



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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First Session

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2018

Sixty-third General Assembly

First Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Mr. Chuck Porter, Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

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

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition whose operative clause is:

“Therefore, the people of Nova Scotia demand that the Nova Scotia Government and all Members of the House of Assembly act in the best interests of students and the public education system and refrain from implementing the recommendations of the ‘Raise the Bar’ report.”

There are 1,500 signatures, Mr. Speaker, and I have affixed my signature, as per the rules.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table another petition, whose operative clause is: The citizens of Cumberland County, who drive Route 302 from Southamptton, north to the intersection of Trunk 2, demand that the service be on the same entire route and be equal to the service on Trunk 2, as they are rated for the same level of service.

Mr. Speaker, may I start over?

MR. SPEAKER: Certainly.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I apologize. I beg leave to table a petition whose operative clause is:

“Residents of Cumberland County deserve safe and reliable roads. In December, Rainbow Bridge was deemed unsafe and shut down. Residents have been told it will take up to two years for the bridge to be repaired. That is unacceptable. The detour suggested by the department is a Band-Aid fix.

Therefore, we the undersigned request the provincial Liberal government immediately start repairs on Rainbow bridge and have a passable bridge and one that can take commercial trucks in place as soon as possible.”

There are 4,261 signatures and I have affixed my signature, as per the rules. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 1024

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas today we recognize International Women's Day, and for Nova Scotia, a special anniversary in 2018, marking 100 years since both the beginning of the right to vote for women in Nova Scotia and the right for women to run for elected office; and

Whereas from when the legislation was passed in Nova Scotia on April 26, 1918, to the progress of the present day, the hard work and the courage of those individuals dedicated to advancing the rights of women continue to shape our society; and

Whereas while there is much more to do, Nova Scotians can acknowledge the proud achievements of the Nova Scotia Legislature, where more women are sitting in this Chamber now than ever before, more women leading Cabinet portfolios in our province than ever before, and that Nova Scotia has reached gender parity on the Provincial and Family Courts;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly recognize International Women's Day in Nova Scotia, celebrate what has been accomplished for women in our province and around the world, and dedicate ourselves to continue the important journey of equality in Nova Scotia.

Of special note, Mr. Speaker, may all members of this House on this day not only remember our mothers and recognize our mothers, but also our daughters. This is an important day to recognize the tremendous journey they have been on to shape this province and our country for the better.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

HON. LENA DIAB: Before I read my Government Notice of Motion, I ask to make an introduction of a number of people in the gallery.

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MS. DIAB: Je voudrais présenter des invités parmi nous, s'il vous plaît. Je vous demande de vous tourner aux galeries là et là. J'ai le plaisir de présenter Jean-Marc Fournier, Ministre responsable des Relations canadiennes et de la Francophonie canadienne de la province du Québec. Avec lui sont Amélie Caron, directrice adjointe du cabinet Ministre responsable des Relations canadiennes et de la Francophonie canadienne de la province du Québec; Francis Paradis, chef de poste du Bureau du Québec dans les Provinces atlantiques. Aussi avec nous, on a Arnaud Claude, agent de projet Fédération culturelle acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Véronique Legault, directrice générale Regroupement des aînées et aînés de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Marie-Claude Rioux, directrice générale Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; et Giselle Thibault, agent de communication Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

S'il vous plaît, levez-vous et un applaudissement pour les invités.

A round of applause, please, to welcome them to the House. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

RESOLUTION NO. 1025

HON. LENA DIAB: Monsieur le Président, à une date ultérieure, je demanderai l'adoption de la motion suivante:

Attendu que les gouvernements de la Nouvelle-Écosse et du Québec ont signé le 20 décembre 2016 un accord de coopération et d'échange en matière des francophones; et

Attendue que par le billet de cette entente, nous contribuons au développement d'organismes acadiens et francophones en Nouvelle-Écosse et au Québec en soutenant des projets liés à la culture, à l'éducation, à la jeunesse, et au développement dans la petite enfance; et

Attendue que la collaboration ainsi établie contribue à la préservation et aux développement des communautés acadiennes et francophones de la Nouvelle-Écosse, à la promotion de la langue française et de la vie communautaire, et à l'amitié entre nous deux provinces;

Par conséquent, il est résolu que les députés de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour remercier le gouvernement du Québec, en la personne de Jean-Marc Fournier, Ministre responsable des Relations canadiennes et de la Francophonie canadienne de la province de Québec, pour son soutien à la francophonie de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Monsieur le Président, je demande l'adoption de cette motion sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas the Governments of Nova Scotia and Quebec signed an Agreement for Co-operation and Exchange on the Francophonie on December 20, 2016; and

Whereas through this agreement, we are contributing to the development of Acadian and francophone organizations in Nova Scotia and Quebec by supporting projects related to culture, education, and youth and early childhood development; and

Whereas this collaboration contributes to the preservation and development of Nova Scotia's Acadian and francophone communities, to the promotion of the French language and community life, and to the friendship between our two provinces;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking the Government of Quebec, in the person of Jean-Marc Fournier, Minister responsible for Canadian Relations and the Canadian Francophonie in the Province of Quebec, for his support of Nova Scotia's Francophonie.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 1026

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

Whereas Viola Desmond, a businesswoman from Halifax, is the first woman and person of African descent to be portrayed on the face of the new \$10 banknote being unveiled on International Women's Day, 2018, a momentous day to celebrate the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women around the world; and

Whereas, in 1946, Ms. Desmond rejected racial discrimination by sitting in an all-whites-only section in a New Glasgow theatre where she was arrested, fined, incarcerated overnight, and Ms. Desmond's court case was the first known legal challenge against segregation brought by a black woman in Canada; and

Whereas Ms. Desmond's story of bravery, courage, and activism were important factors in the eventual abolition of the Nova Scotia segregation laws in 1954, and helped change the course of Canadian history;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly please join me in appreciation of Viola Desmond for being an inspiration, and recognize that her challenges with racism, discrimination, and injustice have brought an individual to such heights, the individual who represented strength, character, dignity, resolve, and resiliency.

[9:15 a.m.]

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried. (Applause)

The honourable Minister of Justice.

RESOLUTION NO. 1027

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

Whereas Nova Scotia joins with others across the globe in marking International Women's Day, and in renewing our collective commitments to advancing the well-being of women; and

Whereas the Department of Justice has undertaken many initiatives to better support women in the justice system, including the delivery of free, independent legal advice for survivors of sexual assault, the hiring of two special prosecutors to focus on sexual assault cases, the launch of a second Domestic Violence Court in Halifax Regional

Municipality, and the delivery of trauma-informed sexual assault investigation training; and

Whereas these initiatives and many others, worked on collectively with community and justice partners, are making a positive impact;

Therefore be it resolved that we all join together here, and across the province, to continue to deliver programs, services, and supports to address all issues and barriers faced by women across the province.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 82 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008. The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting a District Energy System. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)

Bill No. 83 - Entitled an Act to Make Universities and Colleges Safer Places. (Ms. Lenore Zann)

Bill No. 84 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008. The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting Bonus Zoning (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)

Bill No. 85 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1998. The Municipal Government Act, Respecting Cape Breton Regional Municipality. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)

MR. SPEAKER: Ordered that these bills be read a second time on a future day.

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**DALLING, LEE ANN (PICTOU):
WORLD-CLASS POWERLIFTER - INSPIRING**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, Le Ann Dalling spent her entire life facing and overcoming challenges that most of us can't even imagine. Although she was a thalidomide child, she tackled her challenges with determination and hard work, and climbed great heights in the world of powerlifting.

Pictonians were inspired by an excellent athlete who never became discouraged, and would never give up her hopes and dreams. In 1996 she won the silver medal at the Worlds in Denmark, and in 2005 she won the bronze at the Worlds in Sweden. Dalling continued to prove she was one of the best powerlifters with the World Master Championship in Miami, and a World Bronze in Germany.

Dalling was inducted into the Pictou County Sport Hall of Fame, joining her late father Bert, a former local hockey star.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**RCN WOMEN CDN. LEADERS AT SEA PROG.:
COM. LEADERS - THANK**

HON. LENA DIAB: Mr. Speaker, today marks International Women's Day, a day to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, but also to recommit, furthering the advancement of women and girls.

I was honoured this morning to recognize International Women's Day with the Royal Canadian Navy at the Women Canadian Leaders at Sea Program. I was proud to have been asked to attend and was pleased to have the opportunity to meet a host of Canadian leaders, successful women from academia, the philanthropic sector, and our business community.

I want to acknowledge and thank our hosts for this program: Rear-Admiral Craig Baines, Commander Maritime Forces Atlantic; Captain Guillaume Lafrance, Chief of Staff Maritime Forces; and, also, Lieutenant Commander Kray Robichaud, Program Director.

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

**LEAMAN, GRACE AND RADDALL, ELLEN:
INSPIRING VOLUNTEERS - THANK**

MS. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I consider it an honour and very humbling to work with so many strong and capable women here in Halifax and at home in Queens-Shelburne.

Today I recognize two very special young women who, on their own initiative, decided to become involved even more in their community, and have chosen to volunteer in my constituency office in Liverpool. Grace Leaman, a Grade 10 student, was a valuable member of my campaign team and continues to give of her time each week, and Ellen Raddall, Grade 9, has completed her community hours for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Program, and has decided to continue volunteering in her rare spare time.

These two intelligent and capable young women inspire me to work even harder in what I do, and I'm thankful for their help and their support.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

NEON DREAMS DOUGHNUT: ADSUM FUNDRAISER - THANK

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, in honour of International Women's Day, I want to recognize the tremendous work of Adsum for Women and Children. With locations around the HRM, Adsum provides safety, security, and support for women, families, youth and trans people experiencing conditions of homelessness. Providing shelter for up to 80 people a day, and support for more than 1,000 people a year, Adsum takes up mantles like emergency housing and affordable housing, where our governments so often drop the ball.

I would also like to recognize the band Neon Dreams, who have teamed up with North End Halifax's Vandal Doughnuts in a fundraiser for Adsum. After the band vocalized public support for survivors of sexual assault by dropping out of its scheduled tour with Hedley, Vandal Doughnuts created a signature doughnut named after the band in an expression of support and solidarity. Today, proceeds from the sales of the Neon Dreams doughnut will go to Adsum House.

Mr. Speaker, organizations like Adsum and outspoken allies like Neon Dreams are helping shape a world where women can feel believed, safe, and supported. I want to thank them for their work and their allyship.

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

**LIVING OUTSIDE THE LINES ORG.:
SUPPORTS EXTRAORDINARY NEEDS - THANK**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I would like to recognize Robin Gushue, founder of Living Outside the Lines Organization, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to assisting families of children with extraordinary needs. They believe every child deserves an opportunity to lead a fully inclusive, accessible lifestyle.

Olivia, Robin's third and youngest child, was born with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, a neurological condition that affects muscle function and control. Robin originally began writing as a way to connect with other families, but it blossomed into an opportunity to advocate for inclusion, equality, accessibility, and awareness.

Living Outside the Lines Organization provides funding for specially-adapted equipment for most inclusive and accessible recreation programs and has a scholarship program for secondary education or training at accredited institutions.

I would like the members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in thanking Robin and Living Outside the Lines Organization for their caring and vision of a fully-inclusive community.

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

**LEGISLATION TO ABOLISH ELECTED SCH. BOARDS:
EFFECT ON WOMEN - SILENCING**

MS. ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, today, March 8th, marks International Women's Day, a day when the achievements of women throughout history is celebrated across the world. It is a day where friends, colleagues, and whole communities are urged to be motivated and engaged to be gender-inclusive.

It is therefore with a heavy heart that I witness on this day the third reading of an Act to reform the administration of the public education system in Nova Scotia, an Act that will abolish democratically-elected regional school boards in favour of one centralized, politically-appointed advisory council. The abolishment of these democratically-elected positions, the vast majority being women, directly contravenes the very spirit of International Women's Day.

I therefore stand today to let women across this province know that this member on this side of the House - the people's House - values their voices. It is our collective responsibility to make certain that no voice within a democracy is ever silenced.

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

**BLUECHARDT, DR. MARY:
MSVU PRESIDENT/VICE-CHANCELLOR - INSPIRING**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, today is International Women's Day. In my riding of Fairview-Clayton Park, there are so many women who inspire me and others every single day. I am choosing to recognize Dr. Mary Bluechardt, an inspiration to many women in our community.

Before becoming the president and vice-chancellor of Mount Saint Vincent University, Mary was named one of Canada's Most Influential Women in Sport and Physical Activity during her time as the National Director of Coach Development for Special Olympics Canada. Mary was responsible for coordinating over 10,000 volunteer coaches for over 30,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities across the country.

Apart from her work with Special Olympics Canada, Mary has been the recipient of many awards, including the YMCA Women of Distinction Award for Health and Wellness, and has been a guest of Team Canada at the Special Olympics. Mary's work is an inspiration to both the students and community at the Mount.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of this House today to commend Dr. Bluechardt for empowering people both in our community and across the country.

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

**MATHESON FAMILY - RECIPIENTS:
DAVE ARMSTRONG MEM. SPORTING FAMILY AWARD - CONGRATS.**

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Sports bring a lot of families and communities together, and I wish to acknowledge today a family honoured by the Truro Sport Heritage Society on March 4th with the Dave Armstrong Memorial Sporting Family Award. Three generations of the Matheson family of Brookfield have been involved in sports at local, provincial, regional, national, and international levels as players, both amateur and professional, and as teachers and coaches.

In 1965-66, five of six Matheson brothers played on the Brookfield Elks hockey team, and at least two of these, along with all four of their sisters, excelled at softball. Participation in later generations has been more diverse, expanding to include at least 11 other sports.

I wish to congratulate the Matheson family on the recognition that they so deserve.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

DAUGHTER: VOLUNTEER RN (MOROCCO) - PROUD

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to celebrate my daughter, who just turned 24 and is the light of my life. She is a graduate of St. F.X., as a nursing student, and is a full-time emergency room nurse at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital. The day she found out she passed her NCLEX was the same day I was elected.

For most of her life it was just her and me, which I'm sure you can imagine provided for some very interesting days. She is an independent, strong, and extremely caring young woman. Her 19 years of Celtic dance and her volunteering at nursing homes have helped to shape her into the remarkable young woman she is today. She spent much of her life visiting and spending time with her grandparents, and while her great-grandmother was hospitalized for months before her death, she didn't miss a day. It was then she decided that would be her path in life, and she just booked a trip to Morocco with other RNs to volunteer in an orphanage, to care and teach those children who lived there.

[9:30 a.m.]

Today and every day I celebrate her with pride, and look very forward to what's next for her. The opportunities are endless and she has only just begun. She is my greatest accomplishment and my biggest challenge.

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

**CALKIN, JOY (CHESTER)
- LEADER/VOLUNTEER: OUR HEALTH CTR. - CONGRATS.**

MR. HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day, I recognize the enormous contribution made by Ms. Joy Calkin to her community in Chester-St. Margaret's. Joy's original profession of paediatric nursing evolved into teaching at the University of Calgary where she eventually became Dean of Nursing followed by Vice-President Academic. It was our good fortune that Joy chose Chester as her retirement home. In 2007, she was a key leader of a volunteer committee with the goal of improving the health care in our local communities. From this initiative, and her countless hours of work, the group evolved to successfully fundraise, build, and open in 2017 the much needed Our Health Centre, or OHC.

The building is now a vibrant community centre with a family doctor practice, a brand new walk-in clinic and a multitude of health-related activities, including caregiver and grief support groups. Joy's love of people, her extensive knowledge of health care, and her dedication paved the way for this extraordinary accomplishment and I am privileged to have her sit on my constituency working groups for seniors and health care. I congratulate Joy on her accomplishments.

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

**N.S. COUNCIL FOR STATUS OF WOMEN:
UPLIFTING WOMEN/GIRLS - CELEBRATE**

MS. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, as we're all acknowledging, today is International Women's Day. I want to honour our Advisory Council on the Status of Women in Nova Scotia because not all provinces have one, and we're very fortunate that they are such a small and mighty group. It is not the same around the world, there are other parts of the world where women are not celebrated and not held up.

During a medical mission in Africa in January 2018, I had the privilege of working in one of the poorest places on Earth. When we offered the medical care, toys, and food to the villagers, the men and the little boys automatically stepped forward, and we had to push past them to get to those little girls who did not know that they had equal rights. We know there are little girls around the world who have acid thrown in their faces for simply trying to go to school. We need to keep lifting these women up in our lives, and to celebrate them and all of us every day.

The person I would like to acknowledge the most is my own mother, Marjorie Hare, who has persevered for my 55 years in trying to raise me up, and I've lived out her example of volunteering, but it will be hard to beat because she is, I think, up around 68 years as a volunteer in the community.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**ELECT FEMINIST WOMEN:
REPRESENT WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES - IMPORTANT**

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, when Alexa McDonough was first elected, there were no women's washrooms in the Legislature. Thankfully, there are now, but we still design political spaces and processes in a way that doesn't accommodate diverse bodies and experiences. We must rally around those progressive, feminist women who make that decision to enter public life, to support them by donating money, volunteering, and voting for them, so we can see more feminism expressed in all levels of government.

Why is it important for us to elect more feminist women? Because women's lives and experiences are different than men's. Because our issues and concerns will only be taken seriously in politics when women are taken seriously in politics. Why do you think we still don't have a national, quality, affordable system of child care in Canada? Why do you think that we don't have any parental leave provisions for sitting MPs or MLAs? When our democratic institutions reflect the diversity of our communities, so will our laws and policies. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

WILSON, LINDA (SHELTER N.S.) AND OTHERS - IMPACTFUL

MR. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day I would like to recognize a couple of special individuals. First of all, I would like to recognize Linda Wilson, former executive of Phoenix House, HomeBridge Youth Society, and now Shelter Nova Scotia. Linda has had a profound impact on my life, and the lives of thousands of Nova Scotians through the course of her career, which hopefully she will stick around for a lot longer. Linda has changed the lives of thousands of individuals, so thank you.

