits on the value of that particular assignment. Also, in a semestered school, that student actually can wait until the very last day of school before he passes in his particular test. Of course that makes it very awkward, cumbersome and difficult for teachers to get their information to PowerSchool where all the grades and marks go.

Enforceable deadlines - I mean that has to be something that we put into our schools and make students accountable because the reality of it is, they will be accountable when they leave school and get out into the workforce, or if they go to community college or go to universities. In most cases if a professor tells his class that the assignment is due Tuesday evening at 6:00 p.m., it had better be at his office or inside the door and if it's not, my understanding in the past has been that you can forget any evaluation for that particular assignment.

Another thing that many teachers have mentioned to me, Mr. Speaker, is that when changes are occurring, they don't feel they are engaged or feel like they are part of it. Certainly they want to be engaged, they want to be part of any new initiatives, any new

programs that are not going to take their time away from teaching in the classroom. So again, that's something that could easily be taken care of and certainly at no cost.

One pet peeve of mine, Mr. Speaker - the initiatives that are coming down from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development through the school boards to the schools each year. I think we should have a reduction in initiatives. In fact I would even support a freeze for a couple of years on initiatives and let teachers do what they want to do, and that is teach.

I can recall the last few years as an administrator - a principal of a high school, Mr. Speaker - and arriving at school in the middle of August to prepare for the school opening in September and finding on my desk new initiatives, new programs, new things that have to be done, they are mandatory. They are passed on from the Department of Education and I'm saying to myself, imagine, my first meeting with my staff I'm going to have to tell them that this is mandatory, you have more responsibilities, you have more things to do in your classroom, things that are not really attached to the actual teaching of kids.

That was a tough sell. It wasn't easy to do, I didn't want to do it, I didn't like doing it, and I even went to the superintendent and said to him, would you please get on your phone and phone the Department of Education and tell them to take a vacation for a while, leave us alone, let the teachers teach. That phone call didn't happen.

Those are the types of issues that I think could have been addressed early in the bargaining and negotiations and so on, or perhaps divorced from it - discipline policy, attendance policy, retention policy, enforceable deadlines, letting teachers be engaged in whatever changes are occurring, and a reduction in initiatives.

It probably wouldn't cost any money to do that but it would certainly have made the environment a lot more favourable. It would have shown some faith in teachers, that you were really going to try to do something to help them and help the school system.

These changes would quickly make real, positive change in our classrooms and again, probably a zero dollar value. A reasonable government would quickly provide the support for our classrooms and not ignore them. We have gone too far and too long, Mr. Speaker, talking and speaking and putting things on paper and change is not really happening.

The Premier continues to tell Nova Scotians through the media that he wants to go back to normal. This is something that has really upset teachers because during the work-to-rule they have been teaching, they have been following their contractual obligations and teaching and working with students every single day. Going back to normal is not exactly what the teachers want because going back to normal means a lot of things that they see that are wrong within our school system.

For example, overcrowded classrooms, Mr. Speaker - that's what we mean by going back to normal, the way things were. Looking at our soft caps, we would prefer seeing all hard caps but there's a lot of soft caps in our schools. There's a lot of classes that are combined classes that are too large. There are classes in our schools where there may be three or four students in it because it's a particular program. We could have a French immersion class with a certain number in it. Some of these small classes cause other classes to be very large. So do we have classes in our high schools in Nova Scotia that have 40 students? Absolutely.

Going back to the norm, Mr. Speaker, means a lack of resource support. Teachers feel that that particular support is inadequate. Behavioural issues are not being addressed and of course ineffective use of teachers' time because a lot of responsibilities they have are outside of their actual teaching the curriculum in the classroom setting.

As I mentioned earlier, going back to the norm would mean a no-fail policy. They certainly want that addressed. They want that particular policy addressed where, if necessary, they may have to retain some students sometimes.

Again, going back to normal would mean the endless and unproductive data entry that teachers are required to do. Speaking to a teacher a couple of days ago, Mr. Speaker, they mentioned - I can't recall how many students right at the moment, but they had 1,600 blocks to tick off in the computer program for their class.

Going back to normal means a lack of consequences related to attendance. I have already spoken about attendance, Mr. Speaker. No requirements for timely completion of assignments and, most important of all, very long wait times for speech-language pathological assessments. If there's a major problem in our schools, we have too few speech-language pathologists. Many of them have several schools to look after. Schools may see them once a week, if they are very lucky they may see them twice a week. You may have a psychologist coming in and doing assessments with a student which will take the entire day to have that completed and reported upon. You may not see that psychologist for another week where they will try to arrange meetings with the staff and parents. Again, there's such a long wait-list and there's students falling through the cracks as a result.

This is today's standard, Mr. Speaker, it is a typical day in every school in this province. When I look at that, I think it's safe to say that the Premier and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have failed students, parents and teachers. There's a relationship there that's fraying, it's weak and I've been very disappointed with the government's approach because there are a lot of things the government could have done in the early stages to help teachers and student services and other personnel in our schools and above all, the students who are the most important. Any sensible government would have approached this differently.

Teachers know what is wrong with the education system. Teachers are left to support all the learning needs and issues of approximately 30 students of various abilities in their classrooms without proper support. Mr. Speaker, in our classrooms today you will have four or five pockets of various intellectual abilities. You will have a lot of students on IPPs. You may be teaching a Grade 9 math class with 30 students in the class, and you may have 12 students on IPPs. Once upon a time, Mr. Speaker, you could have one IPP that would suit all 12 students who needed IPPs. Now you are not allowed to do that. You have to have an individual IPP for each individual student. This takes a tremendous amount of time. You also have to arrange meetings with a parent or parents for each one of those students twice within the school year.

Some teachers believe there are too many students on IPPs. Some teachers believe that there are students on IPPs because they've been pushed through grade after grade after grade, and finally, when they start hitting the upper middle school years and into early high school years, they run into a brick wall. Things become very difficult for them, and they are unable to achieve any success with their curriculum.

There's a lot of things that can occur quickly and easily that don't cost any money. It would certainly be a great start and would earn a lot of faith in the department with regard to improving education in our system. Teachers are tired of hearing how the department and the government wishes to improve education. Are they truly committed to making a difference? Teachers feel the answer is no because the trust between teachers and the government has been destroyed. Approximately 18 months and three tentative agreements have certainly reached the boiling point where the teachers believe that perhaps the only way things are going to be improved would be a change in government, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure you don't want to hear that.

Why does the government continue to insist on creating committees to study or identify problems? Why are we looking for experts? The experts are in the classroom. We have thousands of experts in our classrooms across the province. If you want to know what's wrong with our classroom situations in Nova Scotia, invite a few teachers in. You can find them anywhere from Yarmouth to Sydney. They will tell you what the problems are. They'll even tell you what the solutions are, Mr. Speaker, because they have the solutions.

We don't have to spend any money on committees. We don't have to spend any money on experts. The experts are there. Go see them. Go talk to them. Find the problems. Find the solutions. Most importantly of all, act on them.

Teachers do not want to see any more dollars spent on committees or studies. They would prefer that any of those dollars that might be available be put right into the classrooms where you can help students. I'm sure taxpayers do not want dollars spent on committees when the answers and solutions are staring right at them. Spend the money to

fix the problems instead of spending it on committees. Enough studies, it's time to implement some solutions.

Again, no need to spend money throwing around I believe maybe \$8 million, which is the cost for these two days off. Teachers didn't want that. They didn't request it. They didn't ask for it. They were insulted. But they did say, if you have that \$8 million, let's put that right into the school system and help the students who need the help.

With that type of money, there's a lot of things we can do that would be very beneficial to our school system. You could add support, psychologists, SLPs, ASD specialists, guidance counsellors, resource teachers, educational assistants, mental health specialists, or Reading Recovery. The list could go on of things that schools need to identify and support students who are in need. Certainly, there are a lot of students who are on EPAs, who need more assistance, Mr. Speaker, because in some schools educational assistants are not getting the opportunity any longer to help struggling students. They are assigned to a student due to disruptive behaviour, and these particular students suffering from this type of disruptive behaviour are sometimes endangering students in the classroom and other personnel, so it's necessary to have an educational assistant assigned to them to prevent someone from getting injured or hurt.

We certainly need more school psychologists to address the backlog of students waiting for Psych-Ed assessments. There are some schools where their students are on a two-to-three-year wait-list. There are that many students with a lack of school psychologists to address the problems, and that is something that should not be happening. We certainly need more guidance counsellors, behavioural specialists. We have too many students now in our schools who are stressed out, depressed, suffering anxiety, and having panic attacks. They need help, and often the help is not there. Like I mentioned earlier, we do have a good program, the SchoolsPlus program, but they're stretched to the limit. The people working in that program, their caseloads are filled and there's no one else to pick up the slack.

So, again, another big issue is when are we going to make students accountable - we have fallen off the fence with regard to making students accountable. Again, you will have a certain percentage of students in school who are very motivated, and they will learn regardless of what is happening around them. They're accountable, they get their work done, they make good marks, and they will be successful. However, there are a lot of students who, for whatever the reason, are not accountable - you can't get them to school, you can't get them to attend class, and you can't get them to complete assignments on time.

I can remember one occasion where - well, more than one occasion - there was this particular student, he was a Grade 9 student, and he was on the fence as far as making it or breaking it and not moving on into high school. I, on a number of occasions, would drive to his house, get him out of bed, put him in the car, and take him to school. I met him about 15 years later, and he thanked me profusely for doing that; he really appreciated it. He also

told me it didn't work because he didn't finish high school. But, however, you try to do whatever you can to encourage students to educate themselves to be educated so that they can move on in life and provide for themselves.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, is it might be time to re-examine standardized testing, especially at the elementary grades. That is something that a number of teachers have mentioned to me. Teachers know which students are struggling; they don't need standardized tests to tell them. They work with these students every day, they deal with these students every day, they test these students every day - and they don't need standardized tests to prove this.

So, as I mentioned before, more resource teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, and early literacy teachers are something that our school system needs. Teachers will also say that there's just too many management jobs in the system, in the hierarchy. There are too many high-paying management jobs, and if these were removed and some of them they feel are unnecessary, this money could be well spent in our school system.

They felt that sometimes these management jobs are positions that are dictating school improvement programs to justify their existence. They do not improve learning in our schools. They do not improve learning conditions in our schools. They actually have a negative impact on teachers and administrators' time.

Mr. Speaker, teachers have mentioned that they wonder if we should continue to use PowerTeacher Gradebook in elementary schools. Is it really appropriate? They certainly believe it's time to reduce the number of outcomes they are dealing with. Teachers have hundreds of outcomes to know, to teach, assess and report. This is just not realistic. They have a tremendous amount of data input each and every day, regardless of whether it's PowerSchool, TIENET, or any other computer program they're responsible for putting data in.

There's lots of teachers who spend many hours a day putting data in, planning, teaching, assessing and putting in this data that's mandatory. When it is report card time, Mr. Speaker, they spend countless hours after school, evenings, weekends, due to the cumbersome reporting they have to do.

Teachers sometimes are lucky enough to have prep time in schools and that just depends on what level - if it's elementary, middle or high school. Some teachers in semester schools for a whole semester may not even have one prep period where they can do all the things that are necessary. Some teachers that have prep time use it to help students, finishing projects with students, phoning parents, counselling students. Prep time is basically there for them to prepare their curriculum to teach students but often they don't have that opportunity because of the reasons I just mentioned.

There are many problems being ignored in our school system. We probably should revamp the provincial testing, allow classroom teachers to give input. We need more EAs for diverse learners. I mentioned earlier that inclusion is not working because the support system is not there. Perhaps we should revamp PowerSchool, TIENET - there's too much time spent on data collection.

It's time to perhaps update some areas of our curriculum also, Mr. Speaker. That is an ongoing job for some but it's a very slow process. Teachers believe there's certainly areas that are outdated and should be changed. And who should do this? The classroom teachers should do this. It shouldn't come down from the top, it shouldn't come from the hierarchy. It's the teachers in the classrooms who know what has to be changed, what should be changed, and we don't need outside consultants to do this here. By using the grassroots, we can also save money and probably have it done right. Again, I'm a big believer in asking teachers for input.

We have to move forward with the main goal to improve education together, in an agreeable and respectful manner. Schools are very complex environments, Mr. Speaker. We have students with ADHD who are medicated, we have students with ADHD who are not medicated. We have students suffering with ASD, we have students suffering with suicidal thoughts, we have students in our schools suffering from hearing loss. We have several students below grade level, we have several students with documented adaptations. Can you imagine a teacher in a classroom faced with these types of lesson plans every day? It takes a tremendous amount of time to prepare these lesson plans for a diverse group in your classroom. Some teachers are struggling because it's just not manageable. They want to help all the students in their classroom, but there are days when they can't, and students are falling through the cracks.

When we talk about specialists - for example, a speech-language pathologist - they often have too many schools. Their caseloads are often too heavy. They often cannot get to the most challenging students. They're in a position where they try to take care of the urgent cases and every other case falls through the cracks.

As we mentioned earlier, when we were talking about a bill, mental health issues are skyrocketing. For some reason, there are a tremendous number of mental health problems and issues in our schools. It's very disappointing when I talk to elementary teachers in elementary settings and they tell me that there are a lot of students arriving at elementary school who have a lot of issues, and many of them are not being looked after because the support systems are not there to help them. It's a matter of other cases falling through the cracks.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of changes that could be handled and used and put in place without going through a lot of time-consuming committee work. The future of our province sits in the classroom, plain and simple, and that is where the financial system has to be placed.

As school boards in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development increase in size, interaction between the top and bottom has become less and less personal, and certainly more top-heavy. The pyramid has reversed. The schools on the bottom are crumbling under the weight, and teachers have been trying to fix the cracks. They need help. No one individual or department is to blame. All are well meaning, but it's just too much.

As of late, you'll often get asked what's wrong with the education system, and "what do teachers really want?" Well, there's no simple answer, but there are solutions. Teachers, first and foremost, want a fair and manageable workload. They want respect for the job they do in what has become a less-than-ideal working and learning environment. Again, their teaching environment is the students' learning environment.

When asked how we got to this stage in our education system, the answer is very complicated. The following policy changes over the last 15 to 20 years have created the perfect storm in education and in our classroom today.

Many teachers will say we should reconsider the age of entry for Primary students. It was lowered to allow four-year-old children to enter a structured classroom environment. Developmentally, many are not school-ready and are at a disadvantage. This policy will feed into the next one - and again, this is feedback that I'm receiving from teachers, Mr. Speaker.

The motive behind the no-fail policy - not retaining, holding, repeating, whatever you call it - is not wanting to damage a child's self-esteem. But moving into Grade 1 while not having mastered the Primary outcome places students in a position where they very quickly realize that they are not as good or as smart as their classmates, and this, in my opinion, impacts children's self-esteem and confidence more negatively. This can feed a sense of frustration for the child.

Meanwhile, a Grade 1 teacher, in essence, now has both Primary-level students still requiring Primary outcomes and students ready for the Grade 1 outcomes.

The same thing happens in each successive year from Grades 1 to 6 at the end of June. In each successive grade, you begin to have more and more students below grade level in reading and math, and it really starts to show in grades 3 through 6. This becomes a bigger and bigger problem for both students and teachers, who are trying to teach to the outcomes for each grade level. Mastering the outcomes at each grade level is essential to taking the next step in a child's education. A strong foundation is paramount to student success.

Again, as many of these students are moving along, they're falling one or two or more grade levels behind. Then they write Nova Scotia achievement tests or other achievement tests, and the results come back lower than the Canadian standard in math,

literacy, and so on. Then you have to look at the dynamics of that classroom. Yes, I have a class of 25, but there are 12 two grade levels below where they should be. I also have maybe five there who are struggling, maybe a grade level below. But they all write this test, and these are the results.

Teachers are now, in each successive grade, juggling to meet the needs of students at reading levels as much as three to four years apart. That's not an easy task. More and more students require adaptations or IPPs, which are Individual Program Plans, in order to achieve success. These students who are falling behind by two or three grade levels are placed on IPPs so they can become successful, but they're not receiving the instructional curriculum at a level where other students are. All students deserve the teacher's one-on-one support, but it is now becoming almost impossible. Some students will have the support of resource teachers or hopefully EPAs, if they are lucky. All these adaptations and IPPs require a considerable amount of meetings and preparation by teachers.

Furthermore, because students often are frustrated with not being able to do the work in the grade level they are in, along come behavioural problems. These distract and cover for not looking stupid because that is how they see themselves in these situations. That's just the reality of it.

By now, you are probably beginning to see what the classroom teacher is up against. Keep connecting the dots because there is more.

Total integration: every child has the right to attend a regular age-appropriate classroom in his or her neighbourhood school. Although there are many positives with this model, it is not without its pitfalls. Why? Because without the extra resources, both human and material, no teacher can possibly feel anything but overwhelmed and frustrated with this type of situation.

Now not only do you have a very diverse classroom composition of students behind in reading and math levels but also students with mental and emotional problems, students on adaptations, students requiring formalized IPPs, students with mild to severe behavioural problems - many requiring restraint when violent - students with physical challenges, and other special-needs students with varying levels of learning difficulties. That's what many teachers are facing within their classroom today. It's a very, very difficult job.

I want to move on further, Mr. Speaker, to the discipline policy. I believe there is a direct link between the no-fail policy and increased classroom behavioural problems, born out of feelings of frustration and lack of confidence that students experience because they can't do the work, and some just give up.

The primary response to discipline problems rests with the classroom teacher. But quite frankly the teacher, who is trying to juggle so many balls in the air, just doesn't have

time to address disciplinary problems as these require an immediate response and a lot of paper and data input afterwards. Therefore the principal or vice-principal, out of necessity, spends more time each day simply putting out fires.

The option for an out-of-school suspension has in the last number of years been frowned upon in favour of an in-school suspension but the in-school suspension option requires supervision by staff, the principal, a resource teacher or a learning centre teacher and if this particular person is looking after this in-school suspension they are taking time away from that person helping struggling students.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that as a result of every incident, an incident report must be filled out and entered into PowerSchool for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. I'm not sure about the need for this. Principals used to be able to deal with the school problems at the school. Certainly I can recall doing that myself, in consultation with parents and that was it. The schools have a code of conduct with consequences for unacceptable behaviour - with parents supporting the school it makes it much easier.

Of course another problem today, Mr. Speaker, in some cases parents are not supporting the school, parents are not supporting the teachers and that becomes a problem within itself. Children have to learn to accept and take responsibility for their choices and actions. We must also reward good behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour is just another distraction for classroom teachers.

Mr. Speaker, so far we have the following problem areas; age of entry, no-fail policy, and discipline, total integration without the appropriate supports. Are we getting a feel for classroom composition and teacher workload yet? Well, if time permits, there is more. Change, change, change - change is good and necessary. It's essential to progress and it's how improvements are brought about but sometimes there is a desire to make a change to something that works, which is unnecessary. I think teachers are feeling that this is often the case in their jobs.

With the many changes in the curriculum and report cards, is it any wonder that teachers feel overwhelmed. Added to the teachers' workload is all the data entry tasks required by the school board and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Teachers must find the time to plan lessons for the classroom, which is very diverse in learning levels and styles. To incorporate the new initiatives, spend hours on new report cards - it seems to change every other year - develop adaptations for certain students, develop IPPs for special needs students, make phone calls to parents and the list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker. I hope that any future changes that would affect students and teachers will come about with greater teacher input - input from the grassroots teachers, the teachers that I call who are in the trenches doing the job.

Who is more qualified to decide what our students need to succeed than the classroom teacher? Policies and new initiatives should never be made by individuals who are years removed from the school and classroom. That's a complaint that many teachers have, Mr. Speaker, that a lot of these policies and ideas that come down from the top are from people who are not really connected to the classrooms any longer because things have changed and they change very rapidly. They certainly have changed since I've been in the classroom and working as an administrator in the school. Spend time in a school and walk in the teacher's shoes and a person will find that out very quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I'll probably end by saying do I think the system can be fixed? The answer to that is absolutely. Will it be an easy fix? Absolutely not. Who is going to fix the system? I think it is going to take all stakeholders to fix the system. It's going to take the department, it's going to take the school boards, it's going to take the administrators, it's going to take the teachers. I think the most important people in that lineup are the teachers because they certainly can address the problems that have led up to the present situation, and by listening to them, taking their advice as to what works and what doesn't work, and by demonstrating a willingness to change once we find out what has to change, only then can real change be realized.

Teachers have tried for far too long to be everything to everyone and we know that's impossible and this should not even be expected. They are asking for more time to teach and less of all the extras that distract from what they love and do best - of course that is teaching children in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, something has to give. The teachers have given enough and are willing to take action to make our schools better again - for students, for parents and for teachers themselves. Of course the remedy starts, hopefully, with this particular bill, but eventually these changes are going to occur.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've covered all the areas and items that I wanted to tonight. I'm going to stop here and give the opportunity to someone else to speak on this particular bill, and I thank you for the opportunity to say a few words.

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

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise to my feet tonight and talk about this really disappointing bill. We've been hearing a lot of facts and figures from the government today and it's interesting to note that when the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development talks about it she talks in a very calm tone today, a very registered tone quality. I'm sure that is to try and diffuse the emotions and the passions that are flying quite high around this bill all across the province right now.

Bill No. 75 - I call it the Blizzard Bill - an Act Respecting Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvement (2017) Act, I have to say that most of the people I'm hearing from are telling me they are heartbroken - heartbroken is the word I've been hearing a lot today. In a week when teachers are supposed to be honoured, valued, and appreciated, these teachers in Nova Scotia are being made to feel completely unappreciated, undervalued, and underpaid now.

Teachers are an interesting breed of people. They are compassionate, they are caring, they love to throw themselves into all kinds of things that they are not paid for in order to help create a better society and in order to help children grow and learn and thrive. But these teachers have been working a lot of hours overtime and more and more the work of the job has crept up so that they are being inundated and they are drowning in all of the extra elements they are supposed to now do, which they feel that many of them are a waste of time, really - the data crunching, all of the paperwork which has been piling up, the testing - there are many, many things that need to go.

In fact teachers are saying that these last several work-to-rule days and weeks have shown them exactly what life can be like when they have a regular life, when they can come and go to work, and they leave at the end of the day and they can have a healthy home life, they can spend time with their families, with their children, instead of spending hours upon hours of doing all the extra paperwork, data crunching, and also the extracurricular activities.

Now I have to say I haven't talked to one teacher who has said that they don't like to do extracurricular activities. They love them, they thrive on teaching kids new things and having fun with them. That's why they are teachers; that's why I say it takes a certain type of person.

I think the public has become complacent in expecting that this is part of their job and that when suddenly they are faced with the fact that teachers are saying okay, we have only a few tools at our disposal and one of them is to stop doing the extracurricular activities, people are saying well they should be doing these extracurricular activities. Why aren't they doing the Christmas musicals, the Christmas concerts and the musicals and the coaching? Well it's because they have to do something and this is really the only tool they have, other than striking.

Now if they were to strike and take away all of their work throughout the day and after school, then there would be a lot more trouble. They know that. The parents would have to get babysitters for the kids, put them in daycares, whatever. It would cause them a lot more trouble. They've been very, very good about letting parents know ahead of time what they're going to do, what they are planning, so the parents can plan.

Of course, this all came to nothing on the day when the teachers showed up at school and the children and their parents were told, don't bother coming to school. That

day - I believe it was December 5th - was a mess. As far as I'm concerned, as somebody who has been watching it from the inside and watching it from the outside, it seemed like a chess game that the government was playing, with children and parents for pawns. They expected the Teachers Union to do something; the Teachers Union did something else and they cried. They took their toys and they went home. They said okay, we're going to close up the schools and we don't want any kids there because it's unsafe.

Later on they went running around getting nine different superintendents to sign something saying that, oh yes, they agreed that it was unsafe. It's smoke and mirrors, Mr. Speaker. It's like watching the Trump Administration. They make up a story and then they've got to go and backtrack to fill in all the empty gaps to try to make the story stick. Some of us just aren't as gullible as others. We see these chess moves being made and personally I feel it an affront that the public, the average, ordinary person, is being led along by the nose and made to sort of believe this spin. It's like, who's wagging the dog here?

Teachers have had their eyes widened, so have filmmakers, so have home care workers, so have health care workers, so have bus drivers and cafeteria workers and groundskeepers - EAs, education assistants. When the government started panicking about their decision to lock children out of schools, when they started to see that this was really going south and this was not a very good strategy at all because it was really making the public very angry, what did they do? They started throwing everybody under the bus. They started throwing the Teachers Union under the bus; then they started throwing the teachers under the bus. Then they threw the education assistants under the bus when they said well we thought it wasn't going to be safe because nobody was going to be there to meet the special needs buses.

That's a completely different union, those are NSGEU workers and they weren't even on strike, they weren't even doing the work-to-rule. So they were insulted and I had many of them writing to me and coming up to me at different public events saying you have to do something. These people are lying through their teeth. They're blaming everybody except themselves for their own mistakes. Here we are trying to do our jobs. We don't even get paid very much for it - \$14 an hour, whoopee. We love our jobs, but they're trying to make us look like we're the bad guys. They're trying to say that we weren't going to be there to meet our kids, who we love, who we would never put in danger.

This is the core of the issue for me, Mr. Speaker. It's bringing it down to an emotional level of human beings, of people, who are being hurt. It is a political chess game of governments trying to say to the public, these are the bad guys, and you're over here, and trying to do a divide-and-conquer manoeuvre. God knows, governments have been doing that for umpteen years, but that's bad government.

When this government came in power, they talked about One Nova Scotia. What has happened to One Nova Scotia? How do you have One Nova Scotia when you keep

trying to divide and conquer the whole province? You turn this one against that one, and you turn this one against that one. The next thing you know, nobody's happy, and everybody is blaming everybody else. That's not One Nova Scotia. One Nova Scotia is, we are all civilized human beings who deserve respect. When you have collective bargaining and you have unions, you need to treat them with respect, and you need to have fair bargaining.

The preamble to the bill begins, "Whereas the education system of Nova Scotia is of vital importance and students have a right and a responsibility to participate fully in learning opportunities." Well of course the education system is of vital importance. We all know that.

That's why it's so important not to go forward with this bill. Teachers are of vital importance. Teachers are of importance to the education system. You wouldn't have an education system without the teachers.

This government has already disrespected teachers by enacting Bill No. 148 and refusing to implement change in the classroom, which the teachers have been asking for for the past year. I stood here in this place and said to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development over a year ago that teachers are complaining that the classes are too big, and teachers are complaining about the data collection. The minister stood there and said no, the teachers are happy. The teachers love us. Oh, I'm best friends with the teachers. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but she misspoke. That is not the case at all. In fact, I was on to something over a year ago when I started bringing these issues to the minister.

How will a bill that tramples on rights of teachers actually improve the situation here in Nova Scotia? Personally, I don't think it will. I'll tell you right now, there are thousands - 9,300 to be honest and more because they have parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and children, and former teachers - all howling right now. It's become very clear that for students to participate fully in learning opportunities, teachers do have to go above and beyond their contractual duties. But they've been doing this, as I said, for years. The impact of work-to-rule has demonstrated that this is the case.

What has the government given them in return? A legislated contract. Legislate, don't dictate. That was on the signs that many of them have been holding up for many months now - sorry, negotiate, don't legislate. Don't dictate.

This is something that I think this government has had in its mind the entire time. They planned on doing this. Why? Because they want to balance the budget. That's the only reason. They keep trying to throw all these people under the bus.

We've had the Teachers Union sitting here when the minister will either play up to them and try to say, oh, you people know; or the next day, she'll try to throw them under the bus by picking out a letter, reading one line from a letter, trying to say that the Teachers

Union didn't want the teachers to have any say to the government about anything. Yet when I asked one of the Pages to make me a copy of it, I saw the entire letter was actually from the unions asking the government to cease and desist because they had breached the contract with the teachers already. So, this is misleading, Mr. Speaker. It's smoke and mirrors as I said, and I can't believe that in Nova Scotia, in Canada, we would be playing these kinds of games.

The next, part two, "Whereas following a 48-hour notice of strike as provided under the Teachers' Collective Bargaining Act, the Union directed members to partially withdraw services from December 5, 2016 to January 23, 2017 and to resume partially withdrawing services on January 30, 2017." That's the next part of the preamble. Well, yes, the teachers began to implement work-to-rule on December 5, 2016 as I said, and they had the right to that job action while there was no contract in place. So how is pointing this out a reason for legislating a contract?

This bill backtracks on progress that has been made at the bargaining table. It extends the wage freeze for four months as compared to the third tentative agreement. This is a slap in the face to teachers; in fact, teachers are calling this the slap-in-the-face Act. It removes third-party arbitration for any impasse resulting from the work of the council to improve classroom conditions. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say this is troubling, this is extremely troubling given that there are concerns about how the work of this council will unfold and whether it will be able to actually improve classroom conditions. In fact, the teachers and the Teachers Union are really scratching their heads and wondering, will this really even happen? Where is this money going to go, and will it actually be spent in the way that the minister is saying that it will be? They're asking whether it will actually improve classroom conditions.

How the council to improve classroom conditions is selected has changed also from what was agreed to in the tentative agreements. In the third tentative agreement, there was a maximum of three from the union, three from the department, and one from each school board. In this bill, the council will be made up of four representatives appointed by the department, one representative appointed by the union, and nine classroom teachers appointed by the school board superintendents. School board superintendents - I wonder if they're the same superintendents who actually came up with the non-safety issue for the minister when she was in dire need of some kind of proof.

These sort of things - "Whereas negotiations, conducted in good faith, between the Minister and the Union are at an impasse following the rejection of the most recent tentative agreement . . ." - I take umbrage to that, Mr. Speaker. Conducted in good faith, I would say from day one this has not been conducted in good faith, and the Teachers Union will tell you. And I'll bet you anything when this goes to court the court will tell you that as well because how can anything be conducted in good faith when you have a gun to your head in the form of Bill No. 148 which they knew was in the government's back pocket, which they knew that the government could take out and use if and when they chose to and, in

fact, they knew that any kind of legislation was right around the corner, which December 5th actually proved.

We came to the brink of that legislation being implemented and put into place on December 5th, and then it was stopped. And that was a good thing, and it would be nice if that could happen again this time. But it seems to me that perhaps the backbenchers have been whipped into shape this time, whipped into doing what the government wants. And I understand, as I've said many times in this House, what it's like to be a backbencher and have to be told to do things that you don't necessarily want to do. I feel sorry for people who are feeling mixed emotions right now, and I certainly understand that it's not an easy thing to do, but I have to say this bill is outrageously bad and we should not be passing this bill. It's going to hurt relations with teachers in this province for years to come. The Savage years are much remembered by my mother and people of her age and that was in the early 1990s and people had forgotten, younger teachers coming up the ranks didn't know, they took a chance on this Liberal Government and here they are, with a slap in the face, just like the film industry and the home care workers and the nurses and the health care workers and even just to have the Premier take out a letter in the *Chronicle Herald* promising union workers that he was on their side and he believed in this kind of bargaining.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but he has completely done the opposite, just like he did with the film industry when he promised that they would have the film tax credit safe for another five to 10 years and then did the opposite. That's pulling the rug out from under people's feet. That is not the essence of integrity.

People are looking for integrity in their government officials. They want to be able to trust us, and these kinds of things do not send a good message to the public in general and to specific sectors that feel they are the brunt of the hatred of this government. Union members feel absolutely despised by this government, and with good reason, because they've been treated with disrespect from day one. Seven bills that are anti-union bills, that's like union-busting. That's as bad as what they're trying to do in the United States right now.

I have to say that your counterpart in Ottawa, Mr. Trudeau, our Prime Minister, he's not treating people like that right now, so I wish that the Premier would take a lesson and take a page from his book.

Mr. Speaker, teachers are really finding they just can't do any more when it comes to being parents, being psychologists, being people to all these children who are basically - it's like they're raising a child. It's like they have suddenly now become the people who are raising these children. They spend more time with these children sometimes than the children's own parents do. I think we have reached an impasse and I think when the Premier says we're going to go back to normal, it's never going to go back to normal. Normal is done. Things have to change and I think that this whole last year has really opened up a lot of teachers' eyes.

Teachers just want to do their job. They want to have a comfortable life, they want to spend their time putting their energy into their classrooms, into the children after school - many of them, as I said - and yet right now teachers are feeling so angry that they have actually come from around their desks and marched in the streets and chanted and carried signs. It's not easy to get teachers to do that. Yes, they did it in the Savage years and what happened there? The Savage Government lasted one term. They ended up having to stay in for a fifth year. Why? Because they knew they weren't going to get re-elected, that's why. And sure enough, we haven't had a Liberal Government again in Nova Scotia until now and now this government is doing the same thing. That doesn't set a good precedent.

Teachers who I've seen come in little dribbles and drabs at the beginning, coming out, a few with their signs, a few saying that they weren't happy, has grown and grown. The students and the parents who have supported them have helped their cause and they did it all on their own, organically. It wasn't political, we had nothing to do with it. We didn't even know half of those people when they started appearing.

I have to say that it seemed like people in the government, people in the media, were surprised because people are so used to teacher-bashing in this province, people are so used to being able to go look, look how greedy they are, they get two months off in the summer, they get their Christmases, they get their March Breaks, they get snow days, they get paid a fortune, what are they complaining about? But you know as I said, their job is much more difficult than people give them credit for, and it has grown and grown to be much more complicated than it ever was before.

When suddenly parents showed up and were saying Parents for Teachers, and Students for Teachers, people looked at them and the first questions out of the media's mouth the first day they showed up here in the lobby was, well how many of you belong to a political Party? They went down the line and the first lady said, well actually, I am a member of a Party, I am a member of the Liberal Party. Then the next one said oh well, gee, I guess I am a member of the Green Party, and then it went down the line. The majority of them didn't belong to any Party or they belonged to the Liberal Party, so it had nothing to do with politics. It's doing the right thing. It's standing up for your values and your belief systems.

In many countries in the world union members are respected. In the Scandinavian countries, 90 per cent of workers are unionized. They have good benefits, they have good pensions, they're looked after, and they work well with the government.

When we have people in our province saying well I don't have a pension, why should they have a pension? That's like a race to the bottom, and surely we shouldn't be encouraging each other and encouraging others to be jealous of other people's jobs. How many times do we, as MLAs hear, oh you guys with your golden pensions? Well they don't know that you have to remain in government for 20 years before you even get 75 per cent

of your pension. They think we get it immediately and we're all living high on the hog, but most of us aren't. I'm not, I just get by.

What I have to say is that we shouldn't be comparing ourselves to others and we shouldn't be encouraging others to compare themselves to others. In fact, what I want for myself I want for others, that's the NDP way. That is the New Democratic way - we want for others what we want for ourselves. That's it, it's that simple.

I want people in Nova Scotia to have good lives. I don't want children living in poverty, I don't want children going to school hungry. I want our working people to be respected, to be appreciated, to be valued, and right now they are not. They are not feeling it for good reason, because this is very disrespectful of them and of the work they do. So when I hear the minister say oh, the teachers are going to be happy, the teachers are going to be happy in the end - no, they're not. I'm sorry, they're not.

Yes, we need to start making these classroom changes, yes we need to start looking at the conditions but they wanted certain things, even as simple as classroom caps all the way through. Now I know that costs money, I realize that. I realize it costs money but this is something we could do. As I said in Question Period today, we could do it quite easily. They're doing it in New Brunswick, so why can't we do it here?

The other thing I wanted to mention was the Dexter Government, we keep hearing a lot about what happened under the Dexter Government. The Dexter Government cut the overall education budget but they increased per-student spending. So they cut the overall education budget while increasing per-student spending. That was possible because each year the system shrinks by about 2,000 students - there's declining enrolment. There's good demographics and good math, but it was bad politics.

The Liberals claimed that the NDP cut \$65 million from the education budget and promised to put it all back, but that was always a made-up figure. It was quibbling over a number, over exact numbers, but the thing is it was a \$13 million cut with cost pressures on top of that. But that's not a cut. The government keeps saying \$65 million, \$65 million, like a mantra. It worked in the last election, but I don't think it's going to work this time. Too many people are wise to the fact that this government spins the numbers. How many times have they spun the numbers? I can't even count the times. (Interruption) Yes, it is true, I'm afraid.

You ask any of the sectors that have come under the firing squad from this government, and every single one of them will tell you that the government spun the numbers. Who's wagging the dog?

One of the things that I've said millions of times is that I never believed in cutting education funding at all while we were in government, which I didn't. I fought quite often with the Premier and the caucus around the table, standing up and saying, "This is a

mistake.” But as I’ve said before, I was a backbencher. No one was listening to me. I felt like a canary in a coal mine, singing away, warbling away, trying to warn them of the catastrophe to come, and nobody listened. Well, now we’re over here in these little seats, and you’re over there, but the pendulum continues to swing, my friends.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. I’d ask the member to direct to the Chair and not speak directly to the people opposite. Thank you.

MS. ZANN: Thank you for the reminder. I told myself before I came here tonight that I wasn’t going to say “you,” but it is hard to remember that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is that this deal - they’re trying to paint a rosy picture of this deal, but really, as Graham Steele said, it’s like the teachers wanted bread but got crumbs. The Nova Scotia Teachers Union website crashed on January 25th because people were trying to get on there to learn about the details of the tentative agreement that was announced, but once they found out what it was, their hopes crashed too. Graham Steele says, “The reaction of teachers on social media and in the NSTU telephone town hall was almost uniformly negative . . . They wanted meat and they got soup.” And they rejected that contract for a third time.

Teachers know what they want, and the union tried to get as much as they could, but from what I’m told by my union executive friends, they had a gun to their heads. They were told, this is what you’re getting, and it’s going to get worse if you don’t accept it. And guess what?

MR. SPEAKER: Order. I do believe the term “gun to your head” probably isn’t appropriate.

That’s the second time. There was a previous one on “lying through the teeth.” I’d really appreciate it if you would tone down the height of your speech. Thank you.

MS. ZANN: Mr. Speaker, I’m sorry. You appear very tired, and I’m just trying to get up through this speech for an hour. It’s six o’clock in the morning, so please give me a little bit of slack. I haven’t had any sleep either.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. I would like you to please not direct me to give you a little slack. I am not tired. Thank you.

MS. ZANN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, this bill is a sham. It’s smoke and mirrors. Every teacher I’ve spoken to - and there are a number of them reaching us on social media, on Facebook, in emails - I’m sure that many of the members here have received emails. I believe people were even getting messages here tonight. The phone was ringing off the hook - angry teachers who are calling their MLAs to tell them, “You vote for this bill and I’m not voting for you.”

I think that we're at a place right now where the government has an opportunity to make a choice. They can keep going on in this direction, or they can halt.

Mr. Speaker, could you please ask people to stop walking in front of me while I'm giving this speech? Somebody's done this several times now, and it's very distracting. He's done it several times.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The walking between would be between you and me. It's perfectly appropriate for people to come and leave the Chamber as they please on that side. Continue.

MS. ZANN: Anyway, Mr. Speaker, one other thing that I wanted to say as well is that students are feeling the crunch and, yes, parents are feeling the crunch, but again, as I say to the students in Truro, this is where you find out what teachers do for you for free. We have bandmasters in Truro who are renowned, who have worked long hours, long days, and weekends. They have several bands. It's a tradition in Truro started by J. Chalmers Doane and then Ron MacKay and then Paul Barrett, and then there have been many, many other teachers after that who have given hours and hours and hours to the students. It's almost - I wonder how they have a home life at all.

We also have a musical in Truro; in fact, the musical at the CEC started in 1972. The guidance counsellor started that musical which has now become quite famous, in our area anyway, and it's led to many musicals being done in many other schools. In fact, it's something that the kids always look forward to. Not only does it bring the kids out, but it brings the whole community together. People get very excited when they can see the amount of work that goes into it. For somebody who's in the theatre or been in the theatre, I obviously realize all the extra stuff that's going on behind the scenes and how many teachers it takes to actually pull it off.

This year, for the first time ever since 1972, the school musical was cancelled. The only other time that the school musical was possibly going to be cancelled was in 1979. I was at university by that time, at York University studying theatre and Poli-Sci. The guidance counsellor called me up and asked me if I could come in and replace the lead female who had family troubles and had to leave two days before the show opened. So they flew me home to Truro, and I was able to learn the show and went on in two days. The show went on - that's when we learned the show must go on.

This year, the kids have contacted me and said we're really bummed out. We really want to do a show, we really miss it, and the teachers can't help us. We asked them if it would be all right if we ask you if you could help us out because you have a community theater society and we're working with you in the summertime in Shakespeare in the Park. Would you please step forward and help us? So I called the union and I said, listen, would this step on anybody's toes? I certainly would never cross a picket line; I would never want to hurt the teachers in any way - I'm definitely on their side. And they said if you do it off

campus, in a different place, and it's not the same musical, then we have no problem with that. In fact, that's great; that's awesome. In fact, the teachers are working so hard on these musicals that they find it's great that community members are now stepping in that are going to help.

Many people have offered to help us with carpentry, they're giving us donations and helping us with costumes and things like this. The kids are actually directing it themselves, I'm just facilitating them by producing it for them. I'm getting the kids to do every part of it themselves so that they get to learn how much goes into producing a show so that from now on they will certainly realize exactly how grateful they should be to these teachers who spend so much time.

Now, that said, right across the province, many of these things are not happening. A lot of teachers are starting to say I'm enjoying my life; I'm enjoying being able to go home and spend time with the family, and maybe I do need to look at all the extra stuff I do.

I think that this contract being as bad as it is is going to leave a terrible taste in their mouths. The other thing that it does is it puts the onus on teachers because the minister is saying, well, I can't force them to do things; that's just on their own terms, so it's up to them. But then they're going to feel pressured to keep doing it.

I'm sure that if the contract was better, if teachers would have been listened to, if it wasn't forced upon them, teachers would be feeling much more open and much more warm about going forward and their futures. Many of them are just disillusioned and wondering why their government is treating them this way. I have to say again, I don't blame them at all.

Another thing that I've noticed of late is the fact that the government is expecting that all of these different unions now will have to take basically the same wage pattern. They also are - the members rejected the three tentative agreements and then the partial strike by the union has been in place since December, except for the one week after the third tentative agreement.

So when the legislation amends the expired collective agreement to the schedule, the amended agreement is deemed a new collective agreement, but this net effect that teachers are no longer in a legal strike position because there is a collective agreement in effect is going to create more problems, I think, for the government and for teachers. This will be taken to court and I am quite sure that it will be found unconstitutional, as some of my colleagues mentioned earlier today - we just have to look at British Columbia to see what happened there with a similar bill.

I know that the Minister of Justice said she thinks this one is different and the Premier has said that from the beginning, but we look at it and, well actually it's pretty

much the same thing. The thing is, again, with Bill No. 148, that shows that this is not particularly fair bargaining and that there are many things in place that will be taken into consideration as well.

The legislation introduces a commission on inclusive education to identify appropriate reforms. The deadlines for the interim recommendations are by June 30th for implementation in September 2017 - final recommendations within one year of commencement. So one has to ask, has this been the plan all along for this government or is this something new that has come up? I know I'm going to be very interested to find out what the commission does find out and what the council does decides, and I'm sure many teachers are going to also be very interested to find out what the government decides to do about this.

However, again I feel that teachers have not been consulted on this bill. Teachers are saying that's great that you're saying you're going to be consulting us, but you were always saying that you're going to be consulting us and then you never do. They say that writing into a website on the Internet is not consultation, and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development kept claiming that she was in fact consulting with teachers when it was an online write-in poll, and teachers said that's not enough.

So I'm glad that the minister and the members are getting letters from the teachers, as we are, and I hope that they take the time to actually read them because they're very impassioned. I'm pretty amazed at the incredible writing of these teachers - most of them are heartwarming and they are heartbreaking. People are pinning their hopes on the fact that perhaps this government will have a heart, that perhaps the blizzard bill will thaw and that people will give it a second thought and give them a second chance because they need us now more than ever to show them that we really do care about what they do.

Without teachers in a society, they're the ones who help us make a healthy society - to build a healthy society from day one, from when kids first come into school. A lot of my friends are elementary schoolteachers. Dad was an elementary schoolteacher in the beginning and then in the end, as he grew older, he ended up teaching early childhood development and then he taught modern methods of education.

In fact, a lot of what we're doing here in the education system is still behind the times. There are much more progressive ways of training kids and teaching kids, and many other countries like New Zealand, they look at the whole child and testing is not quite as important. The core testing, stuff that we bought from the United States, they've already proven in the United States it doesn't work and they've moved on to something else.

I think that teachers feel that their time is being used up in ways that are unproductive, that are not helpful, and that are not helping to teach the kids. That's what they really want to do. They want to teach. That's what they signed up for. That's what they trained for. That's what they love to do.

Coming back to my original theme, it's an art. Teaching is an art. I couldn't do it. I couldn't stay there in a classroom and teach kids all day. My mother used to come home after school, and she couldn't have any loud noises. She had to have no music. She had to just put her feet up, and then she would be back at it again at the kitchen table doing her work, marking papers till two or three in the morning. I've seen it, and I've seen what it does. Mom did that for 30 years. She never complained, and she took the extra time needed to look after kids who needed the extra care, who needed the extra attention. I find that many of our teachers do that.

I think that we need to put a pause on and say, let's look at it. Let's take it back. Let's put it in front of one of the committees. Let's take it to one of our committees and study it. Let's get teachers coming in and having a say on this bill.

They will come in to Law Amendments Committee, but the way things seem to go in this House, people just seem to march right along. It's like a star chamber. People come and try and speak. They're told they can only have five minutes. They're told only so many people in that room. They're treated like cattle or like criminals, as if it's expected that they're going to cause some big uproar and take over the Legislature or something.

This started with the home care workers. Home care workers are one of the oldest workforces in Nova Scotia, mainly women. What did they want? A \$2 raise. They were legislated back to work, and their right to strike was taken away from them.

Then there was the nurses. There were SWAT teams in the Legislature protecting people from nurses. Why? Why all this extra drama? Why all the extra protection against Nova Scotians who just want to make a good living, who just want to be respected by their government, and who just want to be treated fairly?

I don't understand why there seems to be this war against the working people, against working-class people. Why would that be? I don't understand it. But I know that people are not going to take it. I don't know what's going to happen next, but I can tell you in the next election it's going to be a rough ride for the Liberal Party.

Other key elements of the legislation include the commission, the classroom conditions, and the inclusive education. The commission will conduct jurisdictional review, best practice review, and current policy review. No change to existing policy is permitted other than interim recommendations while the commission completes its work. Fine. But the thing is, the teachers' original intent is to try and effect change immediately. I don't see why we can't do some of the things that the teachers have been asking for and that the union has been asking for, especially when it comes to class size.

Why not hire new teachers? Hire more teachers. Hire more EAs. Hire more specialists who can work with kids with special needs. Get more teachers in the classroom. Many of the teachers are saying that they feel that they don't have enough support in the

classroom. They're not able to teach if there is some kind of ruckus or if one of the kids is acting up. Then they have to pay attention to that child, and the rest of them all suffer.

They also have all of these different IPPs as my colleague also mentioned earlier tonight. I have to say, I've also spoken with many in the African Nova Scotian community who are concerned about IPPs. They feel that it's so easy for children to be put on an IPP when really they need to be studied a little bit more to feel them out and find out if they need an IPP. They say sometimes that will affect their ability to go into colleges, that they want to be accepted at universities, so we need to look at some of these things as well.

Finally, I think we need to just look at the possibility of bringing teachers more into the decisions that are made before these bills come before us. This bill was hastily cobbled together; it's a mixture of three of the contracts that have already been rejected. They have been rejected because the teachers don't like them. They don't agree with them and, to be honest, I don't see why you are taking away their long-service awards either.

You give it a different name; the government gives it a different name. They don't call it a long-service award. I find that by changing the names around and calling them bonuses and things like this, it takes away what it really is. Teachers were asked to accept other offers in the past. They had many things taken away and in replacement they were offered other things like this, like the long-service award. And now this government comes along and it's like they've forgotten that they had already given up things in order to get this and they're saying oh, aren't these people greedy.

The Premier came to Truro right after the election in 2013 and he addressed the chamber of commerce at a breakfast meeting. He said, you know one of the things we're going to do is we're going to get rid of long-service awards; he said, why should people who are lucky enough to have the same job with the same employer for 30 years expect to get a bonus at the end of it?

I sat there that day and I looked at him and I listened to his words and I thought, that's the difference between him and me, because I was brought up to believe that we should be grateful to public servants who give of their time and their lives and their energy to the public and, yes, they deserve to be treated with something at the end. But, as I said, this was part of a negotiating opportunity years ago that now is being taken away from them.

The government keeps saying oh, we're not taking anything away from them. Yes, you are, you're taking away their long-service award which they were planning on having that banked into their retirement years and you are freezing their salaries. So that is taking away something - they are losing money here and yet the government keeps saying over and over that they are not taking away anything.

Again, this is a spin, this is a propaganda technique to make the public think that they are not losing anything. Again, it's a divide and conquer tactic which I object to because it goes against my very grain, my values, and the principles that I stand up for.

Mr. Speaker, would it be all right if I made an introduction, please?

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead.

MS. ZANN: I'd like to introduce Sandra Mullen, the first vice-president of NSGEU, and Kim Jenkins, also an NSGEU member. They are up in the west gallery. Could we please give them a warm welcome. (Applause) My goodness, I wonder if they're getting up or if they are still up - I don't know.

Yes, I wanted to say that the service award retirement - yes, that's what he called it, he called it a retirement bonus. It's not a retirement bonus, it's a long-service award. Again, I'm just going to say this, there's a big difference between an ideology where somebody says oh, look at those people, how lucky they are, they got to work for 30 years at the same company and then they expect a bonus at the end.

To me that is uncouth, it's unfair, it's undemocratic and it's disrespectful. I saw that right after the election in Truro, so it didn't really come as much of a surprise to me when I saw this. I knew that the bottom line was that this is exactly what the Premier planned to do all along. He might say, oh no, we can't afford it, the cupboard is bare. We know what it is, he has put all his eggs in one basket, then he wants to balance the budget. But he wants to balance the budget on the backs of the people, on the backs of the working people of Nova Scotia. That's not okay.

This government also at one point tried to take \$10 million away from seniors, but the seniors were smart. They had a lobby group and they figured it out and they said you're telling us that you're doing something good for us, but you're actually taking away \$10 million. Then what happened was they put the brakes on that. Why? Because seniors vote, that's why.

Then after that what happened, oh, isn't that interesting, \$8.5 million cut from nursing homes. They tried for the \$10 million and that didn't work so then they went for \$8.5 million from nursing homes. Why? Did they think nursing home patients aren't going to notice? What about their families? What about the workers? In my riding alone there are four seniors' homes, nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and they've all had hundreds of thousands of dollars cut. It shows because they've had to cut nurses, they've had to cut staff, and they've had to cut cooks in the kitchen.

We've heard about the food cuts in Dartmouth where people were having to eat on \$5.40 a day or something, which is absolutely ludicrous. I've had so many people from my

riding coming to me and complaining about these cuts. Again, Mr. Speaker, why are these cuts coming? We know why: to balance the budget.

Why is this an austerity budget, why do we have an austerity budget, why is that so important? I can tell you right now that hanging your hat just on that is not going to win you friends and it is not going to win you the election. I don't understand why the Premier is being advised or why he is marching along to this tune, because I can tell you that it's hurting people. There are people in my riding who have come to me crying, in grocery stores, in one of the pet stores, at the farmers' market, saying their loved one who they need to put in a long-term care facility had to be put in one far away because there aren't enough spaces in Truro. They then have to drive long miles to see them and long miles to come back. They feel it's just not fair.

Why are we not looking after them as well and why are we taking things away from the working people? These people are in favour of the teachers and say they think it's a travesty. They also know that we're not having enough doctors, we're not having enough long-term care facilities, and they know there are cuts to these places.

Again, why balance the budget on the backs of the children, on the backs of the teachers, on the backs of the nurses, long-term care workers, filmmakers - \$24 million. Mr. Speaker, it's not that much for that beautiful industry to be growing here in Nova Scotia. We all know that we lost out because of the billions of dollars that other provinces have made in this past year with the dollar so low, and Americans - the entertainment industry just expanding at an amazing rate.

Mr. Speaker, to get back to this bill and the collective agreement, other amendments to the collective agreement include language changes included in the second and third tentative agreement. It doesn't include the two days self-directed preparation and development time. Teachers are losing out on this and teachers know it. Every single teacher in Truro that I know has come out - and these are principals too. I know the minister likes to try to spread the principals from the teachers, but principals are teachers too. It's interesting because at all the different rallies that I've attended, the principals have been there as well. They're not happy either.

I have to say one more thing about our students. I want to talk about the fact that these students - some of whom are here tonight - have come out of the woodwork gangbusters, and I have to say that gives me hope. That gives me hope because here we have young people who care. They care about their teachers. There are also older teachers who are close to retirement and they've come out and they tell me, I'm not doing this for myself, I'm doing this for the younger ones that are coming up behind me.

Again, a lady stopped me in the grocery store the other night, she had tears in her eyes. She had marched on this Legislature during the Savage years as well and she said, Lenore, this is even worse. She said, this is disastrous, but I'm doing it for the young ones.

We have young ones coming out for the teachers and they will hold the torch for tomorrow, and I have to say, my hat goes off to them. I don't know if I had as much chutzpah when I was 15. I had my eyes in the stars and my head in the clouds wanting to be an actress, but I'm very pleased to see these students coming up and stepping up to the plate and speaking out, and not being afraid to grab a microphone and give a speech to 100 people or 1,000 people. It's very exciting.

I hope that they will remember this night, remember this week, remember the blizzard bill and say, never again - we will fight for the people. With that, I'll take my place.

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

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, I guess this bright hour of the morning reminds me of a song that used to be sung in Cape Breton - Getting Dark Again, but I guess we're going to start the opposite, it's getting light again and probably will be a few more days of this getting light again - and I can't understand why.

We're called in here in a forecasted blizzard to deal with a bill that government says has to put an end to this impasse with the teachers because kids aren't getting their education.

I've talked to a lot of teachers since this work-to-rule was put in place who tell me that they're getting more time in the classroom with the students, but the problem with that is, an education is not just what happens in the classroom. A well-rounded education has to do with things that happen either outside the classroom, at lunchtime, before classes start, or a little bit of help, librarians, and so on and so forth - we could go on with that for days. But when you think about the emergency of this, I don't see it.

If this debate had taken place at a regular hour of the day and we went into the evening and stopped at midnight and we all got a good night's sleep and started the next day, I can't see the difference of a day maybe - couldn't see much more than that - and this bill would pass, the same as it's going to pass with us working and being here for the night. It's not healthy for everybody. It's not healthy for staff. It's not healthy for every member that's here.

Some of the older guys that are here probably had even less sleep, but when you think about what this is doing to everybody that's in this Chamber, everybody that's in this building, it's not healthy. It's not healthy for them. It's not healthy for the teachers and the students. They would like to be here to listen to what's going on, but we debate a bill through the night - when these kids have to get up and go to school tomorrow, these teachers have to get up and go to work tomorrow. I just can't understand what the emergency of this bill is.

These teachers would like to listen and watch it on TV just to see who in this Chamber is supporting them, who in the Chamber is looking out for the students and the teachers and the parents. So I guess my question is, what is the emergency?

Let me start again by saying thank you to the 9,300 teachers, plus or minus a few, in this province who give their time, who studied to become a teacher to make sure children get an education they deserve. These children are the future of our province. We were there at one time. Some of us did a little more in education than others, some of us went on to further our education and some people did very well without having to go past the high school or the first degree level, but the people who did go on to be teachers to make sure that our children had the base to start in life we have to thank them. I want to thank them personally here today for what they've done for us here in the Chamber but for what they're doing for our children today.

I know we've all had a favourite teacher, one who made an influence on our life somewhere along the way. I know myself it was a math teacher I had in junior high school who would stay after school. We were into something called calculus - I guess it was high school - and she made sure that the three or four of us who just weren't getting that, she stayed and passed that on to us and made sure that we got it so that we could have that base to move on.

I was involved in sports and I was involved in extracurricular activities, and God bless the teachers who did that. But we now realize that they did this on their own time. We thought it was normal for that to happen but they did this on their own time. They did this voluntarily, they did it freely.

Another teacher I had who talked about how he and his wife went to school at different times in their career. One worked while the other one went to school, and when he got his teaching degree he went to work and his wife went to school. So they planned to have this great retirement and something happens to one of them, here you've got a teacher who now his wife is not well and he worked all that time, put all the extra in and he didn't get to enjoy that. Part of that contract was the long-service award.

I know myself in the health care field, when I went to work at the hospital I went to work for a lower salary to take the benefits that went with that government job, and one of those benefits was a long-service award. I took a cut in my pay at that time to take the little benefit later on, when I could have gone into the private sector, made a lot more money but didn't have those benefits.

For a government to walk in and say that's not negotiable, that's off the table, I don't think that's fair. That's something that gets negotiated into a contract, it's something that should get negotiated out of the contract, not taken out unilaterally.

When you get into that, Mr. Speaker, that's not honest and fair negotiation. When you go to the negotiating table, here's what's on the table - everything, now let's figure out what you want and what we want and then work out a deal somehow. Nobody is really happy but people come out satisfied, and we don't have that happening in this contract.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed we're here for a number of different reasons. First of all, the students are suffering as far as their extracurricular goes but they're getting a little bit better education, I'm told. I feel bad for the teachers who want to put this time in, put the extra time in but can't do that.

You've got to feel bad for the parents who are caught between a rock and a hard place - they want to support teachers, they want to see their children get the extracurricular activities, the prom, and so on and so forth. They are torn between that.

You've got to look at things like student teachers who aren't getting that little bit of extra help in the classroom to get their teaching degree. You've got to think that everybody is hurting a little bit and we'd all like to see this coming to an end, but we'd like to see it coming to an end amicably where both sides give and take - yes, we lose this but yes, we gain that and so on and so forth, so that everybody gets a little bit and everybody comes out satisfied.

The other thing is that most of us have been here since Sunday. My wife is home to deal with this snowstorm by herself, as are most of the people here. For what reason? For an emergency debate that was going to happen? Mr. Speaker, that's not fair to the families at home who realize that this is our job, but when you've got an emergency we expect it to be an emergency.

There's no emergency here. If it took a couple of extra days, if they knew the snowstorm was coming, they brought people in and they knew the cancellations were coming, where is the emergency? So we're here since Sunday. Our families are home dealing with the snowstorm and we're sitting here in a non-emergency situation debating something that could be done at the bargaining table, because it doesn't fit with the government's financial plan or the government's plan that - I read it here that there's no way to agree to this now because we tried it three times, so I'm taking my bat and ball and I'm going home. Here's what we're doing now because we don't have the time for this or we don't have the energy for this or you guys aren't worth this. I don't know what the reasoning is and no one seems to have been able to tell me what the reasoning is so far.

Mr. Speaker, I question that. And I'm disappointed that that's where we are today and for that reason. I know that since this has happened I took the opportunity to visit a few of the schools in my area - the elementary schools, the middle schools, and the high schools - and over the last couple of weeks, I spoke to teachers in these institutions who are concerned about the status of our education system. But, you know what they're concerned about the most is their students. They want to ensure that our students are getting

an education, an education that's well-rounded, an academic education and an extracurricular education. We want to see an end to the impasse, but we also want to make sure it's an end that people can live with, all people can live with.

Will things ever return to normal? I doubt it. Teachers don't trust the government right now; some of them don't trust their own union. Will they all go back to doing what they were doing before that's not in the contract? Then it's not classed as work-to-rule, it's then classed as work in your contract. How do we force that to happen? We don't. Should we? No, we shouldn't. You know, we look at the cost in this agreement - they got a 3 per cent raise. Now I'm told at the very first of this that if they had said we'll take that 3 per cent you're going to get and put it in the classroom working conditions, teachers, extra teachers, extra support staff, they would've done that. But we went to the bargaining table, the 1 per cent, 1 per cent, 1.5 per cent, and 0.5 per cent is not on it - that's it. The long-service award - gone. Is that bargaining in good faith? I don't think so.

We get into how this started. We get called back in December to supposedly deal with a bill that's going to end an impasse with the teachers, to legislate a contract on them, and the first thing the government does is they lock out the students for a day for safety concerns. Now, I don't know a teacher in this province who would see a student go to school and not be safe, and to think that the suggestion is that that would happen, that it would pose a safety risk to the students upset a lot of teachers, and the relationship went downhill from there, Mr. Speaker.

The very nature of the teacher's job suggests that teachers are there for the children. I don't know of any who would allow anything to happen, so I'm glad the government did come to its senses then and realize that the work-to-rule wasn't a safety issue. They did have people on the school grounds - lunch people, people beforehand to make sure that there wasn't a safety issue.

Today, or yesterday I guess it is now - it's the wee hours of the morning - when the bill was introduced, I don't know about anyone else's phone but my phone started to light up because we had heard that this work-to-rule was affecting a child's education, and a bunch of teachers contacted me by text, email, and Facebook to say that it has affected their education. But the academic part of their education affected some people for the good because teachers now are spending more time in the classroom, less time on the computer, less time doing data entry or photocopying or whatever they did before - now they're spending it in the classroom. The only problem and concern they had was if someone needed extra help, they couldn't give it to them, and that ate at a lot of teachers. That ate at the so-called what teachers are made of. It bothered a lot of them.

I know that a specific teacher, when my young fellow was in junior high, did a lot of extracurricular over his regular day hours to make sure he understood his math. We tried to hire that teacher as a tutor, and he had no say in it. He didn't want anything to do with us hiring him, but he would stay for an hour after school and help him. It got him through

those junior high years. In high school, he was great. He went on to community college and now is in the police academy. He's doing great because of that little extra boost he got from that one teacher.

I'll bet there's not one MLA or person in the gallery today who doesn't have that one teacher that they can say made a difference in their life. I know that I could probably name three or four of them, and if I asked everybody in here, they probably could too.

This is where our teachers are. They're there for our students. But there's only so many times you can kick somebody before they fight back. For years, teachers have always said, well, we'll take that because it's the students who are going to suffer. It's got to the point now where it can't be done anymore. Classroom conditions were such that they just couldn't do it.

Some good faith would have been, let's add a few things early. Let's change the attendance policy. Let's change the discipline policy. Let's change the failure policy, as we heard today.

A person not achieving the goals and keeping them behind to make sure they achieve the goals to prepare them for the next level, is that failing a kid? Or is it just making sure they're prepared to move on in life?

A lot of the problems we have with our children today is I don't think they know what it is to fail. Every kid makes the hockey team. Every kid makes the soccer team. Life isn't like that, Mr. Speaker. When you go for your first job, and there are 10 people applying for it, and there's only two jobs, eight people are going to fail and move on to the next job. But they'll learn from that interview they had before, and that's the idea of the failure policy.

It's not to punish children. It's not to give them a complex that they're not as good as the rest of them. It's to make sure they're ready to go to the next level. If they're not, are we doing them any favours when they're two or three levels behind the people they're in with?

That's a simple thing the teachers have asked for. Believe it or not, they've asked for it, and we haven't delivered. It's something that we would like to see done early to show some good faith, and then get into some honest and open bargaining.

We have to look back. We talk about how the work-to-rule affects the teachers. But you've got to realize what a lot of teachers did without being asked to do: the school concerts, the proms, the graduations, the sports teams, the extra help, the breakfast programs, the data entry, stuff that the government asked for that we're told they did but didn't really see any results from. It didn't change or affect the conditions in the classroom to allow the teachers better working conditions to provide more for the students. That's

stuff that I worry about because when you get into that situation where a teacher can't help or is told they're not able to help, that's a big concern of mine.

Here we are today. We're talking about a contract that's going to be legislated on our teachers. I can't see where there's any real classroom improvements. They're going to study. They're going to spend \$20 million to study what can be done in the classroom to improve.

I looked at some schedules in the back of the Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements Act. It gave a few tables of teachers' salaries. Most of them started at about \$42,000 or \$43,000. If you took \$20 million at \$43,000 a teacher, we could improve the classroom conditions and the classroom sizes greatly by hiring a bunch of teachers. By the time they get to the top of their scale, the older teachers will be ready to retire, so we're not really out a lot of money after that initial investment. And the classroom conditions improve automatically, which means better learning conditions for our students. The younger teachers, who do have children of their own, understand the value of the extracurricular and helping and doing what they can do that way.

We're going to legislate a contract on our teachers sometime next week, or sometime near the end of this week. We don't know that. It's all going to depend on how many people present at Law Amendments, what their concerns are, and if we're able to make any amendments to the bill by listening to some of the people, the teachers and parents and general public who present at Law Amendments.

But let's just say the bill goes through the same way it is now. They get a contract. They work to this contract. The contract they're working to is similar to the one they had, but now they're calling it work-to-rule. Do we legislate our teachers to go back and do all the volunteer work they did before? I don't think that's in there. Do we legislate them to make sure they put in the extracurricular or the extra data entry? I don't think that's in there. So we go back to what we have right now. It doesn't change the working conditions in the classroom, and it doesn't make the conditions better for the students, nor does it make it better for the teachers. We're here in an emergency debate and there's no emergency.

What the legislation does is legislate a wage package. The reason they took the package they did was because more people voted for the first contract than for the last contract, so that's the wage package we're going to keep. From what I can understand, in between the first tentative agreement and the third tentative agreement, it was going to cost the government \$17 million more to change how they distributed that money.

So right off the reel, we've got \$17 million we could put into classroom conditions. If that's the case, again, more teachers. More books. More study aids. That it could do. But what it doesn't do is make teachers go back to what they did before. It doesn't improve the

sourness that's going to be left in some teachers' mouths - if "sourness" is a word - if it doesn't make teachers feel really good about the relationship they have with the employer.

I can say, Mr. Speaker, that I was part of the days when the Liberal Government back in the 1990s gave us five days off, or so I thought. It was five days without pay, so it was great - we had five vacation days - until the paycheque came in and you realized you couldn't make your car payment that month because you were five days short on your pay. That's not something that you thought about at 22 or 23 years old, until you got your paycheque.

This is not going to do anything that's going to change that. It's done nothing to improve the classroom conditions, and I'm sure it's done nothing to help the relationship with the government. So when you get into that, we've got to worry.

Here we are again. It's Teacher Appreciation Week. How are we showing our appreciation? We're legislating them a contract.

The teachers I talk to, they want to teach. They went into the teaching profession for that reason. They don't think they're being respected by the government - allowing them to do that, allowing them to teach the way they would like to: in the classroom, maybe not putting all kinds of data into a computer to know that it's not going to change how they teach down the road.

I've heard that work-to-rule was unsafe. You know, when you get into a situation where they think students are unsafe, that would probably imply to me that there were no teachers there. But teachers are there. So we're going to impose a contract in law.

I've heard from teachers, they're not happy. I've heard from students, they're not happy. I've heard from some of the general public who think that the teachers get too much - they're making too much money, they've got too much time off.

Mr. Speaker, I think that in the teaching profession you have to be a special person and if the job was that good, I think we all should have been teachers. I'm going to tell you, I wouldn't want to have been a teacher. I studied to be a physiotherapist, not a teacher and I'm not going to complain about what the teachers can and can't do because I didn't understand completely until I went to a classroom one day with one of the teachers at Ferrisview Elementary School.

I was in that classroom for a day with this teacher who had two teaching assistants in the classroom because there were three or four children who had behavioural issues. She was trying to teach I think 16 students in one corner, there were the four other students in another corner with the teacher's aids and I'm running around and my fear was that the bright kids are going to do okay, they'll do it on their own. The middle kids are going to

survive, but they're just going to survive, and the kids who needed that little bit of extra attention weren't getting it, so they are the ones that were falling between the cracks.

Teachers voiced that concern to me over and over since that day I was in school and I understand what they're talking about because I saw it. Until you've lived a teacher's life, you probably don't really understand what's going on in that classroom. I would urge everybody to have a good chat with some teachers, not just one because you don't want to get just one biased opinion. Get the opinion of a number of teachers - elementary, middle school, high school.

I visited all those schools since then and I've heard the same thing - they want to teach. They don't want to be limited in how they teach, they want to make sure that the curriculum they are teaching is reachable, achievable. Some of them may have to do a little extra to get to that goal. They don't complain about that. We have teachers in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, and I know they are good teachers because I've heard nothing but good about them from the people who taught in their school or the students they had or their colleagues here, telling me how good they were as teachers. I don't think that's a great thing to limit how they teach and to put limitations on them is not a great thing either.

I think we should at least listen to what teachers have to say. It's almost like in this contract that the government knows what the teachers want, they know best. They are saying that they brought this to the union but from what I'm told, the union felt they had no choice but to bring this stuff back and then the people get to vote on it.

We've heard in this Chamber that we've had three agreements. Well you didn't have three agreements, you had three tentative agreements and 9,300 people have to ratify that agreement. That's not what happened. Each agreement got higher rejection, so for some reason, and we know the reason, teachers didn't like what they were getting thrown on their plate. So they are going to take away some of the stuff from the first negotiated contract and they're going to add to some that was taken away in the second and third contract and we've got a mishmash of what the government thinks is best because as we're told in this, we're at an impasse. They said they conducted negotiations in good faith and they're at an impasse so this is why we bring this tentative agreement forward.

Now if you're negotiating in good faith and you are giving and taking, you go back and start again, or you add to or you take away what you have. So by allowing teachers to teach and some of the extracurricular activity, I'm sure the union would take the work-to-rule off if we guaranteed to bargain in good faith. I believe the union and the teachers now, and the government, think that one side doesn't want to talk, the other side doesn't want to talk so maybe we should start with two new negotiating teams and allow them to go into a room and try and figure out what's going on and what the impasse is.

So as we talked about before, there are things that could have been brought into play. Attendance policies - why should a child who doesn't attend classes for no good

reason, other than illness or something that's beyond their control, not go to school for a certain percentage of time and still move to the next grade? What is that telling the kids who are in school? It's okay not to do the work, but you're going to go ahead anyway. What does that prepare our children for in our later years? It sets them up for failure automatically.

A discipline policy - I've heard teachers who have talked about what happened in a classroom. They can't put a child out of the classroom because they're right back in the next day no matter what they've done. Is that fair to our teachers? Is that fair to the parents who have to go to fight to make sure their kids stay in school? Is it fair to the principal and the school board people to make sure these kids get back to school?

I think if we put a discipline policy in place and we abide by it, and the children realize that if they don't attend school and they don't behave the way they should - we behave the way we should in society; we have discipline policies. I can't drive down the highway at 140 kilometres an hour and not get caught eventually. It would be something if we could do that and turn around and say, well, Dave Wilson, the member for Sackville-Cobequid, allow me to take that ticket away from you and there's no consequence for your actions. So that's something we could put in place.

Again, I talked earlier about the failure policy. Some classroom teachers have five and six different programs they're teaching the children. That can't be very much fun when they're into that.

We're also talking about what could be done here that could be challenged constitutionally - and how much money is that going to cost? We've seen in B.C. it was \$300 million, and possibly more, for something that could have been solved 10 years before that. But in saying that, this government won't have to deal with that. It will be a future government that has to deal with that, and it seems like we've done that a lot where we've just moved it down a little bit, someone else will deal with it. That's not fair to the children; it's not fair to the people coming in behind us because I'm sure in 10 years most of the people in this Chamber won't be here - either as an MLA or even in the province if this is the way that we're going to treat our residents.

We heard yesterday that the Premier wants the classrooms to return to normal. The normal that we've had is students get promoted regardless of their attendance - so don't show up for work, but you keep your job.

I had an experience back when I was first married and my wife was a Girl Guide instructor and they had one of the head honchos in at a meeting in my kitchen. I came home from somewhere and just at the time they were talking about if a Girl Guide is not there to complete their badge when they have their meetings, do they still get the badge? The answer was no. How do we know that they did the work? How do we know that they completed it the way they should have completed it if they do it at home with the help of

other people, and not supervised? Attendance policy is the same way. If you're not in school, how can you get that promotion?

We talked earlier about the no-fail policy and I don't think it's a slap to the child if they don't move on to the next grade. I think it's doing the child a favour in certain circumstances, so they can learn the information they need.

School is a preparation. Every grade prepares you for the next grade and the next grade, and when you get to the end of the high school years it prepares you for university. University prepares you to go to work in life. What are we teaching our children if we push them through that without having to achieve the goals for each of those levels? That really costs nothing - actually, you could probably save money in the long run because of the money that you save on IPPs. So that's something we could implement.

One of the normals is we had students in some classes that have no desks. They are sitting on the window ledge, they're sitting on the floor trying to pay attention on what they're doing in the classroom. Is that the normal we want to keep? I don't think so. I mean I talked to people at the high school in my area who had their book allowance cut a couple of years ago, how do we teach children in a classroom and have them do homework when there's one book for two or three students or one book for two or three classes so you can't even take the book home and do the extra that you need to do if you need to do it. Or if you do group work in our area, then one high school does the whole Northside, so a child who lives in Florence and a child who lives in North Sydney, how do they expect to get together to do that? If they have one book, they're going to have to.

We're looking at aggressive students and not enough teacher assistants or educational assistants to help deal with the people who actually need the help. Do we want that as our normal? I don't.

We look at overloaded teacher workloads. Teachers who have different behavioural problems in the classroom, teachers who have four and five IPPs in a classroom. If I go on vacation and take my child with me for a week, a teacher is expected to give that child their work for that week. They have to do that all the while they're teaching all the other kids as well. That's not the normal I want to see.

Teachers have spent a lot of time inputting data into the computer system. I've heard a story, I think it was here this evening, where one teacher was walking by the area where they normally put the computers and they're always fighting to get their data in. They're not doing that now; they're spending that time in the classroom with their students. That's not the normal I want to see. It takes away from some of their precious preparation time.

We can tease teachers. I have a lot of teachers who are friends who I tease that they only work six hours a day. But I know that's not the case. I know the teachers I tease about

that know that's not the case because they are putting that time in before school, after school, nighttime, all kinds of other times they can sneak that in, plus dealing with their own family life. That's not the normal I want to see.

You know there's even some schools that they don't have enough classroom resources - books, teacher assistants, educational aids - and that's not the normal I'd like to see either, Mr. Speaker.

We're dealing with student overcrowding, decreased resources. We want to make sure that what we do as a norm is make sure there's no overcrowding in the classroom. Use some of the money they're going to use to study some of these problems to hire more teachers, hire more teacher assistants, if necessary, add an extra teacher so the class size is now 10 or 15 instead of 25 or 30. I think that's the norm I want to see.

We want to make sure that students and teachers have effective classroom time so that the student gets the one-on-one with the teacher when they need it and gets the help they need when they need it or gets to do the group work when group work is necessary. It's preparing our students for the next level, the next grade, the next step in their life, the next stage in their life. To me, that's what an education system does.

We can teach children all kinds of things in the classroom that they may never use but it's to prepare them for what's to come later, prepare them how to think, prepare them how to look at things objectively. A science student finds out how to read a scientific paper objectively and just doesn't take the results of what they are. The only way they get there is through steps, and that's where our teachers are so important.

We don't have enough speech-language pathologists in the class in the school system. Our mental health strategy is not serving the students the way we should serve them. The student who needs a speech-language assessment could wait years. People who need a mental health assessment could wait months. Is that serving our students properly? Is that what we want to have as our norm, students who need help who can't get it?

We have that in our health care system now. We see it every day, we hear it every day about some of the mental health issues in our health care system, that people are waiting years for. And what do we see? A bunch of letters sent out from the Health Authority asking, do you still need the services because if you do, we'll put you back on the list, but if you're better, we'll take you off. Do you think someone's going to admit that they still need it? They're going to tell them they're better. We see the results of that. We read about those results. That's not the normal I want to see.

We have kids say that there's no timeline to complete assignments and assessments. A child can come in May, pass in all their assignments, and still get a pass to the next grade. If students do that, teachers are expected to have it corrected and in.

There's \$20 million being put to hire some experts to find out what the problems are in the education system. We've got over 9,300 experts, teachers who deal with these situations every day. Let's ask them. I know we're going to set up a task force with nine teachers on it. But let's ask all the teachers. Everybody is going to have a different perspective, but I'll bet you that the majority of them are going to have the same perspective. That's the way we improve the conditions in the classroom. If we can do that, then we can improve how students learn and what they learn, and make sure they have the ability and the tools to go on in life.

On the news yesterday, the Premier said that with work-to-rule, students aren't getting the education. The teachers I'm talking to are saying that students are getting a little bit more education now. They're not getting a completely rounded education.

Like we talked about a minute ago, he wants the classrooms returned to normal. Well, the normal we had hasn't been working, or we wouldn't have the situation we have here today.

I'm going to ask a question, and I don't know if I'll get an answer. The Premier said he has negotiated three contracts. The minister yesterday in the bill briefing said that she wasn't in on the negotiations. Was the Premier in on those negotiations? If they weren't, how do they know that what was coming back was accurate? They're saying that the Teachers Union wasn't accurate in what they were saying. The two days they were supposed to get off were at the discretion of the teacher, and then we hear that it's not at the discretion of the teacher. How much time did we spend negotiating things that we don't know the value of?

Then we heard about the no-fail policy. I asked the question in Question Period today or yesterday - I don't even know what day it is anymore. We're told that there is a fail policy, but there's conditions on that - a certain percentage you're allowed to increase it. Teachers I'm talking to say that they're not allowed to fail. They say that the principal has the final say in whether a student passes and moves on to the next level or stays. It's the teacher who is doing the work all day. I'm hoping that the principals are speaking to the teachers to see what they can and can't do.

We've never been told how many people failed in the province last year. Out of all the students who are here, we never got a number of how many people failed. I heard that in one school board there were two. I'm sure that there's more people not achieving the goals than two, so I guess there is a no-fail policy. That's going to change, I hope.

Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that I would like to see the Teachers Union and the government go back to the bargaining table. I'm sure if they presented it properly, the work-to-rule would come off, if they would negotiate in good faith. Good faith to me is everything is on the table, give and take. You might not get everything you want, but you might not lose everything you want to have either. Don't run out of the negotiating right to

Steve Murphy or to the Internet to talk about what we didn't do today. Leave that alone until they get an agreement, and then have them come out and talk about it, because what we're trying to do is negotiate in public, negotiate in the media, and that serves no one any purpose.

Let the teachers have their say in what's going on. They're the experts. They're in the classroom every day dealing with children every day. They know what's going on in the classroom.

Our biggest problem a lot of times - and we have to deal with it - is that we've got people who are making decisions who are removed from where they're making the decisions for, but think they know what the situation is now. We use the example that the Cape Breton that we live in right now is not the same Cape Breton as 10, 15, 20 years ago, but we've got people making decisions about what's going on or what they think is happening.

So the teachers who are in the classroom now are the ones that know the conditions, so let's work with them. Let's work with the union. Let's work with the government. I don't think there's anybody who wants to see this drag on. But in saying that, if we were bargaining in good faith, we could probably eliminate the so-called work-to-rule and have some kind of normal so-called back-to-where-it-was as far as extracurricular goes and upcoming proms and sporting events. To me, that's just part of the education. That's the rounding of the education - to make sure that the child gets a good overall education.

This is not all just about academics, although that's a big part of it. We want to make sure that's there, but complemented by the rest of it. So I'm sure if we could go back to the bargaining table, hammer out an agreement that's not great on both sides but satisfactory on both sides, we get that working relationship back. We'd have the government and the teachers able to work with each other again. You'd have none of this - I don't trust this side, I don't trust that side. I think teachers want to teach. They want to be respected in the profession they're doing. They want to make sure that their students succeed because I think the teachers believe a failure in their students is a failure in what they do.

I know a lot of teachers who take a lot of pride in their job. They take more pride in their job than anything they've done because that's who they are. They went into this because they're caring people. They want to make sure the students in our province succeed, that our province succeeds - that we move ahead as a province and we make this province a place where people want to come to live because our education is so great.

That's the way it is now. We have great teachers here in the province and we want to make sure they stay great. So let's treat them with respect, get back to the bargaining table, move on from the so-called imposing a contract on them, imposing conditions on them. Let's work with the teachers. Let's work with the government to make sure that these

people get back to where they want to be - that the teachers can be teaching and the students will thrive. With that, I will take my seat.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that I might have been better at this about two hours ago. I feel like I've passed my moment - some time around 5:30 in the morning.

I was a journalist for far longer than I have been a politician and I feel like I want to own a little part of the problem - the predicament that we're in here in Nova Scotia - because I know as a journalist, I spent five years working for Information Morning on CBC, and before then I was a casual journalist. I worked without having a job to call my own, but I worked for the CBC for about 10 years before I actually had a permanent job - some time with Main Street, some time with Maritime Noon - and frankly, reporting on the results of international or national standardized tests on literacy or math scores is kind of an easy story and so I remember - I'm not sure which round it was of the program of international student assessment that came out, I'm not sure which government it was but I remember the story sometime in the 2000s where it turned out our math scores weren't very good and it was a front-page story - it went on for several days. In fact I think the first across-the-country assessment of math scores as part of the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program, the first one was 2007 so it might have been that one or it might have been the follow-up three years later.

I feel like journalists in Nova Scotia, along with many other people, sort of set us up to be searching for this Holy Grail of a score that shows that we're doing well. I think we followed that Holy Grail down some incorrect paths and we're seeing the consequences of that right now in Nova Scotia. You hear that from teachers. They have to participate in school improvement plans. The school improvement plans have to have metrics where they are demonstrating how they are trying to improve how their performance measures are improving year after year.

I asked for a copy of the Budget Estimates and looked at the department budgets. According to the estimates, we will spend \$4.5 million in 2016-17 at the department level for the Centre for Learning Excellence that has responsibilities related to performance management, school improvement planning, research and data analysis, leadership development. Then we spent just over \$1 million on education innovation and another \$2.7 million on innovative curriculum development. Then we spent \$400,000-and some on communicating all of this and the budget of the Office of the Assistant Deputy Minister has gone up \$500,000 over the last couple of years.

I added up all those figures - and that is where some other leadership and innovative stuff happens. So just those figures added up to more than \$9 million. I just kind of guesstimated that that was 140 new teachers' salaries, or 231 EAs' salaries that we could

invest in people actually working face-to-face with kids, doing what they are trained to do. We actually have 9,000 experts in our system who are public school teachers. What they are constantly hearing from us, I think as a society and from the department as a whole, is what you are doing is not good enough. It has to be better, we have to be improving.

I sort of feel it's a little bit like holding doctors accountable for obesity stats. I mean there are social determinants of literacy, there are social determinants of how our kids are doing in our schools and it is not realistic. We just heard at the Human Resources Committee recently that there's an 8 per cent improvement target for literacy goal over four years and a target to close the achievement gap by 5 per cent and we're in the middle of the pack for national literacy scores in a province where about 30 per cent of children live in poverty, and whereas this government keeps reminding us there are limited resources.

Frankly, those 9,000 experts in our system are doing a pretty fine job. One of the things we heard at the Human Resources Committee is that we had eight boards and eight different results in literacy, and that that was somehow a problem. That's one of the things we're trying to address: we don't understand why we have eight boards and eight different results.

Well, we're people. We're people who live in ecosystems. I think about where I grew up in Newfoundland, and there are a couple of small schools on the south coast - you have to get there by ferry - with amazing results in math. Maybe it's like one teacher. What's wrong with that? Do we actually need to make our system uniform? Who knows? It's wonderful if you can figure out their stories behind why certain schools or certain boards are really fantastic in different results. It might go back to one person who's worked really, really hard for 40 years and mentored new teachers in that area and shared their lessons. But I'm not so concerned about standardizing that and then saying, "okay, now, everybody else do that too, and let's all try to get to the same score."

I was reading a report by Grant Frost that I can table, about some science results where we were right up there with Alberta and Ontario and British Columbia, but the reporting on it was, Nova Scotia hits new, lower plateau - because we didn't actually focus on the science results, which were the bulk of the testing results that were released in this particular assessment. We focused on some incomplete data on math and on literacy, instead of capturing the main story, which was that we were doing as well as British Columbia on science. Do you know what their education budget is, what their population is, what their resources are in comparison to us?

One of the messages I've been hearing from teachers is that they are feeling like failures, not just because they can't meet the needs of the students but also because they are constantly falling short of meeting the goals set through Student Success Planning. The irony is that we have the best-educated cohort of teachers in Nova Scotia history, and we

have left them almost no scope to show leadership, because we're trying to uniform it and control it and make sure it's standardized across departments and across boards.

We're not even allowing them to show their leadership in their classrooms. Instead they're crunching numbers about what they're doing so that we can see if they are doing it the same way as everybody else, so we can figure out at the end of the day whose test score is improving and why, and try to make that standardized. Well, it's not a sausage factory.

In Finland - and I love how so many Nova Scotians have learned about Finland in the course of the last three months - there are a couple of really obvious contrasts between what we're doing and what they do. One is that they start their public education system when kids are seven years old. We're bringing four-year-olds into classrooms that are not play-based and asking them to sit at desks and start working on their math skills and their reading skills and their writing skills. It's not fun.

My son, for the first three months that he was in school, last Fall - he's in Grade 1 now - every day he asked if he could go back to preschool because he got to play. So that's one difference from Finland.

The other is that teachers are well trained and respected and allowed to lead. You don't get somebody to go to school for as long as we get our teachers to go to school and then say don't do your own thing, don't shine in your classroom, don't innovate in the way that you think makes sense, given the kids that you're in front of. That's just like a really poor investment, and we've made them invest so much in their post-secondary education and we've invested so much in the post-secondary education of our teachers. So why aren't we actually taking advantage of that? Why aren't we valuing what they can actually bring to the classroom?

I think it's a real tragedy that we have teachers feeling like failures. I think it has been phenomenal to watch the conversation open up and teachers have told me how liberating it is to actually be honest about how they're feeling like failures, how they're being made to feel like failures instead of constantly trying to paper over the system that has real cracks in it.

If we weren't going to invest all the time in Student Success Planning and constant innovation or if we were just to allow innovation to happen in classrooms in a supportive way so that teachers could try different things with curriculum and then try to share it through naturally-forming professional support groups or whatever it is that right now are mandated, if we weren't going to invest in that and in so much data analysis, where could we actually put investment that we know would make a big difference and a longer-term one?

Again, when the deputy minister and a number of her senior staff appeared at the Human Resources Committee I asked the question about the EDI - that's the Early

Development Instrument - which is a very widely accepted, very rigorous assessment of children's readiness to learn, that you'd take between 3.5 years old and 6 years old. If there's one metric, if there's one number that we should actually be focused on trying to shift, it's not literacy or math in Grade 6 or math in Grade 9, it's the EDI because it's a huge indicator for how kids will do throughout their school career and on into the future. It correlates with what kind of experiences they'll have in the health care system, what kind of experiences they'll have in the justice system, because it's hugely related to how well they're being nurtured in their early childhood.

One of the comments I found was really telling in that Human Resources Committee meeting is that we were told the department is looking at doing an 18-month check and a 36-month check to make sure children get early referrals. They're looking at that. We're not doing it and it's super important. Again, that's one of the frustrations you hear from teachers, that right now there's all this data that is collected and almost no action to actually help the kids that we can see are failing. Partly it's because we're gathering the data on a system-wide level too late. If we actually caught them at 18 months, 24 months, or 36 months and referred them to resources then, you've got a whole education career that you can shift. There's all kinds of really fun, innovative, and effective ways of doing assessment at those early levels.

Right now I can tell you because I just went through the experience of having kids. I saw my doctor, who's fabulous, thank God, at a wonderful clinic. I saw her or one of her colleagues frequently from birth until six months and then still quite a lot all the way up until 18 months. Then after 18 months, she didn't see my kids again until they had to get their pre-school check, until they had to get their vaccine before they went to school. Between 18 months and maybe 52 months, doctors barely see our kids in Nova Scotia. There's no systemic check.

You can be doing all kinds of great stuff with having a doctor go in and actually use a board book at 36 months. If you pass a board book to a kid at 36 months, and they can't hold it in their hands, they don't know to orient it the right way so that they can flip through the pages - if they're not doing that naturally at 36 months, you know that they're not being exposed to books. You know that that family needs to have some support in the home.

There are great programs. There are great programs in the community, some of which the Department of Community Services is investing in, like Parenting Journey. But they're not getting us at a population-wide level. If somebody refers themselves, it happens, or if somebody is already in contact with a family resource centre, they might get the Parenting Journey Program. But there's a lot that we could do at that early stage which could make a real difference.

In terms of this actual legislation, I'm quite stumped by some of it. The commission on inclusive education is to be comprised of three experts on inclusive education, not one

of which can be a member of the union. That means you have nobody - nobody - from our education system who can be part of that commission on inclusive education. I think we've all had the experience of having somebody come in and tell us - or at least I've had that experience of having a wonderful expert come in and tell me how to do my job better, except they have no idea what my job is now or the context because they're from too far away from the system. It's like, yes, that would be great, but you don't know this and this and this. So this commission on inclusive education is going to be made up of three individuals who are experts on inclusive education, none of whom will have deep knowledge of where we're at now and what kind of situations teachers are working in now. They're supposed to do their job incredibly fast, and I just don't see how that can work. I just don't see it.

That's apart from the fact that - the fact that we're here at all is really a result of relationships not having been nurtured and the collective bargaining process having happened under conditions that are not actually conducive to collective bargaining. Many of my fellow members have shared quotes that I couldn't agree with more about how collective bargaining has to happen with equal power, where parties get to come to the table with equal power and that process has evolved over time so that employees and the employer are meeting in the middle.

The Premier can say it as many times as he likes, that the Government of Nova Scotia has negotiated three tentative agreements with the union and three times the executive recommended acceptance. Except I've heard the stories from the negotiators who were there for the first one and were shocked - literally quite shocked - when they showed up for the first negotiating session after the initial exchange of starting positions, and they were greeted not with a negotiating team but with a manila envelope that was the government's final offer. That is not collective bargaining. Saying that we can't actually talk is not bargaining.

Shelley Morris, who was then the President of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, said and in a two-page communication to the membership that was emailed out to union members that "In the face of impending draconian legislation it was decided to recommend acceptance of this offer."

The next one that happened under Bill No. 148, which yes, hasn't actually been proclaimed but everybody knows that it could be. It signals the government's intent. Frankly, I think by the time the third deal was negotiated, teachers just felt so disrespected. Why would the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development say that she thought teachers were looking forward to getting back to the classroom when they had never been out of the classroom, as teachers are going to vote on that offer?

I do know teachers who were hoping that somehow people would accept it, that they would hold their nose and accept it just because it has been long and teachers who aren't completely exhausted do love their jobs and love the kids they work for and so they

were hoping that you know we're not going to get anything better so let's just make this stop so we can go back to normal, that wasn't any good but let me get back at it. Then that comment and the Premier's comment about what the intention of those two days was, I think that really scuttled any chances of even getting a very lukewarm approval and maybe there never was a chance at all.

I have two kids in the public education system and I think about them and how different they are and I think about our focus on these math scores and literacy scores and I just think about everything we are not measuring and how I really would rather that we don't focus so much on measuring. I doubt that my eight-year-old daughter is meeting the expected outcomes for reading, but she blows me away with her creativity. I have worn jewellery in the Legislature that she has made, I have more art than I can figure out how to get on the wall. She could speak to strangers, she can speak in front of a crowd with complete confidence. She has such great questions. She has an understanding of human emotion and is able to name her own emotions and what's causing them and why she's feeling like that at eight in a way that I couldn't do in my 20s. She's going to be just fine.

It has taken her a while to learn how to read, and I can see already that her brother is going to be at the end of Grade 1 where she was at the beginning of Grade 3. I'm not going to hold the teacher accountable for that and I know we're not holding teachers accountable for individual students and I know that there's a range of population, but we do sort of act like they're widgets and like what we're trying to build in Nova Scotia is a better widget factory where we get these particular metrics of math scores and literacy scores. Really, we have to worry about if we have flourishing individuals. Do we have individuals who feel connected? Do we have individuals who have - there's all this really fascinating stuff about early experiences and how it shapes people's lives.

You may have heard reporting about the ACE scores.

MR. SPEAKER: Order. I just ask the member to speak directly to myself and not to the members opposite. Thank you.

MS. ROBERTS: ACE stands for adverse childhood experiences. The first large study of this was based on HMO data in the United States so the sample set was largely of people who have insurance, and a disproportionately white and male population group. But because they had this amazing sample set, they were able to trace individuals' reporting of these adverse childhood experiences and look at them and their health outcomes. Adverse childhood experiences include everything from abandonment of a child by a parent, sexual abuse, adverse poverty, neglect - there's 12 or 16 of them.

The amazing thing is, if you have one adverse childhood experience you are going to be okay, but when you get up to four and five, unfortunately we do have children in our society and in our world who are having - one adverse childhood experience often comes with others. But if a child has one adult consistently in their life who they trust and who

they can turn to, it is protective of those eventual outcomes that would otherwise be predicted for somebody who had those experiences.

For some kids those individuals are teachers. If they're in small schools and you've got a principal who is your person who you can check in with or you've got a guidance counsellor who is with you for years or you've got a grandmother or you've got an aunt or you've got a really awesome next-door neighbour, somebody who sticks with you long enough, that person is enough to protect that child from what otherwise are higher incidences of diabetes, of heart disease, of mental illness.

Really, what we have to be working on as a society is how we actually help people thrive. The metric of that is much broader than what we're currently measuring, and unfortunately, what you measure tends to be what you go for. So right now, we're going for what we're measuring and we're measuring this little narrow thing and then we're telling teachers that sorry, you're not doing good enough, let's get on that school improvement plan. Let's hit those metrics and those targets that we've set for goals to improve. But they are not the ones who are creating the poverty that children are living in.

Teachers are already trying to do so much to make up for the childhood circumstances of the kids in their classrooms. Then we're blaming them or holding them accountable if they can't work miracles. I think that's deeply unfair to our teachers. I think the rejection of these agreements reflects that unfairness.

I think we need a reset. I think we desperately need a reset. Frankly, if this government wanted to, teachers have told us how to do it. Teachers have told us, these are things that you could do that don't cost any money. Just do them and then walk away, and let's just cool off for a while.

Instead, no, we're doing the opposite of that. We're not cooling off. We're not creating an environment where there's some good faith. We're not offering an olive branch. Instead, there is this bill, which is imposing a collective agreement that teachers have rejected and studying the problems. Teachers are really tired of studying the problems. They want to see something alleviated. So I'm not surprised at the protest outside.

Frankly, it's an honour and a privilege to stand up and voice my appreciation for teachers who feel underappreciated and also really voice my opinion that there's nothing more important than this. There's nothing more important than our public education system.

To that I would add our early education system, which we don't really have yet in Nova Scotia. We have a system of private and non-profit daycares and preschools which are all really struggling under other changes that this government has made without sufficient consultation. I'm afraid that we may lose some of those. I'm sure that some of

you have probably heard from both non-profit and private operators of daycares and child care centres in your district. But that's a topic for another day. I will take my seat.

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

MR. LARRY HARRISON: I would like to make a couple of comments before I go into my notes. First of all, I have no idea how we got to this point. I don't know what all the background is. I simply don't want to go in making a judgment because it's not going to be that beneficial. I also want to give credit to my colleague from Yarmouth who stated some financial concerns a while ago. With those two things, I want to make a couple of comments.

A little bit about my background: when I went to school, I would go with my tools, the chisel and the hammer, and I would be off to do the work. There was a lot of discipline back then. I remember an instance where we were lined up for the washroom, I think in Grade 3 or 4. A friend of mine and I just pushed one another or whatever, and it was strap time - the one and only time I got that. Respect - you might not have liked all the teachers you had, Mr. Speaker, but you had respect for who they were.

I remember one of my kids, it was in senior high, he swore and the vice-principal happened to be walking by the door when he heard the word. All we saw were two feet going out the door at that level because the vice-principal was about 6'6" and he could handle him. Those kinds of things just don't happen anymore, and I guess it's a good thing that they don't.