Also, to my patient, smart, caring partner, Rena, and my daughters Isla and Rufina. Isla and Rufina, on this International Women's Day and every day, I remind them they can be whatever they want to be. Thank you.

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

**SYLVESTER, CST. DARREN (WAGMATCOOK):
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT - THANK**

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, RCMP constable Darren Sylvester never wasted an opportunity to support Wagmatcook youth.

An RCMP officer for 18 years, Sylvester returned to Wagmatcook in July 2017, where his career in law enforcement began in 2000.

Over the past six months, along with coordinating basketball and floor hockey games with Wagmatcook youth, Constable Sylvester finds ways to encourage the strengthening of the bond between youth and the Elders.

Next month, the Grade six students in Wagmatcookewey School will have the opportunity to do that when Constable Sylvester takes the class fishing, and they will then prepare the meal for the Elders with their day's catch.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking Constable Darren Sylvester for all that he does for youth in Wagmatcook and beyond.

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

**ELIZABETH FRY SOC. - HOLLY HOUSE:
HOUSING FOR CRIMINALIZED WOMEN - THANK**

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, in honour of International Women's Day and as NDP spokesperson for the Status of Women, I would like to talk about the powerful work being done by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia through Holly House in Dartmouth South. Holly House is a transitional housing facility for women exiting prison and jail, operated by the Elizabeth Fry Society.

One risk factor for women in the justice system is the lack of affordable, safe, and stable housing. Elizabeth Fry Society works to fill the current housing gap experienced by women coming out of prison and jail. Up to eight women have access to affordable housing at Holly House with on-site support. It is an integral part of the justice system, and operates with only three staff.

I'd like to just take this opportunity to thank the Board members and the staff of the Elizabeth Fry Society for their commitment to this difficult and essential work.

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

**BOUCHER, JACQUIE (METIS ARTIST):
UNION OF ART AND PSYCHOLOGY - RECOGNIZE**

MR. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, Hammonds Plains resident Jacquie Boucher is a Métis artist who was born in Alberta and moved to Nova Scotia 16 years ago to attend NSCAD, where she took her Bachelor of Design, and subsequently studied at Dalhousie and Athabasca Universities to obtain her BA in Psychology. She believes that art and psychology go hand in hand, both as a way of expressing ourselves and to understand our thoughts and others' perspectives.

Her paintings are currently hanging in private galleries across the country and in the United States. Jacquie has several scholarly articles and research papers published in mental health literacy, and self-help among adolescents and First Nations.

I ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in recognizing Jacquie Boucher on her success and to wish her continued success in her chosen career.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend a happy International Women's Day to my mother, my girlfriend, my grandmothers, my cousins, and all women everywhere.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

CHANGEMAKER WOMEN: BROADENING OPPORTUNITIES - THANK

MR. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, today on International Women's Day, I rise to honour the amazing women who are changing the world every day. From MLAs to doctors, tradespeople to CEOs, stay-at-home moms to paramedics, teachers to administrators, airline pilots to health researchers, women are breaking down barriers everywhere you look.

I want to thank the change-makers for giving me confidence that as my daughters grow up, they will have more opportunities than the generation before them. Let us thank the amazing women who make life easier for those around them every day, and thank you for all that you have done to make sexism a thing of the past. As my constituent assistant always reminds me, the future is female. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

WOMEN/GIRLS WHO INSPIRE AND SUPPORT - THANKS

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day, I want to express my gratitude to five women. Cecilia Greyson, my first constituency assistant, who recently moved on to a new adventure, but who, for more than a year, greeted hundreds of constituents with kindness and competence. Tara Taylor, my new constituency assistant who brings energy, passion, and a wealth of community knowledge to that job. Gabrielle Lacelle, my aunt, who, from my earliest years, was an example of a woman pursuing a non-traditional career path, and has been a huge support to me. Gabrielle, my daughter, who loves me fiercely, and who I love fiercely, and without whom I would not be here. Vivian Roberts, my mother, thanks to whom my children will also have childhood memories of apple pie and Sunday dinners. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**HOPE-SIMPSON, PEGGY (RECIPIENT):
ACADIA UNIV. COM. LEADERSHIP AWARD - CONGRATS.**

MR. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, today on International Women's Day, I want to congratulate Wolfville resident Peggy Hope-Simpson on receiving the second annual Community Leadership Award from the Acadia University Department of Community Development.

Peggy is a very deserving recipient of this honour. For over half a century, she has been a dedicated and effective activist and organizer in a diverse range of areas, including peace and security, education, agriculture and food security, health care, social housing, and women's issues. Her tireless efforts have resulted in meaningful and long-lasting positive changes in her community, her province, and her country.

I invite all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join with me in congratulating the amazing Peggy Hope-Simpson, on receiving this award, and thanking her for her tremendous commitment to improving the lives of her fellow citizens.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

WOMEN/GIRLS: INSPIRING AND TRAILBLAZING - GRATITUDE

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day, let us all reflect on the place of women in our society, here in Nova Scotia and around the world.

On a personal note, I reflect on the memories of my mother. I think of my daughter and the better world I want to help build up for her, and her peers. I'm grateful for the women, and yes, the men too, who have stood by me and supported me in my life, my studies, and in health care, and in growing businesses.

It's an honour to stand here among a record number of female legislators, including a record number of female Progressive Conservative caucus members, and our Leader, the member for Pictou West. We should also thank our trailblazers, without whom perhaps, some of us would not be here. Nova Scotia's first female MLA, Gladys Porter from Kings North. Nova Scotia first elected Party Leader, Alexa McDonough, from Halifax Chebucto. Nova Scotia first female Cabinet Minister, Maxine Cochran, from Lunenburg. Nearly 100 years ago, a woman from Amherst ran for the Conservatives in Cumberland County . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for the member's statement has expired.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**ROWE, LINDA (DARTMOUTH NORTH):
ADVOCATE FOR MARGINALIZED - RECOGNIZE**

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day, I rise to recognize (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Order, please. The honourable member for Dartmouth North has the floor.

MS. LEBLANC: I rise in recognition of Linda Rowe, for her ongoing and tireless leadership in the community of Dartmouth North. Linda Rowe currently serves as a leading member of the Farrell Benevolent Society, and organization that's dedicated to improving the quality of life in Dartmouth North, by working together with residents, community groups, agencies, and local businesses.

She was a part of the United Way Action for Neighbourhood Change, an organization that was a precursor to Between the Bridges, which is now working directly in the community, with the community, for change. She's also one of the founding members, and a driving force, of the Dartmouth North Community Health Planning team.

When I first met Linda, at a meeting of the Dartmouth North Association, I was immediately struck by her deep knowledge and respect for her community, and the people who live there. She is a true advocate and protector of some of the most marginalized in our neighbourhoods, and her thoughtful contributions at meetings always make me think about issues in new ways.

I would ask the members of this House to recognize the impactful leadership of Linda Rowe, and her invaluable contributions to the community of Dartmouth North.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**LEVESQUE, GABRIELLE - NTL. FIGURE SKATING CHAMPS.:
BRONZE MEDAL, JR. PAIRS**

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, at the age of 15, figure skater and Bridgewater resident Gabrielle Levesque, presently training and living in Québec, is proving her talent on the national stage.

Gabrielle and her skating partner, Pier-Alexandre Hudon, competed at Nationals in early January bringing home a bronze medal in Junior Pairs. Having started skating at the age of three, Gabrielle has worked hard to develop her skills into the talented figure skater and young woman she is today.

Please join me in congratulating Gabrielle and her bronze medal win at the Junior Nationals Figure Skating Competition. I'm confident that we may see her at future Olympics, representing all of us on the world's stage.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**COSTELLO, NATHALIE - ÉCOLE BOIS-JOLI:
PROMOTING FRANCOPHONE CULTURE - THANK**

MR. TIM HALMAN: Monsieur le président, je voudrais signaler comment Nathalie Costello, Directrice de l'École Bois-Joli à crée un environnement qui mènent ses élèves au succès.

Nathalie support non seulement ses élèves, mais aussi son personnel, qu'ils soient enseignants, assistants, administrateurs, ou autres membres de l'équipe, Nathalie les appuient pour qu'ils achèvent leur maximum potentiel.

Mr. Speaker, Nathalie Costello promotes francophone culture in my community of Dartmouth East, and has fostered and promoted a deep love of francophone culture in all her students.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, that the House acknowledge and thank Nathalie Costello for all that she does.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

[9:45 a.m.]

MACNEIL, RITA: CONTRIB. TO WOMEN'S MOVEMENT - TRIBUTE

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Rita MacNeil. Rita MacNeil was born in the village of Big Pond in Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island in the Spring of 1944. From the beginning, she faced challenges that would shape her life. Throughout her career MacNeil released 24 albums and performed with artists across the world, in my opinion most notable with the Men of the Deeps with their joint rendition of Working Man.

MacNeil was first introduced to the women's movement in 1971 and it was pivotal to her music career. In 1972 she wrote the song Born a Woman, which expressed her feelings about how women were being portrayed by men and in the media. In 1975 MacNeil released her first album, Born a Woman - a tribute to those fighting for women's rights across the country.

During Rita's life, her music sustained her. In her absence, it continues to sustain people around the world with songs like Flying on Your Own. Rita MacNeil was a trailblazer for both her involvement in the women's movement and for helping to create a music industry on Canada's East Coast.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**EWING, DR. KAREN (BASS RIVER) - RECIPIENT:
YMCA PEACE MEDAL - CONGRATS.**

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, 2017 marked the 30th Anniversary of the YMCA Peace Medal. As part of YMCA Peace Week, YMCAs across Canada presented the Peace Medal to groups or individuals who, without any special resources, have demonstrated in their lives and activities the values expressed by peace - participation, empathy, advocacy, community, empowerment. These groups of individuals serve as models of what we are all capable of, should we so choose.

One of the recipients of this prestigious medal was Dr. Karen Ewing from Bass River, Colchester North. Dr. Ewing was honoured for the creation and successful operation of the Cobequid Veterans Memorial Park. She was also instrumental in starting the Blue Marble Initiative which works to achieve peace and protect our environment. This initiative encourages innovative, compassionate pathways to sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Dr. Ewing, a strong and accomplished woman, a great friend and a good family physician.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

PICTOU CO. ROOTS FOR YOUTH: COLDEST NIGHT - THANK

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, Pictou County Roots for Youth recently had their annual Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser. The event took place February 24th with more than 31 teams and 201 participants. Jan Keefe, the event director and youth worker Shayla Gorman were pleased with all the volunteers and team that made this event successful.

Community groups and local businesses continue to be very valuable sponsors of this event. Any money raised from the event will remain local, to support programs throughout the year.

Pictou County Roots for Youth is an organization for youth ages 16 to 24 who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. I would like to thank everyone connected to this non-profit organization for creating solutions that inspire troubled youth to realize the importance of family connections, meaningful employment and assisting them to overcome the challenges they face.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**FED. OF ACADIAN WOMEN OF N.S.
AND IMMIGRATON FRANCOPHONE - SALUTE**

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Monsieur le Président, comme cette semaine est la Semaine de la francophonie est aujourd'hui est la Journée internationale des femmes, je veux saluer la Fédération des femmes acadiennes et surtout leur collaboration des centres avec le Immigration Francophone.

As this week is the International Week of the Francophonie and today is International Women's Day, I want to recognize the Federation of Acadian Women and especially their recent collaboration with le Réseau en Immigration Francophone.

I had the pleasure recently of spending two afternoons with my daughter at workshops co-hosted by the Federation of Acadian Women of Nova Scotia and le Réseau

en Immigration Francophone learning traditional Acadian crafts and visiting with a warm group of diverse women and it was such a pleasure.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

O'CONNOR, LILA J., DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Speaker, I ask for a moment's silence after I read my Member's Statement. Granted?

MR. SPEAKER: Granted.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge International Women's Day and that here in Nova Scotia we are celebrating 100 years of Nova Scotia women's right to vote. This being said, I wish to honour the life and work of the late Lila J. O'Connor, a former MLA for Lunenburg Centre who unexpectedly passed away December 5, 2017. Lila was a force, whether she was making deals in her antique business or organizing one of the many volunteer events she took on.

I had first-hand experience as I co-chaired the old Mahone Bay school's very successful Reunion 2000 where she shared her leadership, organizational and delegation skills with the committee. Lila served a total of 17 years as councillor for the Town of Mahone Bay and a term as a member of the Nova Scotia Legislature, where she earned the nickname the Bull Dog of the Liberal Caucus, by Premier John Savage.

Lila was indeed a force and for me she was also a mentor, confidant and friend. Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and all members of this Legislature join me in remembering Lila J. O'Connor, MLA for Lunenburg.

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask that all members rise and observe a moment of silence in memory of former MLA Lila O'Connor.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

**MACKINNON, AMY/PITTS, TERRI:
TRI-COUNTY WOMEN'S CTR. (SHELBURNE) - APPLAUD**

MS. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this International Women's Day, I would like to recognize the work and efforts of the Tri County Women's Centre satellite office in Shelburne. The centre offers a range of accessible support services for

women and adolescent girls, such as support counselling, advocacy, accompaniment to appointments, and linking to other services in the community. All services offered through the centre are free. Amy MacKinnon and Terri Pitts work closely with all social service agencies across the county and also organization programs such as SchoolsPlus, the Shelburne County Mental Health Coalition, and the Shelburne County Youth Health and Support Association.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud these women for the challenging and necessary work they do to support those in need.

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

MOTHER: COM. CARE/INSPIRATION - TRIBUTE

HON. TONY INCE: Today, on International Women's Day, I would like to thank a woman who has been an inspiration in my life and a trailblazer in my eyes: my mother. I am often reminded by women in the community of the inspiration she gave to all women and men. I am continually reminded by people across the province who had worked with her of her strength and her caring for others. People often tell me I should be proud.

I'd like to thank my mother for everything she did. Thank you.

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

**MACAULAY, ELLIE (ST. PETERS)
- NTL. PROSPECT TEAM: BASEBALL - CONGRATS.**

MS. ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day, I would like to update the House of Assembly about an extraordinary young woman from St. Peter's, Ellie MacAulay, who started playing baseball at only eight years old.

In Fall 2017 at nationals in Vaughan, Ontario, she showcased her talent, leading the entire tournament in batting average, hits, at bats, runs scored, and stolen bases. This performance garnered her an invitation as one of only 25 women in Canada to attend the annual Girls Baseball Development Camp in Cuba, which took place the week of February 19th and was led by the Canadian women's head coach.

I am thrilled to announce that at the close of her week in Cuba, André Lachance, the Women's National Team manager, selected Ellie to play on the national prospect team in Montreal. I'm happy to congratulate Ellie on her continued achievements. We all look forward to watching her progress towards her goal becoming a member of the Women's National Team.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.

COSMAN, FRANCENE JEN: ROLE MODEL FOR WOMEN - THANK

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day, I'd like to share the story of a significant woman of Bedford. The only other woman to have been elected to the Legislature from my community is the Hon. Francene Jen Cosman, although her riding had a different name: Bedford-Fall River.

Francene began her political career as a member of the Halifax County Municipal Council. In 1979, Francene became Bedford's first mayor, the only woman to ever serve in that position. In 1982, she was appointed president of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. In 1993, Francene was first elected to this Chamber, and served as Deputy Speaker and, later, as a member of the Executive Council. She was re-elected in the 1998 general election.

She did not reoffer the next election, but has remained involved in her community. She currently serves on the board of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. I've often turned to Francene for advice and support. She has always been there with wise counsel.

On IWD 2018 I want to thank Francene Jen Cosman for being a role model for women in our community.

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

**LANGILLE, BRADEN/ROGERS, SAM
- WINNERS: INEX WINTER NTLs. (CAR RACING) - CONGRATS.**

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, it says a great deal about spirit and competence when two Maritime race drivers compete for first place in the INEX Winter Nationals at Citrus County Speedway in Inverness, Florida. Shubenacadie driver Braden Langille won the final two races in the Semi-Pro Legend division for drivers aged 16 to 39, passing New Brunswick's Cory Hall, who had that title before.

Other Nova Scotia winners included Sam Rogers of Lower Onslow who took two of the week's races in the Outlaw Class for drivers 12 and up.

I wish to congratulate Langille, Rogers and other Maritime winners for their remarkable showing in international competition.

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

MONTGOMERY, LUCY MAUD: HERITAGE MINUTE - INSTRUCTIVE

MS. LENORE ZANN: Mr. Speaker, to mark International Women's Day, Historical Canada has released a new Heritage Minute that tells the story of Island author Lucy Maud Montgomery in her own words, as drawn from her own journals. The Heritage Minute explores the celebrated author's struggle with depression and social conventions of the early 20th Century, as she faced early rejection from publishers who sent back her manuscripts for *Anne of Green Gables*. One of my favourite authors as a child, and later performing as Anne in *Anne of Green Gables*, Maud Montgomery was a strong advocate for women. She wrote at a time when there were few serious women writers, and was also the breadwinner at home.

Anne of Green Gables, published in 1908, has been adapted into at least 36 languages and sold more than 50 million copies worldwide. But it reminds us of women's battle for mental illness and mental health, and Lucy Maud Montgomery is now somebody who is teaching us much about that issue.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

PIONEERING WOMEN: BREAKING BARRIERS - THANK

HON. MARGARET MILLER: Mr. Speaker, on this International Women's Day, I particularly want to thank and recognize those who are not often recognized, to thank those first pioneer women who moved with their families to all areas of our country, and through unimaginable hardship, made this country their home. To those remarkable women who, 100 years ago lobbied for the right to vote and have their concerns recognized, they were the basis for women in government. To those women who have immigrated in the last century, not knowing what the future would hold for them in this vast new land, bringing with them their cultures, traditions, exotic foods, and adding to the fabric of our diverse communities. My mother was such a woman.