Personally, I had to be pushed in school. I was not a good student and my parents and the school teachers themselves would push me along to make me do the work.

I do want to say that at the present time we're in a different era and teachers really want to teach, they really do. The teachers I have had contact with in Brookfield and the Musquodoboits, I could not name one who did not want to be there, who did not want to be as much help as possible to the students. However, there is an atmosphere created now whereby the teachers are having a hard job finding the time to teach the way they would like to teach.

What I want to do for the next little bit is to make some comments from emails I have received from teachers. Some of them I know, some of them I do not know, but I just put some of the comments together. These were some of the things they were concerned about: one really felt under-valued; didn't care about salary; was willing to give up lunch hour to help; bought snowmobile suits and mittens for children who didn't have any; worked weekends and nights to develop lessons. Classes include ADD students, IPP students, immature students, those with behavioural problems, students who read, students who couldn't read, students who did not come to school on a regular basis. That was from

one of the teachers. I know her and I know how much she values teaching and how much she values helping the children develop.

Another teacher, her concerns were: overcrowded classrooms; lack of resource support; again, behavioural issues; ineffective use of teacher time; the no-fail policy - whether that's real or imagined, it doesn't matter, they believe that it's there; endless and unproductive data entry; lack of attendance consequences; no requirements for on-time completion of assignments; huge wait-times for speech, language, psychological assessments.

I took this from another teacher and she said, "I have been spit on, kicked, cut with scissors, bruised by thrown chairs, punched in the chest." At this point in her career - 30 years - she feels worthless and she has sacrificed family, health and wages to buy what is needed and yet is called greedy.

I know when I had my previous profession they would tell me that I was the highest-paid person hourly in the existence of this earth. I worked two hours a week for my salary. I know it's not true. I hope you folks know it's not true, but we just joke about it, and I said they had the same opportunity to become a clergyman as I did so they needn't say anything.

What I want to do is just have a look at a couple of these things. One is class sizes. In a perfect world, if all the students were at the same academic level you could have 100 in a class and it wouldn't matter one bit because they're all at the same academic level. But when you're dealing with students who are at different levels of learning, it becomes very, very difficult.

The no-fail policy - again, I know it has been said that there isn't one in existence, but somehow the teachers feel that there is one. In the real world, you actually can fail.

I remember back in the days when they had matriculations - provincial exams. I had no desire to go to NASA, especially after I made 17 on my physics matriculation. The science just wasn't there and I could not understand the concepts and didn't do well, but I knew what I was going to do earlier than that, thank goodness.

Discipline with respect to assignments - when you go to university, you are going to be in an atmosphere whereby the professor really doesn't care. The assignment is due on this day, at this time, and if you don't have it on his desk on that day, at that time, you get a zero - you fail.

In a job, the same thing will happen. If you're given an assignment to do and you don't get that assignment done on the time that the boss expects it to be done, you're gone - fail time. Like I say, it is a different world in school than it is outside, and people need to be prepared to do that.

In conclusion, and this is a huge one - I have talked to many teachers about this and this a huge concern for them. As I said, in a perfect world if you had students at the same academic level, you could handle that, but when you have students at different levels, it's very, very hard.

One teacher said that she had a student who would yell all the time and he would be at the back of the room, but the yelling would interfere with the rest of them paying attention and she was just unable to teach. I mentioned this before in the Legislature that I talked to a parent and she was sending her child who had difficulties - on medication, seeing a psychologist - to school for two hours a day. Invariably, after one hour a day the teacher would call for that parent to go pick up that child and take the child home. Just could not handle it because it was so disruptive in the class.

I have met teachers who deal with behavioural children and children who are challenged in other ways - physically, mentally, emotionally, whatever - and she did one fantastic job with these students. In fact, so fantastic that I set her up with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development so the two of them could talk about a program to handle these students. I don't know how far that went but I know that that teacher is still teaching, she still has that same desire to help those children, and she has done some marvellous things with them.

Behaviour, that's another big one. We are creating a generation of children who have - no, let me rephrase that - there are some terrific children out there who have great respect for property, for people, but there's a large segment now, larger than ever before, I think, who don't have the same respect for property and for people. That might be coming out of the school system where discipline is not allowed to be exercised in the classroom.

You, Mr. Speaker, for instance, if any of us step out of line in this room you are going to exercise discipline. You've done it, you will do it again. We are supposed to be adults who have grown, we have been educated, we're here, and yet discipline is still necessary even among us. If children are not disciplined for bad behaviour, we are going to create a society of disrespect. My goodness, throughout the world now there is just so much disrespect for human life - not that bad in Canada but in other parts of the world it is horrific and I do not want to see our generation go in that vein. I want to see them in the vein of being able to help people.

There is a lot of difficult stuff in the school system, but it can be better. Teachers are able to handle some of the issues of concern. They are few and we do need more, but hopefully we will get more as time goes on and we can put in place an atmosphere whereby the teachers will be able to give what they want to give to their students.

We are in the position of being able to do that. Those who are teachers I know want to teach. They don't want to deal with a lot of administration, they don't want to deal with a lot of difficulties. They just want to go in there and teach. We can create an atmosphere

for them to do their job. There is nothing worse than going into an environment whereby you are not happy doing what you want to do.

I have told people time and time again that if I went into the caucus atmosphere not liking my colleagues, it would be horrible and I probably wouldn't do it but I do because the atmosphere is good. We just need to create atmospheres for those that are working where they are going to want to go to work and do the job that we want them to do.

Work environment is extremely important, it always is. We have the opportunity in this Legislature to create that environment, and I would like to see us move ahead in doing what does not cost a lot. The teachers know what they want. They know what they want now. All we have to do is create the atmosphere for them to do their best with the children who are under their care.

Someone said earlier that for a lot of children, the teachers are their only contact with stability. If the teachers are not happy, they're not going to be stable, and the students are not going to get the best they can from the teachers, whether it be in sports, education, or whatever. Let's try to create an atmosphere that is good for the teachers so that they can do their job well.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: It's interesting that we're back at it again.

AN HON. MEMBER: Here we go again.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Here we go again. I've been saying that for three years, Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions.

It's interesting to see - throughout each of those sessions, you would think that the government would recognize how to approach the next piece of legislation, the next negotiation, the next issue in front of them. But obviously, they haven't. In the last three years, I believe I've been in the Legislature throughout the night more than in the 10 years prior. I've been in the House for 13.5, almost 14 years. In the 10 years prior to the last three, there were sessions that happened throughout the night, but most of the time - if not all the time if I recall correctly - it was because of a pending emergency situation, something that needed to be addressed immediately, or there would have been devastating effects.

We heard just the other day that the Premier said that we need this emergency session to address an issue that is important to Nova Scotians. I would agree with part of that, Mr. Speaker, that it is important that we recognize the issues facing our teachers, our students, and our parents in the school system today.

But to call it an emergency is wrong. To be sitting throughout the night, I believe, is wrong when we have a system in place here in the Legislature that, especially over the last number of years with some of the rule changes, allows for more of a structural component to the day in the life of an MLA in session, where we have a designated time, for example, for Question Period. I think that allows not only the MLAs to be more prepared and better prepared but also gives the staff and those who keep this Legislature open and running - not just the political staff but, of course, the Clerks, security, Legislative TV, Hansard, catering, whatever it is - the ability to make sure that our needs are taken care of, that the session can progress in a manner that hopefully is productive and that it results, in the end, in good public policy.

I have to say, when we know that the budget session, the Spring session, is just around the corner - to call this an emergency session I don't think does anybody any good.

The teachers are going to be in the classroom. They're in the classroom now, I believe, or pretty soon. Our students are going to be going to school. I know over the last day or two, there's been school cancellations. But students will be in school, and teachers will be there prepared to teach. Where is the emergency in that? Don't get me wrong. I've heard from many parents, many students, and many teachers about some of the causes of this negotiation and the results of negotiations breaking down.

My daughter is in university this year. She's first-year university, but was very active in school. I know part of her education and her being active was her ability to participate in school activities, especially sports. I'm very proud that my daughter was involved in almost every sport in school - very proud that last year she was the Female Athlete of the Year for Millwood High, and I tried to go as much as I could to watch her participate in those school sports.

But I have to say some of her teammates who are still in high school understand the circumstances the teachers are in right now, and if anything, I've seen more support for those teachers from students and athletes that I thought might not be on their side over the last number of months, but they are. They've held protests, I know they put signs up along the school close to my home.

I think that the government needs to recognize that there would have been a better approach to addressing the concerns and the breakdown in the negotiations. How ironic we're standing here and it is Teacher Appreciation Week, and how does the government celebrate that? Bill No. 75. Not one mention from the government about Teacher Appreciation Week.

The first thing out of the government's mouth was Bill No. 75. I think that is something that teachers will recognize and be upset about.

I've received emails over the last number of months from students, from teachers, and from parents, and it's quite upsetting over the last couple of days especially when I received quite a few emails with language like "disheartening," "demoralized," "defeated," "undemocratic," "unconstitutional," "mean-spirited punishment," "heartbreaking," "brow-beating," "devaluing the teaching profession" - those are just a few of the words I pulled out from much of the correspondence that I received, and I know that many of the members in the Liberal Government have received also. I'm trying my best to respond to each and every one of them.

The common theme in a lot of the correspondence that I've been reading is that the majority of them have indicated that they've never written to an MLA before. They've never written to the government before, but they felt compelled because of the recent decision of the government to move forward with introducing Bill No. 75, and some of the language and attitude that they see with the remarks from the Premier, from the minister, and from government.

It's interesting that this week, Teacher Appreciation Week, we see that this legislation is before us. And once this is passed - for those listening at home or who might be here in the gallery, the Opposition Parties are trying our best to make sure that we bring forward the concerns that we've heard over the last number of months, but this legislation is going to pass eventually. There is a majority government, eventually it will pass. It will most likely be early next week, mid-week. We can speak on it a little bit through the night. We can manoeuvre some motions if we choose to or talk a little longer in Committee of the Whole, but eventually this will pass mid-week of next week or early next week.

One of the things I know that won't happen is things will go back to normal. If that's what the government thinks will happen with them imposing an agreement, they misunderstand how the teachers are feeling, how parents are feeling, and how some of the students are feeling. This contract and this bill will do little to inspire the spirit of volunteerism that we see in our schools.

I talked about my daughter and the sports that she enjoyed, most of the time had a third party or outside coach - a coach that might have coached in a suburban league or a metro league, if it's basketball or volleyball - but none of that could happen without the support of a teacher liaison. Each sporting team has a teacher that is assigned to it who volunteers their time and many of them volunteer a lot of time. I know basketball, for example - my daughter's school travelled quite a bit last year from Cape Breton down to the Valley. The teacher who was their support was there at every event and she had a young family. Sometimes her family would accompany her on the trip, but often she would be there without them. So how is this going to increase or get teachers to get back to where they were before the negotiations broke down?

We know that teachers spend - and I've received this through a number of correspondence, but I know personally teachers who spend a great deal of their time in the

evening and on weekends preparing for the school day. They take time at night to make sure that they're ready to provide education in the classroom. Often they're advocating for those who are struggling.

I can't imagine being in a classroom where you have a number of different individuals who might be struggling in one component or the other in a lesson plan and how challenging that would be, especially when you see classroom sizes ballooning to 40 or over 40. We talked about class cap sizes for P-6 and I'm glad to see that is continuing. We addressed that and moved on that when we had a mandate here in the province.

Having children in high school - my daughter's in university, but I have a son in Grade 10 - class size matters in the older grades also. I received an email through the night talking about how the students raced to this teacher's classroom because they're short a couple of desks and they sit on the ledge of the window or on the floor, and then they're scrambling to get additional chairs and additional tables. My own son explained to me that he didn't have a chair for the first two weeks of school, and I'm thinking, how the heck are we supposed to have our children learn in that environment? I think it's important that we look at class cap sizes right through to Grade 12.

One of the concerns I've heard in the last little while, especially since the introduction of Bill No. 75, is that it's actually backtracking on what has been achieved so far. So, yes I would agree that there were three tentative agreements, but ultimately the teachers of this province - the 9,300 or so teachers of this province - have the ability to look at whatever is negotiated through the negotiation team. They have the ability to decide as a whole if this is something they support or not.

We've heard often from the Premier that, oh we're just throwing our hands up - we negotiated three contracts with the negotiation team, and the teachers have turned it down. That should send a strong message to the government.

I think the Premier mentioned this in Question Period - I don't know if it was last night at 9 p.m. or this morning at 1:00 a.m. The Premier admitted that the government missed the mark with some of the teachers, with the contract and what was negotiated. So if he has missed the mark and he understands that, then why wouldn't the government look at how we move forward and try to get the teachers on board, try to understand what the teachers are trying to achieve in the end?

We know that in the third agreement that was just negotiated, between that agreement and what was presented in the bill it extends the wage freeze for four more months. It might not seem like a lot, but the symbol of that to the teachers is really just a slap in the face saying that doesn't matter, we're going to take stuff off the table and we're just going to move forward with it.

I've heard about the arbitration and what was presented compared to the last contract that was negotiated, it removes the third-party arbitration for any impasse resulting from work of the council to improve classroom conditions. We've heard from so many teachers about the need to do that so why would we - and why would the government - remove the arbitration component of it?

I know that the government is not in favour of arbitration because we have Bill No. 148 sitting there in the back pocket of the Premier or whoever is negotiating for the government. We heard recently that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development wasn't at the negotiation table, I don't believe the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education was at the negotiation table, and I don't know if the Premier has been. The Premier seems to be the one who will present the government's side in the media, but how do you negotiate in a fair collective manner when you have something like Bill No. 148 over the heads of not only the teachers but the other 312 bargaining units that are next in line to negotiate with the government?

The government and the Premier, when they sat over on this side had a lot to say about fair collective bargaining. In my binder, I have all kinds of quotes that I could start reading of the Minister of Energy and others who made comments when they were in Opposition about respecting fair collective bargaining. The Premier, as the Leader of the Official Opposition in the last mandate took out an ad so all Nova Scotians could see. He sent letters to all the unions about how if he was elected Premier, how if the Liberal Party became the governing Party of our province that they would respect fair, collective bargaining.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is just not happening. This is not the Liberal Government that they promised they would be to voters. Each and every member of the Liberal Government will have to account for that when they go to those same members who belong to unions, or the same Nova Scotians who took the Premier's word about respecting collective bargaining.

It started off with a bang - Bill No. 1, which was really a union-busting bill. It chose to dismantle and control a worker's right to choose their representative to represent their interests during bargaining, and not during bargaining, as they go about their career.

We've seen the mess that Bill No. 1 was. How many times did they fire the arbitrator? I've never seen that in the 10 years I was in the House. That just really dismantled decades and decades of hard work from Nova Scotians from one end of this province to the other on trying to make sure that union rights and fair collective bargaining happened in our province, and we can go to so many situations decades ago on how unfair government had treated workers in this province and how businesses have treated workers in this province. That's why we have labour standards, for example, so that people's rights are protected - those rights that the Premier said he would protect if he was given the chance to sit in this House as Premier.

Then we had Bill No. 37 that went after health care workers and removed their rights to fair collective bargaining. It didn't stop there - we had Bill No. 100. It was the Universities Accountability and Sustainability Act that removed and could suspend a collective agreement and remove any right to strike from university employees. Then of course we had Bill No. 148, which just wraps it all up in really, I think, truly how the government wants to approach collective bargaining in this province.

So you have a teacher's contract in front of us, trying to negotiate fairly, and I've seen from the government an attempt to try to divide the union leadership and their membership. The union leadership, the negotiation team, agreed to this. They said that their employees should accept that contract. I know each and every one of them - and I know there were a couple different people in leadership roles in that who were trying to do the best they could with what was in front of them. The 9,300 teachers weren't in the bargaining room when they were trying to hammer out a deal with a government that held and holds Bill No. 148, for example, over their heads, that says we're going to negotiate, but we're not going to negotiate any kind of financial arrangements - this is it, take it or leave it. That just ends from day one any real true negotiations.

The union leadership tried to do the best they could with what was in front of them - tried to improve every time the potential contract to go back to the teachers to have them look at it and say, what do you think? There are 118,000 students in our school system - 377 schools, I believe, across our province. As my colleague spoke earlier, so many of those 9,300 teachers are trying to do amazing things in different regions of the province and they find in the environment they're in now that it's difficult, very difficult, to try to make a difference in the lives of students.

I haven't met a teacher yet who is teaching just because it's a job, just to get a paycheque - I haven't come across one of them yet. It's almost a calling from what I hear and I can understand that. I can understand people wanting to get into teaching and to try to make a difference in the lives of kids. People want to teach elementary school, some people want to teach high school and junior high. Junior high - I don't know why they'd pick junior high. That's probably the craziest time of any child's life, I've got to tell you.

I remember going to the orientation when my daughter was in Grade 6 and when my son was in Grade 6 - both times I said, you're not going to recognize your child once they leave Grade 9 and it's so true. Such a growth period in just those three short years. So I can imagine junior high - I don't know if that's the first choice for all teachers, that they want to teach junior high, but I've met some amazing teachers that supported my kids along the way and I appreciate what they've done.

It's a calling, I believe, similar to other professions. For myself, being a volunteer firefighter first, which kind of led me into being a paramedic and somehow led me to the floor of this Legislature, I believe I did what I did and the path I chose is because it was

kind of a calling. I got excited when I went on emergency calls. Not that I wanted to see people hurt or see the destruction, but it was just something that's in you and I think that's in a lot of the teachers that teach in our province. They've been saying over the last couple of years that things do need to change, that they are being overloaded. It's very easy to do that and I share in the blame of making the teachers feel that way.

When you're an elected official and you're in government and you're always wanting to try to improve outcomes - and I didn't realize, I don't think, until the last little while just adding stuff to the curriculum, how challenging that is.

We don't seem to take stuff off it; we just seem to continue to add to it, and I can imagine that there are lots of challenges in that. I think that's what we're hearing from teachers - it's that they want to teach.

I got an email last night from someone who indicated that they often would go by the resource classroom, for example, and they would know who the teachers were in there and usually one would be on the computer inputting the mass amount of data that you have to keep up with, and they indicated that in the last number of weeks, every time she walked by that classroom there was no one on the computer. Those teachers were engaged with the students. I think we can learn from that, and I think government needs to learn from that - that's really, I think, what teachers want. They want to be able to engage with the kids, make sure they have the resources to support the sheer challenge of trying to make sure that they can provide that teaching experience to every different child.

We know so much more now than we did 20 years ago around mental health, around how people learn. It isn't just a lesson plan - here you go, you know it or you don't, pass or fail. I'm a bit concerned at the discussion we're going to have in the next little while - some may say we need to get back to just passing and failing. One reason we have inclusion - one reason why we have so much more knowledge on how kids learn and how different one student from the other can learn, or does learn - is important.

I know personally, getting a tutor for one of my kids - and my son is not watching Legislative TV so I guess I can say it's him. He's not failing, but he's struggling a little bit on the concept in getting it; the same class that has 35 to 40 kids in it. So we recognize that and I have to say the teacher has been very good to get back to us even though they aren't doing anything extra. We got the phone call. We got the email. We've had the conversation with the teacher to make sure that we're going in the right direction and it has helped a lot to have a tutor. I know he'll be fine, he'll get through it.

We know so much more about individuals that I don't think the system and the funding and the support has complemented the knowledge we have and the ability to provide different manners of educating our kids. I don't think there are teachers out there who just want to fail kids; they want to see them succeed. We're so caught up in outcomes and test scores and I think they haven't been able to experience different ways of teaching.

With the Internet now, you can go and pick up best practices from all over the world, from different jurisdictions - not just in Canada and Nova Scotia, but all over the world - on how some teachers have improved students' ability to learn the education and the practicums and what they have to teach kids these days.

I hope through this that the government recognizes that they need to address what the teachers have been talking about. We know one of the other areas of concern with a piece of legislation like this is will it stand up if challenged in the courts. We just have to look at the other coast - British Columbia. I believe it has been 12 years, since 2002 and I think another challenge in 2012, around a labour dispute of course from British Columbia and the teachers' union in British Columbia. It was just resolved in the Supreme Court of Canada back in, I believe, November - 14 years they've been in court and the potential cost now for the government there is they're pegging it around \$300 million.

Back in 2002 and again in 2012, British Columbia passed a law that stripped class sizes and composition clauses from teachers' contracts. Of course, the union challenged it in provincial court each time and they were both ruled unconstitutional by the B.C. Supreme Court. The province had negotiated in bad faith and had attempted to provoke a teachers' strike as part of its bargaining strategy.

The question is, will Bill No. 75 stand up here in Nova Scotia? I don't know if the government has extensively looked at Bill No. 75 - are they confident that will hold up? I know that has been a concern with a number of the other bills we talked about. Really, that just drags things out for years on end. Like I say, 14 years in B.C. and we have to wonder if history will repeat itself in Nova Scotia.

We know that we need to improve conditions in our schools; we know that teachers want to get back to ensuring that the priority is the students and their education. Over the last number of months, we know that there has been a lot of, I would call, distractions from that. We've seen, like other pieces of legislation, the outcry from a good portion of the population that will be affected by it. We've seen the protestors. Unfortunately, throughout the night - I know it's 8:30 a.m. now and teachers are in school, but we started this session at 8:00 p.m., came back at 12:00 midnight and really no opportunity for teachers to be involved in making sure that MLAs in this House understand their frustrations, their anger, and understand that they feel defeated and they're heartbroken.

Yes, a lot is going through social media - Facebook and Twitter - and emails and even phone calls to the Legislature. I got a message from somebody in Sackville here who wants me to vote against Bill No. 75, and I think many members across the way have been getting the same thing. I can guarantee to Chris O'Reilly that I will not be supporting Bill No. 75, and I'll call him later to make sure he knows that, but I just got the note as I stood up.

That will be the challenge for government members - how to account for the actions of their government. They're going to be accountable for this, and I don't think teachers and students and parents and those who support the teachers will forget soon about what we've seen and witnessed over the last little while.

As I said at the start, the Premier had made a lot of promises to Nova Scotians on how he would act as a government - open and transparent. I can't agree to that one. Support fair collective bargaining - I don't think I can say that has happened in the province with just the sheer list of labour bills and pieces of legislation that take the rights away from workers in this province.

The next question is, what happens after Bill No. 75? As I said in Question Period today, 313 bargaining units have to negotiate a contract with the government. We're three years-plus into the mandate and they haven't been able to ratify any agreements with workers in this province. That should be concerning to the members opposite. How can the government and how can the Premier say they're willing to negotiate - after Bill No. 75 we're going to sit down and negotiate with the other unions? I've asked the Premier today, and he wouldn't answer, if they're going to impose a contract on each and every one of them.

I guess if the Premier says yes to that then we need to do something about Bill No. 148, because with that in the Premier's back pocket, fair collective bargaining just can't happen. You can't even say those words and mean that fair collective bargaining is going to happen for all those other units. We've heard that from teachers - how was the negotiation team supposed to come away with a tentative agreement that could get through and passed by a vote with the teachers. The first time in history we're on the brink of a strike. There's never been a teacher's strike in this province's history and that's one of the frustrating things with Bill No. 75, that it attacks those benefits that have been fairly negotiated with a number of governments - Liberal, Progressive Conservative, NDP. That is what I think angers most of them - that it's not just about what is going on now and how we move forward and is there going to be a two-year freeze or 20 months or 24 months.

What the government was going after was actually taking away previous benefits that have been negotiated fairly - some of them decades ago. The teachers know how unfair that is, and we know in the NDP caucus how unfair that is. We're all in favour of fair collective bargaining, trying to move forward on negotiating. I understand the financial component of negotiating is difficult at times. Negotiating a contract is probably the most difficult thing government has to do in their mandate. I know that; I've been there. It's not a walk in the park, but you have to work at it every single day. (Interruptions) (Laughter) I'm not repeating what he said. He's out of order - you should ask him to leave the Chamber.

It's not an easy thing. Negotiations are hard, but the track record of this government is that as soon as you come up to a roadblock, they just legislate and legislate and legislate.

That's not really a fair way. Anybody who has been involved in negotiation knows that most of the time the eleventh hour is when you get that agreement - when you get both sides to move.

Those involved in the labour movement understand that you're not going to get everything you ask for. You're not going to win everything that you put on the table; you're not going to win and bring it back to your membership and hold a big celebration. It's a challenge for both - and the same on the government's side. But the two sides have to approach it in a way that they understand that it's a give and take, and I have to say it hasn't been a give-and-take approach with this government.

When you walk in with all these stipulations before you even sit down at the table - I think my colleague or maybe it might have been the member from the Progressive Conservative Party who indicated a letter was given to them and in it outlined probably a couple of the biggest things that you have to negotiate - wages and some of those benefits - that's not give and take, and it shows either a lack of knowledge on behalf of the government on what true fair negotiation is or they understand it fully, but it's their way and they're not going to negotiate fairly like previous governments have. Previous Liberal Governments have negotiated fairly, so I don't know why the current government is so determined to just roll over how collective bargaining has been taking place across the province over the last number of years, and decades.

Teachers know that there are not mounds of gold in the basement of this Legislature to pay off and go into negotiations with huge amounts of asks. I know in the past - I mean, even just in the almost 14 years that I've been here when I first got into the Legislature I think the norm was 7, 8, 9 per cent increases, and if it was anything less, people walked around this Legislature. Teachers aren't asking for that. In this day and age, most unions and most bargaining units are just hoping to get cost of living, which is reasonable. They're not asking for 5 per cent a year. Even 5 per cent doesn't seem like a lot. They're not even asking for that.

So it's reasonable to go in and ask for the cost of living. We know how challenging it is for Nova Scotians over the last number of years with the increase of everything. I had this discussion with my wife the other day at the grocery store. I was always one that just went and bought what I needed. My wife has been teaching me over the years that I should look at the price of things, but we just bought what we needed. I've started to pay attention and I'm amazed at the cost of groceries, for example. Just in the last few years the increase is just unbelievable, and I'm thinking that I need to make sure that I'm careful - and we do well as MLAs, and my wife works - but we need to watch what we spend so that Acadia University can get most of that for my daughter's education.

But I couldn't imagine those who aren't as fortunate as myself and my family, who would struggle going into grocery stores. The costs of things have escalated. I think looking back at inflation, then it's very reasonable that teachers would expect that. They're not

asking for everything, and really wages have not been what I've come across as the key issue. It has been the classroom, it has been the weight put on the shoulders of teachers over the last number of years and then feeling the challenge of trying to make sure that each one of their students gets the education and the attention that they need to bring hopefully success to that student.

So I think it's quite reasonable for teachers to ask that some of those conditions be in their next contract so that it is much harder to change those conditions if they're in the contract. That means you can't change it until you renegotiate that contract. If we're leaving everything to going to a commission or a third party - I'm trying to get the correct terminology, I think it's called a commission that's going to be created - there are no guarantees that if the teacher said yes last week to the contract that things would change in a timely manner. I think that's the biggest concern I've heard from teachers - the government is saying we want to improve classrooms and support teachers in the classroom, but without seeing proof of it, they're reluctant to support any kind of deal.

That was actually one of the things I think they changed. It was a council to improve classroom conditions. In the third tentative agreement there was a maximum of three union representatives, three departments and one from each school board - so nine teachers, I would assume, from school boards.

AN HON. MEMBER: No teachers.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Nine representatives from school boards, I believe, from each of the school board areas? (Interruptions) Anyway, in the bill the council would be made up of four representatives appointed by the department and one appointed by the union and nine classroom teachers appointed by the school board, so a reduction of what they had in front of them and what was in the last contract.

So I think that is concerning to the teachers. They wanted to see immediate action and by the council - and I know there is some stipulation on having some kind of report back by the end of June, I believe, but there is nothing guaranteeing that. As I said, it's removing the arbitration component of the council. So if there was something that you couldn't get agreement on you could send it off to arbitration, which is a third party look at it and hopefully come up with a solution to whatever issues they're dealing with - but that's off the table now. So there is no guarantee that the council itself will even agree on recommendations down the road. I think that is part of why the teachers decided not to support that legislation.

So here we are at almost 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday. We're going to have a number of speakers over the next few hours, but eventually this afternoon or early evening, second reading, there will be a vote on it and it will pass to go to the Law Amendments Committee. That alone over the last three years has been quite challenging and frustrating to deal with - for people to try to get in, get themselves on the list to ensure that they can present to the

Law Amendments Committee so that there is another opportunity for them to make sure that MLAs in this House understand what is going on in the classroom, understand the concerns of a teacher or a student or a parent or just a community person.

We know, potentially, the Law Amendments Committee will start at 9:00 a.m. Thursday, but that alone to me shows, and will indicate, that many of our teachers won't be able to present at that time. As I said at the start, they're in classrooms now teaching. They will be in classrooms tomorrow teaching unless there is a storm overnight, but that shouldn't be a reason, default, that they can come in here. Who knows if we can even get in here tomorrow. So it's going to be challenging for teachers - especially teachers who this really impacts - to get into the Legislature and make sure that they, if they want to, have a say on this legislation.

It's a procedural thing that we should be very proud of as a province that we continue to have in this province. I don't believe every jurisdiction gives the public the ability to come into the People's House - the Legislature - and talk on government or Opposition bills. We're very fortunate to have that in our procedures here, but I believe government needs to make every effort to ensure that those who want to come in, do, and that it's at a reasonable time.

The bill is going to pass and if it passes on a Tuesday or a Wednesday or a Thursday or a Friday, it doesn't really matter much, I don't believe. There is no pending emergency that requires Bill No. 75 to pass in five days - end of story, we've got to do it. So let's accommodate those who want to come in. I believe I've heard there is potentially up to about 300 presenters. So let's make sure that we're accommodating to them. Let them have their say. There may be something in those presentations that government members or members of the Opposition will hear that says, let's see if we can improve Bill No. 75.

I've already stated I don't support it, but I'm not one to say I shouldn't do anything to at least try to improve it, and if I hear and our caucus hears from teachers, parents, students - from whoever - a way to try to improve Bill No. 75, then we'll do that. We've done it in the past. We've moved amendments to try to improve it, to try to make sure that government members on that committee listen intently to the concerns of the presenters, and that they come away, if they have questions, with the ability to ask the Department of Health and Wellness or whoever in government is negotiating or is behind this legislation, the ability for them to question and maybe ask if it can be improved. Can we make it better?

I have to tell you, in the four terms that I have been here, not one Party has monopoly on good ideas. I think legislation that looks at input from across the aisle is much better legislation and much better public policy than if it just comes from a single Party or government or Opposition.

Let's be accommodating. Yes, it means you can't report the bill back tomorrow at 10:00 p.m. so that it's on the order paper, so that Friday we can start Committee of the

Whole House - and I know that a lot of people might not know that process, but it means it happens on Tuesday because there is a holiday on Monday - or it happens on Wednesday or Thursday.

Let's accommodate the Law Amendments Committee, make sure people can get in if they want, have the time to present, allow for members to listen to that, figure out if there are amendments that could be brought forward. It could be done at the Law Amendments Committee or it could be done at the Committee of the Whole House, it doesn't matter, but allow for government members and Opposition members to make sure that if we're going forward with this - and I would hope that maybe some of the government members will voice their concern and say, no, I don't support this, but the likelihood of that is low. We need nine, I think. You have a nine-person majority.

So then improve it. Make sure that you listen to the presentations, that you listen to the concerns through the presentations that will be there in person, to those who have emailed you already or have phoned you or have met with you, to those who might submit a written presentation, which I believe there will be some - and improve this legislation that really will, I think, hurt the teaching profession over the next three or four years - whatever is left. I think there might be two years past the contract anyway.

The government has a huge job in front of them. As I said in my opening comments, this bill does little to inspire the spirit of volunteerism with our teachers. There is a relationship between government and those teachers that will need to be repaired, and it's not going to be an easy job. I just hope that the members across the way understand that and that they take ownership. They will have to take ownership - if it's not next week or the week after, it definitely will be in the next general election. They'll have to take ownership for this piece of legislation. They'll have to take ownership of Bill No. 1, Bill No. 37, Bill No. 100, Bill No. 148. That's a lot of explaining to do on a doorstep when you have about three to five minutes to try to convince them to vote for you and then you're on to the next door; very difficult to do. I could list the different groups and areas that have been affected by all those bills, but I know I'm running short on time.

I hope that I have made an impact on hopefully the government members - that they understand that there could be improvements to this bill. Not that I support it, but if there is, please take the time to listen to those who will be joining us over the next day or two in the Law Amendments Committee and hopefully show the respect that these teachers and these presenters deserve because it's going to be tough over the next few years.

I just want to thank all the teachers out there who have worked extremely hard over the last number of years and decades who I think their best interest is the students. They know, and I know, that they make a huge impact on the lives of these young people, just as all of us here have been impacted by teachers in the past, so thank you for that.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise this morning/tonight - whatever we want to call it - to speak to Bill No. 75 in this emergency situation.

You may find it interesting - I went back to see how many times the Legislature has had to have emergency all-night sessions. Did you know that between 1994 and 2013 when this government took office, there had been one emergency that required all-night sittings? Do you know how many there have been in the last three years under this government? This is the fourth emergency. The term I have for this government is "manufactured chaos." So here we are with another all-night session to deal with Premier McNeil's emergency.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to caution the member not to be using the surnames of members in this House.

The honourable member for Pictou East has the floor.

MR. HOUSTON: We're here to deal with the Premier's emergency - yet again, another emergency. This is not an emergency; make no mistake about it, this is not an emergency. This is a political game. It's just an opportunity for the Premier to divide and conquer and try to pit people against one another for political gain - the reason we're here all night - the reason we're sitting here and maybe we'll be here all night tonight, who knows. We're here for the Premier to advance his agenda of political gamesmanship. It's not an emergency.

But we are here to speak to something that goes to the very heart of why the people in this Chamber seek elected office. I think the people in this Chamber seek elected office because they want to do what is in the interests of the people. As politicians, I think we all start out with a little bit of good in there that we do want to do what's right for the people. The people don't really care about Party politics and who is government and who is not - they want their interests represented. That's what people want. They don't care about political interests. They care about the interests of the people.

We should not be here all night. We shouldn't have been here all night talking about this, but we are here, and we have to deal with this situation that the Premier has again created. This chaos that the Premier has manufactured with his inability to negotiate fairly with people, we're here to deal with that and we need to think about the people that are impacted, the teachers out there, the students, the families, and all the people that have been impacted by this minister and this Premier's inability to treat people fairly.

We're going to try to pick up the pieces here today, because once we get through this, in the end the people will have their say. The people will render their opinion on what has happened here and they will do that at the time that it really counts: they will do it on election day, and I know there are a lot of people that are waiting for just that day.

In the meantime, we have an opportunity to listen to people, and we have an opportunity to act accordingly, and that's what we should be doing. We can't fix poverty with this government's budget, but we can allow teachers to achieve their greatest potential if we would just listen to them. We have an opportunity to allow teachers to achieve their greatest potential by listening to the things that matter to them. But is this government listening? That's what people want to know today.

I know the Premier said he did quite a bit of soul-searching over the weekend as he was searching for a normal - he wanted things to return to normal. I commented earlier that if this is the result of the Premier's soul-searching, then I referred him to a book that I had seen on Amazon, which was the *Soul Searcher's Handbook*, and I would hope the Premier would have a little flip through that because this is not a good outcome from soul-searching.

Here we are today to talk about a contract that will likely in the short term, for some teachers for sure, encourage teachers to only work to the terms of the contract and allow the work-to-rule to passively continue. That's what he has created. That's the environment. He has driven a wedge now between government and the teachers.

This contract, this bill, does nothing to resolve the problems in the education system.

My colleague the member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley, I was listening to him speak a couple of weeks ago. He said something that stuck with me, he said when you lose sight of what can be, you lose your ability to be competitive. So if you are not thinking about what can be, then in the moment today, you'll never have the competitive edge to get there.

We need to be thinking about what can be in the education system, what we can do for our students, what we can do to support our teachers. There's none of that in this bill. This bill is a very short-sighted bill that will cause damage in the education system. How much of that damage is irreparable, only time will tell.

We need to realize that a strong education system is the key to our future prosperity and I don't see that in this bill, Mr. Speaker. I don't see that at all. I'm going to talk about some of the reasons I don't see that. This bill will let the Premier put a tick in his box. He'll feel pretty good about himself, I'm sure, for his fiscal envelope and the protection of that, but at what cost? That's the problem with a short-sighted government, they don't realize the impact of their decisions and the lingering effects their decisions will have.

It will be difficult in some schools, in some situations, to get teachers to go back to competing at that same level that they were of offering the same extras that they were. That is a consequence of what this government is doing today because many teachers are very discouraged by what is happening here.

I read a post on Facebook where a teacher said, "Here's the new reality for what this government has created for Nova Scotia schools." His reality was, I will do my job and not an ounce more. I will not volunteer my time. I will not do any extras at my job. I will not supervise clubs or sports. I will not attend graduation, proms or any other extracurricular event. I will only work the hours required of my job. I will not buy school supplies. I will no longer find workarounds in trying to get things done.

Now I share that with you because this teacher probably will do all those things, that's the irony of it, but that's the mood that has been created today by this government's actions. There will be long-term ramifications because teachers are feeling unloved right now and I certainly understand why they feel that way. They have every right to feel that way because this government has not shown them any love. This government, in the way they have treated them, has not shown them any love.

It's never too late, Mr. Speaker. The Premier can start to turn this around with the help of the minister and even some of the backbenchers. I've read some of their rhetoric in some of their newspapers and stuff like that. It's not helpful to make teachers feel valued.

I would implore the government to stop the rhetoric that teachers haven't been teaching. It's a bunch of nonsense for the Premier to say, "I'm going to get teachers back to teaching, get back to normal." Teachers have been teaching, they have been in the classroom every day in some ways. Most teachers would say they have been more effective because they haven't had to deal with all the nonsense that takes up their time.

The first thing the Premier can do is acknowledge the work that teachers are continuing to do instead of trying to vilify them and make the public believe that there has been nothing going on. It's a complete falsehood, Mr. Speaker, and it's a symptom of the way this Premier treats people when he tries to divide groups and conquer and stuff like that, but it's not helpful. It hasn't been helpful. He could stop doing that right away.

The other thing I would ask him to consider is stop talking about the \$65 million nonsense. When the Premier talks about the \$65 million that he has put back in, they ask, into what? Where did that money go? Did it go into TIENET, into PowerSchool - which incidentally we'll talk about two things that demand more and more time from teachers. Teachers need time, they don't need time for this type of nonsense.

When the Premier talks about the \$65 million, did it go into the classrooms? Teachers know that rings hollow with them. It rings hollow for good reason because if the Premier put \$65 million back into the classrooms and this is where we're at, shame on him because where did it go? It obviously didn't go to where it was needed.

We need to get past the rhetoric of the teachers aren't teaching and he's doing all this stuff, more and more money. Where have we landed as a result of those things, Mr. Speaker? We've landed right here, with an all-night session of the Legislature to deal with

a trumped-up emergency, designed to try to make teachers look bad. It's silly and it's unfair.

Now we don't expect anyone to leap forward and say they've made mistakes here. I heard some of the members opposite having a little bit of commentary when I was talking about \$65 million. They're still defending it, they're still trying to say they've done something, that they've made some improvements. They haven't.

We need to look at how we can start to address the issues we're seeing in the education system. Where do we even start? This government, this Premier, has refused to start. There are many things that can be done that we can start to look at and say well what can we do today? But none of them have been done. There are many obvious things that people are saying, why aren't they doing that? Instead, what we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, is this bill today.

I'd just ask the members opposite to contemplate this as they prepare to cast their vote on this bill at some point or as they listen at Law Amendments - can you think of one student anywhere who will be better off as a result of this legislated contract? Will there be one student better off? When we're done with this at the end of the week, will there be one student better off? The answer is no. What a shame, Mr. Speaker.

Teachers have been stressing that what the government has been coming forward with is not addressing the most pressing issues in education. Do you know what? They're right, this does not improve education. So what's the one big idea that this government has come up with? Let's strike another committee to talk about it - \$20 million for a committee to look at what changes teachers want addressed. What are the issues that teachers want addressed by this committee?

We have all kinds of questions. The fact that that's the best we can do is to come up with a committee is a sad commentary even of itself. It's a lack of innovation and a lack of imagination. It's a problem stretch. What we need are some problem solvers, not problem stretchers. Teachers are problem solvers and teachers know, they can smell it right away what this committee is going to be. They are already worried about the makeup of the committee and are they represented on that committee. They are worried about that. As soon as people started reading that, they know what was happening.

This committee is going to be over two years. Isn't that convenient, Mr. Speaker? We'll probably have another election in between there, it's too long, and the minister has the say over what money gets distributed, right down to - I think it's \$250,000 that the minister has to sign off on. My colleague said last night, geez, they spent four times as much as that to build a wharf down in Portland - somebody else's wharf in somebody else's country, they spent \$1 million on that, presumably no questions asked. Here we are talking about the education of our kids and we're going to strike a committee and if you want to

spend \$250,000, you have to go through all this ministerial approval. I don't know if that's ever going to come, let's be honest.

Teachers are pretty disheartened to hear that this government is going to spend a bunch more money figuring out how to solve the issues that the teachers already know exist and have lots of ideas how to solve. Why not have teachers sit down at their school and brainstorm for some ideas and kind of go up from that, let it flow uphill instead of all this typical government's "we sit in an office building in Halifax, therefore we know better, we'll push it down on you" - this is just more of that.

There are lots of things we could do for ideas. I've got a bunch of ideas myself and I could pass them over to the government, but they're not really interested in solving the problem, they're interested in stretching the problem - that's all they're interested in and that's what we see right here. If this government wanted to solve the problems, right now the minister, under the Education Act, has the latitude to make many, many things happen. This minister could right now make many things happen. Under Section 145 the minister has numerous prescriptive powers, including reporting systems and forms for the administration, and carrying out of the Act.

If the minister wanted to solve problems, if the Premier wanted to solve problems, they have the power right now under the Education Act. It's very clear that the minister can force compliance with everything related to what goes on at the school during class times. I don't see any of that happening. What I see, Mr. Speaker, is just an effort to completely stick the head in the sand and ignore the system, the problems in the education system. There's no effort to improve things.

We all know what it means when we hear that the government is going to strike up a committee. We know that it means that it's a way to avoid a problem. It's just a ploy to wear people down until the problem goes off the front page of the paper. That's all we're trying to do here. We know what this government is trying to do, just get through this, get this out of the news. We'll have a committee, we'll stretch out a little bit, and maybe people will forget. But guess what? People won't forget when it comes to the education of the children of this province.

We don't need a committee. We have 9,000-plus experts who are in the field every single day. Listen to them, try to listen to them because by the time this committee actually finishes their work, we'll be talking about negotiating a new contract again - maybe with a new government, Mr. Speaker. Time will tell on that one.

The only thing that is known is that nothing will have changed. What a shame, Mr. Speaker. The minister has the power today, through the Education Act, to make some of the obvious improvements - nothing, nothing is being done on that. So money that will be spent on this committee to look at classroom and student needs, which are already known

by the 9,000-plus experts in the field, it's just going to stretch this out for years before any conclusions are made.

Let's look at some of the committees we've had in education, because this is not a new idea. We don't expect new ideas from this government. We haven't seen one, and we don't expect one today. If you wonder why teachers are skeptical about this committee, let's look at some of the committees that we already have in education. Mr. Speaker, you may know about the Education Consultative Forum and their mandate, which is to look at the failed inclusion model. That's something that is happening now. Whatever happened with the ECF, as it is known, what happened? What's being done? Nothing. I haven't heard of anything. I've asked, but I haven't heard of anything. I've asked who is on the committee and I can't even get people to tell me who is on the committee.

Don't talk to me about committees and solving problems, we have plenty of them. What about the Freeman report? Did anybody ever hear of the Freeman report? Now I will say that it wouldn't be completely fair, it wouldn't be completely accurate to say that the report has been completely shelved. That's the Freeman report, disrupting the status quo, Nova Scotians demand a better future for all our students. Disrupting the status quo - now isn't it funny that the Premier, after all the soul-searching on the weekend, said he wanted to return to normal, but the Freeman report, I'm sure he doesn't even know about it. The Freeman report said we have to disrupt the status quo and the Premier did all the soul-searching and said let's go back to normal, guys.

It's so sad. If you wonder why teachers are so frustrated by all this, just think about things like that. The Freeman report hasn't been completely shelved but it's definitely accurate to say that some of the most significant shortfalls identified in that report, the most significant shortfalls of the education system, are tied up in extremely long phase-ins, and there's nothing being done.

We talked about one of the policies last night, I'm not sure if it was on behavioural stuff - people have been wondering for years and years and the minister said last night, oh, we have that, it's in draft. I guess maybe they whipped that up over the last couple of days, Mr. Speaker.

We have the ECF, we have the Freeman report. If you go back a little further from that, Mr. Speaker, you can have the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs. That was in 2007; that's another report. If you think teachers aren't discouraged by all this, the Freeman report actually got people excited. When the minister at the time created this action plan there were teachers in the summer of 2015 who said to me they were pretty excited because the minister said all these changes are going to be taking place in this school year, in September. It was a couple of months away at the time.

Guess what? September came and went and no changes, nothing implemented. September 2016 came and went, nothing implemented, nothing is changing - except maybe now we'll get another committee, we'll have another report.

If you think about all the discussion around inclusion - the Premier takes great credit, he says hey, give me some credit, folks, I'm the only one to talk about inclusion, I'm talking about inclusion, give me some credit. What a bunch of nonsense. I point the Premier to the 2007 Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs. This group had a very narrow focus - to talk about that and that was the Aylward, Farmer, and MacDonald study.

Now let's think about some of the recommendations that came out of that report that then showed up again seven years later in the 2014 Freeman report - still not acted upon, none of it, and stuff from 2007 not acted upon, 2014 stuff not acted upon. Some of the recommendations that were crossovers between the two is inclusive education must be flexible, specific programs may require specific teacher expertise. We've been talking about this for over a decade - two decades probably.

Another one - a greater emphasis is to be put on co-teaching. The Freeman report said the same thing. Is that happening? Are we seeing much of that now? These recommendations are a decade old. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? The Liberal Government will institute a committee and they'll put \$20 million aside. If you want to have a guess about how many recommendations come out of those types of committees will be the exact same as those already in the reports on the shelves of the Education Minister, I'll take a wager that quite a few of them, because people know what the issues are. Teachers know what the issues are, but what they are thirsty for is somebody to start to address them and we haven't seen any of that.

I can go back even further if you want. I can go back to 1994, to the BLAC Report. That report was again reviewed for a second time, nothing had happened, the 1994 report. In 2009 said, oh, let's review it again, so in 2009 it was reviewed by consultants and nothing has happened.

Talk to teachers, tell them you are going to strike a committee to help them identify what the problems are, tell me how excited they are. I'll tell you how excited they are because I'm hearing from them and I understand why, because it's just study after study, after committee, after committee. They watch all this money getting sucked out of the system and put over on these committees, with no positive movement.

We do need to have these discussions about what's happening and we need to make things happen. We could be here tonight talking about making things happen, but we're not. The Premier said oh, we have to do this before we can start to make things happen.

I already told you that the minister has all the power under the Education Act; the minister could start to make things happen right away. There's no interest in making things happen. We have some big issues facing education and then we have some significant issues that can be addressed. We have big issues like inclusion. It is a big one; we have a number of reports on it.

Since the Premier was taking such great accolades about having this discussion about inclusion, I wanted to have a look and see what he meant. So I looked through this bill last night and I see that in there in this bill before this Legislature, it states that the intention is to review the literature to establish best practices with respect to inclusion.

Come on, Mr. Speaker, they're going to review the literature to establish the best practices. I already told you about a study that was done a decade ago to talk about best practices. I already told you about a study that was done in the 1990s to talk about best practices. We have inclusion in our education system right now and this government is saying they're going to try to figure out the best practices?

It doesn't make sense, we're not talking about the issues in education, we're talking about how the Premier can squeeze down on a group of people and try to make them look bad, in front of their friends and neighbours. That's all this is about for this minister.