To all women, who every day take on traditional and non-traditional roles breaking barriers all over this world, until all the barriers are gone, we thank them today, it is their day.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

WOMEN: CONTRIB. TO AGRIC. ECON./RURAL LIFE - GRATITUDE

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day, I wish to honour all those women who have contributed so much to the agricultural economy and rural life of our province. Farm housewives, like my own mother, have worked incredibly hard to see all things needed for the farm and family to succeed are done, from driving tractor to ensuring that everyone is well-clothed and fed - no job is too large or too small. Managing

family and farm life included managing employees, running errands, and virtually any job that needed to be done. The magnitude of their contributions to the success of agriculture in the province cannot be overstated. They showed grit, resourcefulness, and love in everything they did.

Please join me in expressing our gratitude to them.

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

WOMEN: GUIDANCE/POTENTIAL - GRATITUDE

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize three of the most important people in my life on this International Women's Day. First, my mother, a role model who has guided me, as a single mom with four children, after the early loss of our father. She is 85 years old - 85 years young - and more active than most people half her age. I just dropped her off at the curb of the Halifax airport Monday, as she left to visit her 93-year-old sister in Florida, and plan their bingo games.

Secondly, my only daughter, that every day shines with more potential. An awesome mother of two awesome grandchildren, a devoted hockey mom, and one of the smartest women I know. Courtney, your future has no limits.

Lastly but certainly not least, my wife, Deidre. Compassion, perception, love of life, kindness, support, dedication - all words that are defined by your action and your soul. Someone who has guided me for the last 42 years, a friend since we were 8 years old. Someone who has only said that she would leave me if I supported fracking. (Laughter)

To these three women, I owe a life of gratitude. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much for those Members' Statements. I would be remiss if I did not add my own two cents to acknowledge the women in my life. My wife, Stephanie at home, my mom Judy in Florida, and my sister Kim, who is a 30-plus-year veteran of the RCMP. I'm very proud of them all - and my daughter Rachael who is fast becoming a strong woman in her own right.

[10:00 a.m.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

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

PREM. - NSHA: PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT - CHALLENGE

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Last year, the Health Authority decided to embark on a new strategy to recruit family doctors and specialists to our province. In a statement of work from the Health Authority, it said that moving from nine districts recruiting for open positions to one province with four recruitment zones has been challenging - and I will table that for the House. In a nutshell, this document admits that amalgamating the health districts has made the doctor shortage in our province worse.

My question to the Premier is, if moving from districts to one Health Authority has made it harder to recruit badly needed doctors, why did this government decide to forge ahead anyway?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I think what he is missing in that report, and what I think all Nova Scotians know, is that the fractured system we had before, the inaction of former Ministers of Health when it came to ensuring we had the appropriate efficient resource improvement centre (Interruptions) I didn't say all of them. I just said some former ones. (Laughter)

We recognize now that under a single system, we can now continue to move on to ensure that we have the right complement of people together to ensure that as physicians retire we can replace them across our province.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Nova Scotia has seen a net loss of doctors; we have a doctor shortage. Mr. Speaker, you would think government would be doing everything in their power to make it easier for qualified doctors to move here and set up a practice.

Unfortunately, a doctor who is helping Nova Scotia recruit physicians from the U.K. calls the process to come to Nova Scotia "fiendishly difficult" - and I will table that. It's a full complexity of bureaucracy and language that's used by the administrative places here, the colleges - language that is not immediately understood. This physician says he knows of at least four people who opted to go to B.C., Australia, and New Zealand, after trying to navigate the Nova Scotia system.

My question to the Premier, will he admit that until the government gets serious about knocking down the barriers that prevent doctors from coming to Nova Scotia, a marketing strategy is simply window dressing?

THE PREMIER: I think the doctor he is referring to is Dr. Bonnington, Mr. Speaker, who actually came to Nova Scotia, I believe, when he was Minister of Health. I want to assure him that we tore down those barriers. We're seeing great results from our relationship in the U.K. Three physicians are on their way, and more to come.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

PREM. - INTL. WOMEN'S DAY: GOV'T. ACTIONS - HURTFUL

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Premier. I don't know if the Premier knows this, but International Women's Day has its roots in strikes and marches. I'm sure if the Premier had been in charge back then, he would have legislated against it and them. Those strikes were for decent wages, shorter hours, and health and safety. These are women's issues.

The Premier's record on women is keeping women's wages down, denying women's right to strike, and denying women's freedom to associate. That's what bill after bill has done to home support workers, care and health workers, nurses, front-line government workers, and teachers.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier admit that his government's actions have disproportionately harmed women?

THE PREMIER: I want to remind the honourable member that through the entire process, when it came to ensure we provided for and supported all public sector workers, not a single person lost any money in our government. What we did was slow down the growth of their wages.

I also want to remind the honourable member about the investments we made, like the great announcement we actually made in her riding yesterday: the pre-Primary program, which we all know is getting our wives and daughters back into the workforce quicker; I'm sure she would have gone to the event the day before when the honourable member talked about the amount of investments we made in affordable child care to ensure that families, both men and women, can get back to the workforce to continue to provide for their families; and I'm sure she would also recognize that the sooner our wives and daughters get back into the workforce they can continue to build their pensions and continue to work to make sure that they build their careers and continue to grow.

I'm very proud of our record. I want to remind the honourable member that when her Party had a chance, they appointed nine of 10 people to the bench who were men. This government has ensured gender equality.

MS. LEBLANC: The Premier's response is interesting but saddening, because there is so much his government could do for women, so much more.

One step would be to get with the times and raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The majority of Nova Scotians making minimum wage are women - 56 per cent, and I can table that. A \$15 minimum wage would make a dramatic difference for women like Simone Mayer. She worked for nearly 41 years in a cafeteria in Church Point. She is making \$14.07 an hour. As she said, in those 41 years, everything has gone up but her wages.

Will the Premier mark International Women's Day by committing to the women in this province that there will be a \$15 minimum wage by 2020?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I'm very proud of the work this government did ensuring that we changed the Guaranteed Income Supplement, that we made sure the basic personal exemption salary, that we made sure low-income Nova Scotians were receiving the biggest benefit of that tax cut - the largest single tax cut in the history of our province.

I want to remind the honourable member I'll continue to work with my colleagues around Atlantic Canada to ensure that we continue to build an environment in this province where all workers are treated fairly.

I also want to remind the honourable member that the minimum wage being set in this province is being set by a formula that was set by the NDP.

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

PREM.: CONTINUING CARE STRATEGY - RELEASE DATE

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: In July 2015, the government released a review of the 2006 Continuing Care Strategy. One of the last sentences of the review is: "These findings, together with the continued engagement of key stakeholders, will then inform the development of our five-year Continuing Care Strategy, set for release in 2017."

Now, I know that as we get older it seems the years go by quicker, but we're in 2018 already. Mr. Speaker, 2017 has come and gone and we have yet to see the continuing care strategy. Nova Scotia has one of the oldest populations in the country and in the next five years it is estimated that 22 per cent of our population will be over the age of 65. This is not the time to drag our feet on this issue.

Will the Premier admit that he is letting seniors and their families down by promising a continuing care strategy that he has failed to deliver?

THE PREMIER: In that question, there is a huge assumption, Mr. Speaker, that when you turn 65 you are automatically old and need long-term care. I want to remind the honourable member that we just had a resolution read by the honourable member for Clare-Digby about his amazing mother, I think at 87, who is now doing tremendous work, and the Minister of Seniors, and Communities, Culture and Heritage, and has worked with organizations across the province that will continue to provide an opportunity for people to age in place, to continue not to age so they come into long-term care but age to be in active living. That's the wonderful thing and he's a great example - no offence minister - of what happens when you continue to look after yourself and age in place.

I also want to remind the honourable member that when it comes to long-term care that we continue to invest, we continue to invest in home care, we continue to respond to what Nova Scotians have told us when they require assistance for medical reasons, for support to live in the home - they want to be able to stay in their home as long as possible and we've made tremendous investment in doing just that. (Applause)

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I know the Premier wants to give us examples of everybody who is well and can stay at home, which is great for them, but we get phone calls from thousands of Nova Scotians who are sitting in a hospital bed waiting for long-term care placement. (Applause)

We have thousands of Nova Scotians who continue to call our offices who are going 100 kilometres away from their homes to get to a long-term care facility or at least a basic long-term care placement. That's an unacceptable way to treat Nova Scotians, the seniors who have given so much to our communities.

My question to the Premier is, it was promised that in 2017 we would have a continuing care strategy that would start to look at some of these issues - when will we be expecting that strategy?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the honourable member that it is unacceptable. That's why when he was minister and there were 2,500 people on the list, we've now gotten it down to 1,000. We're continuing to work with those families to provide that long-term care and provide support. (Interruptions) We're going to continue to work for those . . .

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

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, one of the things about being in this House long enough is we've all got records to stand on, and I'm pretty happy to stand on mine and I'll compare it to that one at any time.

The reality of it is, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to work with those seniors who tell us they want to stay in their homes as long as possible. It's why we continue to work with them and we'll continue to make sure that we provide a myriad of options for long-term care and for those citizens who require it.

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

**STATUS OF WOMEN - SEXUAL ASSAULT:
SERV. PROVIDER FUNDING - CONFIRM**

MS. LENORE ZANN: My question today is for the Minister responsible for the Status of Women.

At the end of March, provincial grants to sexual assault crisis service providers for trauma-informed counselling will expire. I've spoken to a number of these staff and volunteers - workers who support survivors of sexual violence - and they are worried. They are worried about what will happen once this funding disappears. With decreased resources, most centres will not be able to meet the demand for these crucial supports.

I'd like to request of the minister today, would she take a look at it and on behalf of these centres, and could she please guarantee that the funding won't dry up after March 31st?

HON. KELLY REGAN: I want to thank the honourable member for raising this very important question. When those sexual violence grants were given out, it was indicated that they would be for a finite term. However, we have heard what the community is saying, and we are taking a look at the exact issue she is raising.

MS. ZANN: While I do appreciate the work that's been done through the province's sexual assault strategy, the culturally-relevant supports that are provided by the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, for instance, are really essential, and the community-based therapeutic counselling services in Lunenburg-Queens are needed to meet a growing demand, as is the sexual assault centre in Amherst.

Across the province, we really need to be expanding these services, not cutting them. Will the minister please commit to permanent funding for these essential services for survivors of sexual violence?

MS. REGAN: I want to thank the honourable member for her question and for her passion around this particular issue. I also want to thank the women throughout this House who have raised issues like this with me. I want to assure all of them that in the coming budget, we will be taking a hard look at everything we can possibly do to support victims of violence.

I would note for our colleagues here that there is a free online program that you can take that will help you better support victims of sexual violence. I'd be happy to share the information on that with anyone, if they want to approach me afterward.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

TIR - NOVA CENTRE: INCREASED FUNDING - EXPLAIN

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. On Monday, the province announced that it had opened a tap on the 25-year Nova Centre lease. When the project was announced, the province's commitment was \$58.9 million. This week's announcement articulated an annual payment of \$5.38 million, plus an additional monthly operating fee of \$82,000. If you get your pencil out, \$5.38 million plus an additional million dollars for the operating fee, times 25 years, is \$159 million.

My question for the minister is, can the minister please explain how a \$58.9 million commitment put forward by the province now has the province on the hook for almost \$160 million?

HON. LLOYD HINES: Recently, I was very pleased to conclude the substantial completion of the Nova Centre, which is one of the best investments that a government has ever made in this province. It will pay dividends overall. It came in on budget, with the exception of one agreed-upon revision requested by Events East, which was done to enhance the capability of the convention centre. It's on a fixed financing cost at an incredibly good interest rate, due to great management from the people in my department who are looking after it.

Nova Scotians will see this persevere as one of the best investments we have ever made.

MR. HOUSTON: Sixty million dollars into \$160 million - that's the type of investment that financial planners dream of. Unfortunately, those financial planners are on the other side of this transaction from the taxpayers.

In addition, the Nova Centre was almost two years late in opening - 22 events had been booked for 2017, and all of them had to be moved. When we look at \$60 million into \$160 million - I heard the minister say that it was pretty much on budget and on time. We're hearing that about the QEII redevelopment too; the CEO of the Health Authority said, don't worry, it'll be on time and on budget. But there is no budget or timeline for that project.

Can the minister tell the House: were there any financial penalties, or any penalties, to the developer as a result of being two years late on the completion?

MR. HINES: The numbers that the member is quoting are gross numbers. The participation by the province is in the \$58.9-million range for the period of the lease. It's paid out in monthly installments over a period of time. The lease payment is split between HRM and the province.

In terms of the value to the province, we're expecting events to attract in the vicinity of 80,000 visitors a year into the Province of Nova Scotia. The convention centre is a provincial facility. It will attract people into the entirety of the province.

[10:15 a.m.]

We have great appeal in North America, in Nova Scotia, and in Halifax, and we have a secret weapon that brings people here, and that's our lobsters.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

EECD - SACs: FUNDING DISCRETION - CLARIFY

MR. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. The minister has stated that as part of his department's administrative reform he intends to provide for more local decision making. Part of that local decision making includes empowering the school advisory councils.

During a media scrum on Monday, the minister indicated that SACs will be given dollars they can spend in their school communities.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, could the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development clarify how much funding he anticipates will be put at the discretion of the school advisory councils?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: As indicated, and consistent with the recommendations that came forward from the Glaze report, the dollars that will be disbursed will be reflective of the dollars saved from eliminating one level of governance in the education system.

I do not have a number right now in terms of what the envelope will be for each school, but we do need to develop an equitable way of delivering those funds so that our school communities - our teachers, principals, parents, community members - can actually invest in areas that they believe are important for the school community.

MR. HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, school advisory councils play a vital role in our school system. They are a place where educators, parents, and the larger community can come together to help integrate our schools into their neighbourhoods. These are volunteer boards, or at least they have been up until now.

The minister has made it clear that these SACs will now receive public funds to spend. I don't need to remind this government that when public funds are available, all of a sudden, friends come out of the woodwork.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, is the minister prepared to turn the operation of school advisory elections over to Elections Nova Scotia, to ensure they are fair and protected?

MR. CHURCHILL: I don't know if that step would be necessary at this point. We are following a recommendation to review the selection process for SAC members and the mandate, but as the member said, we want more people to come out and involve themselves in SACs.

We have communities where we don't have the participation that we'd like. We're hoping that by ensuring they have a bit more authority in their own school community to spend funds in areas they believe are important, that will actually encourage more people to participate.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

H&W - FAMILY PHYSICIANS: RECRUITMENT COMMIT. - CLARIFY

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness was recently asked by a CBC reporter if all Nova Scotians still expect a family physician for every citizen. I notice he didn't actually answer that question, but rather, he alluded to the reporter that collaborative care clinics will now be able to take care of all the health care needs of Nova Scotians.

Can the Minister of Health and Wellness please clarify, is this government no longer planning to ensure that every citizen has a family physician?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: I thank the member for bringing the question forward. I'm happy to clarify that what I said was indeed, that the work that is ongoing and our efforts as a province to expand our recruitment of physicians for primary care service - family physicians, general practitioners - to the Province of Nova Scotia is ongoing.

We have a number of initiatives we're taking around recruitment incentives, expanding our residency programs, changes to our immigration streams to make it easier to recruit those physicians, so our commitment there remains, Mr. Speaker. Also, what Nova Scotians are really looking for is access to primary care services in their communities when they need it. We believe that collaborative care practices, bringing together other health care professionals to work with those physicians, is an important part of that strategy forward.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Well, it looks like he is eluding my question the same as he eluded the reporter's. The question was, will this government be still ensuring that every Nova Scotian has a family physician? My concern, Mr. Speaker, is that we're actually creating another level of bureaucracy with the collaborative care clinics.

I was contacted - and some of my colleagues have similar stories as well. I was contacted by a mother who called to be seen - her daughter was sick and was seen by a nurse practitioner. A couple of weeks later the same mother called and then was told this daughter no longer has a family physician and has to see the nurse practitioner.

Again, I ask the Minister of Health and Wellness, will his government be ensuring every Nova Scotian will have access to a family physician?

MR. DELOREY: The work in the collaborative practice does not preclude access to family physicians. The goal and the work here is obviously centred around the premise of being collaborative. That means a variety of health care professionals working to their scope of practice to provide the care that is needed by Nova Scotians, to make sure they're seen by the right health care professional at the right time. That means working with our family physicians as well as our nurses and other health care professionals who provide the care that Nova Scotians need and deserve.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

WOMEN, STATUS OF - EDUC. REFORMS: GENDER ANALYSIS - TABLE

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

My colleague, the member for Dartmouth North, recently had an opportunity in the Community Services Committee to ask the executive director of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women if government legislation was examined through a gender lens before it is brought forward. Her response was that, yes, for reports and recommendations that go to Cabinet there is a check box that says if a gender analysis been done and any department putting that forward would look at whether they had done a true gender analysis and check it off. I will table that.

Will the minister table the gender analysis done on the proposed reforms to education?

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. The response that was given at that committee is indeed correct, there is a gender analysis. Each piece of legislation that goes through the House is in fact - you can do a gender analysis on that, there's a place for that, training has taken place for that. But we don't yet have GBA+. I think that's what the honourable member is speaking about and we are examining that issue even as we speak.