Teachers are fighting the good fight. They have exposed the realities of many issues in this system, and inclusion is one of them for sure. The issue with inclusion is that it's not properly supported, that's what the issue was, and people know that.

As a little aside, this just struck me as funny - maybe it's a little bit of sleep deprivation, but I thought it interesting - that here we are talking about classroom supports, classroom conditions, and the lack of supports for inclusion, while at the same time the government cancels the Accessibility Act consultations at Law Amendments Committee. That's cancelled, the Accessibility Act consultations - cancelled. But sitting here to pass a piece of legislation that does nothing to fix the inclusion issue in the education system, that goes ahead because that's an emergency. That's the real emergency. Please don't forget that's why we're here: to deal with that emergency, not the issues that are in that bill.

We need proper resources in the school system if we want to properly effect inclusion. I was looking at a book by Paula Kluth and her book, *You're Going to Love This Kid!* That goes right to the issue that says inclusion has to be properly offered, and in Nova Scotia it is not. It's as simple as that.

Now here's the problem with awareness, and parents should be alarmed by what teachers have been reviewing about what's happening in the education system; they should be alarmed by that. Meanwhile, this government reverts to its old-school political tactics: don't look over there at the issues in the education system, look here at how greedy these teachers - look at them, they want a couple more days off.

If you think about every issue this government faces, it's always look over here - don't look here at the real issue, look over here. In this case, it's look over here at the greedy teachers because they don't want you to look at and listen to what teachers are saying about what's happening in the system. They want you to form an opinion on teachers and it's that they are greedy. Mr. Speaker, that's a crock.

The point could be made and should be made that the Premier refers to an impasse. This impasse could have been avoided altogether with just a little bit of innovative thinking, with just a little bit of problem-solving, by addressing the issues that the teachers are talking about. For the life of me, I can't understand why this government has decided to not act on some of the obvious things that everyone wants and has tried to create this case that they can't do it until later. I don't understand why they won't act on those issues. They're punishing our teachers, and they're punishing all of us, punishing our students. I don't understand why they're doing it. It's a terrible, terrible political tactic, and it's not fair.

The government controls the messaging around this stuff. We know. We've all heard about the communications staff that the Premier has and how big it is and how expensive it is and stuff. They're trying to control the messaging around this.

At one point in time, after the Freeman report, the minister said the action plan was going to be the answer. The minister's action plan was going to be the answer. I ask you, was it? Has it been? Today it's this new committee. That's going to be the answer. That's what we're going to do now.

Teachers will not give up this fight. We should support teachers in this fight because it's the right thing to do. We will support them. Teachers know this is their only option for real change. They've taken a stand here. They've turned the lights on. They want change. We also want change. We're supporting them in that change.

Let's see what the members opposite do when it comes time. Will they just support the Premier's initiative, the Premier's strategy? Or will they support teachers, students, and families? Will they support real change?

We've talked about some of the issues around inclusion and how we do that. We do that with more supports. That's how we address inclusion, with more supports. We also have classroom size issues. We have classroom make-up issues. We have very diverse classrooms today. I said in the speech earlier that the academic classroom is gone, has disappeared. There's no more academic classroom. What we have are classrooms where teachers are trying to survive, trying to manage, trying to bring students along as best they can. They're overwhelmed. They're doing it as best they can.

Apparently, the Premier heard this, and he has put something in the bill to try and address this. If you look at Clause 68 of this bill - I'm going to try to go through this with

a straight face, because it really is laughable. Under this bill, it says teachers may report barriers to carrying out their duties “. . . to their immediate supervisor who shall investigate [and] take appropriate action . . .”

We know what the barriers are to carrying out their duties, like diverse classrooms, many kids on IPPs, many kids at different levels, all this type of stuff. You could actually have every single teacher in the province go to their supervisor and say, I have a barrier to carrying out my duties. This does not solve any problem whatsoever. This is just a fool's game to try and say you've put a piece of legislation forward that addresses something when that's the type of garbage you have in it. It's a fool's game.

If the immediate supervisor in that situation is unable to resolve the situation - just remember now, the immediate supervisor is going to get every teacher in the school coming to them and saying, I can't properly perform my duties with this type of a classroom. It's too big. There's too many IPPs. There's too many kids at different levels. Every teacher should do that. I hope they do. I hope every single one of them does that. If the immediate supervisor in that situation is unable to resolve it, guess what they're going to do? They're going to report the situation to the working conditions review team.

Oh, yay, another committee that really won't have the ability to solve all these issues. It's a great big circle, Mr. Speaker, all designed to let the Premier say he's put in a piece of legislation and that he's listened to people. It's a joke is what it is. It's a sorry excuse for an attempt to address issues in the classrooms. Imagine having 26 kids in one classroom, 14 of those kids requiring assistive technology for reading, and having two computers. That's 26 kids in the class; 14 of them require assistive technology - two computers in the classroom. Just imagine that.

Do you think that might be something that they should report as a barrier to carrying out their duties - every teacher in the school, Mr. Speaker, every single teacher in the school. You have a classroom, we have kids reading at six different grade levels, some that are non-readers and they're expecting the teachers - this government's okay with that, okay with pushing that out and saying, teacher please just keep going, keep surviving. They're okay with that expecting the teacher to create six different lessons on the same outcome. It's completely impossible. This is the type of stuff that we're asking our teachers to do. We need more resources, we need learning-centre support to help not only with academics but with violent behaviours that are happening in our schools.

You hear from teachers that say, I can't leave my classroom during any of the breaks, for recess, for lunch, or anything like that because they have a student that will run away if anyone tries to speak to them. Now, just imagine trying to deal with that. Imagine trying to get up and go to work every day to that classroom and put your whole heart and soul in it and then have this government say, you're greedy and I'm legislating a contract on you. What do you think that's going to do? What do you think the long-term impact is

going to be on education in this province with this type of action from this government led by this Premier? What will be the impact of that?

What we need is to do some of the things we can do. We need to set reasonable class size limits. Other provinces have figured this out and if inclusion is a priority, which it should be and it has to be, set the limits at an appropriate level and provide the supports to the teachers. Don't just tell them to go out in the world, teacher, and try to survive. The teachers are being stretched too thin, and they're being provided less and less EPA support, less and less classroom support. I just told you about the class that only has two computers - all those kids needing adaptive technology and they have two computers. It's just left to the teachers to figure it out. You can imagine how bad the situation is, Mr. Speaker. So what assurances can the teachers and the public have that there's going to be any movement from this government going forward?

It's political manoeuvring with this government. They're obviously trying to maybe keep something in their pocket that they'll get this over with, and then they'll come out with some changes, all the changes that the minister had the power to do a long time ago, and, they'll just try to game that system. They're gaming our kids. We see them game our kids with where new schools are built. We talked about the political schools that are built. We see them gaming our kids with the way the education system works, and it's all gaming. It's all gamesmanship for political benefit.

Meanwhile, we need mental health services in our schools, we need support for our teachers. There are things that we could be doing. We don't need to put \$20 million in a fund for a committee. Why don't we use that and hire some trained psychologists or guidance counsellors to work in our schools. We have kids in our schools waiting years for testing so they can get the supports they need, and, in the meantime, while they're waiting for their proper testing, they're stuffed into overcrowded classrooms.

Some students have been denied educational program assistance support because they haven't had the testing even though it's obvious that they need it. When you don't get the resources, everyone suffers. One teacher reached out to me and said that in the early schools, in the primary schools, students in their class are cutting themselves and threatening suicide. They might have been severely abused at home, they may have been abandoned, they might have seen things at home, and the teacher is saying, how do I deal with it. Please help me. Please support me as I try to deal with it and help this child.

Do you know what this government says? Not today. We'll leave that to a committee and see if we can get back to you later on. That is what this government is saying to teachers today. The answer to teachers today from this government is, not today. That's the message they're sending.

In the meantime, we talk about big issues of inclusion and mental health supports in the classroom, class size and stuff, but there are many doable issues. There are big issues,

but there are many doable issues. We know from talking to teachers that wages aren't the key issue for the majority of teachers. Sure, for some teachers wages are the key issue. I understand that - it's a big group of people, there are 9,000 of them, but for the majority of teachers wages are not the key issue and they're asking, why isn't the government making some of the very doable classroom reforms?

The minister has the latitude to do it under the Education Act. They can do certain things. They have a lot of prescribed powers under that. The minister could be doing something. What are some of the doable things that could be done straight away that would buy some good will with teachers - get some street cred with teachers?

The Premier miscalculated this so poorly from the beginning. He could have taken a couple of steps to get the trust of the teachers. Instead he tried to vilify them, and now he's gone down the path that I don't know how it's going to reverse. It's going to be very difficult to reverse that path, and it just didn't have to be.

Some of the doable things that could be done, and they would be cost-saving things. If you think about the continuous school improvement model, is that something that is really benefiting the education system? It eats up PD days every year. We keep talking about it. Maybe we can just kind of back away from some of those things that have been pushed down and let teachers actually have some control over what's going on.

By not moving on something like that, the government just reinforces its own message that it only cares about its fiscal envelope. It only cares about its financial agenda and they don't actually care about fixing anything. That's the message, and I received that message loud and clear. I've been watching. That's the message.

Things like the continuous school improvement, the Student Success Planning - teachers see these things as a waste of time and could actually save money to be put into other things that teachers want. One thing that I hear a lot is the teachers want to restore learner accountability to the classrooms. Teachers say they constantly hear, "You can't make me do that." Just imagine. I actually know how that feels sitting in this Legislature across from this government. I can kind of sympathize with that actually because a lot of times this government says, you can't make me do that, we have a majority government.

But imagine if you're a teacher in a classroom and you have a student and you're trying to teach and trying to work with him and he says, you can't make me do that. What about some learner accountability? These are things that could happen - the minister could make these things happen. The minister could have made these things happen a year ago. The minister could have made these things happen two years ago with the action plan - but no action. No action in the action plan.

Attendance policy, we're still talking about the grading system and the numeric grades and all this type of stuff. Why are we talking about that still? Why haven't we seen

any action on any of those things? Why won't anyone from that government listen to what teachers are saying and actually start to make a move on them? That's what they want.

I was interested in listening to the minister talk last night about the no-fail policy and the minister says there is no no-fail policy. It's a double negative there, but she says it doesn't exist. It does exist. It might not be on a piece of paper somewhere, but it absolutely does exist. Everyone knows it exists. One of the reasons that it does exist is that if you tried to require a student to repeat a grade, especially in the P-9, then there would be more questions asked about your own teaching ability than you could ever imagine. You could never imagine that you'd be running up against all questions about what you're doing and what your instructions and what your - it has just come to the point where it's not practically possible is what I hear from teachers, it's not practically possible to hold the student back.

The minister can say well that's not true because of course why not have that type of stuff, but it might not be written down on a piece of paper but the reality of it is that it exists; teachers know it exists.

I started earlier on, before I talked about let's cut down the rhetoric, let's cut down the rhetoric from this government about teachers not doing anything since the work-to-rule started, let's cut down all that rhetoric. This is more rhetoric. It's something that just inflames teachers and I don't understand the desire of this government to be so vindictive to teachers, but it comes through in everything they do - because they could be moving on an attendance policy.

That seems like a simple thing that most Nova Scotians would be behind 100 per cent, teachers would certainly be behind it. Why are we doing that? Why shouldn't this government put an olive branch out, so to speak, that says we will put in an attendance policy? The minister has the power to do that, but that hasn't been done. I don't understand why these types of things - the attendance policy, the discipline policy, that's the one I was struggling for the word for earlier.

The minister said they have a draft discipline policy - what good is that? When was that drafted? Was that drafted two years ago? Was it drafted last night in haste? Why don't we have an attendance policy, a discipline policy, and a policy that relates to students having deadlines enforced?

I see some of the ministers are getting a little uncomfortable with some of the realities of the situation but it is what it is, it absolutely is what it is. Why don't we have a policy that enforces deadlines for assignments? As it stands, the teacher has to accept an assignment as long as it is passed in before the end of the semester. That's not going to cut it in the real world.

I had a teacher at one of the community colleges say they had a student in their class and they sat them down towards the end of September and said look, you're going to

fail. The student said, what do you mean I'm going to fail? You come to class once a week and are not doing the assignments, you're going to fail. The student said, you can't fail me, and actually believed it because that's a product of the education system that we have and that's a product of the system that has evolved over time.

It has come to a head. The minister has the power to address some of these things but refuses to exercise that power, and that's the real shame of this because that is not the real world. We are not teaching kids with those types of policies that exist. We're not teaching kids about accountability, because if deadlines don't apply in the school system, then kids will assume that they just don't apply in the real world, and that's not doing a service to anyone.

The attendance policy is something that is really shocking to me once I got into it. A student can be absent any number of days, whether it be one day or 50 days or whatever, and they'll still get credit for the course. Is that preparing them for the future? A teacher told me that they had been approached by their administrator in early June saying this student here has missed something like 100 classes or something, a crazy number. Then the teacher said well you have to bring them along now because they have to get through. Now it was on the teacher's shoulders in the month of June to try to make up for the fact that this student hadn't come to class all this time, because why would the student come to class all this time, there's no attendance policy and there is a no-fail policy.

These are things that the minister could be standing on and saying that I don't accept that as a minister and I'm going to address that - and teachers would be applauding that. I can't understand why that hasn't happened, other than political timing and gamesmanships. That's what we're dealing with here; that's the reality of it. The system we have where children have no consequences of work being handed in after the deadline, they're not going to be retained if grade expectations are not met, it's doing our children a great disservice, because life simply does not work that way. It doesn't prepare them for university, and it doesn't prepare them for the employment force.

In fact, I was a little taken aback - I had a lot of calls from business owners. They called me and said they wanted to speak about this bill, and I kind of thought they were going to say enough is enough, no money for teachers, because that's the Premier's narrative. But they actually said, you have to stand for teachers here because I'm tired of getting a resumé from somebody or interviewing somebody who can't properly read, who can't do simple math. I can't hire them in my shop.

They're saying to take a stand here. Everyone wants a stand taken here except this government, who wants a committee. That's not going to help us.

I can't leave the topic of obvious, doable things without talking about changes that can be made, without talking about PowerSchool. The number-one thing I hear from teachers is, hey, give us some time to teach. Cut out some of this meaningless data

collection. Look at how much money is being spent on PowerSchool. Let's do the cost-benefit and think about what the value of what's coming out of that is.

When a teacher finally sat me down and explained how much data entry they had to do, it was pretty shocking. A quiz they could give their class and mark and give back and say you got 8/10 - or in my case, 6/10 or something - they could mark that and send it back to all the students in an hour. It could take up to 15 or 20 hours to code that into PowerSchool.

What are we getting for that? Who's looking at all this data? What it's doing is taking those teachers out of the classroom, or it's stressing them out in the evening. In particular, using that type of technology at the elementary school level is, as one teacher said to me, ridiculous.

Imagine doing all of that for a Grade 3 classroom. That teacher laid it out and said, if I was a high school math teacher, I would teach three different sections of math and I'd likely only have two sets of math outcomes to teach, assess, and report on. But how do you do that as an elementary school French immersion teacher with hundreds of outcomes to teach? You have to speak to each of those outcomes for elementary school - hundreds of them, hundreds of outcomes.

What are we doing here? Why is this happening? It puts an unrealistic expectation on teachers and causes an incredible amount of stress for them, just around data input. It's taking up hours a day. It takes away from time teaching and time lesson planning. It takes time away from just sitting back and thinking about how you're going to help the students.

We haven't seen any movement on that. There's nothing in this bill that speaks to any of that, or fixing any of that. Nothing. Maybe the committee will look at it; we can get the committee to look at that too.

I've experienced this as a politician, so I can understand how teachers experience this frustration as well. The structure of, when you ask the minister a question and the minister says, well, that's the boards. It's not me. It's the boards. And then you say, I asked the board which schools they wanted, and they didn't have your school on their list, but you built it anyway - well, that becomes the department. It's just the to-ing and fro-ing. But for teachers, when the department comes up with an initiative and they push it down to everyone - I think one of my colleagues said this morning that there's a lot of pushing down of various initiatives and great ideas, and there's never any pulling back. Once it's out there, it's kind of always out there.

We need to be considerate of what will help teachers and what will improve education. We know this bill won't improve education one lick, but if we're going to be - if the department's going to push stuff down, we need to be conscious of that.

Remember my school I told you about, with 14 kids needing adaptive technology and two computers? Walk through a school board office. You'll see smartboards everywhere, and laptops and stuff. Why isn't that stuff in the classrooms? Teachers want to teach; that's what this is all about. There's nothing in this legislation that helps teachers teach - nothing. Nothing. Why? What a shame that we've been through all this emotional roller coaster, months and months of - I forget how many deals the Premier thinks he reached. He thinks he reached three of them with different things he was saying last night over and over, but he never reached a deal. Still, now we have this bill and we have nothing - nothing - in this bill that improves the educational outcomes for one single child. Not one thing, and you have to ask yourself, why?

We hear a lot about standardized testing and the impact that standardized testing has had on our school system. Let's ask ourselves if that's been a positive thing or not - and many teachers have told me just get rid of standardized testing and I'll be happy. Many, many teachers have told me that for various reasons. I haven't heard any discussion about that. These are the types of things that get in the way of teachers teaching. Starting back, going back with a committee and saying we're going to have a committee to look at these things is not going to help teachers.

I want to finish with a story that was shared to me by a teacher who told me, here's what I have in my class. I have one student with ADHD who was medicated; one student with ADHD who was not medicated; one student suffering from undiagnosed ADHD and possibly anxiety and ODD; one student with high-functioning ASD; one student with ASD anxiety who violently attacked family members and had been declared suicidal by a psychologist; one student who repeated the previous grade but still was not making any significant academic gains; one student with severe hearing loss; five students not reading at the grade level; and eight students with documented adaptations.

That sounds like a pretty diverse classroom, Mr. Speaker. Now, she says, let me tell you what I did not have. I did not have any educational assistant time allotted to my classroom because somebody decided there were more challenging needs in the school and that the time that the school was allotted was already taken up, so they had no educational assistants in there. They didn't have any time with the schools ASD specialist - no time with the ASD specialist.

How does this person function in the classroom? I'll tell you how. She told me how her year went. She said the students with the highest needs consumed most of my time while the others were unfairly left to independently learn and practise new concepts. The one with undiagnosed ADHD and possibly anxiety and ODD was usually never more than arm's length away from me. When I was teaching lessons, the child was standing with me, as they felt safest when near me. During the lesson they would usually chant the same sentence repeatedly - such as, I want to call home. At recess and lunchtimes, they would often refuse to go outdoors for physical education, and math classes, they would sometimes hide in my classroom to avoid being taken away from me. I lost virtually any prep time I

had in order to meet their needs. During less structured times, they often wandered around the classroom jumping off desks, destroying the belongings of their peers, and even started targeting some students who called them ugly or stupid or dumb.

Education should not look like this. Education in Nova Scotia in 2017 should not look like this, and yet here we are with a government that is okay accepting that it does, and is more focused on the fiscal envelope today. We're debating a bill that does not do one thing to help that teacher; we're debating a bill that does not do one thing to improve the educational outcomes of the children in this province; we are debating a bill that is a waste of our time and is not helpful to teachers.

I will not support this bill, and I hope some of the members opposite do some soul-searching like the Premier did, and maybe they'll reach the right answer too. I don't know. Thank you.

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

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, it's certainly a pleasure to speak today before the House of Assembly here on Bill No. 75 - the emergency debate, and I just want to point out before I get into my notes that this may be one my last speeches in this House so I take great honour in having the opportunity to stand here today. (Applause)

AN HON. MEMBER: Four more years. Four more years.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Well it may be a while yet so I hope you pay attention to my notes, and I think I'll set out my strategy of just doing that. I enjoy the somewhat friendly heckling from my audience.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to do a little bit of the housekeeping work that I must get done before I return to my hometown. It's a good place to spend Valentine's Day, and I can't think of any better place to spend with 50 of my frenemies. Instead, I have been married for 44 years this August and I think this is the first February 14th that I was not home with my wife. You know, the card is going to come late. I hope we get out to have a nice meal at a restaurant this weekend. I hope she understands that and with the severity of this debate, I think we all will understand that.

My question is not that my family or my wife understands, that I ask for forgiveness. That's not the question here as we pass by Valentine's Day. The question, Mr. Speaker, is will the people of Nova Scotia give forgiveness for a Premier who put people's lives in jeopardy and forgiveness for this debate on this bill? That is the question. Hopefully in the next few minutes I will lay out some of my foundation or structure for this particular argument.

Before I get into my notes here, I think there's some quick information that I'm sure some of my colleagues over the last few hours have presented here but I want to refresh your memory: 9,300 teachers in the beautiful Province of Nova Scotia, more than 180,000 students enrolled in public schools in Nova Scotia, 377 public schools listed in the Education and Early Childhood Development Department directory, and the last teaching contract expired in July 2015. I emphasize 2015 because what I want to say in the next few minutes is that here we are in an emergency debate in a severe winter storm. I ask for Nova Scotians and I ask for the members of the sitting government to pay attention to the information that will come forward.

It is interesting to note, before I get there, Mr. Speaker, that the President of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union said:

[Ms.] Doucet said she wasn't surprised by the results [of the last particular deal], but that it's not a case of disconnect between the unions and the membership. Rather, she said, it's a case of government's unwillingness to "make improvements that are necessary that teachers ask for."

In particular, Doucet said that she thinks teachers are unhappy about the lack of immediate steps to address classroom conditions and workload, as well as the end of the long service award. Attendance and discipline policies could be brought in right away, and would go a long way towards building trust with teachers, she said.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is just a backdrop of where we are. This has been ongoing since 2015 and we are placed in a scenario here in the last 72 hours that now we have an emergency debate in this House. In the next few minutes, I'd like to just kind of underline the severity of the weather conditions that we encountered in the last 72 hours. I know there are a number of other people in this historic building, and I have spent a lifetime paying attention to weather conditions. I can assure you that what I am going to point out now certainly got my attention. I believe if you come from a fishing background, you appreciate the weather conditions of the last 72 hours. The decision-making process from the Premier and the Premier's office as he . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The member seems to be inferring that the Premier is responsible for decisions on the hours of the House. Those rest with the Speaker. You should not be criticizing the Speaker on those decisions.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: I'll check the Hansard when I get an opportunity, but I am referring to the decision-making process regarding the weather and emergency debate at the Premier's office at One Government Place. What I'll . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The member needs to retract that statement and understand that the decision-making process is with the Speaker of the House.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: Thank you very much for your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Again, on the decision-making by the Speaker's office, I'll direct my comments now to Environment Canada and the information that all Nova Scotians had. CBC posted on February 13th: "In a statement released Monday morning, the utility said the powerful nor'easter moving across the Maritimes is making for unsafe working conditions that will slow response times.

"High winds and blowing snow are expected to continue until . . ."

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to read from O'Brien and Bosc on impartiality of the Chair from Page 313. "The actions of the Speaker may not be criticized in debate or by any means except by way of a substantive motion. Such motions have been moved against the Speaker or other Presiding Officers on rare occasions." I would ask the honourable member to proceed to his next point and argument of his intervention today.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: I'll continue. What I'm trying to get clarity on is that I would love to be able to speak about the weather conditions in the last 72 hours. That's what I'll try to do. Under your guidance, I'll continue.

At 11:30 a.m. Monday, more than 8,000 homes were without power. "Whiteout conditions developed by Monday morning. The storm is predicted to intensify as the day goes on, Environment Canada said." Environment Canada is telling me this, and as a fisherman with my background, I am paying attention. I am suggesting to myself and to my family members that it's unwise to be travelling, and you should be preparing yourself basically to be storm-stayed. It's interesting because we had an emergency debate scheduled for that night in this House. What I'm questioning . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I have cautioned the member on the Rules of this House. If you wish to make a motion against the Speaker, you can do that and put that on the floor of this House. If you do not wish to do that, then I would ask you to move to your next argument.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: I am going to put a motion on the floor. Environment Canada put out storm warnings. Somebody made a decision to have this House sit on Monday and then the following Tuesday. My motion is that I would like to have the opportunity to talk about the weather conditions in the last 72 hours leading up to the decision to postpone Monday's events to Tuesday. I think that is a great concern, and my motion suggests that there was staff, not only MLAs, but the service personnel around this structure and enforcement officers. It jeopardized their . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. That is not a motion. That is debate. Again, I request that you move to the next point that you wish to make in this debate on the bill, and if you are not interested in doing that, then I can move to the next speaker.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, in my observation, I'll move on for your consideration. I noticed in the media events that our Premier was using the words about Bill No. 75, that he did some considerable soul-searching. The Premier said that he has done considerable soul-searching on this matter and he wants to table legislation that will bring an end to the dispute as soon as possible.

I'm suggesting that you may not want to hear my weather forecast but I can tell you that you are in for a political storm. I don't think I have to have a motion on the floor to talk about a political storm because you are in the sitting government for . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to remind the member that we shall not be using the word "you." I would ask that you direct your comments through the Chair.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: This has certainly been an interesting debate so far. What I can say, the creation has become a perfect political storm. I would say that the winds or the clouds are brewing certainly for the next political election.

My question in particular to the backbenchers is, are you ready to weather that particular political storm?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would ask the honourable member to direct his comments through the Chair and not directly to the members with the term "you."

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, thank you for your wisdom. Today, at this moment, I am suggesting some common-sense approach to the situation that we have in front of you. You may not want to hear my weather forecasts or political storms, but I'm here to offer you some common sense. The common sense is a couple of things.

First of all, this particular Liberal Government needs to repeal Bill No. 148. They need to go back to the bargaining table. The key point here that I'm going to talk about is there is an issue that has not been addressed and has been here, and I think I understand this file.

The next suggestion is, this particular House - this government - should be re-establishing the Electoral Boundaries Commission. (Interruptions)

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: I really appreciate having the attention of the members opposite because the Electoral Boundaries Commission - my understanding of what I read in the media in the last few weeks - that there was a Court of Appeal decision basically saying that the present Acadian constituencies are unconstitutional.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to ask the honourable member to speak to the bill. The bill is on education and it is not on a boundary review.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking to the bill and what I'm suggesting is common sense. Common sense is that we have a Court of Appeal decision talking about the boundary review, and what I'm suggesting is that if you engage that particular Electoral Boundaries Commission you will have time to address that particular issue and it will give you time to address Bill No. 75, the teachers' commitments or agreements. You need to get back to the bargaining table. That is not that difficult to understand. When it's over, I can tell you that this particular government certainly will be weather-beaten.

I want to pay attention, Mr. Speaker, through you, to the backbenchers when you go out, and there may be an election in the next few months here, when you go out on the doorsteps you are going to be facing the public and they're going to be asking you questions about . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would ask the honourable member to do his best to refrain from using the term "you" in speaking to members of the House. You could rephrase those statements by speaking to the Speaker and suggest that the members do this or the members may consider doing that.

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

MR. BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, thank you for your wisdom and I assure you that there may be an election, through you, to the sitting members, the backbenchers and the Cabinet, that there may be an election in the next few months and they will be dealing with this issue, Bill No. 75.

Not only that, it is interesting to note that last night I had an opportunity to research my Facebook, and the parent/teachers Facebook account numbers just surpassed 20,000, plus 1; that was last night. I noticed there were a considerable amount of protesters out here last night. I'm willing to bet, Mr. Speaker, through you to the members opposite, that they're going to be engaged in this whole process that we're involved in here in the next week. I can assure you with great confidence, that is going to be an election issue, so I'm just preparing the members opposite for the political storm they are going to endure.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the members of the House, on Monday evening, as I sat in my home and I questioned whether it was safe or not to try to get to this particular sitting, I was impressed when I looked at the local news and I saw one individual, one female protester circling around this particular building in severe winter conditions. Rachel Creasor is a resource and behaviour intervention teacher with the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board. Rachel, a one-woman protester, certainly made an impression on me.

A media outlet interviewed her, and I'll quote from Rachel: I came here when it was safe to do so yesterday, and I'm trying to represent all the people that can't be here. One individual, and I can assure you that her voice will be heard in this Chamber in the next several days as we sit here. For any of those who may be taking notes, Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to dedicate this portion and this particular speech to Rachel, and I hope that I catch some of her points she wanted to make during her one-woman protest.

Mr. Speaker, I think Rachel summarizes and captures the devotion she has to the task at hand. She is certainly concerned and she wants to hold her government accountable and she wants to pursue and make sure that there are other options available. I think the question she had was, how did we get here? To me that certainly is a good question - how did we get here?

Mr. Speaker, through you to the members opposite, the backbenchers and the Cabinet Ministers who are listening intently, I happened to go through some of my notes - and it was an interesting letter by this Premier.

In 2013, this Premier had an open letter to Nova Scotia's union members: The Nova Scotia Liberal caucus would like to clarify misinformation being circulated by email the NSGEU members from the union leaders - this email indicated that the Nova Scotia Liberal caucus is against the right to strike: this is absolutely false. It goes on to say - and I

highlighted some of the notes that were in this letter: The Nova Scotia Liberal caucus believes in the collective bargaining process, the right to strike, protecting workers' rights, both unionized and non-unionized, and I ask that you please share this information with your family, friends, and colleagues. And it's signed by the member of the Liberal Party.

Now, I find that very interesting. I find it very interesting because where we are here today with Bill No. 75 kind of tears that up and throws it into the wind, and I don't think that is the same feeling, that the 9,300 teachers have the same respect of the Premier when he signed that in 2013 than he has today. I think there has been some lost ground there. You may ask if there's a path forward, and I suggest that we repeal Bill No. 148, withdraw this bill today, and by coincidence it withdrew back in December of this year. And I would request that the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and this government go back to the table and we recommission the boundaries commission and we address all these issues and we get some time.

Time is what's needed to address these issues because what is needed certainly is a fresh start at the bargaining table, and certainly, there is a need. And, if not, I was I guess censored for talking about the weather conditions that we had in the last two hours, but I don't think I can be censored for talking about the political storm that this Party is going to endure in the next several months. So, be prepared for the political storm - and I can assure you that it's not going to be a walk in the park.

I look forward to some of your comments. I know that the Opposition will spend their time allotted in here to talk to this bill. I'm interested to hear from the present government when they stand up and defend their bill because it's a very interesting scenario - you have a controversial bill and you have the Opposition stand up and speak to it and hold the government accountable. To me, that's democracy, but yet, you see a very limited amount of participation from the ruling Party. Now, I have some concerns about that whole process because if you believe in the policy, to me you would stand up and defend it in a public forum. You would take the equal time whether it's Opposition or whoever and defend your case. That is not going to happen in this bill, Mr. Speaker.

That is my observation of being in this Chamber for a number of years now, and I hope I'm proven wrong, and I hope I see backbenchers standing up here and defending their position, because I know that when they go out in the next election on the doorsteps and to the barbecue circuits that they're going to have to address these questions. So, it's my job to prepare you for the upcoming political storm that you're going to endure in the next several months.

Now, just to prove my case that there's a reluctance for the sitting government to defend their policy, I have a couple of notes here - and on Monday, February 13th, as I sat home, and I actually put down the time, 6:24 p.m., there was a tweet coming from CTV Anchor Steve Murphy. Steve Murphy tweeted: "NS Premier McNeil declines request for interview on decision to legislate teachers dispute. Invitation extended for tomorrow."

Last December, Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to note that Nova Scotia taxpayers paid \$242,000 last year to have a Christmas Tree Boston campaign. They paid \$25,000 payment to CTV Atlantic and I just connected the dots. I said, that wasn't very good, they seemed to fall all over themselves when there's a good news story and certainly the Boston Christmas tree campaign is a good news story but they paid CTV \$25,000 to do some promotional campaign about a good news story. Now, does that sound right to me?

I can say that not only that, but I'm just curious why he would not have that interview with Steve Murphy, he declined that. Not only that, well you may say that's a once-in-a-lifetime, member for Queens-Shelburne, and you were just lucky, you just happened to be there with a pen and wrote that down. But it doesn't stop there. When I go down and travel in my car and I listened to the Sheldon MacLeod Show a day or so ago, the Premier declined a request for Sheldon MacLeod. That was just a day ago and I wrote that down. A coincidence? I think not. I think they are trying to avoid the public scrutiny. I want to stand in my place and say that is undemocratic.

If you have a policy and you think you're going to pass that, don't run and hide and sit on your hands and be silent. Mr. Speaker, silence from this Premier and silence from these Cabinet Ministers and silence from his backbenchers is undemocratic. It is not what we are here for. We are here to defend the policies that a government presents. I want to hear your voices and I haven't heard them yet. All I've heard is decline for requests for interviews. I think I made my point on that particular topic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you would say that you can't be all one-sided, particularly in your speech, you should have somewhat of a recognized quote. I have taken the odd Toastmaster's course and they suggest that you always should have a somewhat recognizable name and an interesting quote that captures what you're trying to portray. The interesting name I came up with was the former President of the United States, Ronald Reagan. I'd like to quote his words, "Where free unions and collective bargaining are forbidden, freedom is lost.

Now I say that is a very powerful few words from a very recognizable name around our globe. What we're seeing here in these last few hours, few days, people's rights being trampled and the silence from the elected Party that is presenting that bill, I want to stand here and say that is shameful towards democracy where we have free speech and we should be able to defend the policies. I'm preparing you for the political storm you will face in the next several months, especially when there's an election being called.

Now I know I was somewhat censured for talking about particular weather patterns, and I will refrain from that, but I understand that this particular Liberal bill wants to be pushed through. It's interesting, as I look at my notes here, how this whole scenario of trying to get this House open on Monday - through you, Mr. Speaker - I find that very interesting.

I wanted to put myself in the mindset of the Premier and the government and how they were probably thinking. I would say that, yes, to me it looked as if they wanted to get everything cleaned up, particularly in one week, and they didn't want to go into next week. That would give the Opposition more time to stand here and scrutinize the bill and raise questions and have their Opposition Question Periods. So I concluded that everything was going to be rushed through and it would be ending this Friday.

The interesting note I have here is that I understand that this Monday, February 20th, is a holiday. It's a holiday that was established by this sitting government. Whether it's karma or the irony of the whole situation, I find that very interesting, how that played out, because it's my understanding that this Liberal Government may not get this bill rushed through this week.

Monday is going to be Family Day. Family Day is going to be an opportunity for the family to sit down and to reflect, and they're going to reflect on what the government is doing to their teachers. Some people may say that that's karma coming back to bite you, but I find that very interesting, and I just wanted to note that. I find it very interesting that this government established a holiday in February, almost on the second or third year, and that karma would come back and have the opportunity for families across Nova Scotia to reflect not only on their families but, I'm sure, on how they're treating teachers across our province. I certainly find that an interesting scenario.

I know this government has suggested that it has done considerable soul searching. In terms of soul searching, I think it may not stop with the teachers. I think if you look at the film industry or Seniors' Pharmacare or the highest ER closures across Nova Scotia in history - to me, there also needs to be some soul-searching on those topics.

Now we have the education file, and if I can backtrack, we have the introduction of Bill No. 148 - to me, that is no more than a large club sitting on the negotiation table and telling everybody, "You come sit here with me, but here is my large club, Bill No. 148, and this is what I'm going to introduce if you fall out of line." That's what I repeatedly said from day 1. You repeal that bill, you take it off the table, and you can start negotiating in a fair way. (Interruption)

Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Energy wants to comment, I think he'll have his opportunity, but I'm willing to bet - and I'm not a betting man, but I'll buy dinner if he stands up and does an equal amount of time on this bill as me. I'll buy you dinner. No problem.

MR. SAMSON: Are we talking McDonalds?

MR. BELLIVEAU: Well, it could be a Happy Meal. (Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back and emphasize, again, the timelines. Again, I know that the Premier, or the Speaker of the House had to be aware of the conditions of this Legislature. I emphasize that again. I'll put my remarks, Mr. Speaker, through you about Environment Canada. Environment Canada talked about a forecast. What I'm talking about here - Mr. Speaker, you can interrupt me if you want - is that there has to be respect when it comes to certain events. What I want to point out here is Environment Canada gives storm warnings. I want to suggest . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I think you're treading on the topic that we cautioned you on before. I would caution you not to go back there. I think we need to finish up.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your wisdom.

When we have a future storm event, and there is a question of travel for my colleagues here, I would be very interested in knowing the travel plans leading up to a future weather event next week. We have 51 members trying to get here ahead of that particular system. I would find that very interesting if there was a future weather event, and we had 51 members trying to get here 24 hours ahead. That doesn't address the safety of a future weather event for the staff, for the enforcement officers, and for the personnel who all make this happen - Legislative TV. I can go on and on. I think Nova Scotians get my point that whoever's responsible for this can clearly show that if people are using this particular system to travel ahead of the storms, decisions are made in reference to travel, so it should reflect the hours of this House. The spin doctors of One Government Place got this wrong. I'll move on, Mr. Speaker.

I know that time is limited here. But I just want to read - I hope this will be acceptable, Mr. Speaker - one letter here from a teacher in Liverpool, Nova Scotia. The teacher's name is Beth Harding, Liverpool, Nova Scotia. I'll read the letter. It goes as follows:

"I'd like to discuss my concerns as a parent and educator about the ongoing labour dispute between the NSTU and the province, and about the state of the education system in general. Now that the possibility of a third tentative agreement being rejected has become a reality, I wanted to revisit a few of my points in case they may be of assistance as you and your fellow MLAs consider your position on the upcoming legislation being tabled this week.

In the words of the premier himself, 'The latest deal contains fair wage increases . . .' With the loss of our long-service award (a previously negotiated item that served as deferred salary for past wage freezes) and without even considering the effects of inflation, the wage 'increases' actually equates to my overall compensation

being reduced by 1 % by the end of the contract. Not only are my wages not being increased, the fact is that with the loss of the long-service award, they are being decreased. I ask you, do you think that is a fair wage increase?"

Mr. Speaker, that is just a portion of that particular email from Ms. Beth Harding. I will certainly table that.

Again, I want to point out that I think it's important to bring some common sense here to this Chamber. Certainly, there's one particular phrase that I love to quote: if you're not at the table, certainly you may be on the menu. I feel it's quite important in this day and age that we take a second breath and look around and see what is the best path to follow.

Mr. Speaker, when I first came here, my first election, I had an interesting call from a gentleman who is a teacher, Sylvester Atkinson. Mr. Atkinson is a former mayor of Middleton, Nova Scotia. He served seven terms, and if my information is correct, he reoffered and was reappointed in the last municipal election in October 2016. Certainly Mr. Atkinson is no stranger to municipal politics.

If you back up about 11 years, when I first was introduced to this Chamber, Mr. Atkinson congratulated me and gave me a call and suggested that he was glad for me to get here and would certainly make an effort to bring the concerns of your constituents to this particular Chamber. I went on to say to Mr. Atkinson in the phone conversation suggesting that perhaps I may not have the degree of education - we have teachers, we have lawyers, we have accountants, and we have a number of different professionals in this Chamber - but with my background as a fisherman, I hope I bring some common sense to the floor of this Legislature.

Mr. Atkinson stopped me right in my tracks, Mr. Speaker, and gave me a lecture, and this is the point I'm trying to make about common sense. Mr. Atkinson said there's no such thing as common sense, it is rare sense; you will not find common sense on the floor of this House of Assembly. I've never forgotten that, you could call it a kind of semi-lecture but I call it kind of pointing me in the right direction, you need to bring common sense to a critical time.

I believe we have reached a critical time in the history of teachers in the education system across Nova Scotia. To me that critical time is right before us. If I could just use Mr. Atkinson's words again, we need to look for a common-sense approach to addressing this issue, Mr. Speaker. I can assure you that I may have gotten a few heckles when I suggested the Electoral Boundaries Commission, but that would certainly create some time to address that particular issue of readdressing the boundaries and it would give time for people to come back to the bargaining table and start anew.

Now, I want to suggest that common sense - and I'll use a quick little analogy here. Back in 1999 there was such a thing in the Supreme Court of Canada called the Marshall decision. The Marshall decision talked about the Mi'kmaq community having access to commercial fisheries across Canada. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the members opposite, that was certainly a large, crucial decision that had to be made in a very short time to address the Supreme Court decision giving the Mi'kmaq community access to the traditional fisheries.

The common-sense approach was that there were several fishermen, myself included, to address a common-sense approach or an interim agreement to address the Marshall decision and we achieved that, and we achieved it in a very few days. I can assure you that if you look back on that decision all parties were satisfied with the interim agreement. What I'm suggesting here is that we need to take the sober, second thought, use some common sense, get back to the bargaining table and address these issues.

I know I only have a few minutes left, but I want to just suggest that it is about the future of our children and as I look to my only grandchild, I see the future of that individual child, Adrienne LeBoutillier, seven years old. I know if they have access to education they can become whatever they want - if they want to be an astronaut, a doctor, a lawyer, or maybe a school teacher - but it comes through education. Now, I can put down my speaking notes and I can speak from my heart because I think that is the most crucial point here today.

To me, there are things that I value and I hope I bring those values to this particular floor. The one thing that I treasure is as a Canadian we have a social medical health care system that is the envy around the world. Can it get better? Can it improve? Certainly, it can, but I think that it is the envy of many people across our world.

The second priority to myself is education. If we give our youth and our future children the opportunity to have a higher education, they'll go on to aspire to be whatever; the world is their oyster and they can achieve whatever they want. I seriously believe that we are certainly at a crisis when it comes to our educational system. I try to project that maybe this was not the best time to have an emergency debate in this House. It is time to take a second, sober thought to kind of renew the whole process, to go back to the bargaining table, to clean the slate, to have both sides sit in there and trying to achieve an agreement.

I really believe that that is the approach that needs to exist in this atmosphere. When I look out and I see the snowbanks and I see that our community is literally trying to clean up, trying to take away snow from their driveways, the cars as I drove here this morning, people were using jumper cables trying to help their neighbour, trying to assist them to get their vehicles out of the snow, and trying to make life better. That is the Canadian way and, to me, this is so wrong, to force a bill through this House. It's one of the highest priorities of our land, the education of our youth and it's wrong, it's simply wrong.

I tried to point out earlier that we can stand here and do our job as Opposition and hold this government accountable. It is a democracy that is certainly our privilege and the envy of a lot of people across our world. I've said this before in this Chamber, I am no world traveller but I've had the good fortune to travel to Europe and different countries and when that little Canadian flag is recognized, people know who you are.

I feel that this is too important, that we cannot make an error here. We need to regroup, rethink what we're doing and make the right decisions for all Nova Scotians. I know that my time is basically limited here today and this has certainly been emotional for me because I want to get this right. I really truly believe that if you hit the pause button and take the time to evaluate what is being done here, that will be better for all Nova Scotians.

We're going to have a critical vote here in a few days, a few hours, and people will hold you responsible. I know that with every vote I've taken in representing the people of Queens-Shelburne, I do not do that lightly. I don't take my job lightly; I take it very seriously. I consider talking to people, and I hope you will have the opportunity this weekend to talk to individuals. I think that's a good part of our process.

It's interesting, I made a comment earlier that we're going to have a holiday this Monday. I find that rather moving. People will say it's calmer and I congratulate the minister for recognizing a holiday in February, but I find that sometimes the stars or certain events line up and it's all for a reason, and that reason I'm confident that it looks as if we're going to get this bill into next week. Just my observation - I assume that may not have been the wishes of the sitting government, they would like to conclude and have it all finished by Friday.

I found it so interesting that people are going to have an opportunity to reflect on a day that this government chose as a holiday to be a family day. I find that very interesting. I wonder, is there some power greater than myself that creates that opportunity. I often wonder about that, but people are going to evaluate this particular bill on that day. I feel that is very important.

I know that - perhaps I never had every comment that I could in this, but I know that I have dedicated members of my caucus around me that will highlight a lot more than I have included here today. I know that I have a committed Party, and I know that I have a committed Leader, and we will be listening to Nova Scotians and we'll be bringing those concerns here to this floor. Whether you are Rachel Creasor, the one-woman protester that circled this building in inclement weather - her voice needs to be heard. The voices of 9,300 teachers need to be heard. The students right across Nova Scotia need to be heard in this Chamber.

If you're in a political Party you have policies and I truly believe that if you have a policy, you should be able to defend that and speak to it in great length. What is sad here, Mr. Speaker, is we are going to see this bill pushed through, Bill No. 75, with a very limited

participation from the sitting government. I find that an insult to the integrity of Nova Scotians and political elected officials. You need to stand up, voice your concerns and speak for your constituents.

Now I know that I may be trampling on a few hard feelings here. We live in an era where we have technologies exploding in front of us. I suggested earlier that the parent teachers' Facebook group has 20,000-plus participants. I am not a world guru tech - if that's a term that I just created and it's not - I'm just an average Joe who participates in that. To me the social media is exploding as we speak and with the different avenues that people are engaged in, 20,000-plus people on social media on the parent teachers support group last night - it was brought to my attention that the present Liberal Government members are no longer participating in that. That is a sin.

Now if you are out there with the Christmas Tree campaign and you spend \$240,000 to go to Boston, and we all agree that that's a great show and I want to be there and let me cut the ribbon and give the spotlight to me and I'm a champion for Nova Scotia, hurrah, hurrah, and give \$25,000 to CTV to make sure you get the publication and the promotion (Interruption) The member for Yarmouth, you'll have your opportunity and I look forward to that engagement. (Interruption)

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 that I got the attention of the member for Yarmouth and I'll continue on that particular topic of the Christmas Tree campaign in Boston, of spending \$25,000 to CTV for adding campaign coverage. Yet when there's somewhat of a critical issue, an issue that you must defend or you should be there in front of the public media defending your position, you decline the interview with CTV's Steve Murphy. A coincidence?

I suggest that this Party is all about going to the barbeque circuit, having the ribbon-cuttings but when the going gets tough and when they have to defend a bill like Bill No. 75, they vanish. They dissipate like the morning fog in the Bay of Fundy on May 25th. I can assure you that the wind will blow from the sou'west in May in the Bay of Fundy. I'm confident of that but I'm not confident that this particular Party, the members opposite will stand and defend this bill. The silence is deafening. When you see the protesters, one individual across this province stands in inclement weather and circles this building and has the fortitude, has the courage to stand outside this building when it's not fit to be outdoors is encouraging. But it's not encouraging when you have the opportunity to speak and you sit there on your hands and you are running for cover.

Mr. Speaker, there will be an election and I look forward to the members opposite on the doorsteps. Thank you very much for your time.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, normally when I rise to speak the first thing I say is how proud I am to rise and speak but I'm not today. In fact hot off the press we have just learned some very important news, and honestly, I feel like I've just been punched in the stomach for my son, for all his friends, for all the students, teachers and parents.

This Liberal Government and the Premier have rolled the dice and this is what we have. We have our first walk-out in 122 years. Do they realize what this is going to do Friday to the teachers, to the parents, to the students in particular? I already, just a few moments ago had a text from one constituent, "I have no daycare for Friday."

I think for the record I will read this press release and table it because this will go down in history. The title is, "McNeil government's anti-education legislation results in Province wide teacher strike. The complete lack of respect displayed by Stephen McNeil and his government towards teachers, students and their families has left NSTU members with no choice but to initiate a one-day province-wide walk-out on Friday, February 17. In the entire 122 year history of NSTU, our members have never faced a more anti-education Premier than Stephen McNeil."

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind the member and all members of the House, even when you're quoting from a document from another party in this House you're not to use the surnames of the members in the House. So if you could do the minor editing required as you're reading, that would be helpful.

MS. MACFARLANE: I stand corrected and I'll certainly try to follow those rules.

"The legislation he introduced yesterday limits teachers' right to strike, erodes their ability to negotiate a fair contract and prevents them from advocating for reforms to improve learning conditions for their students. The result is the first province-wide teacher strike ever in Nova Scotia." Teachers will use the day to ensure the McNeil Government . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Please rephrase that sentence.

The honourable member for Pictou West.

MS. MACFARLANE: Teachers will use the day to ensure this government knows the full impact of their actions on Nova Scotia's public education system and public sector workers in this province. "We believe this legislation is unconstitutional and we owe it to our colleagues past, present and future to take this stand. . . . says he wants to hear from teachers, so on Friday teachers will spend the day ensuring the Premier and his Liberal caucus get the message - his government's bully tactics can no longer be tolerated."