MS. CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I take from that answer that a gender analysis has not been done, and I would request that the gender analysis be tabled before this legislation

goes forward. We're talking about the impact on half the population so I sincerely hope the minister did check off that box.

It's not the first time this government has forced through legislation that targets women. A little over a year ago this government stripped the collective bargaining rights of about 6,000 women working in public education. Now, just in time for International Women's Day, the minister is eliminating the only level of elected government with gender parity. The value of these women is not as wives or mothers primarily, but as elected officials. Negative impacts on the women of Nova Scotia must not be written off as unintended consequences of bad legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Will the minister take what may be his very last chance to admit that these reforms negatively impact women and go back to the department for further analysis and consultation?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I do reject the premise of the question that this government has attacked women. I do not think that is a fair or accurate depiction of any policies that this government has moved forward with.

I will note that while I sympathize with the arguments being presented by the members opposite around the democratic institution of school boards, I must say that the institution of the education system is not here for those folks, it's not here for us, it's here for the students. I will note for this House - that Party has not mentioned students once in this line of questioning.

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

TIR: PAVING STRAT.: ROUTE 5 (BIG BRAS D'OR) - INCLUDE

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

The five-year plan is an important document that provides clarity and direction as to where and when projects will take place. Unfortunately, getting on that plan has proven very difficult. Many residents in my constituency use old Route 5 to Big Bras d'Or, as an example of what's wrong in our paving strategy. These residents claim that before the last provincial election they were told that departmental officials considered work on this road a high priority and that it would be included in the five-year highway improvement plan. Sadly, I can't find it in the plan.

Mr. Speaker, my question through you to the minister is, will the minister explain why such a road as this continues to be delayed, even though it's considered to be a priority for his department?

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, I must say that the five-year plan is an excellent tool in prioritizing and bringing some sensible management into the way that road business is conducted in the province. We rely on the advice of our professionals, our engineers, who determine what the requirement is in the area. With the 24,000 kilometres of roads we have in the province, we can't do them all at the same time.

MR. BAIN: The residents of Victoria-The Lakes are grateful for any work being done, although much more is required. Work is taking place along the Cabot Trail at places like Ingonish that is cost-shared with the federal government but included in the overall totals for Victoria-The Lakes. This road is a vital part of our tourism industry because of the many bus tour operators and tourists that travel this road during the tourist season to appreciate to the scenic views.

My question to the minister is, since the Cabot Trail project is one that is cost-shared, can the savings from these projects because of that be applied to more road paving in Victoria-The Lakes?

MR. HINES: It's hard not to be grateful for the excellent work that Parks Canada is doing within the Cape Breton Highlands Park on their own ticket. That's a great complement to what we are doing. The work that we're doing outside of the parks is not cost-shared and is done solely by the department. In recognition of the excellent upgrades occurring within the park, we are targeting quite a bit of the Cabot Trail, in Victoria-The Lakes, in this year's budget.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

EECD - HS CURRIC.: LIFE SKILLS - COMPULSORY

HON. PAT DUNN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. In a continuously changing environment, securing life skills is a critical part of being able to meet the challenges of everyday life. Young students often lack skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration. Presently in our high schools, they touch on some life skills in a Grade 10 course, Math at Work.

My question to the minister is, does the minister believe we should have a compulsory course for high school students which covers certain aspects of life skills?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: In terms of enhancing our curriculum, that is an ongoing process. We're always willing to take suggestions from members opposite, members of the public, and in particular our educators, whom we are actually going to include more in the development of our curriculum. If the member does have any suggestions on how to enhance that curriculum, I would be very happy to ensure that those are considered during that process.

MR. DUNN: I have all kinds of suggestions, Mr. Speaker. Do I have the time?
(Laughter)

Grade 10 Career Development covers life skills. However, this course is an elective. Grade 10 students have a choice of selecting only two electives.

Guidance counsellors continue to tell me that difficulty arises when assisting students because they often lack the basic skills necessary to build confidence. They have difficulty analyzing options, making decisions, and simply completing applications for post-secondary institutions.

My question to the minister is, will the minister consider making Grade 10 Career Development a compulsory course, giving students the opportunity to learn about tax returns, Canada saving funds, debt associated with credit cards, and basic daily bills?

MR. CHURCHILL: The member and I are in agreement that those are necessary skills to be successful in life after school. I do not have the ability to unilaterally make decisions on curriculum. We do have a process for that. We are also ensuring that we involve more educators in that process. I can say at first glance that I do not think this idea is a bad one.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

TIR: RAINBOW BRIDGE REPAIRS - TIMELINE

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. The Rainbow Bridge has been closed since December 11th. That's 87 days, over 12 weeks. The road that is the detour is now broken down, and that will cost tens of thousands of dollars to repair.

In the private sector, an engineering report would take no longer than three weeks to obtain. I would like to direct a question to the minister. Why, after 12 weeks, is there still no engineering report, which needs to be completed to determine if the bridge needs to be replaced or repaired, and no timeline of when this work will be completed?

HON. LLOYD HINES: As the member opposite and the House would recognize, our primary consideration in the department is the safety of motorists in Nova Scotia. That's what led to the decision and the rigorous inspection that is done of our bridges to determine that there were some failures in some of the supporting members of the bridge, and kicked in the process to determine what work had to be done to either replace or repair the bridge.

We have asked for a consultant report on that and we await that. We expect to have it this month.

[10:30 a.m.]

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, there's no reason why the taxpayers of Nova Scotia should accept that something takes more than four times longer in the public sector than it does in the private sector.

Can the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal please take some responsibility for leading his department and demand some accountability for the taxpayers of Nova Scotia and Cumberland County?

MR. HINES: Mr. Speaker, I am so proud of the people who labour every day, the 2,200 people who work for our department. Their accountability is extensive, and they do not take anything lightly. They are working diligently on this. There are 4,200 bridges in the province and certainly, the highways and bridges in Cumberland County get the same attention as they do in the other 17 counties in Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

LAE - LOW WAGE OCCUPATIONS: WOMEN - ACTION

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, according to data from the Nova Scotia Finance and Treasury Board in 2017, the majority of low-wage workers in our province were women. Women represent 100 per cent of people employed in six of the 10 lowest-paying occupations, and there are no women at all in five of the 10 top highest-paid jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, will the minister explain what he is doing to increase women's wages?

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for the question. One thing I'm doing is I've actually empowered the committee that looks at minimum wage to actually look at what our minimum wages are in Nova Scotia, to actually go outside the rules that were set by the NDP - again, Mr. Speaker, set by the NDP - on what the minimum wage increase could be every year, which was inflation.

Mr. Speaker, the committee sent me a letter, and I looked at the letter, and I said, "I will give you the authority to go and look at what our minimum wage is, to look at where it should be." I will say one thing, when we look at Ontario and Alberta, a \$15 minimum wage, they have full employment, they have a higher cost of living. When you look at New York and Seattle, that are going to a \$15 minimum wage, they are going in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I will not do is sit there without any data - I've asked the NDP to provide any data of how Nova Scotia can have a \$15 minimum wage. Without that data, how can we go there and actually have the people who are trying to help, lose their jobs - because that's what would happen.

MS. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, we would look at it incrementally but thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, with all due respect again to the minister, whatever he is doing to raise minimum wages is not working, especially for women who face additional barriers. Only 4 per cent to 6 per cent of participants in the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Program are women, fewer still are African Nova Scotian or Indigenous. With this government, freezing and legislating collective agreements left, right, and centre, I wonder if the good wages of the labour movement that have been won for nurses, teachers, and other jobs traditionally held by women, will be stripped away, just like their collective bargaining rights have been.

Mr. Speaker, based on this record, how can the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education possibly claim that his government is looking out for women as workers?

MR. KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, looking out for female workers is exactly what this government is doing. It's ironic that on one hand we're talking about minimum wage workers, on the other hand we're talking about professions that are double or triple what the median income is in this province.

The median income in this province is \$33,000. We're talking about professions that the honourable member is saying are being attacked, who are making double and triple that. But they weren't attacked, those professions received a pay raise under this government. What they did not do is receive a 2 per cent HST hike that wiped out all of the pay increases the NDP gave them.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

EECD: IAN FORSYTH ELEM. SCH. - AIR QUALITY TESTS

MR. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. First, I want to take a moment and thank the minister for his assistance in the situation yesterday regarding the poor air quality at Ian Forsyth Elementary School in Dartmouth East.

Mr. Speaker, parents in my community want another test conducted in order to determine there is no Benzene, along with figuring out the problems with the ventilation system. They are asking for a new analysis and proposed solutions to be available to them as soon as possible.

My question to the minister today is simple. I would like to know, as my constituents want to know, whether additional testing took place yesterday, and if not, when will it take place?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This is an issue of great concern. Any potential threat to the health of our students and the professionals who work in our schools needs to have immediate attention.

I have been under the impression - I was informed by the regional office that there was additional sampling being done. I have not seen the results yet, but as we publicly indicated yesterday, as soon as those are made available, we will ensure that the public is well aware of the outcome.

MR. HALMAN: I'd like to thank the minister for his response. I worry that the situation in my community yesterday is a sign of things to come. In the very near future, in a situation like the one parents faced yesterday in Dartmouth East, the chain of command to find answers will become murky. The HRSB was a source of information yesterday.

My question for the minister is, where do parents turn for answers once school boards are gone?

MR. CHURCHILL: As happened yesterday, the operational leads in our system were the ones who took charge of the situation. This was an operational issue, and those folks are still going to be there to address these concerns, as they have been, and to inform the department and the public.

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

H&W: COBEQUID COM. HEALTH CTR. - IMPROVED SERV.

MR. BRAD JOHNS: My question again today is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. On Tuesday, I asked the minister if Cobequid Community Health Centre was part of the QEII redevelopment plan, and I got a bit of a vague answer. The people of Sackville are still left wandering from facility to facility when they have a health care crisis in Sackville after hours.

The people of Hants County have received upgrades to the Hants Community Hospital, and Dartmouth General is getting additions. I am sorry to ask the minister again, but will the minister please stop ignoring the health concerns of the residents of Sackville and tell them once and for all if there will be improved services at Cobequid Community Health Centre?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Again, I thank the member for the question. As I had indicated, the work of the QEII redevelopment is comprehensive. One of the primary initiatives there is looking at how the services being delivered are not just replaced with a mirror image of what was there serving Nova Scotians for the past 50 years, but doing a comprehensive review of those services and the services that are going to be needed for the next 50 years.

That work is ongoing. Some of the work has already begun. The member mentioned some of that work, including the recently announced opening of operating rooms in Hants and work done at Dartmouth General. They can look forward to more announcements in the time to come.

MR. JOHNS: I thank the minister. Look, I know people who've arrived at Cobequid Community Health Centre only to be turned away because they were either just closing or had closed. They're sent in to the emergency rooms at the QEII Health Sciences Centre, where they have to wait for hours to get help.

Sackville, however, has a relatively modern facility and is only limited by staffing and lacking some services that are there. Cobequid Community Health Centre needs some upgrades to offer food services, to accommodate patients, and to expand to accommodate more services. The facility could certainly relieve the pressures and traffic waiting times by offering more of these services.

I've got to ask again, will the minister please give a direct yes or no answer and commit today to reviewing the funding needed to expand services at Cobequid Community Health Centre?

MR. DELOREY: As I've previously indicated and I will say again, the work to review for the QEII redevelopment, looking at the services provided for Nova Scotians to bring those services forward and to enhance those services, ensure we have the infrastructure in place and the staffing to support those needs - not based upon a mirror of what happened over the last 50 years, but looking forward to the next 50 years of health care needs in this province.

Those reviews have been ongoing. The work continues as we've made decisions on specific pieces of work. We've moved forward with those projects and have been able to announce the start as well as the completion of some of those initiatives, and we are continuing to do that. As part of the overall review, if something related to the member's riding comes up, he and his constituents will be made aware of that.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

LAE - ACADIA UNIV.: SECRET LOAN - DETAILS

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: My question is for the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education. Last month, we learned the nature of a 2012 loan to Acadia University. The \$2.7 million earmarked to renovate Cutten House didn't come from the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, but from the budget of Housing Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, when Labour and Advanced Education was asked why they made the original announcement instead of the Department of Community Services, they refused an interview, and I will table that.

Mr. Speaker, while the secret loan was made under a previous government, this government is now responsible for these departments. Nova Scotians are owed a full explanation. Why won't the minister explain why money from a department with a mandate to support affordable housing for low-income families, secretly use that money for another purpose?

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, the member actually premised the question perfectly, the loan was done by a previous government. It wasn't our government that did that loan, that loan should never have been made. I agree with the member 100 per cent, the previous government should not be taking money from housing to give to universities. There was another loan which was done to Acadia University, which was a SOFI loan, which was supposed to be for infrastructure, but it went to operations. That should never have been done either.

So, Mr. Speaker, in terms of why that loan was done, the member would have to ask the previous government.

MR. MACMASTER: Well, if the minister is going to say that he does not have access to the people who worked in the department at the time, to explain what happened, that's what we're asking for here, Mr. Speaker. Nova Scotians deserve a full explanation.

Mr. Speaker, what is going on? We have a \$7 million Education Department loan forgiven to Acadia, then a loan from housing with money approved right here in the Legislature, with an understanding that when it was approved in the Legislature, it was money for affordable housing.

I am an X-Man, and I don't want to appear to have an axe to grind here (Laughter) but Mr. Speaker, if we know that the minister hasn't been entirely forthcoming in the past, and I'll table that his comments were different from the Premier's on this, how can we be certain that there aren't other unusual funding patterns waiting to come to the fore?

MR. KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I assure the member that under this government, the accounting procedures that were done from the previous government are not being done.

Mr. Speaker, I saw a lot of irregularities when I came into government as the Minister of the Public Service Commission, there was \$1 million that was not budgeted for, yet we had no incremental areas where that money could come from, but we still had a full complement of employees to pay for.

Mr. Speaker, I saw something which sickened me, which was that under the previous government, a whole month of income assistance was eliminated so that they could balance the budget. I am proud to say this government restored the income assistance.

So, as I've said, Mr. Speaker, that previous government, 11 months of income assistance - not 12 - for their last budget, balanced on the backs of income assistance recipients.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

H&W: MIDWIFERY SERV. (SOUTH SHORE) - SUSPENSION

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Halifax Needham has the floor.

MS. ROBERTS: In January, women on the South Shore were faced with the sudden loss of their midwifery services, but really the Department of Health and Wellness should've known that the collapse was coming, because before its suspension, the South Shore practice was turning away as many as 10 women seeking care each month.

Registered midwife, Leslie Niblett, was on call 24/7 for eight months without relief before she had to take a leave from her position back in October, which created the domino effect that forced the other midwife to take a break as well.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why he did not intervene and bring in additional support to avoid shutdown of the program, and ensure that pregnant women were getting the primary health care they needed?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: I thank the member for bringing the question to the floor of the House. I think it's important to recognize that the work of the midwives that were being provided not just on the South Shore, but indeed in the metro central region as well as Antigonish, is valued work, Mr. Speaker, valued by the government, valued by those women and families receiving the care, and services being provided.

[10:45 a.m.]

When the situation on the South Shore was brought to my attention, Mr. Speaker, we did respond. We responded by expanding the complement there, posting additional positions to bring the complement, not just on the South Shore but also in Antigonish, to ensure that these services are continued and sustainable.

MS. ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, that does not explain why the response was not done before a crisis was averted. In 2011, a government report recommended hiring 20 full-time midwives by 2017, and it is now 2018. So the Health and Wellness Minister's February commitment will only bring our total to 11 - that's just barely more than half of what we need.

Midwives are a cost-effective, efficient, and a patient-focused way to provide primary care. That is recognized in Alberta, B.C. and Ontario; those provinces have hired hundreds of midwives to ensure that all women can get the care they need and want during and after their pregnancies, yet in Nova Scotia we're still stuck in the pilot phase where there is no access to midwifery care in the Annapolis Valley or on Cape Breton Island.

Can the Minister of Health and Wellness explain why, at this time, and when we're facing a serious shortage of doctors, he has not expanded midwifery care across the province?

MR. DELOREY: Again, I thank the member for the question. As I've responded in my previous question, we share and recognize the value of the services provided by midwives to those women and families who take advantage of the services they offer.

The outcomes and the satisfaction with their services are well-documented, Mr. Speaker. That's why we expanded the complement of midwives. The NSHA has added additional complements to the practices on the South Shore, as well as in Antigonish, back in February. I had the opportunity to meet with the president of the midwifery association of Nova Scotia. We had a great meeting and we're committed to continue to work with her and her organization on midwifery services in the Province of Nova Scotia.

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

CCH - NEW WINDSOR ARENA: FUNDING SOURCE - EXPLAIN

MR. LARRY HARRISON: My question is for the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

In January 2016, the Premier announced a new arena complex for Windsor, and it would be getting \$3 million from the province. The investment was to be matched by \$1 million from West Hants, Windsor, and Kings Edgehill School. The Deputy Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage repeated this commitment and stated that it came from the CCH budget.

Since the amount of \$150,000 max is being exceeded, could the minister explain the source of the arena funding?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: I thank the member for the question. He is obviously talking about a community that is in need of a new area, a new facility, especially when we talk about Windsor as the birthplace of hockey and the need to have a first-class facility to make sure that the Hockey Heritage Museum continues as well very strong in the community.

In terms of the funding, we're very pleased to have available to the community \$3 million for this facility, and that offer obviously stands.

MR. HARRISON: The information is that the original plan for the new Windsor Arena Complex included the Hockey Heritage Museum - we've learned that this museum is no longer part of the plan. Is there going to be funding taken away from the arena of the \$3 million or is extra money going to be found for the Hockey Heritage Museum?