I would like to table this, Mr. Speaker. I retract that word bully, I'm sorry.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, yes, the word bully. . .

MS. MACFARLANE: I didn't know in a quote if you could use that or not. I wouldn't say it myself. I was quoting what it said.

MR. SPEAKER: The intent here in the House is that we do not use unparliamentary language, even if it comes from outside the walls of this House.

MS. MACFARLANE: So here we are today and a lot of words that I heard before I came here from constituents were words such as shameful, disgraceful, waste of taxpayers' money, and the list goes on and on. It truly is a jagged pill to swallow, to believe that a third round of negotiations failed. Why didn't the Liberal Government and the NSTU send in new faces for that third time of negotiations? Wouldn't that have been the proper thing to do? I feel everyone should get a second chance and I believed in the second round, but when those talks broke down, I thought, okay, don't give up.

It's like when your children fight and you want them to solve the issue for themselves so you give them a few opportunities to battle it out themselves and then finally they can't, then you intervene. What this government and the NSTU should have done on the third round - and there still could be a chance that they could do this now if they remove this bill - is to send new faces in. Maybe it just needs new blood, new fresh faces to discuss. I would think that that would be a great opportunity to consider.

I know I stand here no different from the rest of the MLAs in this Chamber. We've all received hundreds, perhaps thousands, of emails and calls regarding this situation. Every time I go to an event, to the rink, to the post office, to the grocery store, I'm constantly being stopped. What do you think is going to happen? The opinions have varied but I can assure you this, Mr. Speaker. I have received over 200 emails, and I know other MLAs have too, but out of all those emails, I am sure there's only three or four that were in favour of legislating teachers back to work. There are so many people directly involved and indirectly, but everyone wants to know why we are not rebooting. Why do we not press pause, go back in with new faces, new ideas, and just try it, see if it works.

We're here today and we're hitting that proverbial brick wall - and that wall will soon be knocked down by a majority government - but let us not forget that when this is over and we all walk away from this historic building, we have not succeeded. We have failed. We have failed the students, we have failed the teachers, the parents, the taxpayers, and I know we have failed ourselves. I know there are MLAs in this room that do not believe we should legislate teachers back to work. I can almost promise you that the days ahead of dealing with the Supreme Court will be no ice cream stand.

As I said earlier, we are headed into the proverbial twilight zone, risking taxpayers' money. We have not educated ourselves on what took place in B.C. Yesterday during the technical briefing of this bill, the question was asked to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development: Have you given any consideration to what happened in B.C.? Do you think it could happen to us? The minister's response was our government believes it will not happen. Well, believe is not good enough. That is a risk. The minister indicated that their lawyers believe that this will not happen. I think all of us should take a few moments today and read what happened in B.C.

Canada's highest court - which often takes several months, Mr. Speaker, to deliver a decision - took only a 20-minute recess after hearing legal arguments, before delivering a 7-2 decision in favour of the union. The decision immediately restored clauses deleted from the teachers' contract by the Liberal Government. I believe at the time the Liberal Government was under Gordon Campbell in 2002 and it was dealing with class size, the number of special needs students who can be in a class, and the number of specialist teachers required in schools - and that was one thing I found very disappointing about this bill. Bill No. 75 has nothing in it about specialized teachers. We all know there's a great need for specialized teachers in this province. Our records show it, our tests show it. We are falling behind every other province in this country.

If many of us could just recall back to what happened in B.C., the B.C. government touched off the legal battle in 2002 by passing legislation that stripped those provisions from the teachers' contract and passed a law denying teachers the right to bargain those issues. Is that what we want to do here, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Government has failed to bargain in good faith. There is still time to withdraw. There is still time to withdraw this piece of legislation and send new people in to negotiate. It's the only fair thing to do and it would be in good faith.

We know that many of the bizarre events related to the negotiations for a new teachers' contract over the past several months show clearly that the union and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development bureaucrats have little understanding of the issues teachers face on a daily basis. They are not listening to the teachers. They are not sitting down, one-on-one, face to face, and hearing them out.

Following are some of the key issues that need to be resolved if there is to be any qualitative change in the crisis in our classrooms. Mr. Speaker, if we are to reform classrooms there's a number of things we have to do, but I do want to point out a number of issues that have been brought to my attention. I literally have sat down with over 50 teachers, sometimes three or four at a time, sometimes one-on-one, one night even a group of 12. They have great ideas, they have solutions. The teachers want to go back to the table, they want to be heard.

One of the key issues is inclusive education, Mr. Speaker. Teachers on a daily basis are facing a broad spectrum of psychological, social and physical challenges, depression - and it's all without adequate support and resources to meet the children's needs in the classroom. There are many students, especially in the younger grades, who are coming to school who are finding that their mental well-being is not being looked after and we have to address this.

The second issue I wanted to speak about is child poverty. Sometimes I do believe that this is sort of the core of a lot of our problems - poverty. We know that 52 per cent of Nova Scotians make less than \$30,000 a year. Poverty is having a tremendous impact on our children's ability to benefit from, indeed, just to even cope with the school environment. They are coming to school not adequately dressed, no lunches, no moral support. They are not washed, they are not cared for, Mr. Speaker, because 52 per cent of Nova Scotians make less than \$30,000 a year.

We all know that technology is playing a dominant role today in our lives, but especially in the lives of many children, even at the elementary level. Many now come to school completely comfortable with the latest technology. They are so advanced with their smart phones, their iPads. They have a world of information at their fingertips and are seeking very different learning activities that are often unable to be provided in the classroom as it currently is structured. That is the reason why we have to revamp the whole education system. I said it yesterday, I heard one of my colleagues say it today, it is a perfect storm that is happening within the education system right now and we need to do something about that.

The teachers are telling me that their professional development days are not allowing them to keep pace with these rapid technology advancements. I think that we should be looking more at some of the school models that are put in place in countries like Finland and Sweden. It's amazing what they're doing with their children, and it's amazing what these children are doing afterwards when they finish Primary to 12. We have to look at a different model that is in line with technology but give the teachers support with it. PowerSchool has overruled them. PowerSchool has consumed them.

I also think one of the other issues is centralized decision-making. We all know that nobody can experience a feeling of a job well done or satisfaction within their job unless they have some control over the decisions that impact their lives and workplace. That's why it is so extremely important that we include teachers in the conversation, something that I feel this government has denied them. Teachers - any professional, any of us - want to go home at the end of the day with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction that we have helped someone or we made advancements in productivity, not the frustration that teachers are feeling with inadequate support and paperwork that seems to be always increasing. It seems like they are becoming basically an individual who collects data.

For the most part, standardized tests are not worth the time, I am told. They're not worth the effort or the stress on kids, teachers, and parents. Teachers, parents, and students can best assess student progress towards defined outcomes if given the opportunity.

Lastly, I think it's extremely important that administrative positions in the teaching profession ought to be given more to the principal. The individual who is the principal of a school needs to be enabled, trained, given the responsibility, and held accountable for the school environment and all that happens therein as well as the outcomes of that school. Everyone needs to be held accountable. I would say that the primary roles of teachers, beyond teaching, as well as any administration staff should be to enhance the principal's role. Working to ensure success for them and teachers is most important.

Given the huge geographical areas of the current school boards, it's virtually impossible for board members to have a personal understanding of issues that impact at the parent and school level. When was the last time any of us in this Chamber knew that a school board member met with a teacher to hear them out? I don't know any in my area, and I have asked the question, Mr. Speaker. Most board members are caring community people who do a good job of the duties and the responsibilities that they are given. But they are losing touch with parents, teachers, and students. It is significant in determining the outcome of education in Nova Scotia that they sit down with teachers and students.

We need a structure. I know that the school advisory councils are there, but they're not always enabling or giving parents that authority or responsibility, nor are they receiving the resources to strengthen that home and school relationship between the parents and the teachers, the teachers and the school board members, the principal and the school board members. Everything is lost between the cracks, and the decision-making process ends up being on the school board without effectively taking the time to listen to the principal and the teachers.

Mr. Speaker, I come from a family with a number of teachers: cousins, aunts, uncles, and my grandmother, who I grew up beside. In fact, I'm wearing her charm bracelet today, that she was given by a student in Grade 8, when she taught. It's over 50 years old. I still run into individuals when I'm out and who say, "I had your grandmother for a teacher. She was really, really strict, but I learned a lot from her." She was strict, and she was a really good English teacher. I lived beside her, so I was very steeped in her environment and often would drive to school with her. I knew what kind of teacher she was, and I knew that students had a lot of respect for her. I know I did.

I think we've lost that in our school system, and I'm not sure why. I'm not sure if it has a lot to do with home life or what has happened, but that respect that students had for teachers has somewhat been lost. But I don't believe it's been lost as much as what this government has lost. What we see right now is this government not respecting the voices of the teachers.

I want to talk about integrity, or the lack thereof, during this process. I always say that smart people change their minds, but when they do, they have to admit and come forward with what they said in the past. I tell my children that it's okay if you change your mind, but it should never compromise your integrity.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development has jeopardized, and I would say compromised, her integrity. Back in 2012, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development had a blog that indicated that students go to school to learn, that teachers go to school because they want to teach them, and that parents expect both.

There's no doubt that it's the responsibility of the school boards and staff to create a positive learning environment where both of these things can happen. It is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to adequately fund public school education so that both can happen. I know that the minister said this, because it was around the time that the \$65 million was taken out of education. I remember reading this, so I looked it up, because at the time I thought, good on you for pointing that out.

The minister, who at the time was an MLA, further continued on to say that it's simple, ". . . there is one part of this equation that is not in place . . . the funding of public education by the Province. In fact, the NDP government has chosen to cut funding to schools by 65 million dollars." Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'm reading these comments from a blog that was posted by current the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. At the time, the minister, who was an MLA, indicated "They have tried to use declining enrollment to justify these cuts. Nova Scotians are not buying that story." Just like today, when they're not buying this decision to legislate teachers back to school.

"What Nova Scotia parents and teachers are most outraged about is the lack of funding to support students in the classroom. The complexities within the classroom are greater today than ever before." That was written in 2012, and they have not changed since 2012. In fact, I think they're even greater today.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that students bring a variety of behavioral and learning challenges to the classroom. Many cannot function without the support of an assistant, but we are lacking so many assistants. Many behaviours are disruptive and interfere with teachers teaching and students learning.

Further comments by the current Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development state that many students have attention challenges and they are unable to focus in a busy environment and every one of these students deserves the support they need in order to be successful. All students need a positive learning environment so they can be successful.

At the time the minister had indicated and further commented on the fact that there were also colossal concerns around classroom sizes, and at the time the minister, who was representing the NDP at the time, suggested that the average class size be 21 students. Parents and teachers know differently.

The minister continued to hear from both parents and teachers who are sharing these same real concerns about class sizes in the school. One angry parent told the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development that the average class size in her daughter's elementary school is 27 - the average class size is 27. Other classrooms have over 30 students and some as high as 40 per classroom. We all know these are soft caps, and this bill is not going to do anything to improve this.

We know that there are hundreds of disgruntled parents and we know that they're sending emails. They're sending out thousands of emails. There are petitions with thousands and thousands of signatures.

The damage that is being done to our public education system by this government will continue to have a negative impact on our students for decades - not years, for decades.

We know that students who have not learned to read by the end of Grade 3 will struggle the rest of their schooling years. This limits their opportunities to have success in post-secondary institutions and the workforce, and of course in their social life. It will also make it difficult and probably have negative impacts on their ability to make a valuable contribution to the economy in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Coming back to my point, 52 per cent make less than \$30,000 per year, and economists around the world continue to remind us that in difficult economic times the last place any government in any country should cut funding is education. That was a quote by the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development off her blog.

In Nova Scotia, one of the first places that, unfortunately, the NDP Government cut was education. This government is not doing anything differently. I know they say that they've hired more teachers, but they're not telling us how many retired. There is absolutely not enough financial investment being made in mental health.

We can't get this wrong, Mr. Speaker, we can't - but we can pause, we can go back to the table, we can send some new people in. I'd be happy to see some faces from all sides here - some MLAs going in and discussing, because we have great conversations when we're not in this Chamber - some great ideas. I'm like, well did you suggest that? Well, we kind of discussed it. No. Don't be aggressive, but be assertive. Get out there and share these ideas. We can do it together. I know that. Our legacy can be that we all made it better. The legacy here today is going to be that for the first time in history there was a strike - in 122 years. That will be the legacy of the Liberal Government today.

Yesterday the minister indicated that a commission will be hired to review how inclusion in the schools should look. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development indicated that the first interim report will be at the end of June. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? There is no assurance of teachers from all geographical areas of the province coming on this committee. We need teachers, we need mentors, we need special ed teachers to sit around the table and be part of this commission.

There is nothing in this bill, in the short term, to help make gains in the classroom reform that we so much need. I've heard from so many teachers, they are upset and feel punished for voting no to the third contract. I fear what the union will do next. I wonder what will happen after Friday.

Mr. Speaker, we need more specialized teachers in our education system. We have, since we've all come into this House in 2013, been discussing mental health. We all know that mental health has been a top priority in this province yet we continue to see no real investment being made by this government. The future burden of mental health in Nova Scotia is pegged to increase to \$1.4 billion, according to the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis. Mental health experts are urging the government to be aggressive in getting ahead of these enormous costs because we will see them, especially if we don't turn this economy around, especially if we don't create any jobs.

Much of this has to do with addressing mental health issues at an early age and statistics prove that if a child is diagnosed by the age of 10, he or she will have a 90 per cent success rate of beating that. Mr. Speaker, we know it is primarily about getting ahead of development of the symptoms and the development of being able to deal with the early challenges of mental health, which is basically early identification and treatment. That is not happening now in our school system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it will take decades. We need to fix it now because the children who are in the school now who are not getting this help, we will see them in 10 years. We pray that they will be helped and out having successful careers but I'm doubtful of that. Mental illnesses cost us all directly at the end of the day. The cost is in terms of longer treatment times for people with mental illnesses, compared to other kinds of illnesses on average. They cost us in terms of loss of productivity when you think of all the youth who are unable to advance in their education or their careers because they are stalled by their emotional well-being.

Mr. Speaker, dealing with mental issues is challenging and complex but this Liberal Government had and still has an opportunity to get ahead of the problem, especially with our youth. It makes me wonder if the Liberal Government spoke to the teachers dealing with students who have emotional well-being issues. I'd say it appears that it's a problem of unwillingness to accept, look and understand the evidence that teachers have been so desperately trying to give. Teachers have been ignored on this and it's time we truly hear them out. They care, they want their students to get help.

We are focusing, perhaps all of us, but I know this government is focusing way too much on what the immediate needs are rather than looking to the amount of money we will save down the road in the long term. We need to do a better job of preparing for the future when it comes to addressing education and mental health under one umbrella. We need to invest more money in our school system with regard to mental health.

I have had teachers tell me they use the term that they feel like a glorified babysitter. They are running around in their oversized classrooms, multi-tasking too many urgencies and challenges that they are not able to properly conduct their lessons for the day.

One of the best analogies that I heard from a teacher was, look at it like this, you have Thanksgiving dinner and you have 30 to 35 people in your family who are coming to dinner. Some may show up, some may not show up. You never know but you have to prepare enough food for all of them to show up. In that mix of family you have some who can't eat vegetables, you have some who don't like sitting by their cousin, you have some who won't even come into the room at all because they just don't like socializing but they show up anyway, you have some who cannot be around anyone with any type of perfume on and then you have few possibly out of those 30 or 35 who have EpiPens and you are worried the whole time you are trying to prepare Thanksgiving dinner who will pull out the EpiPen - what have I possibly put in my kitchen that may affect one of them?

I understood this analogy. It's complex and it's very difficult for teachers to accommodate all the students in their classroom when the number is so high and when they don't really have an assistant. I like the analogy that was given about Thanksgiving dinner because the individual who told me this said you may once in a while get a little help from your husband but really, at the end of the day many do it all on their own. They don't have EAs but they have 30 to 35 students that they have to try and teach. No wonder they feel like glorified babysitters.

Mr. Speaker, I have one French mentor who told me the other day that she travels to 26 different schools - 26 different schools that this French mentor is responsible for. That is insane, that is unacceptable. There is nothing in this piece of legislation, in this bill, that is addressing the demand for an increase in specialized teachers and that is one of the biggest reasons why I will be voting no on this bill.

Another teacher tells me they have nine different school plans to prepare and because they are all different levels of learning in that class, she spends her whole night after she gets her own children to bed and helping them with their school work, planning for the next day, sometimes two to three hours in the evening planning out the next day.

Mr. Speaker, recently we had an opportunity to have the Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development make a presentation at our Human Resources Committee meeting. It was on the province's literacy strategy which I was most interested in. The outcomes for reading and math in Nova Scotia absolutely scare me and should scare

everyone in this room. Across Canada we are at the bottom. Nationally we have - just for the very first time - actually just came on reaching the standard, but barely, for the first time. We have always failed in math and in English.

We have to do something better here and I do give credit, though, to this government with this literacy strategy. I know that it has only been I think a year, a year and a half; it is a good strategy. I was really pleased to see the deputy minister come and make the presentation and I know that we're not going to see those results for a couple of years but that was great to start that and, I'm so happy for that; but we can do more as well. So, it will be interesting to see where we place nationally maybe in four or five years because that's my understanding that it will take that to see an increase because of the strategy.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back to the school system in Finland. I found it really interesting reading about it. It's an amazing system that they have over there. They spend much of their time outside for all their classes and it's really interesting how they interact and have this sense that being out in nature and learning how to build treehouses and, you know, they're learning their math through building a treehouse or building a camp. I would like just to express how I would love to see Nova Scotia look and sit down to review this model of education in Finland. It has amazing results with their youth, and I do believe that it would have aligned very well with our mental health issues.

One of the interesting things that I have learned and one of the issues that is big all across Canada is mental health, and Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Provinces are suffering in that area with our youth in the school system and actually, that is what my daughter is taking at university in Calgary. It's a health and well-being degree where she can go in to counselling children but in an outdoor setting instead of being in a room with four walls. The outcome of helping youth in counselling them in nature is far more successful than having them come once a week for an hour and pay \$200. So, it's a system that I would love to see this Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Nova Scotia have a look at.

Again, I cannot vote for this. I do believe that we can take this opportunity to listen to each other, we will learn from each other, but at the end of the day, the only way we are going to be successful in advancing our education system here in Nova Scotia is if we put pause on this, we go back to the bargaining table, and we put new faces at that table. Try it; just try it. It may work. You can't send people in for a third time and expect a different outcome. You just can't.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak. Once again, I'm very sad with the news of what will take place Friday. I hope that all of us here will get an opportunity to socialize with those teachers that come Friday. Hear them out; you may learn something different, you may not, but it may be something that may change your mind. All I can say is that I truly hope that when everyone votes that they also think

about their integrity and they can go home at the end of the day and lay their head on the pillow and know that they did the right thing. Thank you very much.

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

HON. DENISE PETERSON-RAFUSE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to have the opportunity today to speak about Bill No. 75 and my disappointment and the disappointment of many members and residents of our province in the government bringing forth this type of legislation because we all believe that we live in a democracy, but unfortunately when you peel it away and you're dealing with the attitude of the Liberal Government, the word "democracy" does not go hand in hand with this government.

I would like to take a moment to talk about teachers and the effect that teachers have on our lives. I'm sure that there's not one person in this House who has not been affected positively by a teacher during their school lives. When we reflect back over our younger years and think about our time in the school system, there seems to be always one or two teachers who stand out. What we need to be doing is, we need to be more positive around teachers and their profession. That's where leadership comes into play.

Here there was all this hoopla about One Nova Scotia. Everybody was going to come together because we're One Nova Scotia. We're not One Nova Scotia when we have leadership that's trying to divide and conquer, between parents, between students, and between teachers. It's not right, Mr. Speaker, and it's not fair. It's a lack of leadership with vision. It's lack of leadership being positive and creating that positivity that we need in our province. Whatever happened to One Nova Scotia? It sank. It's buried. The leadership that we have in this province does not believe in One Nova Scotia. It believes in dividing Nova Scotia. That will be next report that will come out or review done by the Liberals: dividing Nova Scotia. They're experts in doing that.

When we talk about teachers and their importance in society, what we have to realize and understand is, do we not want the best of the best of the best in a teacher to teach our children? We expect that. We want that. Why do we not look at the teaching profession at a much higher level than we seem to do in our province? I can't figure that one out. If we want our children to have the greatest opportunities in their lives, we all know that it comes from the foundation of education. Very often, teachers spend just as much time with our children, and with some families more time with our children than their own parents. The influence that teachers have is enormous. It's during those years that children are learning, and they're watching by example. There's great influence on them by the adults that surround them.

If a child comes from a broken home, then the teacher's job becomes even more relevant. But it also puts more pressure on the teacher because they know that background. They know that that child's only opportunity in life maybe is if they have a solid education

and if they have teachers who are motivated, teachers who love their job, teachers who feel respected. It's baffling that, in our tiny little province, we don't seem to see that. If we do see it, we're really truly not putting the actions in place. We're just saying those things. That's what the teachers are seeing.

We know that every one of us who is a parent here really relied on our teachers for our own children and that we would fight the battle if we thought our child needed some extra help, perhaps in reading or in math. We know that not only for our own personal viewpoint for our children to have a better life, but we know as a society that those societies that invest in teachers and respect teachers are the societies that do better. It reduces costs - it reduces mental health costs, it reduces costs in terms of students who are able to go through the system and go to school and then go to university and get a good job. In fact, it builds your economy. It's a true investment.

The best investments for any province are not the quick fix because there's no such thing as a quick fix. It is being visionary, Mr. Speaker, and looking over the years and seeing what we can do and where our investments should lie. It's about priorities.

I had the opportunity that I'll never forget in my life to be able to sit around a Cabinet Table. I do know that it's challenging in terms of where monies are to be spent and what do you take if you have only so much money so if you take from one to give to the other, it can cause trouble. The fact is that it is about priorities.

There's nothing wrong with running a deficit if it means that that investment at the end of the day is going to increase your economy in your province. Your partners at a federal level, our Prime Minister, that's what he ran on in the last election was that we need to spend over and over on infrastructure, we need to spend in health care, we need to spend in a variety of areas. Many people often do not realize that there is a difference between the balanced budget and a deficit. Certainly our province runs a deficit but we're not in that bad a shape and I'm proud to say that when the NDP were in, it was the first time in 50 years that a payment was made on the actual deficit of the province and we ended up with an A rating, which meant that we could borrow money at an even lower interest rate.

Financially being smart means taking that money because you can borrow it at a lower interest rate and invest it. That's what we do personally, if there's an opportunity for us to purchase a home, for example, and we're able to do that at a good interest rate and we're looking at it as an investment down the line. But those investments come years down the line and that's what the problem is with politics. The problem with politics is the election cycle because decisions are made based on that election cycle and every Party in this House knows that. That's what it's all about and that's sad because when Parties talk about the future, they don't really mean it because they're not putting things in place for the future. So you need to have strong leadership that educates people that yes, we can do these things, instead of leadership that keeps saying we can't do this, we can't do that and all hinging on this balanced budget.

Mr. Speaker, I know you need to have control of course over your budget but yet at the same time don't miss opportunities that are there. I'm sure if we went back even 20 years ago in this House and if there were ghosts in the Legislature, probably a lot of the same conversations took place about education - oh, we don't have the money to invest and we have to do this with our money, we have to have a balanced budget. Well if that way of thinking was right, why are we in this position we are in today, as a society? That's where you talk about the austerity budgets, that they just don't work and how much proof do we have to see that it doesn't work. As I said, you don't go wild with your budget but you do look at those things that we do need investments and of course that's in the education system.

I know that there are many from the Liberal side, in particular, who will relate back to and say the \$65 million that the NDP took out of education, but we know that's not factual. It's part of the political game. The \$65 million, if I asked anyone in this House where were those cuts, can you tell me exactly where those cuts were made, and I bet you there's not one including the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development that could give me a list of where those cuts were made to equal that \$65 million - because the \$65 million amount - I know that the Minister of Health and Wellness is saying Reading Recovery. There isn't a \$65 million cut in Reading Recovery.

The fact is that the \$65 million was not cut. It was budgeted. What happened was one of the - out of anger at our government at the time, one of the school boards came up with \$65 million by doing a budget that was a cost-pressure budget. It's a cost-pressure budget - and that's not the way that you budget. Not one department in any government budget based on cost pressures. If we did that through each and every one of the departments in government, then all our government departments would be showing large amounts of cuts. You just don't do it by cost pressures, but that's how that \$65 million was created.

The government, the Liberal Party felt that the more times we repeat that it will stick because they know that in the general public there is so much information flow that goes out continuously. If the media repeats that and the government members repeat it enough then it all of a sudden seems to become a true fact, when actually it hasn't been.

If the government is standing by that \$65 million then they should be able to show exactly where those cuts were. They would have all that information now, being in government.

On the flip side of that, we look at this government saying that they're putting \$65 million back into the education system. Well, where is that? The government is very good at hiding its numbers in little pockets of areas that you can't see or understand how that money is being spent or not spent. What we believe is the fact that \$44 million of that \$65 million supposedly being invested into early years in education comes from the fact that the Early Years division was transferred over from the Department of Community Services,

and that department was valued at the \$44 million. So that went to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and therefore the minister was able to say, well, I have an increase of \$44 million in my budget.

Then on the other hand, the Minister of Community Services was able to stand in this House and say, well the NDP cut \$44 million out of the budget when it was solely a transfer of a division. It's the same with other programs that were transferred from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. So certainly the numbers can be played with in many different ways, just like Russian Roulette and to try to make people believe those numbers.

I think that the biggest question in relation to Bill No. 75, I know that the Premier had said yesterday many times over that the Liberal Government invested year after year into education. Well if the government has invested, what he is talking about, then why do we have a problem? Why do we have a problem in the school system? Our teachers are saying that they don't have the proper resources. Well this government has been in long enough, Mr. Speaker, to be able to identify what those lack of resources are so if all this money supposedly is going into the Early Years in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, why do we have such a problem? Why are we dealing with such an issue and why are we here today because we shouldn't be?

I'd like to be able to see exactly where that money went. Where did it go? I'm sure there have been investments in education, I'm not arguing that, but I'm arguing that the amount that keeps being thrown out is not the amount that was invested directly into education. We have schools throughout this province that don't even have the appropriate textbooks. We have an unbalanced and an unfair school system where in some schools the students have laptops and in other schools they don't at all.

We have an issue in the province in terms of Internet service where some schools or some students have no issue with Internet service and in other areas they do and the education system is pushing that we do everything online. Well what do those students do, Mr. Speaker? These are problems teachers are facing each and every day and we're expecting them to resolve them without a voice and without the resources to resolve them.

Teachers are telling us and all the negotiations that have taken place to date, why haven't we been able to figure that out? Why haven't we been able to go back and say okay, these are the areas? Why do we have to wait to bring in a bill, a heavy-handed bill like Bill No. 75, to be able to listen to the teachers? I'm sure that information, not being privileged to be part of the negotiations, but I'm sure at least some of that information had come across the table, so why aren't we dealing with it? It always seems like the government is dealing with it after the fact by saying we're going to have a committee and we're going to review. Those are the famous words, we're going to review. Do you know what that is? That basically is political language for putting it off. We want to be able to

go into an election and we want to put it off because we don't want teachers to talk about that during an election. We don't want that to be an issue during an election.

I'm sure the whole situation with education has been a complete surprise to the Liberal Government because this was their big win, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and education. If anybody did good with education, it was the Liberal Government and that has not happened. What a huge surprise. That surprise comes from the fact that at the leadership level it's not about discussions, it's about being heavy-handed. This certainly started very early in the mandate of this government. After the Premier sat on the Opposition side and said many things about how he supported the collective bargaining process and how he said he supported workers' rights and on and on. All you have to do is go through Hansard, all you have to do is go through clippings of newspapers - all those things were said.

I find that's problematic, it paints all of us politicians as being the same. It's no wonder the public does not trust politicians. I mean it's bad enough when a politician will say well I promise you this and I promise you that, it's even worse when you premeditate it by knowing that you are going to put on a press conference supporting the film industry, knowing that you are taking a \$4,000 or \$5,000 ad out in a newspaper saying that if I became your Premier, this is how I would support you as a union member or I would support you as a hard worker in the Province of Nova Scotia. And the first opportunity to go after workers in Nova Scotia, the Premier did a 360 degree turnaround and suddenly, everything that was said in Opposition was not true - he did not mean it.

Mr. Speaker, it must be very disappointing to many of the backbenchers who felt that they had a Leader that they could believe in. They would have seen and heard the same things that we did and the same things that every Nova Scotian heard and believed and I'm sure there has been scratching of many heads and many backbenchers taking time on their own thinking, what did I get myself into, you know.

I believed that we were going to have leadership that was going to be fair and support hard-working Nova Scotians just like it was promoted and, as my colleague said, not as advertised. That makes it very difficult for those who will be knocking on doors probably not too far in the future if they're not already knocking on doors. How do you answer a person who says well, your Leader said this but did the complete opposite, we saw it with the health care workers, with home care workers; it's just a continuously long list.

So, it must be really tough for actually the Premier because all along the government has been very much boasting what they've done for education and then suddenly, they're dealt with the hand, that what do we do with the teachers? If we're seeing that we give the teachers a little bit more, what about all those other groups that we have denied? What do we do? That's called painting yourself in a corner.

I just want to go back to just how important our teachers are. You know, I've heard many people supporting teachers and those people understand the role of teachers in our society and then I've heard people that have said, oh, well, they get paid too much, oh, they get the summers off. It's very unfortunate that people have that kind of understanding because that's not really the reality. Teachers work very hard, and they educate themselves, and they upgrade themselves. Why wouldn't we want that?

I would want to make sure that my son when he went to school, and someday hopefully a grandchild, that when we're sending off our grandchild to school that we have the best of the best of teachers for our children. There's probably not one person in here that does not have that desire for their children or their grandchildren. So, if that's the case, why are we not respecting the teachers at the level that they deserve that respect? Why are we not standing by the teachers and taking the leadership to educate those in our society who may have a different view of their teachers?

It might have been because somebody had a bad experience with their teacher. And you know, what I've seen - and, I always call it kind of like the Timmie talks in our community as everybody gathers around a little table with some coffee and tries to out-talk each other and say things that may not be exactly facts but then that grows into supposedly a fact and I think that's what has happened with our teachers in terms of people that call up the radio station when it's a talk show and say, oh, they get the summer off, they get March break off. That's not so. It's a lot of hard work being a teacher, and we should be proud of that and we should want that. Why wouldn't society want that? Because teachers are teaching our most precious, valuable resource that we have.

We always seem to be looking for this golden nugget to promote Nova Scotia, but we have golden nuggets and we don't do anything about them or we take them away. The film industry is a prime example of that; now it's the teachers. Our teachers are the ones who are teaching our children not only their ABCs, not only one plus one equals two or the new type of math that most of us in here wouldn't have a clue how to do, they're teaching life skills.

One of the areas I always felt that we have missed out on like in some other countries is the value of teaching our children about the political world and what it's all about. I find it quite baffling that we do not start at a very young age and teach our children about the different levels of government, and talk about bills and what they mean, and what it's like to be the Speaker of the House.

I found it quite surprising when I was calling about my son's computer and of course got a call centre in India. While I was talking to the gentleman, he wanted to know what I do for a profession. I just said I'm an MLA. I was sure that he would never know what I was talking about and he said, oh, you're a member of the Legislative Assembly in Nova Scotia. Well I just about fell off my chair that some gentleman in India knew what MLA meant when I can go out in my own constituency and I have people say, "What's an

MLA? Oh, you run for the federal government? Are you in municipal politics?” That’s a sad story when somebody in India knows. I said, well, do you take an interest in world politics, is that why you know? He said, no, we’re taught that in school at a very young age. We’re taught how the political systems work around the world.

Why are we not doing that in our school systems? Then we would have more participation from our youth involved in the political world. There would be more of an interest and more of an understanding of what it means to be involved in politics and what it’s all about.

So there are many things that unfortunately we do not do right, and we don’t want to seem to change that - to take that leap and do things differently. I know that the government has said we have to bring Bill No. 75 in because of the situation with our students. I do know that of course if you were a student getting ready to graduate that it would be very upsetting that you might miss out on that or you might miss out on a work term as part of your education degree, yet I think this could have been resolved before all those things took place.

Just standing in the House and saying, well we went to the table three times and it didn’t work out so we’re going to be heavy-handed and we’re bringing in a bill to force teachers to go back to work - that’s not leadership. That’s not leadership at all. Leadership is bringing people together. That’s what leadership is. It’s listening to people. Leadership is not waiting until after the facts and then say we’re going to bring a committee together with teachers. You do that beforehand. You pre-plan. This contract has been up for quite some time. There has been enough time to have those discussions with the Teachers Union, who represent teachers, to bring in teachers who would like to have a one-on-one with the minister and give an idea of what a day in the life of a teacher is.

Did any of our MLAs go into the school and see what teachers are actually doing? Did the minister go in the school? I do see one hand up, and I would say congratulations to that MLA because that’s brilliant. That’s what we need to do. Now I see two. Did everybody spend a full day? Did they give those teachers an opportunity to express their frustrations? I know that some members are saying that yes, they did. Well why didn’t that information then get to your minister? I congratulate those who went into the school system.

I know that the members in this House really don’t want to be in this position, and they don’t need to be in this position. It’s all so sad, Mr. Speaker, that there’s always this rush to get these bills done through a snowstorm or overnight so the average working person doesn’t have an opportunity to see what’s going on in the House. What is that all about? If you make a decision and you feel strong about your decision and that you’ve looked at every different angle, and that’s the only decision that can be made, then you should be able to stand proudly and talk about that in front of those people who disagree

with you. You don't hide. You don't do it in the darkness of night. That doesn't show leadership.

The ramifications of this bill will follow this government and will follow all of us for a very long time to come. People feel they have rights. They have constitutional rights. Each and every one of us feels very strongly about that. When somebody starts playing around with our constitutional rights, each and every one of us rightly gets upset about that. That's what's happening with teachers, and you cannot blame them, Mr. Speaker.

The bridge between the parents and the teachers is coming closer together. I think there's more understanding from parents and from teachers because of the organization Nova Scotia Parents for Teachers. It's amazing the work that they have done in a short period of time to ensure that they understand what the teachers are faced with each and every day and also for the teachers to understand the frustrations that parents have to deal with.

I can remember years ago, before I was even involved in politics, that education always seemed to be an issue when it came to this House of Assembly. Once again, what happens is, politics get in the way. I find that the sad part. When are we going to break away from that? It's all about re-election. The decisions are made based on re-election. The timing is based on re-election, not what is beneficial for the people of our province. If we're here to solve problems, those problems should have been solved a lot longer ago than this. We know that because other governments have dealt with the same thing.

It's the vicious political cycle that actually sets our province back. It will take great leadership, somebody someday to stand up to that and take the risk of that political cycle to say no, I'm doing what's going to be best for the people of Nova Scotia, not based on politics but based on what is the best.

We know that you can stand in this House and say that you support teachers, from the government side, but those are only words. It's the actions that would make a difference. To step down from this Bill No. 75 and to be able to say we are going to go back to the table but we're going to mix it up a little bit so we're going to have a few different people involved in it because we want to be seen as the leadership that actually brings Nova Scotia together as one Nova Scotia, instead of doing the divide and conquer.

We're all seeing that taking place now in the United States with President Trump and I have a real hard time even getting the word "President" out and "Trump" after it. It doesn't fit. You are supposed to reduce stress so I've been really working hard not to watch any of the American stations because it's just unreal. I'm sure that everyone in this House feels like are we on a different planet or what? The things that are being said at a political level and inciting people to fight and to be against each other, that's not leadership. Leadership is bringing people together, and we always hear that saying together we're better.

I wish our Premier would see that in this situation and not give up so easily by saying well we've been to the table three different times and we haven't moved anywhere and we're really disappointed to feel we have to bring this bill in. No, no, the bill does not have to be brought in, Mr. Speaker. We have a lot of intelligent people in this room and there's a lot of intelligent people in the government. I encourage the Cabinet and I encourage the Premier to listen to your backbenchers.

Lots of times - and I know this from my own experience - when you are a minister you are in a whole different world. You are in this bubble and you think that everything that is going on in that bubble is the world. It's not and it's a good lesson for myself to be on the other side of the House because it does bring you back to that reality of why you are here. You are voted in by the people you represent and that becomes more important than this bubble world. The backbenchers know that because they experience that every day and they are the ones that it is very difficult to say that I support you as a teacher and what do you say? I'm sorry that my government has decided to do this? Or I don't agree? Or, when it comes to the vote that I'm going to vote with my conscience, I'm not going to vote the Party line because I got involved in politics to represent the people and represent the Party but representing the Party was not the highest on my list. Representing the people who actually voted me in is my priority so I'm going to stick with that priority.

I know it's difficult. I know that I had times as a minister, there were a couple of issues that our government wanted to bring to the table and, as a minister, I actually refused, I said I will not do that, I'm not going to bring that legislation forth.

I took a beating, I can tell you that but you know one thing, Mr. Speaker, I'll be able to relate those stories to my family and the generations to come that I did not go with the Party line, I went with what was right for the people. I don't want to sound braggish because it's not easy to do but I told Mr. Dexter that if he wanted me, that if an issue ever arose that came between the Party and my constituents, I would go with the constituents. That was one thing I said up front, and to be able to understand that.

I know it's difficult. It pulls at you, because it's very challenging to be the one who says, "No, I just cannot vote for this bill. I'm sorry. It doesn't fit right."

These bills are huge, and I think sometimes we forget that, because we're so busy in our work. Our work is really busy work, there's no question. We all tend to get into that bubble and we do not think about why we got involved in politics in the first place. Long in the future, some people will still be here doing the politics thing. Some of us won't be, either through retirement or losing or our decision not to run, and that bill will still carry on. That's the thing you've got to think of. You're making decisions. Our members are making decisions that carry on in the future and affect thousands of people.

Look at the thousands of teachers we have. Look at the thousands of parents. Look at the thousands of students. This bill will go down in history and will certainly have a bad taste in the mouths and minds of our teachers, our parents, and our students.

It can be worked out. We have seen throughout the world at times that different governments have gotten together and worked out problems that people thought were never solvable. Wouldn't the government like to come out on top, to say, "We're the government that was able to work out a solution" and "we're the government that said we're not going to give up on that" and "we're not going to give up on the fact that people are people and there's give and take, and we're going to go back and give a little bit, because we've already taken a little bit"? I think that comes from the leadership giving you that direction.

Mr. Speaker, I have lots of letters that have come into my office expressing people's views and teachers' views. People do not sit down at a computer and write an email or send a letter just for the fun of it. They do it because they've been motivated to do it, and they realize that they feel that that might be the only control that they have - to write to their MLA, not just to express their feelings but to give us more information and let us know just what this will do to them as a teacher.

In this one email, the teacher says that their professionalism has been questioned. Now, would any one of us - I know that as politicians, we take the brunt of jokes. We take the brunt of people saying - a lot of people think that the only time we work is when we're in this House. We all know different. We all know we're on 24/7 call. If you're going to be a good MLA, you have to be, because whatever problem a person has is huge to that person. We have to respect that. Can you imagine - and you know that when our own professionalism is called up and criticized, that hits home. It's bothersome, because we're working hard and we're sacrificing our time to make things work politically.

It's like teachers. they sacrifice much more of their time than what is necessary in their job to do. They go the extra mile. That's why our children are able to be involved in sporting activities or the creative industries - because the teachers are doing extra work. They're not looking at the clock and saying, well, okay I'm finished now, I'm not going to open a book, I'm not doing anything until the next day. Our teachers are working 24/7 basically.

The same person feels not only their professionalism, but their whole profession is being attacked because of this bill. Is that the legacy that the Liberal Government wants in education? When education was one of the government's prime areas that they felt they could stand tall on and say, we've done really well in education. You really haven't. You say that money has been invested. Like I said earlier, if money has been invested, why do we still have so many problems?

Yes, I know the honourable members say it's decades of problems, but at some point you have to start making those changes because it's the blame game. I hear it in here

every day. If you want to become a government then you've got to stop doing the blame game. No one's perfect, and I know the honourable member wasn't trying to do the blame game, but I know that has been there.

I think that what has been a problem is that teachers have not been actually talked with and in conversation finding out what it's really like. None of us know what anything is like unless we've experienced it ourselves. We can think that we know what it's like, but you know in your own lives, an experience that you've had, you cannot know what it's like until you had that experience.

Minister Churchill, I've said that to him many times, and I would like to congratulate him because he has had a new baby. The member for Yarmouth. (Applause) I just found out yesterday he had a new baby and I told the minister beforehand, I said, you just wait - you think that you know what it's going to be like, but you just wait. It's the most wonderful experience that anybody can ever have. If they have a desire to have a child and they do have a child, there's not another miracle that matches up to having a child or having children.

He was showing me pictures yesterday with the biggest smile on his face. He's only had his baby for three weeks now and he's so much in love with that little girl. You know? That's what life is about. His little girl will be going to school and, boy, time goes fast before she'll be trotting off to school. For hours and hours in that day it's so hard that first day when your child goes to school, boy, I'll tell you that's hard.

I have one child and unfortunately we weren't blessed with being able to have other children or I probably wouldn't have been here because I'd be home with 10 children because I think it is the greatest gift that the Lord can give us is a child or children. You become very protective of your child or children. I can remember my poor son - I was walking into the classroom, he was in Grade 5 or 6 and I was walking him up to his desk until the teacher said, Ms. Peterson-Rafuse, do you think you could leave him outside at the door and he can walk in and go to his desk himself? I was probably embarrassing the little fellow, but to me it was like I had to make sure he was in his desk and he had everything he needed for the day because I was handing over my child to the teacher.

So what an important role that is as a teacher. I knew the teachers were going to teach my child and give him opportunities in his life, many opportunities, that teachers were going to open doors for him. That's why teachers are so valuable.

That's why I want the government to take a second thought and a deep breath. I'll tell you one thing I've learned. People really appreciate it. Government members may think, we've got to stick to this. We started the process. We've got to stick to it. No. I'll tell you, the public appreciates a government that will come out and say, we're having second thoughts on this. Let the Opposition criticize you about having second thoughts.

I'll tell you the public are the ones who are going to appreciate it. The teachers are going to appreciate it.

When you don't do that, you're actually helping us over here because we know how people feel about teachers. We really feel strongly too that teachers deserve much more than Bill No. 75. So we're going to fight tooth and nail for you not to sign Bill No. 75.

But what a lesson that you would be offering to Nova Scotians by saying, we had One Nova Scotia, and we believed in that. So we took a second breath, and we realized that our actions are not following our words, so we're going to change that.

When you read through what I have been sent - and I know that many MLAs have been sent information about Bill No. 75, and we'll hear it at Law Amendments. I was really proud to learn that in Nova Scotia, I think we're the only province that has Law Amendments and gives people an opportunity to come in and express their opinions.

The frustrating part I find with Law Amendments is that when we have a majority government, it often means nothing. You see these people coming in, and they're passionate, and they're telling you their life story and what it means if the government signs Bill No. 75 and passes it. You're sitting there in Opposition, and you sympathize with them, but you know that nothing will change because the government has a majority. That's where the government needs to step up to the plate and say, that's why we have Law Amendments, so we can hear from people. But we should know that anyway. If we're good MLAs, we should be out in our communities and know that there are issues going on in the school system.

What do most of us tell our children? I'm sure that there's not one parent here today who has not read the story I think I can with the little train. I think I can. I think I can. I know I can. That's what I would like to see from this Liberal Government, not I can't. How many of us as parents and how many teachers have said to their students, I do not want you to say you can't? I don't want to hear that. I want to hear you say you can.

How many people have had their parents say that to them? How many people have had their grandparents say that? I wouldn't be in this position today if I kept saying I can't. Many members in this House wouldn't be here today if they said I can't. It's in your being to say I can. Why doesn't our government say I think I can, I think I can, I think I can? That's three times - the fourth time, I can. Wouldn't that show quite an example to our children? (Interruption)

One member is asking me about the book. All I remember is the story inside. It's the train. I remember the story very well because in my household it was read over and over and over again, because I thought it was just amazing. It was empowerment.

That's such a powerful story, isn't it, to read to your children? Every time your children come home and they have a problem with school or they have a problem with a test, and the teachers are helping them out, what do we do as parents? Generally what we say is "You can do it. Study a little bit harder. Go back at it again. Look at it in a different way. I'm proud of you. I know you can."

If we're doing that with our children, why aren't we showing that in our leadership? That's what One Nova Scotia was all about, and unfortunately, it seems that that has just floated off into thin air somewhere.

We can do this. We have to stop saying we can't. That creates negativity, and that's what the Ivany report talked about, that unfortunately, it's not just up to the government. It's up to businesses. It's up to people in our communities.

That's the tone I've heard from the government here when they're trying to deal with issues - for example, the issue with the rural Internet connection. It's about partnerships, and that's the stance that government takes: that you can't expect government to do it all.

Well, why are you not using that same philosophy with this issue with our teachers, to say, yes, we can do this, so we don't have to put people through the fear and the upset and the stress that we're doing? What advantage is that?

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is coming short. My colleague for Queens-Shelburne here, who will be retiring, which is sad - one thing I have to say is that he has been a mentor and a teacher to me.

AN HON. MEMBER: That explains it.

MS. PETERSON-RAFUSE: That explains it, and I appreciate it.

One thing - and I won't pick it up, because I'm not allowed to use props - that this fine gentleman has done for me is, he writes me notes. And he always writes on the notes, "Stay focused."

I can tell you it's hard for me, many times, but I'm trying to stay focused. I guess my focus is that the government can do this. They don't have to bring in Bill No. 75. The ramifications are not going to be good for teachers, parents, or students, nor is it going to be good for the government.

If I had a blackboard here, Mr. Speaker, I would make every member of the government write 100 times, "I can. I can. We can. We can. We will."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the member opposite - or the member to my left - for that impassioned speech as we move into - what are we at now? - 13 hours of debate in this session. It started at 12:01 this morning. People are starting to look a little tired here. Not bad, though, considering the hours and what they're enduring.

In the meantime, I move that we now adjourn debate on Bill No. 75.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 75. Would all those in favour (Interruption)

We've had a request for a recorded vote. We will ring the bells for one hour.

[12:49 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips satisfied?

The Clerks will now proceed with the recorded vote. I will ask all members to remain in their seats and to remain silent until the recorded vote is completed.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[1:49 a.m.]

YEAS

Mr. MacLeod
Mr. Dunn
Mr. Baillie
Mr. d'Entremont
Mr. David Wilson
Mr. Belliveau
Ms. Zann
Ms. Peterson-Rafuse
Ms. Roberts
Mr. Orrell
Mr. Houston
Mr. Harrison
Mr. Lohr

NAYS

Ms. Bernard
Ms. Whalen
Mr. Glavine
Ms. Casey
Mr. MacLellan
Mr. Horne
Ms. Miller
Mr. Hines
Ms. Diab
Mr. Ince
Mr. Kousoulis
Mr. Furey
Mr. Farrell
Ms. Arab

Mr. Maguire
Mr. Porter
Mr. Jessome
Ms. Eyking
Mr. Irving
Mr. Gough
Ms. Treen
Mr. Gordon Wilson
Mr. Mombourquette

THE CLERK: For, 13. Against, 23.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

We'll now proceed once again with second reading of Bill No. 75.

The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to get up and speak to Bill No. 75 to express my disappointment in government of having to come up with a legislated solution to the teachers' contract.

As full disclosure issues may go, I still need to remind people exactly what my family is constituted of: my wife Anne, of 22 years, is a school teacher, a proud school teacher, a hard-working school teacher, one who happens to be working today, as all teachers are working today as they were yesterday and as they were the days before. I'm a dad to Andre, who happens to be in Grade 12, graduating this year and moving on in part of his life, hopefully going off to Université de Moncton to take the sciences so you can imagine the challenges we are having in our house with dad the politician, mom the teacher, and Andre, son, the Grade 12 student. Can you imagine the discussions that we do have around the dinner table when we have the opportunity to sit together.