MR. GLAVINE: As we know, negotiations in terms of the arena build are still going on. Both Windsor and the county remain looking at the best location and, to my knowledge, there's one thing that's certain - the Hockey Heritage Museum in that community will be supported.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

It has come as no surprise to anyone in this House that the people of Cumberland County have been paying more than their fair share of tax over the last 20 years, with the Cobequid tolls.

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 72.

Bill No. 72 - Education Reform (2018) Act.

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

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill No. 72. I will be brief in my opening comments because I know that the members opposite are eager to further debate this piece of legislation.

I do want to thank the members of this House, in particular the member for Kings South, and the member for Dartmouth South, for proposing amendments to this legislation, which I believe have been thoughtful and have strengthened the legislation and improved it. In particular, I do want to thank the member for Dartmouth South, who I know is a passionate critic of this piece of legislation. She also brought forward, I think, very constructive ideas and suggestions in terms of making this piece of legislation better for our kids and for the public.

I do want to speak to some of the arguments that I have become familiar with presented by the members opposite in relation to this piece of legislation. Some key lines of argument that have been presented are around the impact this piece of legislation will have on our students, which needs to be at the forefront; debate around the nature of the democratic institution of the school boards and their effectiveness, from a democratic standpoint; and also, the impact of removing administrators from the unions. I will briefly address a few of those, as I know they will come up in debate.

I do want to say I am very sympathetic to the situation the boards find themselves in. I understand that board members feel hurt and confused by this piece of legislation, and do not agree with removing their level of governance in the education system. I do understand, and can appreciate, the arguments opposite that have been presented around the loss of a democratic institution that, in the words of the members opposite, are important for community engagement and responsiveness.

But there is an issue we are trying to fix with this that does relate to student achievements, success, and supports as well. We have a challenge with having a small Province of Nova Scotia, with having eight independent education systems that do operate very differently. That has led to a situation where, statistically, students in certain regions have less of a chance of succeeding at the same level as students in other regions. That is problematic.

The members opposite, particularly in the Progressive Conservative Caucus, have actually identified in their comments and their arguments, inconsistencies in terms of transportation policy, mental health supports, and other health supports that are in the system. It's these inconsistencies that we do want to address so that no matter where you are pursuing an education in this province, you statistically will have the same chance of

success on a number of levels, and will have the same access to the best practices when it comes to supports that are in place in the system.

I do want to say again that this is not about the board members as individuals, or as a collective. This is a system challenge that has been created over the course of decades and decades. I think it's important that we reflect on why we have the system that we do. Education began at the community level. We had local schoolhouses. Once our society grew, then municipal governments took over the role of education. That led to the creation of trustees or board members.

The Department of Education wasn't created until the 1960s by Premier Angus L. Macdonald. Since that time, there has always been confusion in the system with lines of accountability, with implementation of education policies and programming, and I think it's important to note that. If we were building a modern education system today from scratch, I think it's important to ask ourselves, would we have this layer of elected boards? I don't know that we would. I think we have them now because they have always been there, and we have always kept them in place as a result of the inception of the education model that we've had here in Nova Scotia.

The member for Cape Breton Centre has made the analogy that if the Prime Minister didn't like what provinces are doing, would he then have the ability to disband provincial Legislatures. There is a reason why that analogy doesn't work in this particular situation, I'll bring that member's attention to the current Act, where it discusses the powers of the school boards and accountability.

Here's another challenge that we have with this model. I'll bring the member's attention to Duties and Powers, Clause 64(1) of the Education Act. It says, "A school board is accountable to the Minister . . ." That is a very bizarre situation to have for a democratically elected institution, that they are actually elected to be accountable to one person.

The distinct difference between provincial Legislatures and school boards is that we are not held accountable to the Prime Minister. In fact, we are a separate order of government that acts independently and autonomously and is only accountable to the people who elect us.

It's very different for the boards. This has led to situations where I think every Party in this House has actually fired boards and board members and put one individual in place to run that region of the education system. Every single Party has done that. I don't remember the NDP, when they fired the South Shore board, arguing for the democratic rights of that board when they did that. This is an inherent part of the challenge that we're trying to fix. This is the issue that Dr. Glaze has pointed out as being incoherent and dysfunctional and not having proper lines of accountability from a governance perspective.

This confusion in the system has led again to a situation where, depending on where you're going to school, statistically and historically, you have greater chances of succeeding than in other places in this province. That is the fundamental problem that we're trying to fix here. If you're pursuing education in certain regions of the province, the supports that are available to you are very different, Mr. Speaker.

We really do think that this is a governance issue. It's an administrative challenge that all governments have faced and have tackled differently. I have heard repeatedly from the members opposite that a system is in crisis, that the education system is broken. This is about fixing that actual system. In order to do that, the way it operates needs to change.

In terms of the question around administrators being removed from the union and that impact on student success and achievement, I actually think this is a very important move. We have heard this from administrators consistently. In every single region I have been in in this province, this has come up. They are in conflict. There have been situations where they have received union directives that have put them in direct competition with the laws of the province and their responsibilities to students. There have been conflicts of interest when it comes to supervising teachers and addressing issues of performance.

These things actually really matter for our education system. Teaching excellence is the number one factor that impacts student outcomes. Leadership excellence is the number two factor. Principals have told us that they don't always have the ability to provide those important roles to the system because of this conflict of interest. That's a problem that needs to be addressed.

We have worked with the union to find a position that we hope is as acceptable as it can be to the union. That is allowing the principals, VPs, superintendents, HR people, and all the other people who have held management supervisory positions in the system who have been members of the union - those who are doing hiring and firing have been members of the union, and those who are actually negotiating on behalf of the employer during regional collective agreements are members of the union. This is about alleviating that conflict but ensuring that the connection with the union is still there because we know that is important for people. It has been a long-standing relationship.

We found, I believe, a compromise that addresses the issue of conflicts of interest, which are real and which are inherent in the current structure of the system, but allows that affiliation to be maintained. We are not breaking up a family, Mr. Speaker. We are putting an addition on to the house and asking certain members of the family to stay in that part of the house.

I do think this is actually important for student success and achievement particularly because administrators have had a very difficult time getting their agenda and priorities on the mandate of the union executive. The simple reason for that is because they only make 10 per cent of that membership. By having a professional association that can focus on

leadership excellence - which again does not even find itself in the belief statements of the NSTU and which is the second-greatest factor contributing to student success - that allows them to have a structure in place that actually provides that network of support and structural support for them to do their very best in the system.

[11:00 a.m.]

Mr. Speaker, I've heard the argument proposed by the NDP that our administrators aren't managers, and schools aren't businesses. I agree that schools are not businesses, but nor is our health care system, that's not a business. Community Services is not a business; TIR is not a business. The Department of Environment, every single department, every single service that the province provides is not a business, but we have management in all of these structures, and I think that's an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to executing services effectively to Nova Scotians.

While I know that in terms of the word "management", there is an immediate negative reaction to that term in the education sector, I don't completely understand why that happens but I understand that that is a reality - people in the system do not like that term. I do think it's also important to note that there are key management functions that are happening at the administrative level - hiring and firing, performance measures that are being taken by our principals and VPs.

Managing the resources in the schools, Mr. Speaker, those are management functions whether we want to call them that or not. The question I would ask the member opposite, if our principals and our VPs are not doing these management functions, then who in our education system is? If it's not them, then I'm not sure who is actually going to do that. In fact, I do think these folks are doing these on behalf of our students, and on behalf of the public.

Another change that we have brought forward is around how we approach standards of excellence in teaching, as I mentioned, the number one factor that contributes to student outcomes. I am not saying and never will I say that it's our teachers who are failing our kids, because they're not, but the system has been failing our teachers in this regard. The system has been failing our educators; the system has been failing our administrators, Mr. Speaker.

The fact that we have not even set standards of excellence in this province to provide that ideal that every single educator can achieve to do their very best, to help provide a road map so each and every single individual in that system can pursue their very best in this profession, that is a failure on behalf of government. That is a failure of the system that we have not provided these supports for our educators, Mr. Speaker.

While I do believe the college is a good idea, having a self-regulated professional body that oversees the standards of excellence and provides the supports in place for every

teacher to achieve those standards of excellence in teaching and leadership, it is very difficult to achieve that when there's not buy-in with the sector. So, that is something that we have recognized.

We have committed to move forward with the union in this particular regard, to have standards of excellence and to make sure there are appropriate places and mechanisms in place to ensure that our teachers are able to get there. Also, that involves giving a little more support too. We are asking them to do an impossible thing in our education system, where they have to spend a lot of time on classroom management, there is time taken away from instruction to do other things, which even includes some health procedures that our teachers and our TAs are being expected to conduct, which I do not believe is fair and I do believe it takes away from their ability to do their very best in the classroom.

We are moving forward with recommendations in March. I have not seen those recommendations in their entirety, but this is on the system of inclusion and behavioural supports, mental health supports, health supports, that we will be investing in in the system, Mr. Speaker, we are also looking at the complicated and controversial question of composition, and how we achieve an inclusive education system that does provide for every student in the system in a way that makes sense and that's effective for them. I believe that these administrative changes will actually help us implement those changes effectively and consistently across the board in the province.

Also, another line of argument that has been presented - I know online and in the House - is this notion that Dr. Avis Glaze has presented an Ontario-centric model, or idea, and I do want to challenge that a little bit. First of all, if you don't believe in the recommendations that have been presented by Dr. Glaze, I would suggest that we argue the merit of each of those recommendations and not try to attack her integrity, or character, in terms of advancing your own arguments here.

Dr. Glaze actually lives in B.C. She has worked in Ontario, she has worked in B.C., and she has done education reform in over 50 jurisdictions across the globe, Mr. Speaker. For anybody in this province to say we should not listen to her because she doesn't come from Nova Scotia, I see that as being extremely problematic. Why do we not want to benefit from the best minds in the world when it comes to how we develop education policy in this province?

That is not to say there are not bright minds and great people in this province, but if we are going to shut our doors to outside experience, outside opinions, then we should expect other jurisdictions to do the same. If we accept this line of argument, that we should not look at these recommendations or move on them because Dr. Glaze comes from Ontario or comes from someplace else other than Nova Scotia, then we'd better be prepared to have other jurisdictions tell bright minds from Nova Scotia that they can't go and influence decision-making in other parts of the world. Would we suggest that that is what should happen?

We have bright minds in Nova Scotia. I think the world should benefit from those bright minds, their experience, and their knowledge, much as we should benefit from minds that come from outside of this province as well.

There's been a legitimate concern expressed from the African Nova Scotian community and the Mi'kmaq community that I think is important to recognize as we head into third debate around the loss of those representatives on school boards. I deeply understand the concern expressed by those communities. These were advances that were made by African Nova Scotians and by the Mi'kmaq community. I know that having those seats on those boards has been important and valuable to those communities, and this does change that. I've heard the analogy used that "we fought hard to get a seat at the table, and now the table has been taken away."

I sympathize deeply with that concern. We recognize it. But in speaking with members of the African Nova Scotian community, I also know that we have not, even with this system in place, addressed the chief concern, and that's the achievement gap between our African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq learners and the rest of the province.

So my commitment, which I do want to state on the record: we have taken away one table. We now have the opportunity to be the architects of a brand-new table, one that I hope and I have a goal to ensure has agency, empowerment, and a say in how education policy is delivered in this province, so that we can address that chief concern and problem that we have in our education system, which is that achievement gap.

I want to also mention the CSAP, recognizing their distinct Charter right to oversee the linguistic and cultural aspects of education for the Acadian and French-speaking communities. That will remain, and we will be moving forward with a separate piece of legislation which will enshrine that in law for the Province of Nova Scotia. That will be coming forward later this session.

I do want to take the opportunity, again, to talk about the relationship with teachers and the union. In travelling across this province, I've had a really great opportunity to meet and discuss these issues directly with educators in small venues - 20 to 30 people. I hope people can understand that that led to a very productive form of having a conversation. It's a lot easier to talk to smaller groups of people in a way that is productive than it is at the front of a room of 500.

I hope people can recognize the practicality of that, because those conversations were important. They were meaningful. They helped shape changes to this piece of legislation, and it also gave me some very important insights into the opposition to the Glaze report, which had a lot more to do with a lack of trust in the government than the recommendations themselves. That was very telling for me. If folks didn't even necessarily read the report, but they did not trust the government to act in a way that was in their best

interest or in the best interest of the students, that is a challenge that we need to work our way through.

I know we've been in disagreement with members of the teaching population and with the union but, again, I want to emphasize that at the end of the day all of us have the jobs we do in the education system to provide service to our kids and to give them the best chance at success in school and in life post-graduation. If we remain focused on that collective obligation and responsibility, we will always be able to work through our periods of disagreement, our periods of conflict, our periods of tension, to make sure that at the end of the day we're doing our very best for those students, whom we're here to serve.

I'm committed to continuing those conversations with teachers and the union. I hope to improve the levels of trust, improve the discourse, and ensure that even when we disagree, we're actually talking in a way that's productive, constructive, and helpful for our kids.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, Bill No. 72 reflects the failure of this Liberal Government to bring authentic, real education reform to the Province of Nova Scotia. I think about this morning as my daughters were getting ready for school. As we were going through our normal routines to prepare for school, to get lunches ready, to get snacks ready, and watching them get ready for school, getting their backpacks on and preparing to go out the door, I really started to reflect: what types of changes do we need? It dawned on me that Nova Scotians are asking for a new deal in education, and we're not getting a new deal in education. What we are seeing with Bill No. 72 is the implementation of failed ideas that have been put in place in other provinces and are being recycled here in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotians want a different approach, Mr. Speaker, to education reform. Certainly, implementing the changes that are outlined in Bill No. 72, these changes, very few of our front-line teachers are asking for. The reality is, these changes simply miss the mark. They fail to deliver where reform has to be focused on, and that is the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, the plan for how these drastic changes will actually improve our classrooms has not been articulated by this government. This government recognizes that, through the inclusion commission, we need to get moving on the issues in the classroom; yet, they have the order of operations backwards. That needs to be the sole focus of our push to reform the education system. Everyone in this House knows, and everyone in the province knows, I am opposed to this bill. This bill will not make education better in Nova Scotia. Quite frankly, what it has achieved is further inflaming, further escalating the situation with our teachers, adding to more confusion.

I wish to ask this government some key questions. What happens the day after this legislation becomes law? Are the classrooms of Nova Scotia going to be any better? I, and everyone on this side, certainly do not believe that our classrooms are going to improve as a result of Bill No. 72. Will our schools be healthier as a result of Bill No. 72? Will the students in our education system be better served as a result of Bill No. 72? No. No. No. This piece of legislation, which has been pushed through this House, I believe, will not set up Nova Scotia students for the success that they so rightly deserved.

We see legislation being rammed through with a Liberal majority government. We see the implementation of this bill, in this Chamber, all designed to make people upset, when the reality is this is a time in our political culture, this is a time in Nova Scotia when collaboration is more critical than ever. Look at what the politics of conflict has produced. We have one of the key stakeholders in education, our teachers, they do not buy into the principles of Bill No. 72. We will never achieve real, authentic reform in this province until that rift between the government and the teachers can be mended.

[11:15 a.m.]

Mr. Speaker, I think about the many people who spoke at Law Amendments Committee the other day. When some of those witnesses were talking about the disrespect they feel from this government, whether it's school board officials, or teachers, or administrators, they are feeling very vulnerable right now. Some have expressed that what this bill is about is not about reforming our education, what this bill is about is punishment and retribution. That is unacceptable.

Again, Bill No. 72 represents a failure, a complete failure of this Liberal Government to bring about the authentic education reform that our province needs.

Mr. Speaker, when witnesses at Law Amendments Committee are saying things like "this government can never be trusted again," that "it is a toxic relationship," that the mood among our teachers, the morale of our province's teachers, is at an all-time low - that's the end result of this bill. The end result is that it has permanently damaged, at this stage, the relationship between our teachers and the government.

There's something critical here that we need to recognize, Mr. Speaker, and I've mentioned this in the House before. For quite some time, Nova Scotia and other jurisdictions have moved away from listening to the concerns of frontline workers. I don't know why that's the case, whether it's our nurses, whether it's our doctors, and now our teachers.

When it comes to the education system, it is the teachers who are the experts. They are the ones, day in and day out, implementing the curriculum, designing the curriculum, working hard to keep up with their professional developments. When they tell us that there are problems with the curriculum, when they tell us there are gaps with mental health

services, when they tell us that the policies we have in place in Nova Scotia are not helping students take responsibility for their actions, I advise that we listen and that we listen loud and clear. They are the experts.

Bill No. 72 has resulted in very low morale of our teachers. Let me say this, Mr. Speaker: I want every teacher in this province to know that they are appreciated. I, as an MLA, appreciate their efforts considerably. I want them to know that the great work they do every day does not go unnoticed and, despite the disrespect from this government to our teachers, keep doing the great job you are doing, because at the end of the day we all agree that it is about our students.

That's the point, Mr. Speaker - this bill is not student-centred. This bill is not pro-education. This bill is not pro-classroom and, dare I say, this bill is not pro-respect. If it was pro-respect, the government would have listened, the government would have collaborated, and you would see education reform at this point coming forward to this House that focuses on what really matters, and that is the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, in many respects Bill No. 72 is another example of Liberal ineptitude, poor leadership on a file that is so critical to Nova Scotians. It can be said that there is no greater good, no greater service, than pushing policies that really focus on maximizing education and, because education is so critical for the advancement of any society, families look to governments to make sure the best policies are in place.

When I examine Bill No. 72, this massive, omnibus bill, this 60-page document, people are confused - I am confused as to the scope and responsibilities that are now going to be outlined in things like the Provincial Advisory Council. People look to government for clarity, they look to government for security, for the conditions to prosper. Under this legislation, I do not see the conditions for our students to thrive, for our students to prosper.