There's a challenge, on one side of the equation I have my wife who spends a lot of time away from her family, like I do, who is constantly preparing programs for her students, who is constantly getting her classroom set up. As many of you may or may not know, my wife is a resource teacher; she runs the learning centre in École secondaire de Par-en-Bas and therefore has a number of students with special difficulties. So therefore, her job is making sure that those schedules are adhered to, that the students learn at their rates, and are able to integrate into the broader school community to be able to be contributors to our communities. It's a difficult process, it's a difficult job, and like I said, she spends a lot of time preparing, she spends a lot of time inputting, she spends a lot of time not at home.

I can tell you, as much as I didn't like the work-to-rule idea, you know what, I've had my wife at home sitting around the table having a coffee, talking about our days where normally she's up and gone before I even get up so that she can get her work done. The kids love it, too, because they just hop in the car and get to school with her because of course the doors are unlocked the same time she arrives because of the work-to-rule issue, so they're seeing more of their mom. But what it underlines, Mr. Speaker, is how much of themselves teachers give to their job, to their students, to make sure that they succeed.

I can't leave out my second son Alec who happens to be in Grade 9, who I've talked about before on the floor of this Legislature, who does have a learning disability, who has trouble with reading. I can tell you it's been a bit of a challenge to try to get him that extra help as he needed it. Luckily, we have my wife who is a teacher, so she's able to help him along. But the teachers have been very accommodating, I can tell you, in working hard to the letter of the work-to-rule but also realizing the needs of the children. That's sort of, I think, an unknown part of the story that I think the government's been trying to portray that work-to-rule means that teachers are not teaching. There is nothing further from the truth. They're still working far harder than any one of us would expect.

You know, when we make these decisions in the House of Assembly, we've all had an opportunity to be a government. We've all had an opportunity to look at the finances of the province, we all understand the needs and the wants of our communities, but also the challenges that we have in matching up with the dollars and cents that the budget, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board requires. What we understand, too, is that all those decisions impact something else. They all have a bit of a domino effect or at least a cause and effect that we need to try to maintain some kind of reasonable balance in how we do these things. How does the province make money? The province makes money by having a strong economy. What is the basis of a strong economy? An educated workforce.

These students that are going through our school system today will be educated and they will be contributors to our economy. Wouldn't we want to make sure that they have the tools that they need to participate fully in that economy so that they can create jobs for themselves, that they can participate in those jobs, that they can even draw jobs because that group of individuals will draw businesses depending on their expertise, depending on what the universities are teaching? It draws the economy to here in Halifax, to different parts of this province. It's a job generator. So if you want to look at beyond, beyond the teachers, beyond the students, without that base, you and I and everyone else in this Legislature probably would not have a job because the economy wouldn't be here to support even the basics of a government.

We've talked about many things during my time here. I remember talking about Learning for Life - I forget what the NDP brought forward, but they had their plan. This government, of course, talked about the Freeman plan. We've all talked about how important education is to us, yet today we find ourselves in a place where we're dollar-and-centing things. We're not looking at the value of our good education system versus

what the education system is costing us. There's tremendous balance in those two things. We've lived through other labour disputes in this province regardless of which side of the House we were on. But we remember the repercussions of those things.

When I ran in 2003, it wasn't so long after a nurses' contract, Bill No. 68, if we remember. I know the members who ran at the same time I did - they were probably a little better at knocking on those doors than I was. I remember knocking on nurses' doors after that had happened. I can tell you, those visits did not go well. As a matter of fact, towards the middle of the campaign, we decided there was really no point in knocking on nurses' doors. We tried to identify those houses and tried skip them as we went along. We weren't getting those votes. There was no way.

I think what is challenging the governing Party here is that they realize that they've alienated that group of teachers, that they have now alienated them. As they go out into this election, whenever it may be, they're going to be going to doors that are going to be pretty cold. Even worse, I look at the workers for some of the campaigns. A lot of them are schoolteachers. They were the nucleus of many of the Liberal campaigns and many of our own campaigns too, but I would say mostly Liberal. There is a true political cost to what this government has brought forward in legislating teachers back to work.

Let's go to the feelings. That's the politics of it. I think people are uncomfortable with it, but they're hoping that time will heal all and that by the time the writ is dropped, maybe people might have forgotten about it. But I can tell you they're not going to forget about it. This is not my quote, but I do love it. I think it was Maya Angelou who said it. People will remember you maybe. They'll remember what you look like. They might remember what you said. But they will always remember how you made them feel. I can tell you that this government has made teachers feel - there's a huge list for this one; I'll use three - frustrated, angry, and scared. The rest of the words I probably couldn't use because they're not parliamentary on the floor of this House. Those are all very strong feelings that will not be forgotten for a very long time.

Why do they feel this? You know what? It actually goes back further than Bill No. 75. It goes back further than this government. It may go further back than the NDP and into our government time. This has been building over a number of years. I'm going to join along in that issue. Over time, the department and the school boards have imposed things on the teaching day, upon teachers, expectations that they are supposed to meet, changing curriculum, taking away disciplinary actions and disciplinary policies. This has made the lives of teachers extremely difficult.

I graduated from high school 29 years ago now. It's hard to believe I can say 29 years ago. In the day, the discipline was pretty simple really. I am sort of past the point where there was a strap or that kind of discipline, but I do remember the strap in the principal's office. It sat there on the desk. We all had stories that someone along the way somewhere might have got it. I know no one ever did, but the discipline of it (Interruption)

Well, maybe the member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg actually knows what one looks like or maybe what it feels like.

There was a respect for the teacher that was there in front of you. There was a respect for the principal. There was also a respect for your parents. I knew that if I did something wrong and the note went back to my mom - love her to death - I was in for it. That's a part of that whole disciplinary thing.

I think what's changed here along the way is that we've taken those powers away. Kids know what their rights are and I know full well there are things that we shouldn't be doing. We shouldn't be hitting kids and grabbing kids and doing all that stuff, but there are things that we can do that can maintain discipline and respect in the schools, and the teachers just need some more tools in order to make that happen.

The point I'm making here sort of tries to revolve around the issue of what the teaching profession has become. Teachers 30 years ago were teachers. They were Monsieur, Madame, Mr., Mrs., but over time we're getting to know them by their first names. They're getting friendly. They're getting to be more family members almost, which is kind of okay, but from a disciplinary standpoint, I don't think that works very well. Even to the point now where the crux of the problem - and I heard it in an interview either on CTV or Global, I can't remember which one I saw it on, but when they were interviewing about the teachers' contracts, one guy said, this needs to be resolved quickly because it's teachers who are bringing up our kids. When did that hit the job description of the teacher?

They can teach them math and physics and they need to make sure that there's a well-being, but really it's my job as a parent to bring up my kids. It's a job for you as a parent or me a parent that teaches our kids the basics of discipline - of pleases and thank yous. And it's not necessarily the teacher's job, but somehow that got stacked in on top of all those extras that have come along over the years and we need to find a way to sort of get that back out there. It's all our responsibilities - not the teachers' responsibility. They're part of that responsibility, but not the full responsibility.

So, there is a challenge within our communities and I fully understand it - that kids are going to school, they're going to school without their breakfast, they're going to school with questionable hygiene issues. They're going to school tired. All of these things that maybe were not there when we were kids or maybe they were dealt with in a different fashion, but all of these things are presenting themselves in the classroom, which creates this disciplinary problem within the classroom.

If a kid is hungry, if a kid can't concentrate, well, of course they're not going to get the best out of that class. We, as a society, need to figure out how to balance those things.

The other thing that teachers are finding themselves lost with - they've got all those issues, but to meet the learning outcomes that continue to be dropped on them and to take

those learning outcomes and input them into PowerSchool. There's TIENET, too, and I forget what that one does, too.

Consider this, you are a teacher within a class - I don't know, you teach math and you've got 10 classes of 26 or 25 kids. Each one of those kids, as they go through the system and as they go through that curriculum, have outcomes and all of those outcomes for each one of those kids needs to be inputted into the system, along with attendance and I forget all the things. So each kid, as they go along, over all of those outcomes, requires the teacher to continue to input data. So beyond the regular teaching and dealing with the life of those kids, they've now become data entry clerks because they continually spend time putting all that information in.

I think the challenge that I've heard from teachers is, what the heck is that used for? What are we truly using all of that data for? Quite honestly, do we have too many outcomes? Or is the outcome different than what it should have been 10 years ago? That's the kind of stuff that frustrates the system because there's continually something changing, so just when you've figured out how to do something, all of a sudden something changes again. That's a tremendous frustration.

In a way there should be a hold on many of these initiatives and maybe that's what the challenge was that the minister should have addressed in this one and said listen, we're going to stop and we're not going to require teachers to do all this data input. Maybe there is a way to have another administrative assistant in the school who can help them with that work, but I don't know if there was an appreciation for that within the contract.

So, we get to the issue of the whole bit, you take everything that frustrates the classroom and you take everything that frustrates the teachers, you've got everything that stops my kid and your kid and everybody else's kids from learning the way that they should be learning and they say, well, this has to stop, this is pent up, this has been going on for a long time. That's why I think the Teachers Union and the teachers looked at this contract as a way to try to get those incremental changes written down, finally getting someone to acknowledge them and put things in place to allow them to do that work because a lot of those things, you and I know, are not necessarily things that should be in a contract or can be in a contract, but there should be appreciation for that. They didn't show up, they didn't end up in the discussions and the negotiations and did not end up in the final contracts, as was agreed upon by the parties that were at the table.

The other night - what was it, was it this night, last night, whenever we had the last Question Period, when I hear the Premier say, well, we had three negotiated contracts over two different executives, well, you didn't because the membership rejected them. You don't have a contract until it's actually signed off by the membership. The membership therefore rejected them so the Premier cannot say that he had three negotiated contracts, he did not. They are not final until you receive the approval of the membership.

Quite honestly, last night many teachers were watching Question Period, many people were watching it online and I know many of us know that there's a number of Facebook sites on there and there were lots of people poking fun at how the Premier was answering those questions. As a matter of fact, I think someone made up a drinking game that every time he said "a negotiated contract" that you could take a shot.

AN HON. MEMBER: He was loaded in five minutes.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: We would've been loaded in five seconds over that one, because he was really stuck. He stuck to those lines perfectly. He did it on Steve Murphy, and he did it here in two sets of Question Period.

It does not go well when the teachers hear that kind of brush-off, "Here's my line, and I'm sticking to my line." They know it's a line. It doesn't mean a thing to them.

We're all getting comments and notes through Facebook, through our emails, and I want to thank teachers and parents and students for providing us with all of those stories, with all of those questions. One that I had this morning - and I can print it out when I get a chance - was from Shannon McKenna-Saulnier from Yarmouth. She has a child in the Yarmouth high school and she has one in the Municipality of Argyle, in my district, in Plymouth.

She had many questions about the contract, or about Bill No. 75, and how it was setting up even the committee. There were some questions on how different regions have different requirements about the committee, so how can you just say there are three people from high school, three people from elementary school, and a number of people from the department that would constitute this working committee? She wanted to know whether the government appointees would have an educational background.

She was concerned about the no-fail policy - and I know we keep talking about it here, and the minister said there's no such policy. But how can 9,300 teachers be wrong? If teachers and parents are telling me that there is a no-fail policy, and the minister said there isn't, well, I would suggest that the department is delinquent in its job of explaining what the responsibilities of the school boards are in the first place - how there's such a gap that there is apparently a no-fail policy that doesn't exist.

Shannon McKenna-Saulnier was also concerned about teacher training for kids with special needs, bullying, and how many of these things were going to be caught up within the contract. What I'm going to say to her is that it really doesn't take any of that into consideration. This is simply trying to put this contract on teachers to say you're going to do something in the future and try to get it gone, so that when the election happens, hopefully some people will have forgotten about it.

Trust is something that we pass along, whether we trust the government - and trust is important. The population, our citizens, need to be able to trust that we as legislators, that you as government, are able to make good decisions. I can tell you that because of that relationship that has now been created between teachers and the department and the government, there is no longer any trust.

If there's no trust, how are these two sides going to be able to work together to make the improvements that everybody has talked about and wants to do? Trust is definitely earned. You've got to do what you say you're going to do; you can't bring something up and say you're going to do it and then do the complete opposite, which is kind of what has happened here. If I look at what the platform of the Liberal Party was in the last election, there were a lot of great things about education in it that I would hope they would take seriously. This government was elected on an education platform, really. There were a number of other things in it, most of the things that they didn't actually do either; but, it was about education.

You know, there was that sense that the previous government cut a number of million dollars out of the education system; I'm not going to get into whether \$64 million is the number or \$22 million is the number or whatever it is. Yes, there was a cut in education and yes, maybe the government is putting money back into education, but where? Where are those things going? If a teacher tells me here today that things aren't getting better in my classroom, that they still have too many kids in my class, that the soft cap is still too soft and it keeps moving and they can't do my work, yet the government is saying they're investing millions of dollars in the classroom - there's a disconnect and there's a non-trust there. I mean, how do you circle that square? I think that's the challenge that I think we are into with this debate.

So, I can go back to family feelings and what I think the sense is, from my wife mainly. Anne, again, works really hard and wants to do the best for her children, the kids that are in her class - she works very hard at it. I can tell you, work-to-rule was not her favourite thing. It was not her favourite thing because all of a sudden she had to try to decide what things couldn't get done.

As I said, she's a resource teacher in a learning centre. You know what didn't get done because it's an extracurricular? Every Wednesday, the students from her class go bowling. So, they have an outing, and, of course, they look forward to part of that schedule. So, Wednesdays after school or just towards the end of the school day, they headed off to Yarmouth to go bowling. They weren't able to do that from the time work-to-rule went in. You know, that was hard for my wife not to do. That was hard for her to try to explain to her students why they couldn't go bowling. Somewhere in between there, when work-to-rule was brought down, they were able to get one bowling run in. The kids loved it of course. They felt more whole and again today, we're into a position where they're not able to do that.

There were a number of things that they weren't able to do because they were seen as being extracurricular and voluntary, and that's another sense that I probably didn't write down in my things that I wanted to cover here today - sort of the issue of what's volunteering and what's not. When I was listening to Rollie, the chief negotiator for the province, talk about once the contract is in place and work-to-rule is no more, there was still the discussion on what teachers can or cannot do or what they are expected to do or not expected to do. You know what, that didn't clarify a whole lot there, and so what this government has created is a new normal.

You had a normal where teachers were giving all of themselves and you had teachers that then had to back up a little bit to adhere to the work-to-rule. Maybe some of them like the work-to-rule because they realize all those things that they were doing extra and not getting paid for and actually taking away from their family, their own lives and what they were going without. So, what is the new normal going to look like? Are we going to have those sports teams? Are we going to have those proms? Are we going to have all of those things?

I don't know, but what I do know is that we're going to have teachers who are teaching who are more aware of what their contract says and will no longer trust the government in order to come up with those further solutions that everybody wants to see. It's done and, quite honestly, in my mind, maybe only a change of government is going to change that and maybe not even that might fix it for a while, because of the distrust that they are going to have for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development or the school boards. There are a lot of players in this game who are all part of the success of students across our province.

So what are we here for today? We're still in second reading. We began second reading around 4:30 a.m. this morning and plan on staying in it for a few more hours already, where government is going to have to make its decision on where it's going.

I would say from what I got from the Premier's interviews and answers to questions, that of course his caucus supports the legislation. Therefore, eventually when time runs out here, when we've decided that we're done talking - of course that's a very important part of our process, to make our feelings known and our ideas known and maybe someone accepts them and maybe they don't - at some point we will have the vote.

I know that many people will be watching who is voting for and who is voting against. Again, the intention I heard from the Premier is that his caucus supports the bill and therefore, all will be voting for Bill No. 75 to move along through second reading into the next process of the House.

Of course the next process of the House is Law Amendments so we look forward to Law Amendments because it is part of this process but it's the neatest part of our process because as much as I can stand here and talk about what I think or what I know or what I

don't know about education - I can tell you there are big holes in what I know about education - the public gets to present their feelings to the Chair of the Law Amendments Committee and to the members of the Law Amendments Committee to have another thought about what that legislation should actually have in it, what should be adjusted or what should be edited, amended.

I hope we do have the full opportunity to listen to teachers. We have two challenges, maybe three challenges on that issue tomorrow. So if we finish up sometime this evening, the natural location or timing of Law Amendments would be tomorrow sometime. I would say maybe eight o'clock in the morning to start. So the two challenges we have on that are eight o'clock in the morning, where are teachers? Teaching, they are in school so they are not going to be able to come to the House of Assembly to present their thoughts. There will be some but not all of them.

So we would hope that maybe after three o'clock there will be an opportunity, or four o'clock, whenever some of those individuals can get clear, those professionals can get clear, that they are able to come back and present to this committee so we can hear the true accounts, the real accounts of what the teaching profession is here in Nova Scotia and what we should be doing to fix it, what should be in this contact, how it should be negotiated, how it should not have been imposed upon the profession.

That's one challenge, teachers are working tomorrow. Secondly, we have another storm coming so there has to be an appreciation for that - are teachers able to travel to Halifax tomorrow, because of the storm. Mr. Speaker, I know that's one of your considerations as well, that you have to take into consideration as things are happening here in the House of Assembly, and whether or not all Nova Scotians are able to be here.

I know with Bill No. 59, the Accessibility Act that we were discussing, there were a number of provisions made to be able to see people through video conferencing and other methods. I would question whether that may be an opportunity that we, as legislators, that we, as MLAs, might be able to allow.

I don't know how many people have signed up for Law Amendments Committee at this point. I'm sure I will see a number later on. Are we able to consider it all in one day? Do we want to consider all of it in one day? I don't know. We have the challenge of teachers who are teaching who want to come and present not being able to come until after four o'clock. Are we able to get it done or not in one day? I would probably say no. I guess we'll see how that goes as we have that discussion further on.

We just want to make sure as we go through this process without holding it up more than is needed - I know we all have thoughts on what we're holding up or what we're not holding up here. Of course, we're trying to find that balance between the public's expectation and the rules and guidelines of this House of Assembly to make sure that we have the opportunity to fully vet any bill on the floor of this Legislature. There are some

weird rules here. There are some weird pieces of history of how we consider pieces of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I can say that it is my intention, and I know it's our caucus's intention, to make sure that the processes are used to their utmost, that they're used to their best to make sure that we have the best piece of legislation possible. Someone might convince me that this is the best bill. I doubt that will happen. I very much doubt that will happen. But at least I might have a better appreciation for what the government is trying to do. Maybe government will have better appreciation for what the union is saying, what teachers are saying, what parents are saying, and what students are saying. That's what our processes are all about.

I didn't want to go the whole hour, so I think I might try to wrap up a few things here. (Interruption) You guys can decide who's going next.

The disclosure piece here is that I guess I would call us an education family. I'm happily married to a schoolteacher, and I am proud of all the work that she does. I'm proud of the work that all teachers do. I know they work very hard under very difficult circumstances. They find a way to make sure that those students are able to reach their potential and are very frustrated when they don't have the tools to help them reach their potential. In my area in Argyle-Barrington, there are a number of Tri-County schools and CSAP schools. I know that each and every day they go to those schools to teach our kids, they're giving all of themselves. As a matter of fact, they're giving more than all of themselves to make sure that our kids get the best possible education that they can have. I thank them for every single ounce, every expended piece of energy, every broken toenail - whatever it requires to make sure that our kids get their best.

They should be appreciated, and they should be duly compensated for it as well.

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: I'm glad to rise on this important occasion. Mr. Speaker, welcome to the new normal. The Premier said he wants to get our classrooms back to normal, and I will talk about what a normal classroom looks like today. But it's already clear, based on the events of today, that normal is going to be impossible right away.

In fact, the new normal includes the first province-wide strike of teachers in the history of Nova Scotia. In 150 years as a province, 122 years with teachers organized together, through thick and thin, through the Depression and wars and high times and low times, every government has always been able to work with teachers to deliver a classroom education under fair conditions. That is, every time until this government. I'm reminded of that old expression: Oh, what a tangled web we weave - I'm not sure who first came up with that.

I will quote my Grade 10 history teacher at CEC in Truro, Mr. Barrett, who would say, I'm not sure who said that so when the test comes let's just say I did. Mr. Speaker, that has stuck with me to this day. Someone other than me obviously made up that quote, but it is so apparent that it's relevant today because thousands and thousands of students are going to have their year disrupted on Friday. Their parents, their families, their caregivers, their grandparents are going to have their day disrupted on Friday, the first time in our province's history, and all that falls squarely on the shoulders of the Premier and his government - all of it. Every other government in history is going to work these things out except this one. You know what? The time has come to call it what it is.

When a Premier comes into office and picks fights with everybody, when he tells film workers that they don't have any value in our economy, that drives people apart. When he tells seniors that they can afford to cough up three times more for their Pharmacare premiums, that drives people apart. When he tells doctors that they're asking for too much and they don't deserve it, that drives people apart; and, here we are now with the province's teachers who he has gone out of his way to demonize, to embarrass, to humiliate, to make them feel that they don't have any worth, and they finally are the ones that have said that's enough - enough.

This province is better than this. We should be working together not being pulled apart. The challenges that we face in our classrooms are real and they are serious and they will affect the future prosperity of this province. Yes, they've gone on for far too long, and we can all reflect on that, but teachers have been very clear that in the last three years the rate of deterioration in our classrooms has accelerated. They have spent 18 months trying to tell the Premier and his government those facts, and the government to this day has done nothing to help the teachers make real change. Other than committees, and platitudes, and promises that at some future date we'll start a conversation, teachers have gotten frustrated with the empty promises.

The new reality, the new normal is a classroom strike across this province. You know what, Mr. Speaker? I will say this. Thankfully, it's only for one day. Thankfully, teachers want to make their point and then get back into the classrooms. This could be far worse, but teachers who have acted responsibly, who tried to make their points at a bargaining table with no success even on the things that we should agree on automatically like classroom supports, then resorted to work-to-rule where they delivered the curriculum in class every day and met all their normal teaching functions. Even that didn't cause the Premier to put a few improvements on the table to show some good faith.

You know what happens when you push people of goodwill and good faith like our teachers into a corner, well, at some point, they push back. They see the writing on the wall, they know there's a majority Liberal Government. They know that we're going to do everything we can in Opposition to make their points, to put real improvements on the table here in the Legislature, to slow things down so that every Nova Scotian can have his/her say about the injustice that is about to be done when the majority government finally

imposes its will. They know that. Then, they have reached for that one, last thing that is in their power which is a one-day strike.

They could have called a general strike for the remaining time that we sit here; they called it for one day to make their point. I think they're saying in good faith, if we have to go to this final step, please put something real on the table for classrooms, but that's not going to happen because really the last opportunity that the Premier and his government had to actually do something positive for classrooms was in this bill, and they didn't. So here we have the new normal with ongoing disruptions in our classrooms, and who knows what normal will look like when teachers are finally ordered into a new contract by this government.

Here's another example of the new normal, Mr. Speaker. I have the press release that the teachers put out about a week ago. It's really quite remarkable and I'll quote from it and I'll table it. "Teachers don't have faith in the premier. They don't trust him to do what's in the best interest of our education system."

Mr. Speaker, that's an amazing statement for the teachers of Nova Scotia to make. No one has ever accused them of being partisan, of taking sides. I'm sure there are teachers who are normally members of all Parties in this House and maybe some other Parties that aren't currently in this House. But for the teachers to just bluntly say that they have no faith in the Premier, that they don't trust him, that's an amazing statement.

They go on to say, "If the premier is capable of misleading our members . . . then he is capable of misleading parents," speaking specifically of the \$20 million of magical money that has been included in this bill, with no specific place for it to go. That's quite an admission for the spokespersons for the teachers to make, that if they can't trust the Premier on something as obviously needed as classroom reform, then how can parents?

Mr. Speaker, this is the new normal. We have a government that throws money at classroom reform, doesn't have any idea what it will get spent on, says they want to work with teachers on that, but teachers don't trust them to actually get the job done. Then the government actually pulls arbitration from the committee so that at the end of the day it's the government doing whatever it wants anyway. That's why teachers don't trust them. This is the new normal.

The new normal also means that we are not going to see classroom improvements for the remaining life of this government, whatever that remaining life may be. After all, past performance is the best predictor of future behaviour - three years in, 18 months of negotiations, three tentative agreements. The government has failed each time to put meaningful classroom reform - actual reform, not talk about reform, on the table. How many opportunities is the government going to get to actually show that they have a vision for classroom reform, Mr. Speaker?

There has been some talk about these three tentative agreements around three strikes and you're out - it's the government's three strikes, they're out. Tentative agreement no. 1, put something on the table for classroom reform, show some good faith. It didn't happen. Tentative agreement no. 2, put some real classroom reform on the table, show that you mean it. It didn't happen. Tentative agreement no. 3, put something around no-fail or discipline or attendance or PowerSchool on the table. It didn't happen. Strike three, Mr. Speaker.

This is why the teachers and the government are getting further apart each time they talk. That's why the margin of defeat goes up and up, because the government is not putting forward classroom reforms that teachers want and each time they see that, they get more disappointed and more frustrated, Mr. Speaker, and no wonder.

And it's not just the teachers - students, parents, grandparents, Opposition, we all want to see better classrooms. We've called on this government for a year to bring classroom reform here, if they must, with a budget to go with it, that we can look at and if it's reasonable, support it. We're still waiting, Mr. Speaker.

I've got to be honest, when I saw the bill title come out yesterday, I thought that maybe this is going to happen this time, but in the most Orwellian bill title ever, we have a bill that says it's going to improve the classrooms that actually makes it worse, Mr. Speaker. Nothing new for classrooms, more committees and that's it.

Just to be perfectly clear, the title of the bill is, an Act Respecting a Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements, except that it doesn't have any classroom improvements. If it said, an Act to create more committees and bureaucracy to frustrate teachers to infinity, it would have been an accurate title, but that's not what it says. It's the opposite, because at the end of the day, when this government finally imposes its majority will and forces a contract on teachers it may have achieved the salary and benefit targets that it has, but it certainly has burned its relationship with teachers and teaching assistants and other educational professionals, I might add, that want to see better classroom. It has taken a highly professional and highly motivated workforce and completely demoralized them. That doesn't lead to better classrooms - that leads to more difficulties in our classrooms. That is the new normal. That is the problem.

Here is another new normal that we're going to face over the next few years. The government is going to be sued. The Teachers Union has already said in public that they intend to challenge the constitutionality of this bill in the courts. They are going to sue the government and they have lots of precedent for doing that. I do want to dwell on that for a moment because here is a government that wants to look like they care about taxpayers' money and yet they're perfectly happy to see us be at risk for millions and millions of dollars of legal fees and maybe millions of dollars in penalties if they lose the case.

Many people have pointed to the British Columbia case, which is a decade old case that resulted in a payout by the taxpayers of B.C. of \$300 million; very similar to this bill. Well, maybe B.C. can afford \$300 million, but Nova Scotia can't. Now why would the Premier push through with a bill like this, frustrating teachers and put at risk literally hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money? Wouldn't it be better if that money was spent on classrooms in the first place? Wouldn't it be better if the government is prepared to risk all those millions on legal fees that they looked at those millions and said, over so many years we're going to get more TAs, we're going to enforce hard class caps, we're going to ensure that students meet the curriculum before they are pushed forward and if they're not they'll be held back and they'll get the extra help they need to go through next time. That does cost a little money - why not focus our resources there with, by the way, a very willing professional teaching workforce to go along.

That's the B.C. case, and I do want to dwell on that for a moment because the B.C. case is very instructive to the situation here with Bill No. 75. The British Columbia courts did, in fact, rule that the legislation in B.C. - their counter legislation to this one - interfered with the collective bargaining process with teachers in B.C. and is therefore unconstitutional under Section 2(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which specifically is our freedom of association.

I want to quote from that case for a moment and I will table it. I have it right here and I want to quote from that case. This is the British Columbia case right here. I know our Clerk is going to want to read it in total and make sure that we all have a good background on it because this case does say, and I want to quote from it, that it's clear that the government had a strategy to put pressure on the teachers union to provoke a strike. Doesn't that sound eerie? The government thought this would gain political support for imposing legislation. That is the word of the British Columbia Supreme Court in their decision, which ruled the B.C. Government's attempt to do the exact same thing as this government is doing, to be unconstitutional. I'll table that for the benefit of all the people that are going to want to read that in detail. I highlighted the quote in there so that people could see it.

That court decision was appealed. We're already into the millions of millions in legal fees at this point. It was appealed to the British Columbia Court of Appeal where a dissenting opinion was reached that said that that decision should be upheld because the government had, in fact, trampled all over the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I have that decision here, and I am going to share it with the House in a moment, but it does say very clearly that "pre-legislative consultation is always irrelevant for the purposes of determining a constitutional breach."

This shines the light of day on the Premier's robotic answer that he negotiated three tentative agreements before bringing in his bill. Well, pre-legislative consultation - consultation and negotiation are similar; they may not be exactly the same thing, but they're similar - is irrelevant for the purposes of determining a constitutional breach.

I will share that opinion with the Clerk's Table and anyone who wants to read it, Mr. Speaker.

Now we're tens of millions of dollars in legal fees charged to the taxpayers of the Province of British Columbia, who were dragged down the exact same route as the Premier of this province is dragging us down. Mr. Speaker, that case was appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada less than a year ago.

In November 2016, the Supreme Court upheld the dissenting opinion of the British Columbia Court of Appeal, which upheld the original Supreme Court of British Columbia decision, that the same legislation in British Columbia was unconstitutional. When they did that, the Supreme Court of Canada took all of 20 minutes to come to that conclusion and ruled from the bench that the decision should be upheld. I have that decision of the Supreme Court here. The Clerk is anticipating that I'll table it, but I'm happy to do that, and I will do that now, Mr. Speaker.

The damages that the taxpayers of British Columbia are now on the hook for - because of the same reckless Liberal Government there as we have here - is \$300 million. If the job creation strategy of the Liberal Party of B.C. was to enrich a lot of lawyers, they succeeded.

I know the unemployment rate here is too high, and there are thousands fewer people working in Nova Scotia today than three years ago, but surely it is not the intent of the Premier and his government to see millions and millions of dollars going to hire more and more lawyers. Nothing against lawyers, but we need teachers. We need teaching assistants. We need better supports in our classrooms. That's where that kind of money should go, and common sense tells us that if that had been done the first time around, a year ago, we would not be here in this emergency session today.

By the way - and I don't think the irony is lost on the people who are watching us in action - when the Premier called this emergency session, there was no emergency. Teachers were teaching and students were learning. The pretext to this emergency session was laughable. Ironically, by provoking the strike action that the Premier has provoked, he has actually created an emergency. If you check the Rule Book for this House, emergency sessions happen when there's already an emergency. They are not called in order to create one, but that's exactly what's happened here. The Premier has called an emergency session and then gone about creating an actual emergency, which is the strike vote that's been taken and the strike action that's been called. What a shame. It could have been so easily avoided.

I see you checking the House Rules, Mr. Speaker, and I'm pretty sure you'll find that I'm correct, that it's assumed that there is an emergency when the Speaker makes that decision - I'm not questioning the Speaker's decision in any way. I know the Premier advised him on that, and it's the advice that I'm speaking of.

Having said that, I do want to talk about something that's very near and dear to everybody in this Chamber, I'm sure - I certainly hope so - and to all Canadians, just to wrap up my little legal lesson. I have to disclose, of course, that I am not a lawyer, but I am a Canadian, and I am proud of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which I have here.

I probably don't need to table the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Mr. Speaker, but I will, because it might be time for a refresher. It's certainly time for a refresher for the Premier. One of the things we cherish about this country is that we are a country of laws. Even the government is not above the law. Even the Premier of a province is not above the law.

All Parties in this country have come together at different points in our history to enumerate the rights and freedoms that we all enjoy as Canadians. I want to do this in a non-partisan manner. John Diefenbaker brought us our first Bill of Rights, and Pierre Trudeau brought us the current Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We all should feel some pride of ownership over it. The biggest pride of ownership, the thing that makes us the most Canadian, is that everybody enjoys the same freedoms and the same rights under the law, everybody.

There are four freedoms that are listed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They are in Section 2. The one in question is 2(d), the fourth one, which is freedom of association. Political Parties exist because we have freedom of association. Lions Clubs and volunteer fire departments exist because we have freedom of association. Unions exist as well because we have freedom of association.

The Premier wants to divide the province into those who are with the union and those who are against the union. This has got nothing to do with whether you're pro-union or anti-union. This has everything to do with whether you believe in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and whether you believe that, under the law, a Premier and government are not above the Charter of Rights and Freedoms either. At the end of the day, these are the rules of the game that even governments have to live by. That's the point. Even when they don't like it, they have to live by it. That's what makes this country great.

That's why the British Columbia Supreme Court, the dissenting opinion of the British Columbia Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court all have upheld that what this government is trying to do in this session has been unconstitutional in British Columbia.

I have a similar case from Ontario, which I was going to go through in great detail, but I think I'll just table it instead in case someone wants to see it. Oh, you want me to go through it in great detail, Mr. Speaker? You were nodding a second ago. No, okay. Well I will table the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Public School Boards Association case from 2016 in Ontario. It's the exact same scenario.

All of which is to say that what the Premier is asking this House of Assembly to do is likely unconstitutional. It's going to cost us millions of dollars as taxpayers either way and condemn us to years in the courts. Some other member can get up if they want and argue that it's not. That's wonderful. That's Canada. That's freedom of expression. They may even have opinions or cases of their own to back up their side. That's great. We'll find out when the courts eventually rule, at some future date, on this mess.

One thing is certain today. This government is going to be sued for breaching the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That case, when it is pursued, as it definitely will be, is going to cost millions and millions of dollars. At the end of the day, a decision will be reached, and we may even owe more money, all because for the last three years we have had a Premier and a government that turned its back on classroom reform, that refused to listen to the very employees - our teachers - who we trust to deliver education in our classrooms. We have a Premier whose style, to be blunt, is so confrontational and so mean-spirited that people of good faith get pushed away . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I think "mean-spirited" is just a little bit over the edge.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BAILLIE: Let me claw that back closer to the edge, Mr. Speaker.

My point is that none of this had to happen. None of it had to happen. Three opportunities to put real classroom reform on the table were all missed by the government. Three opportunities to reach out to teachers and actually do something constructive for our classrooms were missed. At some point in the next week, this government will force through a contract for teachers, leaving behind a trail of destruction and no hope of meaningful classroom reform. That's bad enough but that is not the end of the story because they've also condemned us to years of court challenges and millions of dollars of legal fees and settlement costs. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that that is not good financial management. That is the worst kind of financial management because if you actually worked with your partners in education to make things better, all of that could have been avoided.

That brings me to the old normal that needs to be fixed, the old normal where in places like Basinview Drive Community School in Bedford there are 37 students on advanced learning programs needing EAs and there are only 7.5 EA or TA equivalents for them - one school but a real example of where we're shortchanging students who deserve to get a fair and equal education who are not getting the supports they need. This bill tells them, sorry, we're not doing anything for you. That's a big problem.

At École secondaire de Par-en-Bas, I actually spoke to a TA there this morning, Lynn d'Entremont - who I should disclose is no relation to my colleague who sits beside me. Lynn is exactly the kind of caring professional whose job it is to make our classrooms

work for all students as a teaching assistant. Lynn's not even in the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. Lynn is in a different union who also is without a contract or without any hope of help to do her job. All Lynn wants to do is right by her students, help them meet the curriculum, give them the extra help they need to be part of the classroom like every Nova Scotia student deserves and she's frustrated because she doesn't have the resources to do that anymore. She doesn't feel the government has her back when she tries to make classrooms inclusive and safe and have the environment conducive to good learning. That's the reality at her school.

Let me tell you about the normal at River Hebert District High School which is a new school, and it's great that it is. It took seven years of that community fighting to get that school over three governments but it's done. However there was one last injustice for that community to fight last year because when the time had come to order the desks for the new school, the government decided to slash the order in half as a cost-saving measure. Now, can you imagine if that had not been fixed, we would have built a new school and delivered that new school to the community, and then only bought half the number of desks required for the students? Can you imagine that? That really happened. That really happened, and I've got to give a lot of credit to the principal of that school and the teachers there who rose up and pushed, and pushed, and pushed to get that fixed.

At the end of the day, here is a government that thought, well we've got to save money so let's just cut the order in half. No thought to whether those desks are needed or how many students actually want to sit down when they get to class or what that would do to their ability to learn if they had to fight for seats. It was just a decision to save money. This is why the Teachers Union said that the government knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing. What is the cost of desks? What is the value lost of not having enough desks in a classroom? It is inconceivable that that is the normal that the Premier wants to get back to.

Let me tell you about two elementary schools in Springhill, West End Memorial School and Junction Road Elementary. They're both so old, Mr. Speaker, with leaks and mildew and dust that the school board has declared that their condition has become an impediment to program delivery. In other words, their condition is so bad that we cannot expect teachers to teach the curriculum because of the facility.

The gym in Junction Road, the roof leaks so bad that there are dozens of buckets on the gym floor on any given day, filling up with water, drip by drip. The library at West End is in the middle of the school and is a high-traffic zone as students go from one class to another. How can you study in those conditions? The gym there, which is substandard size, doubles as the cafeteria. Think of the danger when you are in that gym class after lunch with all the risks of spillage and so on, Mr. Speaker. This is why they can't deliver the curriculum in those schools anymore.

The engineers went in and the school construction specialists went in and the school board weighed the needs of those students against all the other properties in that school board and they said that this is at the top of the priority list for new construction - three years ago, again two years ago and again last year and yet they are still not getting a new school, Mr. Speaker, while they watch other schools that on the provincial-wide combined priority list were 20 spaces below them, leap to the top, which just happened to be in the riding of the Premier and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. That is shameful.

Teachers don't trust the government to actually manage what's in the classroom, and parents don't trust the government to actually build the schools in priority of need. What trust is left? Zero and that's a big problem, Mr. Speaker. That's why any hope of real reform in our schools has been lost for the duration of this government. It is gone. For all of those who believe that education is the best investment a government can make in our future, that is a pretty sad thing to realize.

You know, Mr. Speaker, one of the great things about our province, our country, is that everyone does get an equal shot at a good education, or they should. Whether you live in River Hebert or South End Halifax, you deserve an equal shot. Whether you are flying high as a student or you have some learning challenges and need help, you deserve a shot in our classrooms. That's one of the promises we make to young Nova Scotians when they start out.

When we reach the point that a government cares only about imposing a financial contract and, in fact, cares about that more than keeping that promise to the next generation of students, we are in a very sorry place. When that government gives up on working with teachers to make things better and resorts to legislation that is going to be sued and likely is non-constitutional, then we have reached a very sorry place indeed, Mr. Speaker. Maybe that's why we have a Premier who said, I want to get back to normal. Well, you know what? I don't want to get back to normal. We in the Opposition, we don't want to get back to normal. We want better than normal. We want higher than lower; we want more than less in our classrooms. Who wants to be normal? We want better than that for our students and our teachers.

It's not that teachers are not making it clear about what they're looking for in the classroom. A five-minute Google search will find hundreds of essays written by teachers about what we need to do and they are all making the same points - give us an attendance policy that we can enforce. You know the normal right now, Mr. Speaker, in many school boards is that students can show up on the last day and hand in an assignment and the teacher is forced to mark it and pass it. What message are we sending to that child about responsibility when we allow that to happen?

Maybe the government thinks that all teachers do is take a history book and take an English book and teach the contents. Well that's a pretty shallow view of education, Mr.

Speaker. By virtue of our actions and our beliefs and our values, we teach them what's important in life too, by taking responsibility for your own education, like showing them that we value education very highly as a society, like teaching that there are consequences when you hand in your work late. Those are important things that we learn in school as well, but the "normal" does not allow that to happen.

We don't want the normal; we want better than normal. We'd be more than happy to come to this House and debate a bill that fixes that one problem and pass it unanimously, but that's not going to happen.

The same with discipline policies, Mr. Speaker. How many teachers have talked to all of us about the physical risks they take in classrooms, from all kinds of students? How many teachers have told us of the verbal abuse they suffer in our schools every day, from all kinds of students, and their hands are tied behind their backs - there is nothing they can do about it. Somehow the message has gotten through to seven and eight year olds that they know the teacher can do nothing about it. What kind of message are we teaching to these young kids?

We do need real, meaningful, discipline policies in place, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of law. Then we need to give those to our teachers with their discretion, in their professional judgment, to enforce them. Teachers need to know that their government and their Premier trusts them and will have their back when they do.

That's our view of how the system should work. We don't want normal, we want better than normal and that's something we could be doing right here today, Mr. Speaker, but we're not and that opportunity is lost for the life of this government.

Let me talk a little bit about the data collection. We encourage people to enter the teaching profession. They go and get a degree, they get a B.Ed., they get a master's degree, two, three, four degrees, they spend a decade in university, they are highly trained professionals, as they should be - we want them to be the best they can be when they are teaching our kids.

I wasn't going to say this but I think I will, Mr. Speaker - I can't think of a more highly valued function in society than that. I would be afraid for people to compare it to the value of politicians, to be honest with you. Teachers build the future of this province every day. That's why they're so well-educated, that's why we invest in their professional development, and that's why we put them in places of such great trust as in the classroom.

In the last few years we've condemned them to data entry up to their eyeballs, Mr. Speaker. I'll give you an example - and I've heard this from a number of teachers in my constituency. Let's say your class is 50 minutes long. If it takes you 10 minutes to take attendance because you have to fire up the laptop and the Wi-Fi is slow and you have to enter the data manually, you've lost a good chunk of the teaching time just on attendance.

You're not allowed to do that later, you have to do it through the PowerSchool system. Then you are home at night and rather than working on tomorrow's lesson to make it as best as it can be, you are condemned to more data entry.

Mr. Speaker, we're not against data but there has got to be a healthy balance. Why would we place such well-educated, trained teachers in our schools and then not let them do what we've actually invested in their education so that they can do? Think of those millions of dollars in legal fees and what they could have done to make data entry easier so that teachers can spend more time with their students. We don't want to go back to normal. We want something way better and this is another example.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to finish today without also talking about mental health, something that is a big issue for the Progressive Conservative caucus, as you know, something that we have been bringing to this House for over a year now, something that we didn't bring to this House as a club to beat over the government's head, something we brought to this House as a positive contribution that we want to make while we spend our time on this side. That is one of the greatest health challenges of our time. Mental illness affects just about every family in Nova Scotia, either because someone is mentally ill with whatever ailment they have or because they are a caregiver for someone who is mentally ill - every family, including my own, including many here in this Chamber and around this province who have been brave enough to tell their stories.

Teachers regularly bring up the skyrocketing incidence of mental illness in their classrooms, at heartbreaking ages, Mr. Speaker - depression, anxiety, dyslexia, all kinds of mental illnesses that are showing up in our classes in greater numbers. I'm sure scientists will write many studies about why that is; in fact, that is who should do it, it's not our job here to do the scientific studies. But it is our job here to make sure that the supports are in place to help people suffering from mental illness, to help their caregivers, and to help the teachers who are often on the front lines.

For a long time, we've been talking about mental illness and one of the questions we get asked regularly is: it's such a big issue, where would you start? Let's start in the classrooms, Mr. Speaker, let's start with adolescent mental health. Let's put the resources in place there as our first step on the journey to getting every child who is going down the road of a mental illness the help they need, as soon as they need it.

Teachers are raising this. We could be actually allocating resources for that great need right now, in this session, but we're not, Mr. Speaker. There are classes out there, 25, 30 kids in the class, five on IPPs, three on adaptations, four with diagnosed mental illnesses, some who are medicated and some who are not. We could actually help with that.

I don't want to go back to the normal; I want something better than normal. That's what we should be talking about here today, and adolescent mental health is a place where we could be starting. I do want to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, that we do have the

SchoolsPlus program and it is a good program. It's not in enough schools, and the ones that have it are often sharing a mental health professional among many schools. Sometimes students show up at their school but the mental health nurse or professional is not there that day, they are at a different school and so that person has to wait - that's a dangerous place to put a young child in with depression - or they're told to go to the emergency room where they are probably going to have to wait.

Mr. Speaker, it wouldn't take a lot to find the resources to put mental health professionals in every school, to train our teachers who are asking for this, by the way - what to do to identify the signs of an emerging mental illness in a student, where to send them, who to get them in to see, how to deal with it? They are the first ones who are going to see it in too many cases. Why not put it in the curriculum so that students themselves learn early in life, first of all, that mental illness is an illness like any other. It's not something to hide, it's something to acknowledge, bring out into the open. Why not train them about what the signs are, if they have thoughts in their head or dangerous thoughts or otherwise, what that means, who to go see, how to get the help they need.

Mr. Speaker, these are modest investments that we could be making today. I don't want to go back to normal; I want something better than normal. This would be a big step forward; it is way better than normal, but that's not going to happen.

Here we are, Mr. Speaker, with all these issues. I've listed some of them and my colleagues in both Opposition Parties have listed others. I think we're doing our best to show you, sir, and our colleagues across the way what normal looks like today and why the bill that's before us is not good enough, not by a long shot, why deciding whether teachers get 0 per cent or 1 per cent or 1.5 per cent is the least of our issues. It's the one they're determined to fix. It's the least of our issues.

These are much bigger issues, yet there's no bill for these, Mr. Speaker. That's what's wrong. That's what's wrong with this government's approach. That has got to change, and it's not going to change. It's not going to change for the life of this government because the very people that a government has to have a good relationship with to make our classrooms better are the teachers, the TAs, and the education professionals. That relationship has been destroyed. It is going to take a change of government to make our classrooms better.

I've come to that conclusion, having watched this government three times strike out on actually enacting something meaningful so that teachers could know they're serious, and so that parents could know they're serious. They're serious about imposing a contract. That's the least of our problems. That's so small. That is so small - 1 per cent or 1.5 per cent. That is so small compared to what we're talking about here.

I don't think anyone ran to be here for something like that. We ran to be here to work on the big stuff. The big stuff includes adolescent mental health. The big stuff

includes showing kids respect for education, having meaningful deadlines for assignments, learning the value of hard work, learning the glory of education, and wanting to go as high as they can go with our full endorsement. That's the big stuff. There's no bill on that. This bill might as well be called the bill with the littlest stuff possible so the government can declare that they jumped over an anthill because they forced a contract on teachers.

Mr. Speaker, who cares? Come on. Look at the things we could be doing. In the middle of a snowstorm, the Premier called us here in an emergency - through you, of course, Mr. Speaker, advised you to do that. I'll get that right. For what? To force a contract.

Which is the greater emergency? That students and teachers go to school and feel unsafe, is that not a bigger emergency? That young Nova Scotians go to school with diagnosed or diagnosable depression or anxiety and become a danger to themselves or others when that happens and we as a society have the tools, the counselling, and the medicines to help them heal, and we don't do it, isn't that a bigger emergency? That teachers say they're overwhelmed in class and can't deliver the curriculum without help, isn't that a bigger emergency? Why did we not have an emergency session on any of those things?

You know this, Mr. Speaker. As soon as the government gets its way on their contract, they're going to adjourn this place. All those other things are still going to be going on, unaddressed. It's like the Premier pulled the fire alarm and dispatched the fire department to help get a cat down from a tree while the house was burning down next door and doesn't think that's the bigger emergency.

We have a cat. We're cat lovers in my house. Nothing against cats, by the way. It's an analogy. But you get my point.

The government is here to force their way in this bill. They say it includes classroom improvements when really, all they've done is tell teachers the same thing they've been telling them with less and less success each time, which is that they'll have a committee or a commission. You might as well keep ramping it up. It will be a Royal Commission next, and then it will be a galactic commission at some point. But it's still a committee, Mr. Speaker, with no objective, with no actual concrete things to work on.