Mr. Speaker, we need to take a moment and talk about process. This has been quite the eye-opening experience, I think, for anyone new to the political process. We recognize there is a desire on the part of Nova Scotians to have a new deal in education, to put forward reforms that will focus on the classroom, yet this government is very cavalier in making those proposals and implementing those proposals.

They had the choice, they could have collaborated, they could have worked with our teachers. Instead they choose to further escalate, to further ignore the concerns of our province's teachers. So, it is very cavalier, the rollout of these changes. I believe, Mr. Speaker, they again undermined people's faith in this government's ability to manage a situation, because to truly manage the situation would have been, by this point, to have brought forward changes that focus on curriculum, changes that focus on mental health.

In Bill No. 72, there is no vision in this legislation. There is no deal for a better education system in this province. What we get in this bill is a government that is doubling

down on the very policies that brought us a disaster in Nova Scotia health care. I find that to be very troubling. There's nothing original in this bill. What we see contained in this bill, as I mentioned, has been implemented in other provinces. What we see in this bill simply further escalates tensions with our teachers.

Mr. Speaker, as I said this morning as I was getting my daughters off to school, I was really thinking about what type of education system we need. Then from there, I started to think about all the people who came out to Law Amendments Committee and had their say on what is wrong with this bill. I want to go over some of the themes that, for those of us who were there and listening, there were some key themes that emerged from Law Amendments Committee that I think captured why so many people, including myself and many others on this side, are opposed to Bill No. 72.

First of all, one of the themes that is crystal clear is that government is not listening. If you are listening, you can sense a tone of respect, you can sense a tone that there is a desire to collaborate. In this case, we're not seeing that with the government. Actually, in a lot of cases, you see that with this government.

Another theme that emerged was that there is a grave concern, and rightly so, that this is a carbon copy of what the Province of Ontario did back in the 1990s, obliterating school boards. Well, in the case of Ontario they didn't obliterate them completely - I think they kept 74 school boards - but that's the route we go, somehow vaporizing school boards is going to make the classroom better in the thinking of this government.

Removing principals from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union - again grave concerns over that have been expressed that by doing that, we will move from the collegial model that currently exists in our schools, where teachers and administrators work in a collegial manner, to be replaced by an almost adversarial type of leadership. These are grave concerns, and this has been expressed by our teachers and administrators.

We see a theme that emerges out of the Committee on Law Amendments, that emerges outside in this province. People are concerned about school closures. What will the process be as it relates to school closures? Will advisory councils be able to advocate for rural schools? At this point, the themes that we're seeing clearly show there are huge loopholes and huge gaps in this legislation. Far too many questions. These are the things, that, so far, examining this ominous bill, have been identified. What else will be identified down the road that is going to add more chaos to an already fragile education system?

Another key theme that is being expressed by Nova Scotians, their reservations with this bill, is that there were fundamental flaws in the methodology employed in the Glaze report, that you had a situation in this report where some ideas were pushed as it relates to data. You see the result of that where teachers felt demoralized as a result of some of those pieces of information that were being put out there in the Glaze report.

As a response to that, teachers were simply asking, slow down, consult, can we talk about that, you're arguing this in terms of test results, we have other pieces of information that say otherwise. To me, that's an opportunity to discuss. That's an opportunity to debate.

Again, every call on the part of teachers, on the part of those who are opposed to this bill, to slow down, consult - if you're going to be moving with big reforms, make sure they're focused on the classroom, and not this - whatever this is, and whatever it will end up being in the months and years ahead.

One of the things I've noticed as a parent and as a former teacher: students, kids like routines, as do adults. What this bill does is completely alter the structure of our school governance. No one knows the specific details as to how parents will talk or reach out about transportation issues, what the scope and power and responsibilities of SACs will be, what will be the true role of the provincial advisory council - far too many questions. As this government put these ideas out, the ask was simple - slow down, so we can we talk about this. All only to lead to the legislative process we have right now, where this government is ramming the bill through.

Another theme that has clearly come out in this is that this is a rushed and cherry-picked group of changes that will not impact the classroom. I tend to agree with that. I tend to agree that, specifically as it relates to taking principals out of the union, specifically to vaporizing school boards - they don't seem to connect. If the end goal is to improve the classroom - and the end goal should be to always improve the classroom - why take that approach?

A lot of other themes have emerged from the Committee on Law Amendments from those who are opposed to this. There's a theme we are seeing emerge that there will be an abrupt change that will push us back further. We are seeing an abrupt change. When these 11 recommendations were put out there to Nova Scotians, people were taken aback by this. Really? These are the 11 recommendations for education reform, after we had our teachers stand up just a year ago and say "no, these are the seven or eight things we need to focus on"?

Mr. Speaker, we see the theme that emerges in this legislation, that this is an affront to the democratic process. I mentioned at second reading, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is very exclusionary. It excludes voices, and wiping out elected school boards without consultation is for many in this province profoundly anti-democratic. I'd like to point out, there were other options available for school governance reform. Members of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association expressed to me that they had other models that could've been analyzed. For me, I would see that as an opportunity. Like many people in Nova Scotia, I want to see school board governance reform, and I'd want to work with school board officials to achieve that. This government does the opposite, they choose to go nuclear on school boards and phase them out. By phasing them out, we are silencing some very important voices.

Mr. Speaker, it all comes back, in many regards, to this fundamental question: what should the foundation of education reform be? What should that foundation be? Bill No. 72 doesn't represent that foundation. What it should be is that we have a student-centred curriculum, we are updating our curriculum to meet the needs of the early 21st century, we are focused, we must be focused now on improving the inclusion model.

I have to say this Mr. Speaker, certainly the exclusion of inclusion in Bill No. 72 was a shock to so many Nova Scotians. I think for many who weren't paying attention to this bill, it got their attention. To have such a gap in a bill like that is an indication, a careless indication on the part of this government, that they haven't listened. They haven't understood what teachers and parents have been arguing for quite some time: that if we're going to do education reform, we've got to get the foundation right. That foundation needs to be focused on the classroom.

So, Mr. Speaker, still looking through the themes that emerge from Law Amendments Committee, the themes that have emerged in this legislative process, where the government is ramming this bill through, one thing that became crystal clear is our classroom conditions, which have still not been fully addressed or at times, not taken seriously by this government. I spent time in the classroom, and I know others have in this Chamber as well. I know first-hand what a shock it is, if you're teaching high school, to get your register, and to see that you have 34-35 students. And then you start to go through the data, the information on those students, to discover that seven or eight of them are on IPPs, five or six of them are on formal adaptations, and you discover you do not have one classroom in front of you, you have 15 or 16 classrooms in front of you. When teachers came to Law Amendments Committee, just a few days ago and last year, that is what they were talking about.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of Nova Scotians support the inclusion model. The issue is that the principle of inclusion in this province has not been properly resourced, or costed. Often what we've done is we've had things look very good on paper in terms of an IPP. Clear objectives are laid out in that program plan. The teacher will look at that plan and say this can be done, but then you encounter the day-to-day grind that exists in the classroom. From first taking attendance and then settling your students to get them focused on learning but then you discover that strategy isn't being effective for 20 per cent of your class. So, you have to adapt quickly, use a different strategy to try to engage your students. Then, after your period, after your class, after that's done, you oftentimes realize that you have not maximized the learning opportunities - and why is that? Because often, often, the resources simply weren't there; the space simply wasn't there.

I ask this House, I ask this government, why is it we have a Bill No. 72 before us and not, right now at this moment, an Act to reform the classrooms of Nova Scotia - why is that?

Now, there are many who say it is because this bill isn't about reforming the classroom, which we know it's not. What this bill is about is about payback. It's about making people realize, making our teachers realize that they are not in charge. When people express that to me, I feel very saddened by that. It's how they feel, and I want this government to recognize it's going to take a lot for them to change that perception. They have severely damaged the relationship with our teachers and that's on you, that's on this government - you had an opportunity.

One of the things when I was trying to read through Bill No. 72 is that I kept thinking to myself, what a missed opportunity. This government could have begun to rebuild trust right away - get them onside, get them onboard and, by doing so, you could have achieved some great classroom reforms up to this point. Instead, what do we get? A bill that focuses on bureaucracy, a bill that focuses on what some say is about busting a union, when what's it's really about, this bill is about making sure teachers know who's in charge. And this government needs to be aware that it's going to take a long time and a lot of effort on their part to regain that trust and that's something that became crystal clear at Law Amendments Committee - there is damage done to that relationship.

One of the presenters at Law Amendments Committee - you could tell he had a lot of experience teaching history - he asked a very important question at Law Amendments Committee. It's Brian Forbes, and Mr. Forbes had a unique take on all this. He asked, why is it that the education system, why is it in an uproar? I think that question captured what a lot of Nova Scotians are feeling right now and asking right now. He sort of took us back about 30, 40 years and he talked about a relationship that used to exist between government and public servants called "collaboration" where you would get together - you'd have your differences but in the spirit of mutual respect and in a spirit of collaboration we're going to get a deal that might not keep everyone happy but a deal that is in the public good.

He indicated, and certainly got me thinking, what has changed in the last 30 or 40 years to now in terms of the relationship between government and its public servants. Of course, it was expressed at Law Amendments Committee that it is this government's leadership style, this Premier's leadership style that has resulted in the breakdown of trust between our teachers and the Government of Nova Scotia.

Something else, Mr. Speaker, that kept coming up time and time again was the mood and morale of our province's teachers. Again, that has to be addressed; that is a major problem. Having spent some time in the classroom, I know the daily grind of going in and delivering the curriculum. In order to achieve that, you need to know that you're backed up by the other stakeholders in education. Our teachers certainly don't feel backed up by this government.

We heard from people who very much were concerned about class composition. I do agree with the government, based on my experience as a teacher, that teaching excellence is very important. Teaching excellence is critical, we need to ensure we have -

and we do at the moment - systems in place to make sure that when a teacher is assigned to a specific subject to teach that they have all the necessary competencies because, if you want to set your students up for success, you want to set the teacher up for success.

We already have some unbelievable administrators, and systems are already in place to ensure we get the right principal, the right VP for any given school. It's not a perfect system but it's certainly a system that the teachers of this province - and let me be clear, we're not taking issue with that. When they were marching around Province House last year nobody was saying, take principals out of the union, go nuclear on school boards. Nobody was saying that, Mr. Speaker. What they were saying was, focus on the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, teaching excellence, administrative excellence of course, but if we've listened to our educators, we know that it's also class composition. Plainly said, that is about the learning environment. Many of our teachers have been saying we're not getting our students in the right learning environment. One of the things we've been doing in this province is we've taken a cookie-cutter approach, sort of one programming fits all. That is why members of the PC caucus are such strong advocates of a return to skilled trades programming in our high schools, to ensure students get in the right environment.

At times, Mr. Speaker, the edge of babble that's out there really gets in the way, I think sometimes, for people to understand what it's really about. When we're talking about class composition, we're talking about getting our kids in the right environment. For many parents that is stressful, to know that you're sending your child to a classroom where you know they are not in the right environment and, if you can get them in the right learning environment, you know your child will thrive and find success. We need class composition addressed to set up our learners for success, to set up our teachers for success.

Another issue that emerged at the Law Amendments Committee, and we also hear from parents and teachers, is there needs to be a sense of urgency when implementing programs when it comes to mental health in schools. In this Party, we have certainly advocated for a very long time to have mental health professionals in all our schools.

Let me give you a little history lesson, Mr. Speaker. I remember a few years ago being asked to go to the HRSB at Spectacle Lake and to listen to Dr. Stan Kutcher. At the time - and this was about five or six years ago - Dr. Kutcher was giving professional development to teachers who were willing and felt comfortable to be a go-to person in the school. At the time, my understanding was that a go-to teacher would be for a student who may not want to go to a guidance counsellor or this teacher or that teacher, but someone on staff who they were comfortable with to talk about some of the issues they were having. Our role was to help them and - listen to this - access resources.

[11:45 a.m.]

I signed up to be a go-to teacher, a role that I very much got a lot out of. I learned a lot and, more importantly, I learned a lot about the gaps that exist within the Nova Scotia mental health system.

I can certainly recall, when I started my career, that mental health was never talked about in schools, it was only talked about in whispers. Then we encouraged our youth to talk about their mental health. We have these go-to teachers in place at our schools to encourage them to talk about their mental health, only to discover that in a crisis the resources are not there. You are told it is going to be an eight- or nine-month wait.

Mr. Speaker, those are the things we should be focused on right now. A bill should be before the House that focuses on an issue like that, and if we had listened to our teachers - if this government had taken it seriously - those are the types of things we would see before the House right now.

Going back to the Law Amendments Committee, I want to take a moment and analyze a very profound presentation to the committee by Mr. Pat Savage. I had the honour of teaching beside Mr. Savage in Dartmouth East, and I always wondered why students were running to his class. Maybe he's chastising them for being late, but no, they couldn't wait to get into his classroom because Pat Savage gets you thinking, and that's what a great teacher does.

At Law Amendments Committee, I think Mr. Savage certainly got all of Nova Scotia thinking. I believe his criticism of Bill No. 72 is quite profound and needs to be restated. His opposition to Bill No. 72 is based on two premises: a citizen premise and a principal premise. He indicated that it is the role of government to open the paths to democracy, to always encourage more democracy. And, I suppose, if you look at democracy in terms of mechanics and nuts and bolts, you would say it's about voting, getting on voters' lists, this and that, when there is an attitude towards democracy.

What Pat was saying is that our attitude towards democracy is being eroded. When we are excluding voices, when we are not consulting, and when we are choosing not to listen to the authentic concerns of our front-line workers, that is a problem. It is an existential problem that I worry, if not addressed, is only going to get worse as time goes on.

His other main criticism was from the perspective of being a principal. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. It is a role where you will have your teachers on staff looking to you for direction - pedagogical direction, direction for the day-to-day operations of a school - and a good working relationship between a teacher and a principal is so critical.

Mr. Savage indicated that amongst principals in our province, the term “manager” is used as a point of derision. The term is often synonymous with someone who is not doing their job properly. If you are doing your job properly in teaching, it means you have built great relationships. It means you have created an atmosphere where people feel welcome, they know that their voices are encouraged to be expressed. How do you measure those things, Mr. Speaker? How do you gather data on that?

Mr. Savage raised a lot of very important points that I think were key, absolutely key, when people look at this bill, if they have the stamina to go through this omnibus bill, to ask those key questions.

At Law Amendments Committee, a resident of my community, Sabrina Fenyvesi, I believe made a very profound statement. She used the analogy of her child coming to her and saying, I need new shoes, my feet are hurting, and her response being, I’m going to buy you a new hat. She said, that’s Bill No. 72. It misses the mark. It misses the identified problems. Mr. Speaker, if you understand deeply the issues that are in our classrooms, then you can understand why Bill No. 72 simply misses the mark. That is why, in this Party, we reject it, and we cannot support it.

She talked about something that I thought was very, very interesting. I asked her to describe the mood, to describe her relationship with this government as a teacher. She indicated to the Law Amendments Committee, “I don’t necessarily want to leave teaching, but I want to leave this toxic relationship.” Wow, that is a powerful statement, for a teacher of this province to come to the House of Assembly to say, “I don’t want to have anything to do with that, I don’t want to have anything to do with their approach on how they govern, how they administer the school system.”

I ask the government to reflect on that. That is a powerful, profound statement that I hope provokes you to think about the way in which you are interacting with our public servants - I want to leave this toxic relationship.

Mr. Speaker, how have we arrived at this point? Oh, yes, it is when you push your ideas on people. It is when you push your ideology, I suppose, on people, and you fail in a basic principle of leadership. That is consulting, making sure voices are heard and that you take those concerns into consideration.

There’s another theme that I think is very important to bring up. It’s the concern over the replacement of the collegial model as it exists now between teachers and our administrators. I think like most things in life, Mr. Speaker, most of us, when we speak, we want to speak with a bit of authority. To do that, you speak from experience. I can tell you as a former teacher, and I think a lot of teachers feel this way, that there was not an issue with that collegial model. Sure, I have no doubt some did, but the vast majority I don’t believe do. There is a concern that that collegial model between teachers and

administrators is simply going to result in an increase in tensions and an increase in grievances.

Law Amendments Committee was powerful. Law Amendments Committee made me realize, and further validated in my mind, that this bill completely misses the mark.

The end result of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that it does not adequately address the systemic problems that we see in our classrooms, the systemic problems that plague our education system. Bill No. 72 has simply resulted in low teacher morale. It has resulted in parental confusion. It has resulted in voices being excluded in a conversation where many voices must be included. Parents are confused. There is a lot of uncertainty.

Bill No. 72, I believe, is wrong for Nova Scotian students. Bill No. 72 is wrong for Nova Scotia.

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

MR. GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin my response to the third reading of Bill No. 72, this bill by which the government is about to obliterate democratically elected school boards from the political landscape of our province, with some International Women's Day related reflections on the subject of the education of children and young people about democracy.

I'd like to direct members in their imaginations first to one of the most important pieces of public art on the subject of democracy in Canada; that's the statue of the Famous Five on Parliament Hill. The statue, which I expect many members will have visited, is on the Parliament Hill grounds on the Rideau Canal side, and it depicts five women in vigorous and animated conversation and discussion. The women's names are Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Edwards, and Nellie McClung. Now, the visual centre of this sculpture is the figure of Nellie McClung holding up a proclamation. The proclamation in this statue on Parliament Hill, which Nellie McClung is holding as she's engaged in conversation with the other group of four women, it's about so long and it just has engraved on it three words: women are persons.

The proclamation in this statute that women are persons refers to the decision of the British Judicial Committee of 1929, a decision which the statue memorializes. Prior to that Privy Council ruling, women were not eligible to be appointed to the Canadian Senate because the relevant legislation had specified that only what it called "persons" were eligible for such appointment. The Supreme Court of Canada had ruled that women were not to be understood as persons for the purposes of this legislation.

The Persons Case - which the statue with the four women and Nellie McClung presenting the proclamation before them - the Persons Case as the appeal of the five women to the Privy Council came to be known - followed eight years after the first election of a

woman to the House of Commons. Its significance in Canada, that case, is that it established an extraordinarily important principle. The principle established in the Persons Case, memorialized in that statue in that important landscape context on Parliament Hill in Canada, is the principle that there was no level of democracy in our country to which women could be denied the right to hold office.

Now, I have mentioned here before that I spent the largest part of my adult life in the community of Upper Musquodoboit, where my wife and I raised our children. Upper Musquodoboit is as wonderful a rural working class community as any in which children anywhere would want to be raised, but it is not a privileged community. So, the experience of wide travel is not something that is shared by the majority of the children of that community, nor are there an awful lot of opportunities for the young people of Upper Musquodoboit to experience in a personal way or in a direct way a connection with the places and the institutions that shape the democratic system that we live in.

With this in our minds, over 20 years ago, a group of us parents in Upper Musquodoboit undertook a project to introduce the children of our community to the institutions of Canadian democracy. Every two or three years, just on our own, without any organizational or institutional sponsorship, we would between us gather up every Grade 6, 7, and 8 student in the community - this would only typically be a couple dozen kids - we would pile them in our vans, take them out of school for three days, and drive them to Ottawa, where we'd sleep them on the floor of a church and feed them sandwiches in our Member of Parliament's boardroom, and then jam-pack-cram two days with visits to many dimensions of Parliament Hill, the House of Commons, the Museum of Civilization, Rideau Hall, the Supreme Court of Canada, and other parallel institutions central to our democracy.

[12:00 p.m.]

But of all those things that we took those kids to experience, and all the times that we did that, nothing in those trips was any more meaningful or any more important than what we did every time we took the Grades 6, 7, and 8 kids of our community to Parliament Hill - we took them on the trek across Parliament Hill to visit and be in the presence of that statue of those five women from the Persons Case.

There, every single time we made that expedition - and we made it many times with a group of a couple dozen Grades 6, 7, and 8 students from our community - as the kids gathered around that statue of the Famous Five, the significance of the Persons Case was explained to the young people of our community. Once we'd explained the significance of that case, we took pains to make sure we took a picture of every single girl in our community within the armspan of Nellie McClung holding that up, so that the girl would have a picture of herself standing in front of Nellie McClung, with the Women are Persons proclamation in front of her.

To this day, there are women from that community who have and who prize that picture of themselves with Nellie McClung. The picture says, to each of those girls and women, something very important, and that's what I wish to come to in the context of Bill No. 72. What that picture said to each one of those girls, and what that picture says to us as they saw themselves before that proclamation from the Persons Case, Women are Persons, is this: the world of democracy is not something that you are just relegated to watch from a distance. It is, rather, a world that involves you. It is a world that is connected to you. You are part of it. You are one of the ones who are included in the picture.

Now, what is so deeply troubling about Bill No. 72, with its obliteration of locally-elected school boards in our province, is that it is sending all kinds of people exactly the opposite message of the one that we parents in Upper Musquodoboit were at such pains to impart to the young people of our communities, particularly to impart to our daughters. Make no mistake about it - Bill No. 72 says it very clearly. Its message from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, from the Premier, and from the government in general, to many, many people, is plainly and simply, you are erased from the picture. You are one of the ones who is to be removed.

Nothing less than that is what is being said. Nothing less than something that is absolutely exclusive is what's being said to those who are represented on the seven English school boards of the province today by African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq members.

Listen to these words from the Commission on Effective Electoral Representation of Acadian and African Nova Scotians, a document that figures centrally in the government's program later in this session. Here is the advice given to the government by Commissioners Doug Keefe, Sharon Davis-Murdoch, and Kenneth Deveau, as follows: "As it continually adapts the education system, we urge the Department of Education to always consider the broader roles and significance of the African Nova Scotian school board seats."

In another place, the authors of the report recommend that the mode of a special African Nova Scotian-dedicated seat on every school board, they say of it that this be a mode that be considered "as a starting point for other organizations." Some consideration. What the government has in fact done is take the very core of the concept of effective representation, namely that one should see oneself included in the picture, has taken the very core of the concept of effective representation and wiped it out, photoshopped it away, reversed it, so that people no longer see themselves there in that important democratic picture.

Reverend Michael Alden Fells, African Nova Scotian representative to the Tri-County Regional School Board, said this very clearly a couple of weeks ago in the *Yarmouth Vanguard*. He spoke about how people had gathered and worked hard over the years to make sure the Black voice was heard in education, and that he could still hear his mother's voice who had told him years ago that she thought it would never happen. She

said, "I don't know if we'll ever sit at that table, but when we do get a seat they'll take away the table." He went on to address himself to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, who needed to be told, he said, not to remove the table because Black people haven't been at the table long enough.

It's not just an image. It's not just a couple of words, "the table," and taking away the table is not just a metaphor. It's a truth at the core of the experience that is being spoken of there of a people. Don't take away the table - it's another way of saying don't photoshop us out. Look at the image of democracy, don't take us out of the core of the democratic heart of the picture. Or we can hear the articulate voice of Archy Beals, African Nova Scotian member of the Halifax Regional School Board who, in his own response to the Glaze report, has written that in his view the impact of the closing down of school boards will be that we, as an African descent community, will continue to lose ground and become more and more disengaged and disenfranchised.

Does the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development hear those two words? Does the Premier hear those two words? These are very important words to cause to be pronounced - "disengaged," "disenfranchised." Do they hear that they have committed what in democracy is as unconscionable a thing as can be committed? They have taken a razor blade to the photo. They have erased people who have cried out to government, do not remove us from the picture.

We've heard the argument made here many times throughout the debate on Bill No. 72 - don't worry about these voices, these voices will be heard, these voices will be respected, these voices will be honoured. But this, on the government's part, is to fail to understand the most fundamental point about how democracy works.

The point which is at the core of the message of that Persons Case statue on Parliament Hill, the point which no child from Upper Musquodoboit ever left there without having drilled into them, the point namely is this: you are in the picture; you are part of this society; you are not an observer; you are a participant. The reason you are not an observer but a participant, the reason you are part of the picture, the reason you are one of the people who belongs in the front of the women are persons, people are persons, is because you as a citizen are one who can be elected.

Listen again to the Commission on Effective Electoral Representation of Acadians and African Nova Scotians, here's what is written there: "The fundamental principle of democracy is sovereignty of the people, that is, we confer the right to govern on people we elect."

I do not question that this government, having obliterated the only level of government where women are adequately represented, will seek to appoint women and to be guided by their advice, I do not question that this government, having obliterated a level of government - which no matter what happens in an election, Mi'kmaq and African Nova

Scotians must be, are guaranteed to be, at the table - will appoint Mi'kmaq people, the government will appoint African Nova Scotian voices and the government, having appointed them, will attempt to be guided by their counsel. I don't question any of that, but that is not the point. The point is that such people will be there in those positions as those upon whom something has been bestowed. They will be in those positions as those who are the recipients of an appointment, as those who are recipients of a recognition, as those who are recipients, even, of a gift. They will not be in those positions in that special, honoured capacity which the Persons Case and the Persons statue commemorates, that honoured position of ones having been elected to represent the people who put them forward by means of their democratic vote.

The parents of Upper Musquodoboit, over many years, slept on church floors, drove all night, ate peanut butter sandwiches in Ottawa for days at a time along with the young people of our community because we wanted our children to grow up understanding this: votes matter. Respect matters. Elected voices matter and so it is hurtful and disappointing and contemptible that this sovereign truth has been undermined by the Government of Nova Scotia.

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

MS. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, this is our last opportunity to talk to Bill No. 72 and I know that everybody who has been watching these proceedings has been left with one disheartening thought. It is that the Government of Nova Scotia can put out a bill shortly after reviewing recommendations that they accepted with undue haste and then, after there was an outcry to the point where teachers, with tears in their eyes and their fingers shaking, clicked yes on a vote to do an illegal act, that they then went around the province and invited people to come and talk to them.

I've been in health care, you all know, for 35 years. We work as teams all the time. Pardon me? (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Keep your comments directed through the Chair.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

MS. ADAMS: Managers have clear, defined roles with policies and procedures that outline what they're supposed to do. Education had a school board that was supposed to have clear policies, and educational rules and regulations, guiding what they were supposed to do. The Auditor General said in 2015 that the Nova Scotia Government did not provide those policies and procedures. You can call them whatever you want. Those school boards were there to serve the education system. We all went out and voted for them. The fact that so many of them were acclaimed is absolutely beside the point.

What we know, and I'm going to quote from this book, *A Healthy Society: How a Focus on Health Can Revive Canadian Democracy*. The quote comes from the Hon. Roy Romanow, the former Premier of Saskatchewan. The book was written by Ryan Meili who is the current Opposition Leader for the New Democratic Party in Saskatchewan.

[12:15 p.m.]

So, as we all know, the Hon. Romanow was appointed to the head of the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada and I'm going to quote what he said, because of all the things that have broken my heart in this whole process, is what he has written in this first foreword to the edition. He says:

“You hear it all the time - in the media, from the public, from politicians themselves: politics is broken. Canadians, and people around the world, are becoming increasingly frustrated with what they see as a widening chasm - a chasm between citizen values and public policy, between what people believe in and what governments do, between the world we envision and the one in which we live. There is a widespread belief, reflected in decreasing voter participation and growing cynicism among citizens, that the system isn't working as it should, that politicians [including me, aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing]. . . . The question before us, as we hope for something better, is what exactly should they be doing?”

This book goes on to describe that, and I'll table that quote.

The thing that disheartens me most about this process is that the honourable minister himself, in his opening remarks, wanted to address the key lines of arguments that he finally heard during Law Amendments Committee and in this House. I would have wished that he had heard these long before this legislation was drawn up. I wish that he had released the Glaze report and then gave it to stakeholders, then asked them for their feedback, and then drafted legislation. That's what collaboration is; this was dictatorship. Those recommendations were approved in full a split second after they were released, before any of us had a real chance to read them and talk to people.

The minister said he wanted to address key lines of argument. He said he heard that people were concerned that this bill didn't address the impact on the classrooms. He didn't address that he was going to do anything differently, but he said he heard it, what people wanted to hear. My phone has been blowing up for the last few weeks and I haven't heard from a single person - and maybe it's a biased sample - who said I like it, let's do it, good on them. Maybe they're contacting your side, but they're not contacting our side. I realize that may be the case sometimes.

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development admitted that he heard that people were concerned about that, that that was the priority, but he didn't change anything in the bill about that. He said he also heard from all of us - the Law Amendments Committee and everybody out there - about the loss of a democratic institution. It is a massive loss. There are so many obstacles to women being in politics. Their very own government, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, has a Campaign School for Women coming up but, as many of you know, there are a lot of people who started off their career on school boards, especially those with younger children, where they learn the rules and regulations, and they make a move on upward to higher levels of politics.

The Auditor General said that there were rules and regulations not in place for the school board, so they've been thrown under the bus and blamed for the mismanagement, when they were not given instructions on what to do. It would be kind of like driving with Stevie Wonder, and expecting him to get you from point A to point B, when he doesn't have a clear path that he can see forward. Throwing out the school boards and blaming them for the problems that we have, frankly, is abominable and I apologize to them for being given that designation.

The minister also said in terms of the key lines of arguments that he heard, about the administration changes with the unions, and what they're doing to the school principals. My colleague previously spoke about Principal Pat Savage. I have a new high school in Eastern Passage, Island View High School. Principal Pat Savage is that new principal. Before he's even stepped foot in the door, his heart has already been broken. He spoke in Law Amendments Committee about the changes that this is going to bring about between the principals and the teachers. He talked about it, we talked about it, everybody at Law Amendments Committee talked about it, and how did the minister respond? Did he change anything? No.

The issue goes back to how are we supposed to get people to engage in the democratic process, encourage people to speak up, when they pour their hearts out, the tears are flowing, the teachers are screaming at us to listen to them, and then absolutely nothing changes.

I want to make some comments on Principal Savage's remarks because this is my community. This is my constituency. These are children in my communities who are going to be affected. This amazing principal, who is about to start this new adventure with these students, already had his heart broken. He came to talk about the Glaze report and Bill No. 72, and I'll be tabling this when I'm done.

He said he wanted to talk as a citizen. The citizens of this constituency and around the province have repeatedly said: we said it, nothing changed. He said he wanted to talk at Law Amendments Committee as a principal. The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development said he listened. Nothing changed.

Mr. Savage said, “Ms. Glaze suggests that the elected school boards have been dysfunctional.” (Whose fault is that? The Auditor General did not blame the school boards. That is not who they pointed the finger at. I have already suggested where they pointed it.) “If this government has identified that as a problem what has this government done to bolster democratically elected boards?” I would ask, what have they done to improve their role, their policies, their procedures, and oversight?

Mr. Savage said, “Show me the concrete steps taken!” In the future, if this government cannot show me what they did to help the school boards if they thought they were struggling - Mr. Savage put it in a way that I have heard over and over again, and I quote, “I question the value they place in democracy and local oversight of education.”

The last time I spoke to this bill, I went through it clause by clause as to where it says that the minister may or shall appoint, do, or say anything. There is no concrete plan in here as to what he is going to do because there are too many clauses in there that say he may do this or he may do that. Frankly, if I said to my son, “I may take you out to dinner and to a movie tonight,” that doesn’t give him any confidence.

I know the minister said he heard that people had a lack of trust. I wrote it down, “lack of trust.” He said he heard all over the place that people were saying there was a lack of trust. If he wanted to build trust, there is still time. This bill does not have to pass today. This government does not have to do this. He could stop and pause this and take the time and let people have a longer look at this to actually say to them, I listened, so what are the ways we could work together to bring about some changes?

I can’t remember who said it to me - oh, I remember. It was a real estate agent in my constituency who said, in real estate, the best deal selling or buying a house is when both sides lose a little, when one side gives, and so does the other side. Frankly, with the exception of the college and a little bit of the association for the principals, there was no give, only take.

Mr. Savage went on to say:

“For our larger political culture, we lose the level of governance with the highest representation of women, Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotians. We lose a level of governance that can act as an entrance way into our province’s politics. I am from Dartmouth. In the first election for school board members in Dartmouth in 1978 four people were elected. One went on to become Mayor of Dartmouth and later Premier of Nova Scotia. Another went on to become our education minister. Both from different parties. Both started off in elected office as school board members. That ‘on ramp’ and political education will be lost and we will all be poorer for it.”

What does Bill No. 72 replace? According to Mr. Savage,

“A 15-member board for the whole province - up to 12 members appointed by the minister.

“This is an advisory board. Advisory boards do not make decisions. They advise, they make suggestions to the minister.”

Well, we have been advising. We have been making suggestions to the minister for a week. Nothing has changed. People at the Committee on Law Amendments advised, made suggestions to the minister. Nothing changed. People online were sending emails and saying to us, we're not hearing from the government side, they're silent, it's crickets.

So how are we to have any confidence that an advisory board appointed by the minister is going to be listened to? If those aren't open conversations and open meetings and open minutes, we will never have any idea if they were listened to except for what we hear on the grapevine.

Mr. Savage also went on to make another really important point: “Meetings of PACE must be presided over by a member of PACE chosen by the minister - This council cannot even choose its own chair.”

Who does that? I've been on a dozen boards of directors in my time. I have never once been on one where the board itself did not elect its own chair. There is way too much power in the hands of the minister, and that is what people are upset about.

Mr. Savage goes on to say,

“As a citizen if I want to get involved in education, what does PACE mean to me?

“In short, I cannot determine a lot based on this legislation. I can tell you that:

- 79 elected positions” - where people are going to be held accountable every election day - “have been replaced by 12 appointed positions” that we have no control over.

- “Advisory boards do not vote on budgets. Who will oversee the allocation of resources in the education budget? Who will question the Minister, Deputy Minister and Civil servant's decisions?”

If you're appointed, you're dependent on that minister for goodwill. How much are you going to challenge his decisions, and how well are you going to be able to hold him to the recommendations you make when you're appointed and not elected?

One of the other points that Principal Savage made - as a principal - he's been in the education system for a very long time, and he asked this not four days ago.

"If this [bill] passes into law what is the new role that principals play?" If he doesn't know, who does? "This is not an abstract question. All over this province principals are trying to figure out what is this new job?"

I'm going to read that again. "All over the province principals are trying to figure out what is this new job?"

I don't want a job where I don't know the job description. Well, okay, I took this job with not a very clear job description, and there were some details left out I should have known about (Interruptions) Well, I thank the member for that clarification.

The principals are trying to find out, "Is this the job I signed up for?" Do you know that terrifies me? This is the principal who is supposed to start in my constituency in less than six months, and he's questioning whether it's a job he even wants anymore.

We need him. I'm terribly upset that this amazing principal isn't sure he wants to be there. Then he goes on to say, how much time do I have to decide if this is what I want? Not much. A massive change in education, and he has very little time to decide if this is the job that he wants to do.

He wants to know if his voice is going to be heard. How does it change now? How much is he going to be consulted, and how much is the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and his department going to listen? They're not feeling very confident right now, and there is still plenty of time to change that.

[12:30 p.m.]

For my constituents, I don't want to wait three years for another election for them to feel like they're being listened to. There is still plenty of time for the minister to consult with these people, to help them understand what their roles are and to assure them that he's going to listen, but you can only assure somebody you're listening if you actually respond and concede, which he did today some of the points, but you actually have to be willing to make some changes; you can't have all the answers.