That's why it went so wrong when the Premier said we'll put \$10 million into the committee. That didn't get anyone's attention. Then he said, we'll put \$20 million into the committee. That's going to be really good. That is so backwards, Mr. Speaker. Who funds a committee without any idea where it's going? Why not start with the reforms we want and then figure out what the budget's going to be? Bring a plan like that here we'd be the first to say that's right, let's support that. But that's not going to happen; that's not financially responsible - just keep throwing more and more money at a committee to make

it sound better. That's irresponsible. That's irresponsible. That's why it's just so offensive not just to teachers but to all Nova Scotians who do want to see something meaningful.

It was bizarre to say the least to see the Premier two days ago pat himself on the back because he wants to start a conversation about inclusion. Three years in and 18 months of talking to teachers about the classroom where they are getting more and more frustrated and he throws this lifeline out that okay, he's prepared to start a conversation; apparently, that courageous in his mind. Well, where does he want that conversation to go? You know, we do need to figure this out; we do. But we surely should be clear about what we're talking about. For example, we don't want to go back to the old way of streaming kids, so let's rule that out; let's rule that out.

Every child deserves to go as high as they can with the full support of our government and society - that was the basis of inclusive classrooms. So maybe the current system is not delivering the results that we need; fine, let's deal with that. But let's set some goals starting with that one - that no child's going to get left behind, that they may learn at different rates, they may have different learning disabilities, and they may require special help depending on what that impediment is, but we're going to find a way to get there. And let's not confuse discipline with inclusion. That's not fair. Let's make it clear that when we're talking about discipline it could mean anyone who interrupts the learning environment. When we're talking about inclusion, we mean getting all kids the education that they need maybe in unique ways in some cases but always included in our education system. But in a desperate attempt to try to look like he was doing something, the Premier bravely offered to start a conversation three years in.

Well, I don't know how many of us went through all the work and blood and sweat and tears to come to this place - and we all know it isn't easy to get elected here, nor should it be - we didn't come here just to be able to retire some day and say well we started a conversation. We need to actually get stuff done. No wonder teachers are putting out press releases to say they don't trust the Premier anymore. They're tired of hearing that someday in the future we're going to start a conversation. Let's get that conversation going right now - and while we're doing that, let's put in place real support to hold the system together while we do. I don't want normal; I want better than normal. These are things we could be doing now that we could all support.

I know we've had some debate already about the no-fail policy, the policy that apparently the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development discovered two days ago doesn't exist but is still writing a letter to the school boards to officially inform them that it doesn't exist. I mean the absurdity - and 9,300 teachers they've all felt the pressure to pass kids through. They've all seen graduates walk across that stage that they know in their heart we have let down because they should not yet be graduating - and they know they're about to go out in the real world without the tools they need to succeed because of that.

I'm not satisfied to have the minister write a letter to confirm the old normal; we want better than normal. We have a curriculum; we are trying to tie it to the needs of the 21st Century both intellectually and workplace-related. We should show kids that we expect them to need it - we should pass them when they do, and we should hold them back when they don't. And by "we," I mean the people that we entrust with that big decision, and that is the teachers of this province. They need to know that their Premier and government will have their back when they do. It is the only meaningful way forward. These are the big problems. These are the big issues. These are the things we should be working on solving, but to continue to deny that there is a no-fail policy when every teacher knows otherwise - it's certainly in practice. To get caught up in the wording of whether it's a policy or a practice or whether things like credit recovery, where we zoom you from 40 to 50, so we can put you through don't exist, they do exist. We're not helping our students when we allow that to happen.

I don't know where the theory came from that everyone should always pass in life, but it's not true, and it is when we stumble and someone helps us up that we know we're really getting somewhere. That's why the no-fail policy has to go. That's how we show students we're serious about education - that you're not just putting in time. You're actually learning how to be a full productive adult, grade by grade, capable of taking on the world.

Nova Scotia has so much going for it. We have all it takes to succeed and we should be focusing on those things. But for the last three years we have a government that comes in and wants to cut things - which is easy on the government and hard on the people. That wants to shut down successful businesses like the film business. That sees seniors, if they have saved their whole lives and made a little extra money for retirement, wants to take that from them to punish them for their success. That's piddly stuff.

We don't want to work on that. We're going to reject this because we don't want to work on that. We don't want to think like that. We certainly don't want to be lead like that. There are big issues and big opportunities in this province, and some of the biggest issues and some of the biggest opportunities happen to be in our classrooms.

I will use a quote, and I know who started this one - John Kenneth Galbraith once said that too many governments think that the success of economic development depends on massive infusions of capital. He said they're wrong, and he was an economist. He said they're wrong. He said the future of our economy depends on massive infusions of education, and he's right, and that's not happening here.

We're debating whether the teachers get 1 per cent or 1.5. That's the small stuff. We reject it because it's time for big thinking. It's time for grasping those bigger opportunities, and that starts in our classrooms. So when this bill is done, we've got some of our own that we put on the order paper yesterday that I asked the Government House Leader to call for debate and pass as a test of whether they're serious about classroom

reform, including adolescent mental health supports, including meaningful attendance and discipline policies and including getting rid of the no-fail. That's our great opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead.

MR. LOHR: I would like to call attention to my mom, Mrs. Lohr to you - Oma to her grandchildren and great grandchildren up in the Opposition gallery. (Applause)

She doesn't want me to tell you this, but I will. She's on her way to Israel tomorrow on a two-week trip with her cousin from Calgary. I'm very proud of her. I should take this opportunity to apologize for all the times I tracked through the house with my boots on. (Laughter) I know I'm digressing. I just want to tell you a little bit of her story. I debated whether I can do this with keeping a dry eye.

As a young girl in Holland, she had a platoon of German soldiers live in her home for a year. One of those soldiers taught her how to swim. She didn't dare tell anybody in the neighbourhood because that would have been doing stuff with the enemy. The sergeant in that platoon would tremble when the bombers from England went overhead because he had a little girl just her age, back in Germany. They were good to her family, my family.

She lived through four months of Canadian artillery shelling when the First Canadian Army tried to conquer the island she lived on, which was the last island necessary to use the port of Antwerp - I do tear up on this. She was liberated by Canada in November 1944. She and Dad came to Canada in 1958 with no money. They didn't even speak English and made a life here, and I'm very proud of her. (Applause)

It's my pleasure to take a few moments to talk about this bill. I know much has been said about it. I do want to talk about the actual bill for a few moments and then talk about the concepts in the bill, An Act Respecting a Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements.

First of all, I would take issue with one of the whereas clauses. It says, "AND WHEREAS the education of the students in public schools and the right of students to participate fully in learning opportunities is being unduly disrupted by a prolonged labour dispute between the Union and the Minister."

I would take umbrage with that whereas clause. I've had a couple of teachers communicate to me that certainly there are things in this period of work-to-rule, but in fact, the focus on education probably has never been greater, as teachers are no longer doing some of the data entry that they have issue with and are no longer doing some of the other

side things that they have always been doing. It's possible, and I would suggest to you probable, that at this moment in time, during work-to-rule, the actual quality of education has never been higher.

That being said, I recognize that there are things in work-to-rule which we all have issue with. Will there be a prom and sports programs? Mostly what is affected are the things that are important to school life but a little bit on the periphery of the actual educational content, and that is not what this whereas states.

I know much has been said about the fact that the classroom improvement part of this Act is, in fact, creating two committees. There's a commission to reform inclusive education, which I think might have been already created, and then there's a council to improve classroom conditions. So there's not one but two committees created here. There's a long history in Nova Scotia of governments using committees to kick the decision down the road. I think there's a sort of cynicism in the province about committees. That's part of the problem, that there is no faith amongst the public and the teachers that a committee will solve the problem, especially when some of the issues are so pressing and so clear. In a few moments, I will get into some of those issues.

Another issue I have with the bill - I can't claim to have read the entire thing. I just cast my eye through it. There's a fair bit in the bill relating to the actual contents of the collective agreement and details about the wage pattern which, frankly, I don't totally understand, not really having been involved in how it's written. But I do want to cast my eye on one article, Article 68A Assessment:

“When a classroom teacher is required to perform Provincial or Board mandated student assessments that require extended one-on-one student-teacher time, including, but not limited to, Oral Reading Assessments . . .”, and on and on it goes, “. . . supervision of the remaining students shall be provided by a substitute teacher unless the hiring of a substitute teacher is not operationally required. The obligation to hire a substitute shall be deemed to have been met in the event a substitute is not available . . .”

In other words, even when they are required to do one-on-one assessments, there is no guarantee they are going to get - according to this. Of course, this is a statement saying the employer can't do the impossible if someone is not really available. In fact, we know there are substitute teachers available, and this is one of the issues I believe we are going to end up with and I want to drill down into - the fact that there is a shortage of human resources in our school systems, in EAs and EPAs.

This is something in the bill that I have an issue with, these several things - the fact that there are two committees created by this bill, both looking at different parts of the education system - there isn't really any clear instruction on how those two committees are

going to interact with each other. What if one says something conflicting with the other - where are we going with that? - and one committee is looking at one specific piece, inclusion, and the other committee is looking at classroom conditions. I would suggest to you that they're part and parcel of the same problem, that in fact you can't disentangle those two issues. So I question the logic of this bill as it is.

I know my colleagues have drilled down into the legality of the bill, given what's happened in British Columbia. I question if this is an ill-advised bill that will cost us a huge amount of money too. I question that.

How did we get into this situation? I will say that I do not believe it was this Liberal Government's doing that got us here. I think this has been a slow-moving train over many years. Many successive governments have had a role in education, but all of a sudden we come to a crisis moment. There are things that have happened in the last few years that exacerbated that crisis, but clearly what we are looking at is a movement of history, of our sort of social conditions.

There has been a breakdown in trust of authority. I remember when I was in school, if a note or something came home from the teacher, I was in trouble. Probably most of you remember that too. Nowadays, the parent is as likely or more likely to take the student's side. So there's been a breakdown in trust, even though we've probably never in the history of Nova Scotia had a more professional, more well-trained group of teachers than we have today, many of them having two and three degrees.

Where did that breakdown of trust come from in our society? I think it probably happened in the Vietnam War, in that era, and the loss of respect for the President of the United States through Nixon, and we see that is ongoing. Our society, our culture, is changing, and we can't say that that is the Liberal Government's fault. That's life.

However, we have seen that there are things that have happened in the last few years that have changed. One of the things that has changed is that there are fewer EAs available now. We know that we're running a program of inclusion, and I would suggest to you that the engine that runs inclusion is human resources. If you're going to have a classroom with five or six different grade levels right in that one classroom, then you need to have human resources there. That is what we see has changed in the last three or four years to make things substantially worse in the classroom, which has brought us to this moment in time.

If we don't fund inclusion, it won't work. If we don't provide the human resources there to make it work, it just can't happen. It can't be successful, and it puts the teacher in an untenable position of having too many needs to meet, and meeting the most urgent need, the greatest emergency at the moment, which is not always teaching that sort of core group of students who are at grade level. Likely it's dealing with a discipline problem or dealing with some other emergency.

We see the frustration level in teachers has gone right through the roof. I know the Premier has said through this bill that he wants to get back to normal in the classroom, and there is an article that I will table that says "Normal = students being promoted regardless of attendance. The Premier of NS wants classrooms to return to normal. Normal = a no fail policy for students who refuse to do assigned work."

I would like to say, before I table this, a few things about the no-fail policy. I can believe the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development when she says that there isn't a written policy. I find that more disturbing than if there was one, because in fact, there is a de facto policy across our school system that there is a no-fail policy. I have a big issue with the no-fail policy not because we want to see any kids fail but because I believe that it is a mistake to have that policy in general.

I just want to drill down into that for a minute. My belief is that - and I would love to have someone correct me on this and I did drill down into this earlier today, or I guess it was yesterday - about 20 years ago there was an idea that came out that if a student failed, the damage to their self-esteem would be greater than if you just passed them and then dealt with them catching up afterwards. I think that went right across North America and I don't think that was written down anywhere. If there's any data on that or if that was a conscious decision, how that decision was made, that decision certainly was made across our school systems across North America, I think.

The consequence of that was, and in fact I think that in the beginning it worked relatively well because there were relatively few students in that situation and the teacher could deal with that. But what has happened over time is there has been a proliferation of students in that category and when they go from Grade 3 to Grade 4 without really learning how to read, if they don't catch up in Grade 4, they go to Grade 5 and they don't know how to read. If they don't catch up in Grade 5 they are in Grade 6 and they don't know how to read and on to Grade 7, and then in Grade 7 or Grade 8 they realize hey, I'm way behind my cohort. At some point they figure that out and the damage to their self-esteem at that point is much worse than if they had been held back a year and had learned the material and had been taught to buckle down and work and learn and do the work.

I think that because of that we see we're in sort of a situation right now where we just simply have so many IPPs in the classroom - individual personal programs, personal instructional programs. These IPPs, that some teachers have classrooms with a Grade 8 English class with maybe 26 or whatever number of students - I mean, classroom numbers is another issue but say there's 30 students, maybe there's half of them on some sort of adaptation or IPP.

Where that comes from is the fact that we were willing all along just to simply keep moving them along, whether they got that material or not. The sad part is that a good number of them, maybe not all, maybe for some of them it's legitimate, they aren't really

capable of doing that material but a good number of them would be if they were taught how to do that material.

I don't believe that by passing them in that circumstance, especially children who we know are capable of doing that work, that we've done them any favours. Part of it is the lack of an attendance policy. There's so much absenteeism in our schools that teachers have a hard time teaching. I was aware that it happened at Grades 7, 8, 9, and 10, where you would expect kids to be taking off, but I have teachers who are teaching Grade 3 who tell me that they have kids who miss one to three days every week.

I call upon the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide the data on that - what is the absenteeism rate in our schools and what impact is that having on our teachers' ability to teach?

We also see that included in this absentee issue is the fact that there's no sort of penalty if you pass in work late. You can pass in work any time and still get marked for it. In fact, the story is, and I suspect that the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development would say there is not this policy, but a child could virtually miss the whole year, show up on the last day and be graded. This is what we've been told - maybe that is not written in policy but in fact that is happening.

We've just come through Valentine's Day and I was listening on the radio to something about Valentine's Day and somebody on the radio, I think it was on the CBC, said the opposite of love is apathy. I was sort of taken aback because I think the opposite of love is hate, of course. But I got thinking about what that statement said and apathy is lack of caring and maybe that is the opposite of love.

I don't believe there's anybody in the system - I would not say this about the minister or the staff of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development - I don't believe anybody really feels this way, but the message that is being sent to our students is one of apathy. If we really don't care if you come or not, then we really don't care. That's an apathetic attitude for us to have, as a system. I don't believe the message is that we don't love you. I know teachers love their students dearly, I know that. I would never say that about anybody in this Legislature, that they don't care and don't love these students.

In fact, the message that is being sent is that this is apathy, and if apathy is the opposite of love and I can get what they're getting at, then this is sending these students the idea that we really don't care if you show up or not. Think about that. What message is that to send to the student? Likewise, the message that if you don't pass that work in on time, you're still getting marked the same - I really didn't care if you did the work. Well, you did it - okay, I'll still mark you - that's good, great, but I really didn't care about my deadline. That is a very apathetic message to send to that student.

I believe the idea that we're going to pass you anyway, whether you really learn the material or not, is also apathy on our part, to send that message. I think that however we arrived at this point, this is the wrong thing to say about what we're trying to achieve here. We need to send the message to the students that we care deeply about them, we care deeply about them learning the material, and we care deeply about them achieving all that they can achieve.

The idea that a no-fail policy, that a no-consequences policy - you really don't have to learn the material, you're just going to go on and on - in my opinion, the idea that these things are teaching our children something valuable is totally wrong.

I can tell you that one time I heard one of the business leaders of Nova Scotia talk about his method of business planning. He said he was on the failure method of business planning. That method of business operation - this was a very successful multi-millionaire - was that you were allowed to make little mistakes in business. If you weren't making little mistakes, if you weren't making any mistakes, that was a mistake, because that was a sign you were doing nothing. But if you were making little mistakes, that was a sign that you were making the business go ahead. You just couldn't afford to make the fatal error. You had to avoid the fatal error that would sink your business, but you always had to be going forward, and if you made little mistakes along the way, don't let that bother you.

This gentleman said his philosophy was that he never let his mistakes get him down. He learned from them.

I believe that in life, that is how we learn. We learn from our mistakes and we learn from things that don't go right. Students need to learn from things that don't go quite right. If they get a failing mark on a test, then they learn from that. They go, what do I need to do to recover from this?

In fact, since someone has mentioned summer school - I was talking to one person recently who said that when she was in Grade 7, she had to do math summer school. She never let that happen again. She learned from her mistake about not doing the work in class.

I believe that this is the sort of thing - we need to send the message to the kids that we love them, that we're not apathetic about the work that they're doing or what they're learning or whether they attend school, but that we love them and we care about everything we are teaching them.

I know that's how we all feel about it. I know the Liberal Party - the other side - feels that way, and I know the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development does too. Everybody cares deeply about what we're doing. But if we're sending the wrong message to the kids, which I believe we are, then we've missed the boat on that.

I think that, particularly in terms of the attendance policy, we have well and truly missed the boat. I have a friend from Manitoba who lives in Nova Scotia now, who is well and truly shocked that missing a certain number of days at school would not trigger a social services visit to the student's home.

I've had a couple of teachers tell me about the efforts that they've gone through to get students back in school. Teachers do care about their students attending. I had one teacher tell me that for a month she picked up a student every morning herself to get that student in school. I had another teacher tell me that for quite a long time she and another teacher took turns phoning a little girl every morning and saying, are you coming to school? So, making that phone call.

I know that principals and vice-principals in our system take it upon themselves to go looking for these kids when they miss school. But can you imagine how discouraging it can be to be a student of average intelligence who was just never challenged to do the work, never really facing the consequences of not doing the work, to find yourself in Grade 8 or 9 and realize you're well and truly pretty far behind, and then not feeling like going to school?

I can tell you that the people at the Workers' Compensation Board know that if someone misses a year of work, the odds of them ever going back to work are very low. It's quite rare for someone who misses a year of work because of a workplace injury to ever go back to work. Even missing school - I would suggest it's the same thing. Every day that you miss makes it a little bit harder to get back into that school. We need to have an attendance policy that has an organized plan on how we're going to deal with students who miss time.

I believe that these two things - we talked earlier about putting in a bill about discipline. In fact, I know there's a code of conduct policy, and if you read it, you say, yes, that's pretty good. But where are the teeth in it? I think two fundamental aspects that our school system needs are an attendance policy, and we have to communicate to the kids that we really do care whether they learn the material or not.

That means we're not just giving them a free pass if they didn't learn that material. We want them to learn the material. We're evaluating them, and they have to prove that they know the material. We send the message to them that we care about what we're teaching, and we care about them. We don't want to see them fail. We'll go through the extra effort to get them to learn it, but if they didn't learn it, there are consequences to that. One of the things that we have to learn in life, and I know we're all adults here, and you've all learned that, is not everything in life goes the way you want it to go.

As I said earlier, I think there's two things that we teach our children. We teach our children to love, and we teach our children to work. Obviously, we teach our children to love in the environment of the home. We show them love, and we teach them love.

Teaching them to work is a bit more challenging in our generation. Turn the clock back to when this House was built, a couple hundred years ago, and it was not that hard. There was a pretty steady stream of chores to do, and everybody worked. Most of us are living in such convenient circumstances there's virtually no chores to do. How do we teach them to work? Work needs to be taught through rewards. Rewarding work - obviously, we all work because there's a reward to it.

There needs to be a reward to working in school. That is getting a good mark, passing. But if you don't do the work and you get the reward anyway, that sends a pretty negative message through the whole system, right? There has to be a consequence, too, if you didn't do it. If you asked your son or daughter to mow the lawn or shovel snow and they didn't do it, would you pay them? Are you teaching them anything of any value in doing that?

In a sense, this is where the school system is at. I don't think it's anyone's fault that it got here. I don't think that what I'm describing here is reflective of anybody's attitude here in this House or in the educational system or the teachers. I'm just saying this is what I see is being communicated here. I think we can do a lot better in the way that we are teaching our children if we take a slightly more obstinate approach, maybe, to the message that we're sending.

I want to say that I recognize that there are daunting, daunting challenges in the classroom. I'm sure that everyone in this Legislature has received distressing emails about circumstances in the classroom. We've talked a little bit about them. I had a teacher tell me that she got a class of about 19 students, and half of them had contemplated suicide or attempted suicide, severe mental health issues. I don't know how we recover from that. How do we get back? Where do we go? There has to be a significant amount of mental health support put into schools.

Dr. Stan Kutcher will tell you that the first time a mental health issue shows up is the best time to deal with it. It's the most opportune moment to treat it. Left untreated, it becomes increasingly more difficult to treat. Most things in life are like that. If you don't fix the roof right away, it leaks more. If you don't put the fire out instantly, it becomes extremely difficult to put out in about three or four minutes. That sort of thing is true about mental health, too, that the most opportune moment to deal with a mental health issue and probably the least severe presentation you're going to see of it is the very first time.

That's why we need to start looking at how we're dealing with these mental health issues in our classes. I have some emails from Grade 3 teachers (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Kings North has the floor, and I'm hoping his mother can hear him speaking. Go ahead.

MR. LOHR: We see emails that say, I have three students diagnosed with ADHD and one undiagnosed. Well, the teacher is making that diagnosis based on something, probably based on some pretty severe classroom issues.

There is a requirement that we - I believe that if I could look at this, sort of take a long view of this impasse and where we are right now, I've told you I'm not really convinced that we're in an emergency situation. I realize this is an emergency debate. I realize there is the Teachers Union on one side and there's the government on the other, but if you take the long view, whether it's this government or the next government, whether that be our Party or continues to be the Liberal Party, once this current impasse between the union and the government is over, there's going to be a lot of repairing in that relationship to be done, I would suggest, between employer and employee. But the reality is . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order. If I just might interrupt for one second, please, on a notice from the House Leader for the - the Honourable Michel Samson.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Do I correct the Speaker for using the name of a member in the House?

MR. SPEAKER: It's probably best if you don't.

MR. SAMSON: First of all, I apologize to the member for Kings North and certainly want to welcome his mother here in the gallery as well. I grew up thinking there were only Acadian men who couldn't speak about their mother without having a really hard time but apparently it goes through other cultures as well but very well said and a great story to share with the House and certainly welcome your mother here. I can assure you that I wouldn't have done any better, had I had to share the words that you were sharing. (Applause)

I apologize for the interruption but in light of the interest with Bill No. 75 and for those who are watching the proceedings today, it's now four o'clock on Wednesday. I wanted to advise that in light of how the bill is proceeding through the Legislature today in discussions with the Opposition House Leaders, we will be calling Law Amendments Committee this evening at 7:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m.

For those who have not already called the Legislative Counsel Office, I know some have called already and they will be reaching out to see who may be available during that time slot but if there are those who haven't contacted yet and who would be interested in coming this evening from the hours of 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., the number for Legislative Counsel - and I will ask the Legislative Library to tweet this out as well - is 902-424-8941. Again, Law Amendments Committee will begin this evening on Bill No. 75 from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

I can also advise that Law Amendments Committee will resume as well tomorrow, on Thursday, at the hour of 8:30 a.m. I will be introducing a motion at close of debate in order to try to accommodate as many people as possible who have asked to be able to make presentations on Bill No. 75, again which has been discussed with both Opposition House Leaders as well.

Again, I apologize to the member for the interruption but wanted to get that information to the public and to those who have been following the proceedings, as quickly as possible. Merci beaucoup.

MR. SPEAKER: I thank the honourable Government House Leader for that public service announcement.

The honourable member for Kings North has the floor.

MR. LOHR: If I may digress for a moment, one of the great surprises for me being in this Legislature is the Law Amendments Committee. It's my understanding that we are the only Legislature in the country that has anything like Law Amendments Committee where every single Nova Scotian who wishes to have input into a bill can have their 10 minutes of time and let us, as legislators, know what they think. It makes me very proud to be a Nova Scotian and to be in this House to know that we have that, our population has that opportunity and, as it stands, many Nova Scotians don't even realize that that opportunity is there.

Any bill that comes before this House goes to Law Amendments Committee and any one that they are particularly - anyone who has a particular concern about a bill has that opportunity to speak. I wasn't aware of that and even when I was running to be an MLA and it was a very pleasant surprise about serving in this Legislature.

I want to finish up by saying that in my opinion, as I was saying, when we look at where we're headed, once this sort of current impasse is resolved - and it will certainly be resolved at some point, and presumably unfortunately there will be a legal challenge and it will go on. The main thing is I believe that we as a Legislature, and through the government management of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the teachers, need to fix this issue for the sake of the students - for the sake of our students. The issues that the teachers are bringing up are real and impact their ability to do their job. It's probably why, in my opinion, the vote has gone the way it has. I know the teachers I talked to in Kings North tell me that they understand that they are very well paid. They are just deeply frustrated at classroom conditions and the way they've gone, in particular the loss of the EAs.

I want to tell you one story, and then I'm going to take my seat. This is a true story I just heard the other day, and I apologize, as it's a bit graphic. This was a teacher - I don't want to identify if it was a male or female teacher, and you'll understand why - teaching a

Grade 7 core curriculum course. I don't want to identify the course. In this class, there are a number of IPPs and adaptations, and there's one 13-year-old girl who's at a Grade 1 level. She's non-violent, so she doesn't qualify for an EA. There's no EA in this class because this girl is non-violent. But she really needs an EA.

This teacher tells me, "John, this student - this girl - will come in all covered in blood, and I just have to go deal with that." I said, "Blood? Why blood?" Again, I apologize, this is graphic, but she says, "This student doesn't realize when her period is going to happen, and it happens, and she doesn't really remember from one month to the next. She doesn't know the days of the week or the time of day. I just have to drop everything and deal with that, and help her out. I'm trying to keep track of that and track the time of the month for her."

It was very evident that this teacher cared very deeply about this student, and very evident from the description I received that the other students in the class were simply superb about the whole situation, too, and helping out. But this is the kind of stuff, as I was saying when I began - I believe that one of the things about this is that it is a human resources issue. This teacher said, "John, I just need an EA," and I said, "How many classes can we say that about in the province?" How many more people just need an EA? How many more teachers just need an EA?

Anyway, I tell that story to point out that these are real issues. These teachers are dealing with tough, tough circumstances. I didn't even get into biting, self harm, violence against teachers. There's so much material here. This is real.

Whatever happens in the next week, in the next year, whenever this court case is done, whoever is the next government - we've got to fix this problem. We've got to find a way to fix it, and we've got to do it not because the union wants something done or because the government is going to gain brownie points, but because our students need us to.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak on this bill today. It's obviously generated considerable interest, as the motion later will clearly demonstrate. I understand there are quite a few people signed up who wish to speak to the Committee on Law Amendments and who are looking forward to speaking to the members of that particular committee. I guess we'll debate that a bit later.

I haven't been here that long, I guess. I've been here about eight years, and I can't remember a time when I was getting real-time messages from people watching the live feed of Legislative TV from across the province and commenting on the things that are said in Question Period or the things that are said during the debate.

Maybe we should start by saying thank you to the government and the Premier, because as one of the teachers who was here last night, Tim Halman, said to me, "Experience is the greatest educator in life." Over the past few months, and especially the past few days, many Nova Scotians who had no idea how the Legislature operated - or, frankly, even cared that we were here, most of the time - have learned a lot about what we do, how it works or doesn't work, and how they have their voice heard.

I guess if we try to look for positive things coming out of different events, that's a positive. People are paying more attention to what's going on here. As well, somebody just sent me a note and said they didn't want people to start learning about what was going on in the education system in this way, that teachers have been trying to fix this for a long time silently and working behind the scenes. They can't do it anymore so that's why we're here.

I think a good theme for this debate might be a quote that I actually read as I was going through some old documents today: "Education isn't a line item in a budget, it's our future." Mr. Speaker, I just want to repeat that for everybody, to make sure they got it: "Education isn't a line item in a budget, it's our future." That was the slogan for the Liberal education platform in the 2013 election, yet now every press release and every comment that has come out from the Premier on this issue has talked about the need to balance the budget. That is the specific opposite to what he promised and what the slogan was, which was that it wouldn't be a line item in the budget, it would be treated as something outside of that. That's something that I ran on at the time, that I stood up for and that I'm still standing up for. That's one of the many reasons why I think this debate is so important.

You know people are learning through this process the difference between free votes and whipped votes and with the Premier's comments the other day that there will be a free vote on this, people are contacting their MLAs - or some MLAs, I guess, probably not all - asking how they'll vote. I want to be clear, everybody is entitled to vote the way they believe. If you vote differently than I do, that's democracy and that doesn't mean that you are wrong, but I do believe that you owe it to your constituents to explain why you choose to vote a given way on a bill, on either vote, yes or no, and to answer those questions and defend it.

It has to go beyond "because the Party told me", because at the end of the day we are all elected as individuals. The constitution makes it quite clear that we are not elected as members of a Party, we are all elected as individuals first. That's the way it is, which means that when a constituent asks, the answer is not to start ignoring your Facebook messages or the email in your office. You have to respond at a certain point, in an hour or two hours or whenever we will have a first vote on that and people will really want to know at that point. If you really believe in this bill, then you need to be prepared to defend that to your constituents and explain why.

I want to spend the bulk of my time today talking about what this bill is supposed to do, what it doesn't do, and the problems in the education system. One of the things I want to say at the outset because this debate, especially once the inclusion committee was mentioned, started igniting fears and passions, especially among parents, people who have physically challenged students, intellectually challenged students and so forth.

I think we need to be very clear that a discussion on inclusion must not dehumanize students or anybody with any kind of disability. Some of the discussion over this issue over the past few weeks has bordered on talk returning to the 1900s and I don't think that's intentional. I don't think anybody has made comments on either side of the House in any intentional way to do that, but it has come across that way. Every student deserves the opportunity to learn, to be supported and thrive in a safe and caring environment. Every teacher deserves the opportunity to teach and be supported in a safe and caring environment and it's up to us, as elected representatives, to ensure that happens.

Now I've heard it said a few times that we need committees to figure out what's wrong and I guess that's one of the fundamental disagreements we're here to debate today. I don't think we need any more committees, we've had a lot of them. Just in my time in the Legislature we have had a lot of committees on education. In fact, the current Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, when she was Minister of Education under a previous government, had a committee on special education to deal with inclusion issues that is still there and is still technically on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website. What's happening with that committee? Why do we need another committee looking at the same sorts of issues? There also appear to be many solutions to the problems we're currently facing which don't seem to have been put on the table by either side. I think we need to discuss some of those.

I want to share with you today some of the stories of the many parents, teachers, and students who have reached out to me. I want to say, most of the people who have reached out to me are parents. Second is students, and then teachers. I've heard some people say they've only heard from teachers. Well, I've heard from more parents than anyone else. I'm not going to stand here and tell you everybody is against this bill. That's ridiculous. We all know there are people who support the bill. There are people in this House who support the bill. That's true.

Nobody can claim to have a monopoly on the feelings of Nova Scotians. But I do believe that the majority of Nova Scotians are concerned about this bill. Even many of the people I've spoken to who thought they supported the bill, when they found out what it didn't do, had significant misgivings because it wasn't going to solve the problems they were concerned about, and I'm going to talk a bit about that.

I believe that voting for this bill is akin to saying that the real issues in classrooms, from violence, to outcomes, to addressing supports for students who need assistance, don't matter because this bill puts addressing all of those issues off to some future point. I believe

that this bill is a choice, saying that putting off problems for committees and the future is okay. But I don't think it is.

I want to start by taking us back briefly to December when the government originally was calling the Legislature back and locked students out, saying that the safety of students was at risk. That was a bit strange because the examples they gave concerned teachers showing up only 20 minutes before class, but that's what the contract allows. I wondered at the time whether anybody bothered to look at whether the province would even be covered for an accident outside the contracted teacher hours. Sure they might be supervising, but are they even covered? I understand that there were letters released from superintendents. I recognize that. But the example I would give is that at that point there was no indication that any teacher in this province or any principal would do anything that was going to put students at risk.

Yet today at Ian Forsyth Elementary School, the fire doors were blocked by snow when the students arrived - an issue I've raised previously in this House. The accessible stairs that were put in for a student whose case I raised in the Legislature in the last session were blocked with snow. There is a stairway and ramp that are supposed to go into a classroom that are inaccessible because of snow. All along the outside of the school where the doors to the classrooms are - the only alternate exit - every single one of those doors was blocked; I'll table the photos of that.

What I want to know is, how is it possible that December 5th was a potential safety issue for students, when blocking of the fire exits and blocking of the accessible ramps and stairways at an elementary school is not a safety issue? It's a double standard. All it means is that that was a safety issue for political expediency.

As I talk about the school system and what the options were, I want to talk briefly about my own experience in the education system. Mine was not typical because I did not fit the mould, which I'm sure will surprise nobody here. I got that in first before I got heckled because I knew it was going to come. In elementary school, I was chosen last for sports. I was bad at every sport including dodge ball. I felt left out all the time and I don't know why. I had friends, but I still always felt unaccepted. In fact, I was terrible at sports and I still am. You don't want me on your hockey team - I'm going to tell you that right now.

AN HON. MEMBER: What about the Leafs?

MR. YOUNGER: I don't even think I could make the Maple Leafs.

But I found things to do. I was in school plays and I'm going to tell you how I came to know the school community. I was in Grade 5 and I had one of the leads in a school play at Christmastime, and my father died. The thing was, my father was very involved in the school. I was 10 years old and my father used to grow the plants for the Spring Fair and he

made this stand, that we still have in my mother's basement, and the whole bit to sell these plants. He was involved, and years later they would come to name a section of the library at Bel Ayr Elementary after him because of his contributions.

Everybody came out. I went a couple of weeks after he had died and still did the school play. The teachers were there, the friends were there, and it was how I came to really understand that, despite sometimes feeling left out there was this community. So even though I was terrible at sports and all those things, it didn't really matter.

At the time, the Dartmouth school system had a program called Full Time Enrichment, which was basically if you did well on these logic tests you could get put in this program. From Grades 6 to 9 I was in this program and there were a lot of people like me. Some of us didn't fit in as well - some did - and in a way I guess we were our own group IPP. It had pros and cons and to this day has pros and cons, but it was a way that the school system had found to allow people to excel in their own way and at the things that they were able to accomplish.

It was through the teachers that I met in those programs that I found the sports that I could do - even though I was still not great. I joined cross-country, which I could do - I just always came last, and I became a competitive kayaker. Those sorts of things I found because of them. I experienced school debating and that's where I found the interest in science and went on to Prince Andrew High School where I was fortunate and had many great teachers. This would surprise probably many of the people who I now hang out with who were friends in Prince Andrew, but it wasn't until I became an adult that I realized that some of those people felt they were my friends. Some of the people that I hang around with now from high school, I had no idea even liked me at the time. Maybe they didn't.

High school for a lot of people is a turning point and we only need to look at the connections that people have to their teachers. We often think about teachers as women - I think because the majority of teachers are women, as far as I know. But of course in my case, and I said I didn't quite fit the mould - because my father had died, in Grade 5 it was the male teachers who pretty much became role models. So some of those people I have seen over the years - like Rees Matthews, Cliff Coveyduck, Robert Dawson, Cliff Hutchinson, and a bunch of others who made a difference.

The thing was that for many students, high school becomes a defining time and that's where some of our greatest issues are, and greatest issues that we aren't addressing. Grade 10 was the year that I ran away from home, yet Grade 11 was the year that I won the National Science Fair. Then in Grade 12 I got scholarships because of those teachers, that helped me go off to university. There are similar stories all over the place to this sort of thing.

So I mention this because I think we are underestimating sometimes the role of teachers when it comes to the difference in any kid. I was the nerdy, geeky kid from the

single parent household who didn't feel they fit in. I wasn't rich. I wasn't poor. I didn't fit in any mould, but the teachers made a huge difference.

Teachers oftentimes spend more time with students than they do with parents, and we expect a lot from them. Increasingly, we're asking them to take on tasks that distract them from teaching. So today we learned that we are facing, on Friday, the first strike by teachers in this province in the entire 122 years of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

It was said before me that this problem didn't happen overnight. Nobody can sit here and blame this government and say all these problems are their fault. This has come a long way, but this is the chance to fix it. This is the opportunity to say we're prepared to actually fix this and start putting in place the supports and things that we know are needed today - not by setting up another committee. We've already had the committees. We have dozens and dozens of letters and reports from teachers who are all pretty much from across the province saying the same things about what is needed as the immediate steps. Where they differ is on some of the longer-term stuff, but there are immediate steps that are required.

So I sit here, and I ask, what is this legislation intended to solve? Is it classroom conditions? No, because it just sets up committees. I might add that one of the major committees in this was promised last December, so it wasn't a new committee in this last contract offer.

Maybe it's set up to solve wages and service awards. Yes, it does address that, but it strikes me that, in the many thousands of emails from parents, teachers and students, that that isn't what this fight has been about. Has it been a priority for a few? It probably has. There are 9,300 teachers, as far as I know, so I'm sure it was the number one priority for a handful, but that is so rare.

In fact, a lady from the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board - it's interesting because a lot of the letters I've received are actually from the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board. Her name is Amanda Hernandez, and I'm going to quote from the letter later too. She said:

Have you noticed that the things I'm asking for are strictly student based? Did I mention at any point a raise or other money for my pocket? No, because that's not what I'm fighting for. The future of this province means more to me than that.

I have tons of letters here saying the exact same thing. The Premier wrote a letter to the Speaker, which I can also table - I'm sure everybody has seen it by this point - in which he is asking for the Legislature to be resumed. In it he said: The withdrawal of services in our school system has caused harm to the learning outcomes, their university

and college eligibility, as well as their athletic aspirations. This is not acceptable and can no longer continue. Our students deserve better.

That was his reason for recalling the Legislature, but here is the problem. The legislation doesn't solve any of the issues that he has actually recalled the Legislature to solve. In fact, in the briefing the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development gave two days ago - with the sessions it's getting a bit tricky to determine - when she did that briefing, she acknowledged that in fact, there was no way to force teachers to take on the duties of extracurricular work, helping people at lunch time, coaching teams, writing reference letters, or any of those things.

Unlike what we've heard from the Premier and the minister that they want to get teachers back in the classroom, they have been in the classroom. In fact, they have been using all of their time to teach rather than just some of their time to teach. So from that perspective, from an academic point of view, students have actually had more teaching time, not less, which is sort of part of what we're all fighting for here - to have more focus on teaching.

I think the minister, to some extent, acknowledged a little bit of that when she said that, yes, maybe there is a problem with TIENET and all these other programs. I don't pretend to fully understand the issues of using TIENET and the others, but I understand they're an issue. I understand that they take time. I have friends across this province who are teachers who are entering grades - not just grades, but data that serves very little purpose - at 11 and 12 o'clock at night on a regular basis because that just happens to be when they finished everything else from the day.

I have friends who when work-to-rule stopped for a short period of time - and this was a term teacher who didn't even know if she had a job the next day, when she heard work-to-rule was going back Monday stayed up through Sunday to make sure all of the marks were entered into the computer system. That's the kind of dedication that exists.

We talk about this return to normal. If we think that stuff is going to come back, I think we better start thinking differently. Today I heard about a school where the entire school of teachers has said that they are not going to be doing anything but work-to-rule. If it's not in the contract or Education Act, forget it.

Another teacher, Aaron Peck, posted publicly - and I'm going to read you what he wrote because I think it's important it reflects quite a few letters I've received from teachers in every single part of this province:

Here is the new reality [the Premier] has created for Nova Scotia schools. I will do my job and not an ounce more. I will not volunteer my time. I will not do any extras at my job. I will not contribute my intellectual property to enhance or further my

profession. This means I will attend mandatory meetings and professional development, but I will sit quietly and do nothing. I will not supervise clubs or sports. I will not attend graduations, proms or any other extracurricular event. I will only work the required hours of my job. I will hang up the phone, stop what I'm doing and walk out the door when my shift is over. I will not buy school supplies or other materials to support my classroom. That is my employer's responsibility. I will no longer find work-arounds or use my personal data when things like wi-fi don't work. I will simply put in a tech request and teach. I will understand the contract to the letter and do absolutely nothing more than what it says. This is the result of infringing on my constitutional right to fair and collective bargaining as a member of a union.

I received his and it was the first one I had received and I said, wow, that's quite a statement. So then today I hear somebody say their entire school agreed today that they're going to be doing the exact same thing. Then I started getting letters from other teachers. Some of the other Opposition members have as well saying, no, this is going to be a permanent protest.

So what does that do? Did work-to-rule cause problems and issues sometimes? Sure. But let's all acknowledge that any kind of job action causes some sort of hardship. That's the point of a job action, but is it better to have a union or some other body say, this is the work-to-rule guidelines that everybody is going to follow or is it better to have a scenario where 9,300 teachers decide for themselves what they are and are not going to do? In every single class room you have a different experience. I actually think the former is probably better for students and if we are truly here for students, why don't we do the right thing for students and recognize that we actually can't solve the work-to-rule complaints because other than a couple of things (Interruption) I'm just going to take a break because somebody would like to make an introduction.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I would like to thank the member for this. It is my great pleasure today to introduce in the west gallery my wonderful, beautiful wife Katie Churchill, and for the first time to introduce our new three-week-old daughter, Cecelia Louise.

I just want to say this has been an incredible experience to become a father and it has given me renewed purpose in this Chamber and in life in general. I know that the love of my family will carry me through many obstacles that I will undoubtedly be facing in life. I do want the House to give my family a warm welcome, please. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. YOUNGER: Certainly I offer my congratulations to the minister and his family as well. There's nothing like having a baby in the Chamber to change the entire mood, all of a sudden, of everybody.

I was talking about what this potentially does and is it better for students with the legislation or without. Let's accept that everybody is here for the students. The government thinks we have to do this for our students and in the Premier's letter that I tabled, it said that our students deserve better. So does this make it better? I don't think it does. You now have 9,300 different versions of work-to-rule in the province. Is that better than having consistency and knowing what's going on? I don't see how that's possibly better. There were options, but they haven't been taken. I think that there are options the government could have taken to start recognizing some of the challenges and done some things which may not have cost money.

Let me give you an example. A good friend of mine, he's in a group, we go down and do a Navy SEAL obstacle race down in the United States. He coaches hockey and so forth, and he has worked with Sidney Crosby and Nathan MacKinnon and all these guys; in fact, he gave my son one of Sidney's hockey sticks the other day. He was one of the people who was really upset because he was like, the kids aren't getting to do the sports stuff. I said, okay, well, why aren't they? And somebody else said, why aren't the parents volunteering? He said, they are volunteering, but a teacher has to be there because it's a school team.

I don't know when this rule started. I can guarantee you teachers did not create it. My understanding is that it is some sort of strange insurance rule, but apparently if you have a sports team - and I assume it would be the same if you had a debating club or chess club or a theatre group - that you have to have a teacher supervisor present. So in some cases that teacher happens to also be the coach or the instructor, so they might be the hockey coach.

In other cases, I found that the teacher brings their books along, sits in the rink - 6:00 in the morning or on the weekend or in the evenings - because a teacher needs to be there because it's a school team. Now ask yourself: Is that really a good use of a teacher's time - keeping in mind that this is something that they're sort of "volun-told" or "volun-pressured" to do because without some teacher going, the kids aren't going to have their team. You can understand the pressure that might cause.

Wouldn't it be better to solve that problem around insurance? The Premier talked about athletic accomplishments - "athletic aspirations" were the words he used. Would it not be better to solve that problem as a gesture of goodwill to teachers and say we know some of you are still going to want to be involved in these things, but those weeks where you're sitting there and you have all this stuff to do, you have all this marking to do, we're

taking that pressure off. The parent and volunteer coaches can go coach - you don't need to be there. They can still be associated with the school. Why can't we solve that issue? That issue shouldn't cost a single dime to solve, but would help with the workload. That's just one small thing, but there are lots of things like that that are taking the time of teachers and putting pressure on them that doesn't need to be there.

In the bill that we have before us, one of the things the minister has done is taken away the two days that were offered, and nobody knew what they were. I agree with the Premier, it didn't seem like anybody wanted them. Somehow there was a miscommunication, misinterpretation - I don't know how they got there, but they got there, they didn't want them, they're gone. But they just took them away. They were willing to spend that money and now the government is not willing to spend that money.

There was a teacher who made an observation - and let's assume their math is correct for now - that the amount of money that those two days would have cost would have hired 122 EPAs. So let's say they were wrong because they miscalculated on benefits - let's say it's 100 EPAs, so we'll round way down. What is one of the biggest issues we are hearing from teachers in this province and parents? The lack of EPAs. Why does that matter? Well, we rightfully try to include as many people in classrooms, and I think that creates a very rich learning environment for students, but there are some people who require support to be there. That's just the way it is. They should be there, but they require the supports. So you have to ask yourself how somebody can be put on a high-needs IPP without having an EPA funded for that.

I have appeared at appeals for people at the Halifax Regional School Board to get them on IPPs, and I had actually always assumed until a couple of years ago that once you got on there, if you actually had a need for - if this was something that actually should have an EPA there that would come with it once it was approved. In fact, I thought that was why the board was so reluctant in approving them at the time, because they didn't want to have to then argue to get the funding for those positions. But it turns out that isn't the case at all.

Outside of the fact that EPAs are dreadfully paid, the reality is that it is almost impossible in some classrooms for a teacher to deliver the program that they are being asked to deliver without the proper supports in that classroom.

There are numerous stories of classrooms - in fact, there was one I got today where they had nine IPPs and 14 adaptations in one class, so that's 25 students right there. I don't know how many students were in the class, but let's say it was 30 because somebody in that class has to not be on an IPP or an adaptation, so let's say it's 30. That means 25 students in that class are not - 23, sorry. I was thinking in my head, that number's wrong, it's 23. So you have 23 students - that means that there are at least 24 lesson plans. Think about that. Can you imagine teaching 24 lesson plans? Split grades are hard enough.

In some places - I'm sure that in some of the more remote areas we probably have three grades that are split, let alone two. Just think about that for a second. Can you imagine having to create that many lesson plans and then not having sufficient EPAs? It's just crazy.

On top of that - I don't want to dwell too long on the no-fail policy, but I do want to point out something. The minister yesterday - or this morning really - in Question Period insisted that the no-fail policy has never existed. Almost as soon as she said that in Question Period, emails over here started going off as teachers sent us the no-fail policy from her own website.

I looked at it and it relates to, again, IPPs and adaptations, and so what I think appears to be happening is - and I have to look into it further because granted this was less than 24 hours ago - we're playing at semantics. You've got a class that, say, for the sake of argument, has 30 students. There are 23 students on adaptations and IPPs, which means there are 23 students at least who fall under the no-fail policy. That's pretty much a no-fail policy.

If that understanding is correct, then is the minister correct that there isn't actually a no-fail policy? Well I guess technically she's correct, but the reality of the situation is not that. The reality of the situation is that there is, in fact, a no-fail policy that applies to a heck of a lot of students, if not all students because you can then imagine - why would you as a teacher want to fail your students who are not on IPPs or adaptations while moving on the other ones? I mean, you're just going to create a whole bunch of other issues.

I spoke last night in both Question Periods about another issue in the classroom that I think could be solved today. I don't know whether it will take some money, but on this one I don't care, and that's violence. If anybody is willing to stand up and argue that if it takes money to end violence in classrooms, that they're not willing to support it, I can't wait to have that debate.

In 50 seconds or 45 seconds or whatever you get in Question Period it's hard to go through all the examples, so I'd like to read a few of them:

At 17 weeks pregnant I was assaulted by a student. I was thrown into a locker. He then took a binder and continually hit me in the stomach. The student was always supposed to have two people with him.

When I worked in junior high at a learning centre, I had a microwave thrown at my head. The student literally ripped the microwave out of the wall and threw the microwave. The student then turned, attempted to grab the live wires, and with the two of us in the room we had to evacuate the rest of the students.

The answer to that was not something through the code of conduct. It was, you knew what you were getting into when you took this job. I don't know why that's okay. I don't know why we're not saying that - again, even as a gesture of goodwill we're going to make it a priority to address that. Why is that okay for the other students in the class? And don't for a second think, oh, this is students with disabilities because it's not. There are violent incidents from students regardless of whether they have a disability or not. There are students who are not on any kind of adaptation or IPP at all who can be just as violent towards students because that's just what they are and they know they can get away with it.

There are a few problems. One, it labels all students with that by saying they're all bad students. We've seen those movies about the teacher that goes - in fact, *Waging Peace* is a documentary that was done about a junior high school in my riding, Caledonia Junior High, that Edy Guy-Francois came in and turned around because that was the situation there. Why did we go in and fix that school? Now that school is a well-performing school and yet we're not willing to address this when other teachers come forward.

This other teacher writes: Over the years I have had chairs thrown at me, buckshot thrown in my face. I've been sworn at, called names, and verbally abused by parents. I've had kids throw temper tantrums, a kid bring a knife to school and come to class high.

A knife is bad enough - today at Citadel High School there was a kid with a gun. We get reports of kids with a gun and we never know if that's true. They arrested the kid - 17 years old - arrested him in Dartmouth on Parker Street and he had a handgun. This is what we're dealing with in schools and yet a committee is the solution. Unfortunately, a committee is not the solution.

There are a lot of these stories coming from parents and teachers. I've read you a number of them from teachers and a couple from parents, and I want to read something from a student. I'm not going to read it all because it will take my entire time. I think she's still in the building somewhere, but you've all heard Kenzi Donnelly talk. In fact, she starts her note saying:

I know you're probably all sick and tired of hearing from me by now, but I guess if that's the case I'm doing my job. I'm a 17-year-old Grade 12 student at Prince Andrew High School and I started Students for Teachers.

She goes on to talk about the conditions that they're being faced with. She says:

The conditions we are being faced with in our classrooms far outweigh those of work-to-rule. We are not getting the best education possible when we are stuck with large classes. We need to have access to one-on-one time with teachers during class time,

which we are not getting enough of because of the data collection and the number of students in the class.

Let me tell you about the number of students in a class. When the new semester started up at Citadel High, there were math classes there with 49 students. That was more students in an almost brand new school - brand new to me - than there were desks. At what point did it become acceptable in this province to have classrooms where people have to do a version of the cakewalk to get a seat in the classroom? In what version of Nova Scotia did it become acceptable for kids to have to sit on the floor in a classroom because there weren't enough places for them to sit? It's not the only school.

I heard that and I went, that's a one-off story, that doesn't happen very often. I've now been shown examples of that in high schools - high schools in particular - across this province. Why on earth is that okay in Nova Scotia?

That doesn't even get to the resources. I could talk for the next two days about stuff in the textbooks. I've had people send me scans of textbooks that are so - it's so sad you just want to laugh. Apparently, Pluto is still a planet in some of the science textbooks. In Grade 9 geography, Nunavut isn't a territory. We still have the Northwest Territories and Yukon. I'm sure the teachers correct that when they get to that and they say, no this is what it is. I honestly don't know offhand what year Nunavut became a territory but that was a long time ago.

So we've got to be able to replace those things and fix them. Sure, ancient literature and ancient European history isn't going to change a lot, so that's okay, but when it comes to science or geography - I mean, geography doesn't change that much, although lately it seems to be changing by the week in some parts of Europe.

Why are we giving people the wrong tools? What's going to happen when these people graduate and go to university or they go to community college or they go out into the workforce? I remember a couple of years ago I met with the DSTN folks - and I say that's funny because now here we're talking about yet another owner there. They said to me at the time when I was down touring - they were still making wind towers at the time - that the biggest problem they had was finding employees who were sufficiently literate to read the technical manuals. The biggest problem that this employer was having was finding people sufficiently literate to understand the manuals and the safety programs to build the wind towers.

Now we all know that in the case of that, finding employees didn't end up becoming their biggest challenge. We all understand that at this point, but the fact that was pointed out as an issue has got to point directly back to a failure in the education system. I can't imagine a world where even the world's most amazing and best teacher could possibly ever teach kids in a class when they have 23 or 24 different lesson plans; when they have children who deserve and have a right to and need EPAs and can't get them; when they do

not have the support of their principals or the Education and Early Childhood Development Minister to deal with violence; when they don't have the ability to deal with real everyday ongoing issues in the classroom; or when they have more students than they have desks. That is a classroom management exercise. That is not education. That is not teaching. And it's not right.

It is not fair to the students and if we are to believe that the reason we are here is because of the students and what is best for the students, this bill frankly does nothing to improve anything for students. We've had the committees. Time and time again we have not only had the committees, we've had the reports.

The minister has been the Minister of Education under two different Parties and had committees report to her, including the Freeman report earlier, which I know was not overly well received by many teachers, but what happened to the stuff they did like in that and that the public did like in that? Why didn't we have a discussion about that? Instead we're starting the whole process all over again, and in two years from now we'll say, well, maybe we need another committee. That's not going to be good enough. The problems are there now.

These stories about teachers and students experiencing violence in the classroom are happening this year - not 10 years ago. They're happening this year. The stories about Citadel High and other schools with more students than desks at periods - that's this year. That's within the past couple of weeks.

The stories that we are hearing from parents and teachers and so forth who have more students requiring EPAs but can't get the funding for the EPAs are happening now, and yet, hiring more EPAs is going to cost money, but has anybody ever figured out what the costs of not addressing these issues are?

I think this is a fight worth having. I truly believe that the foundation of the future of our economy - our health care system, our entrepreneurs, our inventors, our doctors, our lawyers, our welders - is all based on the fundamental of having a working education system and it doesn't work. The Premier believed that in 2013 when we were on the campaign trail. In fact, some of what I am saying right now are the very things that he was saying.

A lot of people today have argued about things like the constitutionality of the bill or is it going to go into court and is this fair treatment. All of those are legitimate issues. Easy to spend weeks and weeks on education here, discussing this. I am fighting this because the education system isn't working and I don't sincerely believe that it is working for teachers. I don't think it's working for parents, and I really don't think it's working for students. I don't think that's because of work-to-rule.

I think that's because there are issues that everybody seems okay with putting off for a year or two or three, and I'm just not okay with that. I wasn't okay with it in 2013 and I'm not okay with it now. I stood up here in Opposition when the NDP was in government and said many of the same things. I can't believe that I'm still saying the same things again.

In another stage of this debate I will get to talk about some of the other stories that people have sent me. I've got hundreds of them here, and that's just in the past few days. I could go back to the ones I've been getting since December, but that's just in the past few days stories people sending me, and I know other people are receiving them because I've seen your emails copied on them.

I'm going to leave this sort of where I started to say that I do respect the fact that everybody in here has the right to their own view on what's the best way to go here, but I also firmly believe that if you're prepared to support this legislation then you need to be able to write back to your constituents or call them back and explain to them why you believe in it. Don't ignore them. If you truly believe that you should be voting for this bill, then in your heart you should have no problem calling those constituents and explaining to them why you believe what you believe and why you're voting the way you do. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I would like to remind the honourable member for Dartmouth East not to use the term 'you' - speak directly to other members, putting your comments through the Chair.

The honourable member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg.

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take a little time to speak on Bill No. 75, an Act Respecting a Teacher's Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements.

There is not much left to say. We're getting close to the end of debate and there are many people in this room have expressed many of the concerns that we've all heard, but I think the one thing that we have to bear in mind is who this bill is going to have the most effect on. Who is it that will suffer from the consequences of this bill for many years to come? I believe that's the students of the Province of Nova Scotia - the young people who are in our classrooms who we hear time and time again are our very future. It is where we need to be.

We need to invest in education so that we can have a strong province, so that we can have a province that will stay vital and will be able to provide for our seniors as they grow old. Every report that is economic based on restarting our economy talks about the value in investing in education. Now we're at a point which I think is very sorry in our history.

I should do a disclaimer too. I have a daughter that's a teacher, but she doesn't teach in any of the boards that are affected by this contract. She teaches in a First Nation contract, but I have grandchildren that are directly impacted by what's going on here.

I think everyone that has been selected and given the privilege to be elected by their peers have to think about why it is that we're in this House of Assembly. How did we get here? We all had to put our names forward on a ballot and although we may be from different Parties, people chose to send us here to represent their ideas. Now we come to a time where we truly do need to have a free vote in this House of Assembly.

We have to think about how we got here. I know that I was lucky enough to be selected by a majority of the people in my constituency. Why am I here? I'm here to represent their views - not my views - the views of the people that took the time to go out and elect us. They are the ones that we're accountable to and responsible to. Mr. Speaker, when you have a piece of legislation jammed down people's throats, takes away the rights of individuals, that is something that we should not be able to support.

We have to remember what our role is. We are not here to fulfill the wants and the needs of any political Party. Yes we belong to a political Party. I belong to a political Party - I have for a long time - and I'm very proud of the fact that I belong to it. At the end of the day that's part of the mechanism that makes our democracy work, but it's not how I got here and it's not why I got here, and it certainly isn't the only thing that we need to take into account when we're voting on such a piece of legislation.

Like a lot of my colleagues I'm sure, I visited most of the schools in my constituency. I would have got to them all, but somebody decided they had to have the House back soon. There was an emergency, I heard. The only emergency was getting here before the snowstorm, but that's another story and we won't go there.

When I was there in those staff rooms, I listened to the teachers, I listened to their concerns. If you close your eyes, it could have been any one of those staff rooms because all of the concerns were there about the kids that they were helping to learn. It's a little bit ironic. Some people talked about money, about cost of living, but they talked about the challenges that they had or the things that they didn't have. They talked about attendance policies. They talked about discipline. They talked about inclusion. They talked about a no-fail policy.

Then yesterday in this House we heard the minister say that there is no such thing as a no-fail policy in the Province of Nova Scotia, and I have to tell you, that scared me. It scared me that we would have 9,300 teachers who believe there was a no-fail policy and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development of this province did not communicate that there was no such thing? There is something wrong with that. If anything, we should be scared about the fact that the information is not being shared with the people we represent.

If indeed this bill is going to improve the outcomes of our children in school, let's talk about it. One of the things that we talk about that we send children for is so they can learn how to do math and understand their alphabet and learn how to spell and all those things that go with it, but there are other things that you learn when you're in a school environment. There are social skills that you learn. You learn that it's important to be responsible, which is what I hope people will be when they vote on this bill - responsible to the ones who brought them here.

We learn in school to be sure that we know what it is like to work on a team, to work in a classroom situation where other children have challenges and they need help as well as you do. Those are the kinds of social skills that we have to be sure are developed. If there is a no-attendance policy and a person can miss 40 per cent of their time and still expect to be passed on and moved to the next level, you have to wonder what kind of a service you're doing to that child because when a child goes out in the real world and gets a job, they're actually expected to show up all the time.

If a child goes out and fails at a job that he's doing because he or she didn't show up or they're not living up to the expectations, they won't have a job - they will be failed. What we're saying in the system that's giving them the social skills and the needs that they have, we're saying in that system it's okay, you don't have to pass in your assignments on time, you don't have to be here all the time, and oh my goodness, it doesn't matter if you live up to what the expectations of the course are. That is a disservice to every child in the school system of the Province of Nova Scotia.

Then for the Premier to say, I want to get back to normal - what is normal? When I heard the Premier answering that last night, his normal was, well we had three agreements and we met with two different executives and we came forward with an idea. Well that's not normal. That didn't do anything to help the children or the people of this province.

When I talked to those teachers in the schools that I visited, in some of the schools they were two and three weeks ahead of where they were this time last year because all they were doing was teaching and they weren't being distracted by all these other things that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development puts on them.

For the Premier to say that children are not receiving an education is very disrespectful of the teachers that are doing their job. It is not fair to say they're not doing it. They were listening and doing what their job description required them to do, and children told us they were getting a better education. The norm is never going to be what it was in the past, but a bill like this will never make it better for the children.

I have written down some thoughts and ideas because I wanted to be sure to get them across to the people who are here. For example, there is a need for immediate change - not further committees and commissions to consider change. The education system in Nova Scotia has become one of accounting, not accountability. The teachers - who by

definition should be teaching - spend an unreasonable and unnecessary amount of time collecting and entering data, and that does not have a positive impact on student achievement. It is for the board and department that they're collecting information - information that I would call Pampers, because it's going to cover their backside.

We have become data rich and information poor, or what we refer to as DRIP. For example, Continuous Student Improvement (CSI) and Student Success Planning (SSP) initiatives have become exercises in data collection that must align with the board's business plan - not an education plan, but a business plan. That doesn't make any sense to me. This artificial endeavour has low performance targets and results in classroom teachers devoting time to top-down directives, time that should be spent with students. Professional learning community - or PLC - meetings consume infinitely valuable resource time that the teachers could better spend preparing for lessons and assessing student work.

The EECD has not produced any direct data that correlates with CSI or SSP to increase student achievement. What all that means is there are a whole lot of programs in place that have a direct impact on the learning ability of our children. The directives that come from on high are taking away resources from actual teaching.

Now, you have to wonder, you have to wonder why it is that teachers have to be involved in looking for an attendance policy. Why are teachers looking for a discipline policy? Why are they worried about this no-fail policy? Those aren't things that should be dealt with at the negotiating table. Those are directives that should come from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. They should be passed down to the different boards across this province, and they should be implemented by the boards uniformly right across the province so that everybody is dealing with the same situation. But for teachers to think that they have to sit down and negotiate tells you that indeed the program is failing.

There are so many other things. I got frustrated here last night when I asked the Premier a couple of questions about things that he has said in the past, and I'm prepared to table these. The Premier said in 2013 that the real foundation of any collective bargaining is the fact that the employer and the employee have to be at the table feeling equal, feeling that they are both feeling respected, and feeling that they are both having their voices heard. Well, the hundreds of emails that I've received - and I'm sure you've received - certainly don't reflect that statement by the Premier of this province.

He went on to say that in order for the agreement to have any kind of substance, both the employer and the employee have to feel valued at the end of the day when that agreement is finished. Well, here we are today doing a piece of legislation that is being jammed through the House of Assembly, that is taking away the collective bargaining rights of individuals.

Mr. Speaker, I come from the Island of Cape Breton where we had people like Bill Davis and J.B. McLachlan and Clarie Gillis. Those people fought for the rights of people to have collective bargaining unrestrained, and now we're here in the House of Assembly driving this through. It's not just about teachers anymore; it is about the whole collective bargaining process and who's next. The members of this House, all of us, will have to stand in our place and we will have to tell people how we vote. When we go back home, we're going to have to explain to the people that we represent why we voted that way.

Let's go back to the beginning. This is about our children. It is about the very foundation of making our province better than it is now. What have we decided to do? We have decided that indeed we're going to force a piece of legislation. Well, I'll make it very clear that this bill may go through this House, but it won't be going with a vote that I will be giving it. I will be voting against it.

I would ask each and every member of this House to think before you vote: is this a true reflection of what the people of Nova Scotia want; is it helpful for the people of Nova Scotia; is it important to the people of Nova Scotia; is it necessary for the people of Nova Scotia; and last but not least, is it kind to the people of Nova Scotia? I would ask each and every one of you to think before you vote.

MR. SPEAKER: If I recognize the Government House Leader it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving to close debate on second reading, earlier, around four o'clock this evening, I announced that the Law Amendments Committee would be meeting this evening beginning at 7:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. As well, I indicated that I would be introducing a motion regarding how the Law Amendments Committee will proceed tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, the Legislative Counsel's Office has advised us - which I've shared with both Opposition House Leaders - that there is a significant number of Nova Scotians who have asked to appear before the Law Amendments Committee and to be able to have their input on Bill No. 75. If we are to do the traditional means of Law Amendments Committee, which is in the Red Room, we do not believe we will be able to accommodate everyone who has made that request.

In consultation with both Opposition House Leaders, we have proposed that we would also be able to have the Law Amendments Committee and a subcommittee in the Committees Office, which is a normal meeting place for us, so that we could have as many people as possible coming to appear before the Law Amendments Committee, to make their concerns known to the government and to all members of the Legislature. This is

something new, but I think it's something that under the circumstances would certainly allow more Nova Scotians to be able to make that presentation.

Mr. Speaker, with the unanimous consent of the House, I would make the following motion:

Moved that

(1) There is hereby established a subcommittee of the Law Amendments Committee composed of five members of the House of Assembly named by the Government House Leader, two members named by the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and two . . .

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

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. You called on the minister to move second reading; that is a motion. There's a motion on the floor. This is all very interesting, but it has nothing to do with second reading of Bill No. 75, and it's not in order when there's already a motion on the floor to move second reading.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Government House Leader, were you just reading the motion and going to . . .

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, it will require unanimous consent, so obviously, this will be put to all members of the House.

Moved that

(1) There is hereby established a subcommittee of the Law Amendments Committee composed of five members of the House of Assembly named by the Government House Leader, two members named by the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and two members named by the House Leader of the New Democratic Party; and

(2) The Chair of the subcommittee is a member of the subcommittee named as the Chair by the Government House Leader; and

(3) The sole responsibility and the sole power of the subcommittee is to hear and question witnesses respecting Bill No. 75, the Teachers Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvement (2017) Act.

I would so move the motion and ask for unanimous consent on that motion.

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

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, there has been a motion to move second reading of Bill No. 75. I don't understand how we can push that aside and not have a vote on Bill No. 75. I would ask you to rule on that, please.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Government House Leader, I believe what we need is unanimous consent to suspend the second reading on Bill No. 75 to deal with your motion, is that correct? (Interruption)

The motion on the floor is second reading of Bill No. 75. If you want to table a motion to suspend second reading of Bill No. 75 in order to deal with your new motion, that would be the correct process.

To deal with your new motion, the House requires unanimous consent, and I've heard several nos.

The motion is defeated.

The motion we're going to deal with is to close debate on second reading of Bill No. 75.

The honourable Government House Leader.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, it is my pleasure to rise to close debate on Bill No. 75.

I think there has been a lot of discussion regarding this piece of legislation. It is certainly a difficult time for all members of the House, but clearly we have a situation where after three tentative agreements that were agreed to - not only agreed to, but in fact with the third agreement, the union executive boasted of all the gains that were made. The president was on social media the daily leading up to the vote arguing why this should be accepted by teachers, and yet it was rejected by an even greater majority of teachers, which we fully respect.

We have heard from parents, we have heard from teachers, and we have heard from students who have clearly said that work-to-rule was having a negative impact on the classroom and on the school environment. Many of them have told us we need to put an end to this and have supported our calls for legislation.

We have also learned while we've been here that even members of the Opposition have indicated that they've received more phone calls asking them to support our legislation than to actually vote against the legislation. (Interruption)

The member who said it will I'm sure be prepared to defend his comments, but the fact is, it's ironic when we hear the Leader of the Official Opposition saying how we should

be making decisions here in this House about classroom changes. How ironic when we have heard on so many other aspects the Opposition saying how we need to do more consultation with the people affected, yet in this case they say, here in the Legislature we know what's right for classrooms and we should pass it here.

In fact, he's brought in two pieces of legislation that clearly don't even say what it is that he's looking to say. (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Government House Leader has the floor.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I listened to the Leader of the Official Opposition when he spoke and I think the least he could do is show a bit of respect when others are speaking here in this House.

I'd have to say, if I was the member for Pictou East, I would be very quiet these days because considering how he has been called out for his comments earlier today that he has made, shame on that member for exactly what he has said. (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Government House Leader to direct his comments through the Chair please.

MR. SAMSON: Again, what we have allowed is a committee, which for the first time in our province's history will bring classroom teachers to that committee to talk about the main issues affecting the classroom.

I understand many teachers have said, we've seen too many committees, we've seen too many commissions. Obviously we've heard that, which is why we've put a firm date of April 30th for those changes to be put in place so that they will be in place for the next scholastic year beginning in September of this year. (Applause)

We have heard from teachers in all of our ridings who have told us, you need to be able to hear from current practising classroom teachers. They have made it clear that they don't feel that those voices are being heard at the school board level, at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development level or - they've been very clear - at their executive level with the NSTU. They feel that has not taken place and when we met with teachers and they asked, why aren't you talking to us directly? I said to them, because we're not allowed to - your unions made it clear that we are not to talk to members directly.

We have put in place with this bill an opportunity for classroom teachers - the breakdown has been provided by the Premier, nine teachers from Nova Scotia who are in classrooms at the different levels of elementary, middle school and high school that will finally be at the table to talk about exactly the issues that we have heard from them. By

having that date of April 30th I have confidence that those changes will be put in place and those will be real changes and they'll be changes that teachers have supported.

We know the issue that the union has now indicated that there is going to be a strike on Friday, which means that kids will not be in school. There is an opportunity with the consent of the Opposition to move this legislation faster, which would prevent students from not being in the classroom on Friday. We've seen that students have been out of the classroom twice this week - in some areas twice last week. The thought of being out of class again on Friday is not putting the best interests of students first.

There is an opportunity to change that. There is an opportunity to have this legislation passed before, to put an end to work to rule, which is what parents, teachers and students have been telling us. I would hope that the Opposition knows that if there is a strike on Friday and kids aren't in class, they bear responsibility for that. (Interruptions) They have the opportunity to change that and as a result they will have to (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Government House Leader.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, they will be the ones to respond to parents, teachers and students who want to be in class on Friday. There is an opportunity for that to take place. With that, again, we look forward to the Law Amendments Committee process. I will present my motion again, which I would hope the Opposition will accept to allow for more Nova Scotians to be able to present at the Law Amendments Committee tomorrow. With that, I would move to close debate of second reading on Bill No. 75.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 75.

There has been a call for a recorded vote.

We will ring the bells for 45 minutes.

[5:29 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips satisfied?

We'll now proceed with the recorded vote on Bill No. 75. I would remind all members, with the little bit of extra noise outside, please . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips satisfied?

We will now proceed with the recorded vote on Bill No. 75. I would remind all members, with the little bit of extra noise outside, please to remain extra quiet until the

vote is completed, and when it's your turn to say Yea or Nay, please state it loudly so the Clerks can hear it.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[6:15 p.m.]

YEAS

Mr. Churchill
Ms. Bernard
Ms. Regan
Mr. Samson
Ms. Whalen
Mr. Glavine
Mr. Delorey
Mr. MacLellan
Mr. Horne
Mr. Stroink
Ms. Miller
Mr. Hines
Ms. Diab
Mr. Ince
Mr. Kousoulis
Mr. Furey
Mr. Farrell
Ms. Arab
Mr. Maguire
Mr. Porter
Mr. Jessome
Ms. Lohnes-Croft
Ms. Eyking
Mr. Irving
Mr. Gough
Ms. Treen
Mr. Wilton
Mr. Rankin
Mr. Gordon Wilson
Mr. Mombourquette

NAYS

Mr. MacLeod
Mr. Dunn
Mr. Baillie
Mr. d'Entremont
Mr. David Wilson
Mr. Belliveau
Ms. Peterson-Rafuse
Ms. Roberts
Mr. Orrell
Ms. MacFarlane
Mr. Houston
Mr. Younger
Mr. Harrison
Mr. Lohr

THE CLERK: Those in favour of the motion, 30. Those against, 14.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

Order that the bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

We've now 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 decisions to build new schools must once again be made based on the needs of students not on the needs of the Liberal Party.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

EECD: SCHOOL CONST. - CRITERIA

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to stand in my place tonight to say a few words about something that this entire PC caucus certainly is disturbed about, the way things have been happening with this government over the past three-and-a-half years.

Nova Scotians expect their tax dollars to go to good use. They expect that the decisions made by elected officials are the best, most appropriate ones to address issues of infrastructure and program delivery. People trust that their government will be fair and responsible with their hard-earned money, and that doesn't appear to be happening with this government, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, this government has shown clear disregard for that with their choices for school construction. They have broken the trust of Nova Scotians.

The Auditor General, one of the most objective players in our democracy, noted the clear political motivation in the Liberals' choices for new school construction. In fact, he said he was at a loss to understand why this government made decisions to build schools in the Premier's constituency and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development's constituency. New schools that were low priority for the school boards were built in both the Minister of Education and Early and Early Childhood Development's constituency and the Premier's. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General wasn't the only one at a loss to understand these suspicious decisions.

Parents and students in Springhill couldn't believe the decision. They couldn't believe that they'd been overlooked again and again and again for a new school after being on the school board's priority list year after year after year. The Chignecto-Central Regional School Board requested that two elementary schools in Springhill be replaced with a single, new school the past number of years. People in Springhill are wondering why this government holds their children in so little regard, and I can't blame them. I'm sure if any MLA in the Legislature were to visit these schools, they would see the holes, the leaks,

and the disrepair in these schools. It's very obvious from a very quick look that these two schools need to be replaced with a new facility.

This Liberal decision is impossible to understand and even more difficult for this government to justify. In fact, no one can justify this decision. In fact, with all the spinning I've been hearing for the last couple of hours, I don't even think a person could spin a good story to justify this particular decision. Parents and students on the Eastern Shore don't understand this government's decision to overlook their kids and build a school to replace J. L. Ilsley High School. After all, Eastern Shore District High School was on the Halifax Regional School Board's priority list - J. L. Ilsley was not.

It's not surprising that the board put Eastern Shore District High School on the list. That school doesn't have safe drinking water. Imagine now, Mr. Speaker, a school in such disrepair and also not having proper drinking water, having to truck water in each and every day. Let that thought sink in. In 2017, in Nova Scotia, we are sending young people to a building that has contaminated water. That is simply disgraceful.

So, the hard-working people are left to wonder what is different between them and the people who live in Halifax Atlantic. What reason could possibly be given to veto the stated desire of elected school board members to build a school that they did not endorse? What reason can be given to condemn their kids to an education in a school without safe drinking water? How can this government justify this shameful situation? Those people don't have an answer, and there is no answer. There is no justification.

Last night, we heard geography might play a role in Liberal decision-making. Well, that's cold comfort to the people of the Eastern Shore and the people of Springhill. What about the parents and students of École Wedgeport? As my colleague, the member for Argyle-Barrington, highlighted last night, that school has been on the top of the list for CSAP schools for many years. That school has holes in the wall and other problems. Anyone with any common sense would take a quick look at that school and realize that it is a priority and it should be replaced. What geographical reason can be used to deny students of École Wedgeport a new school?

Like the Auditor General, I am certainly at a loss. After all, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development frequently states that the school board is the be-all and end-all decision-maker. But in the case of schools in her constituency, in the Premier's constituency, and in the constituency of the member for Halifax Atlantic, the Liberal Cabinet vetoed, overruled, and ignored the decision of the respective school boards. In one case, a board member told media that the government's decision perplexed them. I understand their confusion. The Auditor General is baffled.

But unfortunately, I think I understand the reasons for this cynical Liberal decision-making around school construction, Mr. Speaker. I begin by stating a fundamental political truth. Governments are entrusted with the privilege of acting fairly and in a responsible

manner. Governments should make decisions based on the needs of people they represent, not the needs of the people they sit beside at the caucus table.

I am very sad to say that this government has failed that fundamental test. I am sad for the parents, students, and teachers of École Wedgeport, Eastern Shore District High School, and Springhill. I am sad that the self-interested actions of this government are fuelling disbelief among Nova Scotians. This government has squandered an opportunity to do the right thing and soiled their legacy. That hurts every Nova Scotian.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my place.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

MR. JOACHIM STROINK: It's of great importance to have schools in our ridings, and it's important to speak about our schools and how important they are to our community. When we look at schools, there's a lot of things to be considered. There's student need, student programming, conditions of schools, the need for capital repairs, regional fairness, and submissions from the board. All these fundamental things make up the basis of what a school or a new school is being built to.

Let's go to regional fairness. I want to talk about a school that's being built in my riding, LeMarchant St. Thomas. After 13 years of promises from all political Parties, finally it's being built. Finally, the school is down, and it will be built up. You know what the beauty of the thing is? It's a full community engagement, and it took three governments to do that.

Let's talk about Frank H. MacDonald. That was a board decision to put two schools into one. That school cost \$5 million. That's showing regional fairness.

The Leader of the Official Opposition says that he's not getting any money for schools in his riding. There was \$9 million to the junior-senior in Springhill that was completed in 2014. That was an investment in his riding. In River Hebert, two schools were combined into one with an investment of \$12 million. That was completed in 2016. The funny thing is - maybe not the funny thing - in 2009, Springhill had an A&A, and the board said no to that A&A talking about regional fairness.

Let's talk about Bridgetown. It started under the NDP. They led community consultation, and even initial design phases were started. There were two A&As going there for two different schools. When the two schools were looking at it, they said, if you're going to do an A&A in each school (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable for Halifax Chebucto has the floor.

MR. STROINK: If you're going to do an A&A in each school, maybe it's cheaper to do one new school and amalgamate the two schools. Under the NDP, that's what happened. So thank you. That's how we got the school in Bridgetown.

Let's talk about something else here which is really interesting that this government has done - a maintenance capital fund of \$15 million. This capital fund is for school boards to apply for funding to fix their schools or help their schools. The Leader of the Official Opposition in his riding, if he's brought so many concerns forward about the Springhill school, then that school board has never applied for that money. So there is money on the table for him to look at and to represent so he should be able to do that.

With that, I guess the big, hot topic in this room is J.L. Ilesley - 16 years on the list for repairs. The board asked for a renovation, so what TIR did was they had a look at the school and said, how do we do this renovation? Well, you know what? The school is built for 1,000 people and there are only 600 people going to that school. Maybe to re-invest that whole school and build that school, then maybe the smart thing to is, well, why are we going to renovate a school that's for 1,000 kids if only 600 are going to use it? So why don't you put that money into looking at new schools for something that can be built specifically for that community?

The big aspects of it are - the windows were broken, asbestos, silica dust. I mean, we talk about water - silica dust, that's air, breathing. That can create health problems for these kids. Then we had loss of heat for two weeks. That's another example of why that school needed to come down. That school was in desperate need of repair or a new school.

The interesting thing is that this is about regional fairness. The riding of Halifax Atlantic is having a new school based on regional fairness and based on the need of a new school and the condition of that school and an unsafe place for those kids.

I also find it very ironic that in 2013 the Leader of the Official Opposition went to J.L. Ilesley, put his name on the petition saying we want a new school for J.L. Ilesley, I will do what it will take to do this to build this school. That was his name with 5,000 other people. That was the Leader of the Official Opposition.

The other interesting thing is in 2013, Darrell Dexter went to J.L. Ilesley with big fanfare to accept the petition and the promise of building a new school in the riding. Now we have the Progressive Conservatives, now we have the NDP . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto has the floor.

MR. STROINK: It's very ironic, you have the Leader of the Official Opposition, past Leader of the NDP both saying that J.L. Ilesley needs a new school - so were those political promises just for the votes? Sounds like it.

So how do we do this? Let's talk about that. Let's talk about the investments of schools in ridings for votes.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto has the floor.

MR. STROINK: So with school consultations we're getting the J.L. Ilsley project together and with that - J.L. Ilsley was number two on the list so I guess this is a thing that all Parties have stood there on the grounds at J.L. Ilsley and said, hey, we need a new school - and now you sit in the Chamber saying it's all about the votes. I think that's what you guys would say too. We're actually just committing to it because we're going to fix that school for that community.

So then the final thing that I have to say is under our wonderful friend John Hamm and his chief of staff at the time - I'm not sure who that was, but the chief of staff at that time who knows all too well about creating promises for schools (Interruptions)

It's interesting because John Hamm looking for votes promised 20 new schools just before an election just so he could try to get some votes. This is the kind of stuff that you're saying to us, but you're leading by example, and your Leader over there is great at doing that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind all members that the honourable member for Halifax Chebucto has the floor, and I'd like to remind the honourable member for Halifax Chebucto to direct his comments to the Chair - not to refer to other members directly.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto. Just a few more minutes, we're almost there.

MR. STROINK: I apologize. I just wanted to highlight the fact that the Leader of the Official Opposition under Hamm led that whole promises of schools - 20 schools - and he stood on the J.L. Ilsley property and promised that school. So I guess those are the things that we really have to discuss here today.

Going back to the fundamental aspect - and now I have a little bit of time so I want to talk about the wonderful opportunity that we're building in LeMarchant-St. Thomas and the development of the school, because that whole public consultation with the community was a great thing. We all reached together, we all worked together and we built this school. The community had so much impact and input into that school, from the design, the colours, the gym, the glass, all that kind of stuff. I look forward for the member for Halifax Atlantic, that he will get to go through that experience to build a school that will help his community to be better.

Do you know what? That's exciting. Those are the things we do because we committed to this project with the utmost responsibility that this is the right thing to do because it is a desperate need for that community. That community is growing, that community has more kids being active. They need this facility, they need this new school because this is the hub for them and this is about regional fairness. You know what? That is why we are committing to this project.

Mr. Speaker, for those short words talking about the importance of regional fairness in building a new school, because with taking that into consideration, regional fairness occurs everywhere, in everybody's riding - we've all had opportunity to have schools in the riding so thank you very, very much.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: It was very entertaining to watch the member for Halifax Chebucto stand, with so much pent-up energy, to talk about fairness. He sits on his hands all day when this bill is before the House he has nothing to say, nothing to say about teachers, not one word to say about teachers and he wants to stand up and talk about fairness now. Isn't that interesting? I wonder what he would say to the people of your fine constituency who are also waiting for a high school - built in 1965, they can't even drink the water. They spend \$50,000 a year to bring water in but it's more fair for his buddy over there to get J.L. Ilsley for some reason but not you, Mr. Speaker. I feel sorry for you.

What we should do if we want to have a fulsome discussion about fairness, we should talk about the process because this member and his caucus think they are the ones who can decide what fair. They are the ones who can opine on where a school is determined - not the school board, not the people on the ground, they have nothing to say about it. So the people in the school board, the people in the community, the people in the school board . . .

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

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The school boards determine the needs of the communities, not the MLAs, not the people who are in this Chamber. They don't have the right to determine what is fair. Just because you are sitting at the Cabinet Table doesn't mean that you determine what's fair.

Talk about regional fairness, the member doesn't understand the value of a school to every community and for him to take a community out in isolation and say, well, they really need a school, it's only fair to do that - it is completely lost on him. He is in a complete little vacuum, which is the issue with this government. He doesn't understand that there are communities all over this province that need schools, all over the province.

For him to sit here in this Chamber and say that he can determine what's fair is completely laughable.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you would completely sympathize, given what has happened to your community, where they also deserve a school, just like all the other communities that want one. Imagine going to the people of Eastern Shore, and this member would walk over there with you, perhaps, hand in hand and say, people, you don't need a school but these guys over here do because . . .

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

MR. HOUSTON: The Speaker's people deserve to have their feelings expressed, just like the people in Cole Harbour, who are sitting in Cole Harbour watching a school being built in Eastern Passage that most people don't want. They don't even want the school. (Interruptions)

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

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people from Eastern Passage who have reached out to us say how saddened they are about the politics of a new school there that will completely decimate the existing schools - the programming won't exist. It's going to be a completely sad day. It's going to be a failure.

So, we can look at what this government does. The member can stand there and talk for his seven minutes. I can't believe he talked for - he almost made it for 10 minutes. He wants to stand up and lecture us about fairness. He wants to talk to us about how he knows what's fair. Perhaps what he might want to do is look over his speaking notes, which somebody handed to him, and ask himself: If so many politicians made these promises, I wonder why the schools didn't get built? Could it be that the school board stepped in . . .

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

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can sit in this Chamber and we can talk about how we're broke and we have no money, but the people can see through that. They can see through a government that's broke and has no money for evil, greedy teachers and no money for those nasty, dirty nurses and that dirty film industry. Oh, we have no money for that stuff, but you know what we do have money for? What we have money for is a school in the Premier's riding that nobody asked for - except probably the Premier. We have money for a school in the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development's area that nobody asked for, that the board didn't ask for - except the minister might have wanted it. We have money to build the J. L. Ilsley High School, which no doubt the

community needs. Lots of communities need schools, lots of communities (Interruption) Wedgewood is one.

Maybe it's lost on the members what happened in River John, what happened to that community. It's a little tough for the people of this province to fight so hard for their schools, to fight so hard for the thing that keeps their community together and then turn around and watch this government build a school in Eastern Passage, build J.L. Ilsley High School, build a school in Bridgetown - to say to the people in River John and in Wedgeport and in all the communities around this province, we have no money for you.

It's just a little bit rich when we have the minister stand up and say, I can't speak to that because it's the board. Now the board is recommending schools, but it doesn't matter what the board says; it's only what the Cabinet wants. Anyone who wants to sit in this Chamber and try to defend those schools and try to advance the position that there's no politics under this government in the building of schools - nobody believes you. We know what's happening here and the people of the province know what's happening. Maybe the member will stand up again tomorrow and talk about the bills before the House and talk about some of the teachers. I'm sure he probably won't, but he had a lot to say on the subject of fairness tonight.

I just can't sit here and listen to that type of talk about fairness when we know what's happening in communities all across this province who are in desperate need of money to be invested in their schools, who are in desperate need of new school construction. They're all very valiant needs, all very admirable causes, so when there's a scarcity of capital, you have to make good decisions based on objective information.

That objective information, I would submit to this House, comes from the board. The board is looking at their needs, and then when the boards are putting their priorities list forward to the government - to the various committees there, Finance and Treasury Board, wherever - they are supposed to aggregate those and fine-tune it down to the provincial needs. Why are they aggregating down and picking schools that aren't on any list to begin with? Fairness is not part of that equation. That's a subjective discussion. We can just call it what it is, because it's not right. (Interruption) My colleague has another word, but I won't use it, Mr. Speaker.

We will sit in this House for the next two days - three days, four days, I don't know what stunts might be pulled here - and we will talk about "fair." I've been speaking against a bill today because I don't think it's fair. I don't think it's fair to the children of this province, and I don't think it's fair to the teachers of this province, and I don't think it's fair to the families of this province. It's not fair to anyone.

When we're talking about the education system and the delivery of curriculum, we need to talk about the environment and the building. So tonight it's fitting that we're talking about school buildings. It's fitting that on the day that this government - every single one

of these members stood in their place and said, yes, we support this legislated contract. Every single one of them, and without hesitation, I may add. On the same day they did that, they want to stand up here and say, what we do is fair in the new school construction process.

I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, what every Nova Scotian would say: it's not. We know it's not, and we're going to call it what it is.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What a show, what a show. When I listen to the member for Pictou East speak, my favourite part is that he likes to scan the crowd to see who's up there. (Interruption) I have two minutes, so you're going to sit here and listen. We are sick and tired of people like you telling us that our community isn't (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order. Order, please.

I'd like to remind the honourable member for Halifax Atlantic not to refer to (Interruption)

Order, please.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're a joke.

MR. MAGUIRE: I'm a joke? Is that what you said? That's out of order.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's a joke.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic will come to order.

MR. MAGUIRE: First of all, Mr. Speaker, he called me a joke. I want an apology.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

AN HON. MEMBER: He initiated it, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Do a point of privilege.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic, with 10 seconds.

MR. MAGUIRE: I would just like to say this. The member for Pictou East is that type of person. He's not driven by values. He has you all fooled. He's driven by power and

votes and will stick his knife as deep as he can into the member for Cumberland South and his position.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

That concludes our time for late debate tonight.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, based on discussions that were had with the Opposition House Leaders regarding Law Amendments, the fact that we are going to meet this evening from 7 to 10, I am advised that that entire slot has been filled by Legislative Council, so you are able to contact people in time to appear tonight.

There are still a significant number of people who have asked to present tomorrow. Therefore, we have proposed and have advised the Opposition House Leaders of a suggested method of having more people be able to make presentations to the elected officials here in the Chamber by having a subcommittee meet in the committees room while we're having the traditional Law Amendments in the Red Room.

Mr. Speaker, in order for this to be agreed upon, it does require the unanimous consent of the House. I will ask for that once I read the motion. The motion is that . . .

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Rule 32(1), notices of motion require two days' notice, other than prescribed in Rule 5C(2). No notice of motion has been given in accordance with Rule 32(1). Also, notices of motion, according to the routine proceedings of the day, have passed for today.

According to Rule 33, which allows waiver of notice of motion under unanimous consent, it appears that the Government House Leader was seeking to utilize Rule 33 even before seeking consent and waiver to return to Notices of Motion.

So let's address that. The notice of motion - the unanimous consent to return to Notices of Motion was not given and will not be given. As such, the motion to split the LAC into two committees is out of order. Should the minister wish to table such a motion, he can use 32(1) in the next routine proceedings.

MR. SPEAKER: The minister is seeking unanimous consent to waive the two days' notice.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. MICHEL SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I will read the motion now.

Moved that

(1) There is hereby established a subcommittee of the Law Amendments . . .

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. ANDREW YOUNGER: You also need unanimous consent to revert in the order of business in order to move the notice of motion in the first place. Unanimous consent first has to be asked to revert business back to motions and then, if that is given, he can move another motion and reading it, then asking for unanimous consent.

MR. SPEAKER: That is, in fact, one way to do it. Another way is to seek unanimous consent.

The honourable Government House Leader.

MR. SAMSON: Mr. Speaker, I will now get to the motion in question.

Moved that

(1) There is hereby established a subcommittee of the Law Amendments Committee composed of five members of the House of Assembly named by the Government House Leader, two members named by the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and two members named by the House Leader of the New Democratic Party; and

(2) The Chair of the subcommittee is a member of the subcommittee named as . . .

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Again, Mr. Speaker, he should be asking consent whether he can consider the motion to begin with. I would think that that would be in order before he would even read his motion.

MR. SPEAKER: What the honourable Government House Leader is attempting to do is to inform the House as to what he is seeking the consent form for. (Interruptions)

The honourable House Leader of the New Democratic Party.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader tried to do that on a motion for second reading for Bill No. 75. To us, in the daily routine, there's an

ability for the Government House Leader or any member of the House to move a motion to hopefully have something changed, a rule change or a committee change.

I would assume and I would think that you would actually have to have that consent prior to going back to reading a motion that would fall under the daily routine.

MR. SPEAKER: The reason it was dispensed with earlier was because there was a motion on the floor. What the Government House Leader is trying to do now is inform the House as to what he is seeking unanimous consent for.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, the Leader in the House of the NDP tried to put a motion earlier today which you ruled out of order because it did not come with notice under Notices of Motion. This is the exact same situation, and I ask you to consider your earlier ruling and make a ruling consistent with that one.

MR. SPEAKER: I'm going to let the Government House Leader finish reading the motion, then I will seek unanimous consent to entertain a vote on the motion.

The honourable Government House Leader.

MR. SAMSON: I will get to the motion again.

Moved that

(1) There is hereby established a subcommittee of the Law Amendments Committee composed of five members of the House of Assembly named by the Government House Leader, two members named by the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and two members named by the House Leader of the New Democratic Party; and

(2) The Chair of the subcommittee is a member of the subcommittee named as the Chair by the Government House Leader; and

(3) The sole responsibility and the sole power of the subcommittee is to hear and question witnesses respecting Bill No. 75, the Teachers Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvement (2017) Act.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to seek the unanimous consent of the House to have this motion approved.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed? I heard several noes. The motion is tabled. (Interruption)

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. JAMIE BAILLIE: You can't table a motion that is out of order. You asked that he read it so you could consider whether it's in order. I submit to you that now that he's read it, it's still not in order. You can't table a motion that's not in order. It's the same as what happened to the Leader in the House of the New Democratic Party earlier today.

MR. SPEAKER: I accept your point of order. My error. It is not tabled.

The honourable Government House Leader.

MR. SAMSON: It's unfortunate all Nova Scotians won't have the opportunity to present tomorrow because of the opposition (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

MR. SAMSON: As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's quite unfortunate that what would have been a (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

MR. SAMSON: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. As I said it is unfortunate that all those who were seeking to make presentations have been denied by the opposition.

That concludes the government's business for today. The House will meet again on Thursday, February 16th, from the hours of 9:30 p.m. until 11:59 p.m. As indicated earlier, Law Amendments is going to be meeting starting at 7:00 p.m. this evening in the Red Room and will start again at 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 16th.

With that, I move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow night, Thursday, February 16th, at 9:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for adjournment for the House to meet tomorrow night, Thursday, February 16th, from 9:30 p.m. until 11:59 p.m.

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

The motion is carried.

The House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9:30 p.m.

[The House rose at 6:58 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 894**

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas Dartmouth East resident Chris Blonde saw the need for all natural dog treats made with human grade ingredients and founded Blondie's Dog Treats; and

Whereas since May 2015, Blondie's has created low calorie, crunchy treats like Carrot Chips, Pumpkin Bites and Sweet Potato Fries; and

Whereas Blondie's products are now sold in almost two dozen retailers in the area;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Chris Blonde and wish Blondie's Dog Treats continued tail-wagging success.

RESOLUTION NO. 895

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas the Forum for Young Canadians is a non-partisan program for youth aged 15 to 19 founded by the Foundation for the Study of Processes of Government in Canada; and

Whereas the Forum runs three week-long sessions where youth develop leadership skills and to learn about how government and parliamentary democracy works; and

Whereas Dartmouth East resident Kenzi Donnelly, a Grade 12 student at Prince Andrew High School is one of 300 Canadians accepted to attend the forum;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Ms. Donnelly and wishing her a once in a lifetime experience.

RESOLUTION NO. 896

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council's mandate is to encourage and promote both the craft movement in Nova Scotia and the public awareness and appreciation of craft products and activities; and

Whereas each year more than 199 of the finest craftspeople in our region come together to exhibit their work; and

Whereas in November 2016, the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council celebrated its 40th Anniversary as a registered non-profit organization;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating the Nova Scotia Designer Crafts Council and its members and wish them all the success in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 897

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas Matt Albright is a native Dartmouthian and attended Prince Andrew High School; and

Whereas Matt at 6'5", 295 lbs., is an offensive lineman who played at Saint Mary's University and has enjoyed four years in the Canadian Football League; and

Whereas Matt and his team the Redblacks ended a 40-year championship drought in Ottawa by beating the Calgary Stampeders 39-33 in the 2016 Grey Cup;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Matt on his team's thrilling overtime Grey Cup win.

RESOLUTION NO. 898

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas for seven years, Aviva has been investing in charitable community initiatives across Canada; and

Whereas the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre is a welcoming space where people come together to grow, cook, share and advocate for good food; and

Whereas Aviva recently recognized Dartmouth North CFC with a \$100,000 grant;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Dartmouth North CFC and wishing all Dartmouthians good food in the future.

RESOLUTION NO. 899

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas John Burton joined the staff at the Boys & Girls Club at the tender age of 24; and

Whereas for over 20 years, John has been a champion for children, youth, families and the community, and was involved in the building of the East Dartmouth Community Centre; and

Whereas John has accepted a position with Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada as the Regional Director of Atlantic Canada and will oversee a total of 26 clubs throughout the four Atlantic Provinces;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking John for dedication to the community and wish him well in his new position.

RESOLUTION NO. 900

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas CPO2 Sean Kelly will retire from the Royal Canadian Navy on February 28, 2017, after more than 25 years of dedication and loyal service to Queen and country; and

Whereas CPO2 Kelly enjoyed many tours aboard several HMC ships and participated on numerous overseas deployments throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East; and

Whereas CPO2 Kelly was nominated as a member of the Order of Military Merit;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Sean and wishing him a wonderful retirement with wife Michelle and their fur-babies.

RESOLUTION NO. 901

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas the 2017 Canada Games, this country's largest multi-sport event for young athletes will welcome over 4,000 athletes and coaches; and

Whereas Dartmouth East resident Elisabeth Heroux-Rhymes has been selected to the Nova Scotia Canada Games Volleyball team;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Ms. Heroux-Rhymes and wishing her well in Winnipeg in August at the Canada Games.

RESOLUTION NO. 902

By: Mr. Andrew Younger (Dartmouth East)

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

Whereas the Horatio Alger Association of Canada recognizes Canadians like Wayne Gretzky, Alain Bouchard and Jim Pattison who have demonstrated perseverance and achieved great success in life; and

Whereas since 2012, the association has awarded close to \$2 million in annual scholarships to students in financial need who have overcome significant adversity while demonstrating strength of character, strong academics and a desire to contribute to society; and

Whereas Jessie Christie, an East Dartmouth resident who attends Prince Andrew High School has been awarded a \$5,000 Horatio Alger Canadian Scholarship this year;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Ms. Christie and wish her well with her post-secondary education.