If I know one thing in health care, no one person, no one group of people, has all the answers. But I'll tell you who has the best training and that's the teachers and the

principals of this province. You'll never convince me that anyone but a teacher knows better than a teacher what they need to do in their classrooms.

I do want to take this moment to talk about a comment that the minister made about the value of having somebody come from out of province. There is absolutely nothing wrong with having Dr. Glaze write a report. I worked in Ontario for seven years, and I gained all sorts of experience from going to another province, going to another country. What's the problem is that her opinion and her recommendations were weighted so heavily on one side of the scale that thousands of Nova Scotians', principals', and teachers' opinions and recommendations did not come anywhere close to balancing out that scale.

That's the problem they have with the recommendations and we would have been delighted to have gone through those recommendations one by one, as I did with my constituents, parents, teachers, and students. They were happy to go through every single recommendation because they took the time to read the report, as did I.

There were some good things in that report, some things that aren't appropriate for here, but the weight of one person's report outweighed at least 20 per cent to 30 per cent of this province, if not more. How does one person's opinion weigh more? It isn't that she's not from this province, but it outweighed everybody else's opinion and that is the biggest heartache of all because you're left with the opinion, whether it's right or wrong, and it doesn't even matter if it's a right or wrong, whether it's true or not, the people of this province are left with the thought that you deliberately went out and found someone who was going to write recommendations that you wanted all along, even if it's not true - and I'm not saying it's true; that's their perception. The way to balance out that perception would have been to give equal time, equal opportunity for other organizations to have submitted their reports, their recommendations.

You know, I went through the school review process in Eastern Passage and it was a fantastic process. The SOC, the FAC, and everybody involved, a small but mighty group worked really hard to collaborate, and there weren't a lot of contentious issues because we weren't opening or closing any schools. It was just, how are we going to redistribute the boundary lines?

Then we went through the school review process in Cole Harbour and hundreds and hundreds of parents showed up at those meetings, and at the very beginning of the process - because it got delayed twice by the school board for various reasons - so it would start at the beginning of the school year, every parent there expressed a fear that their effort and their words and their recommendations were going to be put on a scale and then pushed off the scale and they were going to be ignored and everybody who worked on that school options committee and the advisory councils and the people involved in that process bent over backwards to give everybody a voice, to convince everybody, no, this time will be different. We are going to listen, and all of those parents who gave up week after week of

their time away from their children and their spouses and their friends, they committed to that process despite their fear that they were going to be ignored.

They put out their recommendations, they held all of the appropriate meetings, and they gave everybody a chance to consult and to give feedback. And it was contentious because we were talking about the fact that some schools may have to be closed. We didn't know at the time that pre-Primary was coming - so, surprise - that whole process, we don't know what's happened to it because now the schools that had some vacancies were maybe going to get a pre-Primary break.

I went to every one of those meetings and I spoke at all of them - no surprise there. What I said at the time echoed what I was hearing from all the constituents: is this going to make any difference when it gets to the school board? It wasn't the school board reps who were going to get to say anything, it's the school board administration that's going to get to respond, not the school board reps. I said, well, when do the teachers submit their report and recommendations on this? They're the ones in those classrooms, they're the ones who see the closet that we have in one of my classrooms in Eastern Passage, where kids are taken for "quiet room." It's not a quiet room, it's a closet - and they asked me to let you know that all of our closets are full in my constituency.

They said the teachers aren't being consulted. They don't get a voice, they don't get to put a report in, and I'm like, how does that make any sense? I said, what do the school board reps get to say? Nope, they don't get to submit a report either. When it came time for that report to get released last June, there were thousands of people from four constituencies who were waiting for those recommendations, but even as they waited for those recommendations, they wondered, when they make those recommendations, is that going to make any difference to the government, or are they just going to read those recommendations and do whatever the heck they feel like doing anyway? There was no way to convince people that they should have any confidence in what the next step would bring.

Guess what happened? If you haven't already heard, the morning the report from the school board administration was supposed to be released, it was halted, and everybody found out on Facebook. That's how we all found out - a little posting, no report. We still did not see that report. We still have no idea what they were going to say, and that was in June. If we do the math - June, July, August, September, October, November, December, January, February - we're talking nine months. I could've had a baby - well, I couldn't have had a baby, but I could've had a baby in that amount of time. I'm done there, trust me. My kids will be very happy to hear that. (Laughter)

AN HON. MEMBER: Never say never.

MS. ADAMS: Oh, I can say never or I'm going to be suing a doctor, I'm just saying. Anyway, in all seriousness, nine months - nine months we've been waiting. It's been

agony. I get more calls on that, other than a doctor, but I'll talk to the Minister of Health and Wellness about that next month. They are waiting. There are thousands of people in four constituencies, whose children have no idea what's happening to them.

Pat Savage went to his students and he pulled them, and he said, okay, there's some uncertainty here. We're not sure what's happening here, but I care so much about you, I'm going to ask what you want. We're so happy he has that approach. He polled the students at Cole Harbour High in Grades 10 and 11, and said, we understand that you have a loyalty to your school, do you in Grade 11 want to stay at Cole Harbour High and finish out your final year? They voted 70 per cent or more in favour of doing that.

Our understanding, or my understanding, is that they will be allowed to do that. That's their understanding. It's my understanding, and their understanding that there's going to be a bus provided for them next year. It was my understanding that those students who need the International Baccalaureate and the skills trades from Eastern Passage-Cow Bay area, who are not going to be able to get it at Island View High, because the school was built without that capacity, who want to go to Cole Harbour High, are going to have to apply as out-of-area students.

Our hope was that they would take courtesy busing along with the students who were finishing up Grade 12. Now we're hearing about courtesy busing being cut back. I have parents calling me asking, what's the minister doing about that? Have we just voted to have all these Grade 12 students stay at Cole Harbour High without any guarantee of busing?

These are very serious issues. I have people willing to move to make sure their children get the education that they want. I have businesses that are not sure if they are going to renew a lease where their business is because they don't know if the high school is going to be open or closed.

Mr. Savage said at the very end of his remarks, "... we do not have a lot of time to make up our minds should we remain as Principals under this new streamlined system. I think most of us accept that the government will not be able to provide clear answers to our questions if it sticks to its present timetable. "This is what they are saying. This is not what I'm saying. These are the people with the most control of our education system and the future of our children, and they are saying that they don't have adequate information.

We know this bill is going to pass, but the minister still has an opportunity to reach out to all of those principals and provide enough information so he can make sure he retains as many of them as possible. We will be counting. I guarantee you, we will be counting how many principals leave this system as a result of these changes.

Finally, he said:

“The saddest part of this is the destructive cycle we find ourselves in; created by this course of action. Teachers had to threaten an illegal strike to get our elected representatives to meet with us. Principals and V.P.s have to make rapid, poorly informed decisions so a government can meet an timeline. And all of this negative swirl as we await a report on Inclusive Education that affects the most vulnerable in our education system - which should demand all of our best.”

When we talk about inclusive education, you all know I started my career at 12, working with children with special needs. They were not in classrooms. We couldn't even get babysitters for them. Those of us who worked with those kids on Saturdays at the YMCA program started by Janet Landry became those babysitters. Nobody had a clue how to handle those children, so she taught us.

We're throwing EPAs into the classroom without any training and expecting them to suddenly know how to handle children with special needs. It's a master's degree for me as a physiotherapist to know the same information.

Our education system and our health care system are completely linked together. The better our children do in education, the better their health; the better their health, the better their education. Of course, we all know that their income level and their housing are also intimately linked together, but we're talking about Bill No. 72.

The most phone calls I get, besides for a family doctor in the Eastern Passage-Cow Bay area, are from parents with children with special needs. The epidemic number of children who are waiting for autism testing is unbelievable. Whatever the reason for the rise in that number, I don't know. We certainly didn't talk about it 30 years ago. But they can't get access to extra resources unless they've been diagnosed.

I have people in the military who get posted here after being on a wait-list somewhere else for two years, only to come here and not be able to get a family doctor for their child, so they never get tested until they get posted somewhere else. There are many of them now who are actively asking to be posted somewhere else where they can get that testing and the care in the schools.

The inclusion commission report was for our most vulnerable students. How could we be introducing this bill, let alone passing it, before that is done? I'm someone who works with the disabled. I have devoted every waking minute of my career to helping them. I am sickened that we couldn't stop this before that point. There was no reason why we couldn't have waited for that report. There is no reason now why we couldn't have waited for that report.

[12:45 p.m.]

I hate to talk about the future, but come the next election, people are going to be asking you that. What was the rush? I want a T-shirt - what was the rush? There is no one out there who said, ram this through as quick as you can and get out on March Break. With all due respect, they're not saying it now, and now is what matters.

This government had an opportunity - still has an opportunity - to say, you know what? The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development said himself that they heard threads and key lines of argument from us and from Law Amendments. There is still an opportunity, if you choose to take it, to pause this bill and to start and go through this as we have and just admit that there may be some truth to what these people are all saying. When you get unity amongst everybody on this side and all the people we have heard from around the province, it feels like arrogance to totally dismiss everything that they have said in favour of one report.

Mr. Speaker, every teacher out there, every principal who's struggling with what to do next, all the kids I know who are looking at going to teachers college who are now questioning that decision, my own son who decided not to become a teacher - he's going to move on to become a professor because that was a system he believed in - we owe them all an apology for the way this was done. It's not even in the details so much as the way in which it was done.

There are going to be future bills brought to this House - I pray to God that this government is listening. I know you believe in this. I don't doubt it for a minute, and I respect you for believing in what you're trying to do, but we are trying our very best to represent what we are hearing. That's our job. We're telling you what we're hearing. We're not feeling like you're listening.

In the future, there will be questions about this. I'm going to come back the week after next and ask what's happening to the schools in my constituency? What's happening to the courtesy busing? What's happening to the kids in Eastern Passage who want to finish out their year at Cole Harbour High? We need those answers.

You want to reduce mental health, so stop stressing out my constituents. They just want an answer. They can deal with whatever reality is. Just tell them what is going to happen to them. It is my job to make sure my children can cope with the stresses of the day.

Uncertainty in the health care system, when you don't know what's going to happen, that is one of the things that cause the greatest stress. The research on this is very, very clear. If you have two courses of action for health, if you don't know if you need radiation or chemo, the uncertainty itself will make you sicker. I have constituents whose mental health has been affected by this entire process. They just want answers. They keep

calling me and asking, when, why, how? I keep saying, I don't know. I can't get the answers. It has been nine months.

I'll leave you with this thought. Once we're outside this Legislature, and we're in there eating lunch and things, we get along really well together. I can go across the aisle and talk to anyone in the government - there might be an exception or two - who always treats me with respect. (Interruptions) Not you. Not you. Not you either. You're good too.

AN HON. MEMBER: They probably won't talk to us either.

MS. ADAMS: Exactly.

We are not perfect. I know we are doing the very best we can. I don't doubt for a minute that everyone in this Legislature is trying their very best. But we do have an obligation to tell you what we're hearing. That's what we're trying to do. I know you are doing what you are hearing, but on the balance of scale, we ask that you consider the one report that you got, and all of the voices that you've heard since. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Just before we move on to the next honourable member here, I just want to remind all the future speakers that I have been a little lax enforcing the not speaking directly to other members. I know this is a passionate subject, and I just want to draw your attention to try to be extra-vigilant in that regard. So, keep your comments directed through the Chair.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the reminder to be speaking directly to my colleagues in government, all of whom I know are paying rapt attention to the words that I am about to say, and who will be listening with open ears, and open hearts to the advice that I'm about to impart.

It feels like we've been debating this bill forever, Mr. Speaker, doesn't it? Even in sitting down to write these remarks, my first thought was, well, what else is there to say? We have been discussing, and discussing, and discussing, but in fact, that's not true. We have been debating this bill, this 60-page bill, which will rewrite the way that education happens in this province, for one week. We have been debating it for one single week, and I think that's one of the biggest problems we have right now as we are on the precipice of watching it move into law.

Even though it has only been a week, Mr. Speaker, people have been paying attention. We have had dozens of people come forward at Law Amendments Committee. Many in tears, I'll say again, speaking passionately and from the heart. Many for a second time. To a person, with maybe one or two exceptions, they were begging this government for different things - they had different advice, and different worries, and different fears -

but they were almost unanimous in asking for a pause. Some wanted the bill scrapped, not all, what they wanted was to have the chance to read and understand it, and as they asked over, and over, and over again for that opportunity, I was so grateful because I, myself, would like that opportunity as well.

Every MLA in this House has received dozens, if not hundreds of letters from constituents across the province. We've heard the protests outside these windows. Many have commented that if nothing else, the introduction and debate - if it can be called that - on this pernicious bill, has made clear that people must become attuned not just to the content of the legislation that this House passes, but to the process by which it is passed. I can safely say, Mr. Speaker, that the public is appalled at the way in which this bill is being rammed through - especially on the heels of Bill No. 75 last year, which was also passed in a snowstorm.

Even former MLAs have chimed in, both publicly and behind the scenes, with their own questions and comments about the particular tenacity with which this government has decided to dismantle our education system. They, and we, are still asking why. We know more than we did when this bill was introduced, but not as much as we'd like to. We still have so many questions, Mr. Speaker.

School advisory committees have been raised time and time again, as the new bastion of local decision-making in the education process. How? How much money will they receive? How will the members of the school advisory committees be selected? School advisory committees, with respect, are not regional voices, they are micro, hyper-local voices, and they are very important - but they don't take the place of speaking for a region of this province. What does this empowered SAC even look like? It's impossible to know, Mr. Speaker.

School capital - how will we know when a school is or isn't going to be closed? What is the process by which we will determine this? My colleague for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage spoke passionately about the school review process in her constituency, and the questions that are still outstanding there. How will those processes go forward?

I hasten to say that at least in the Halifax Regional School Board, the school review process is something that has received a great deal of attention in recent years. It is a process that requires, more than anything else, collaboration, consultation, and listening. With respect, these are three areas in which this government has not distinguished itself. I do not have faith that going forward, we will have the robust processes that we need to make the hard decisions about which schools and what infrastructure gets attention in this province.

It's amazing that people even participate in those school review processes and they do, by the hundreds. Why is it amazing? It's amazing because notwithstanding the recommendations of the school review processes, this government has still seen fit to

determine when, where, and why schools are built, with no accountability to the public at all. That already exists, and my fear is that it will continue and it will worsen.

We introduced a bill to make Cabinet decisions around school infrastructure spending public. We respect the rights of Cabinet and the responsibilities of Cabinet to make tough decisions. We want to know why they're made. As with most of the other requests for transparency, Mr. Speaker, it was denied.

We have grave questions around the representation of African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities in the school system. We've talked today, on International Women's Day, a lot about the erasure of women's voices with this bill, but it's important to note that women are not the only ones being cut out with this bill. African Nova Scotians make up more proportionately of the elected school boards than they do of any other level of government in this province. It's very important they retain that voice. Those African Nova Scotian representatives on the school boards are elected, they are elected by other African Nova Scotians in this province who choose them to be their voice at that table to discuss the hard issues around education.

We've seen, in the last week, several horrifying, seriously disturbing, racist incidents happening around the HRM at schools. Racist graffiti, racist epithets, anti-Black racism is a reality, it is a reality in this province and it is not going away. We need the tools and the voices, and the empathy to deal with this issue, and to figure out how to make our schools safe, nourishing places for all learners. By getting rid of the elected African Nova Scotian school board caucus, we are taking a major step back in that direction.

Who will be in charge of busing, Mr. Speaker? This bill is silent on that. Will children be able to have lunchtime supervision at school? When I was in junior high school, there was no lunchtime supervision at school so I had to find a friend whose mother didn't work, to whose house I could go every day, or I could go to the mall and waste time, and waste money, and maybe skip a class or two. Will we be going back to that? Or will we recognize that we live in the 21st century - at least the 20th century - and recognize that we need our schools, our systems - our political systems need to reflect the reality that we often have children in two-parent families. It needs to reflect a lot of other things, but I'll stop there for now.

What will happen to funding across the region? This is a conversation we haven't had. We're rationalizing the system, but we know that the funding to school systems across this province is not equal. In the Halifax region, where half of our population resides, there's a substantial amount of supplementary funding that comes in from the Halifax Regional Municipality, and that funding is very important. Without it, we would have major issues in terms of offering things like French immersion, in terms of offering the meagre things that we can offer to students for whom English is a second language, in terms of courtesy busing - all of these issues. These are persnickety, detailed, kind of boring issues, but they are seriously important, and they are very important to parents.

What does rationalizing even mean? Regions are different, schools are different, school districts are different. How are we going to level the playing field, and is that going to lift students up or is it going to drag them down?

[1:00 p.m.]

Those are a few of the questions that came to my head as I sat at my kitchen table last night at 11 o'clock at night, the only opportunity I had to think about making comments on this bill, but there are so many others. There are so many others that we don't even know we should be asking because we haven't properly had the time to examine this legislation.

Yesterday when I asked whether the minister would make the provincial advisory committee meetings transparent, he said that's not the way things work in the Westminster system, in a Parliamentary democracy. Well, Mr. Speaker, I was thrilled to hear about the minister's commitment to democracy because we need a lot more of that in here.

The biggest question behind Bill No. 72, the nut we still haven't cracked, the answer we still haven't gotten to anyone's satisfaction is, why are we doing this? What is the premise? We're told our kids can't wait. We're told there's an achievement gap. Let's unpack this.

What is the achievement gap? Our children are not failing. We place about fourth in standardized test scores. Not all learners in Nova Scotia take standardized tests. Many educators, administrators and parents agree that standardized tests are not, in fact, an accurate measure of student performance. If we're talking about raising the achievement gap of our most vulnerable learners, most of our most vulnerable learners don't even take those standardized tests because they are on individual program plans or other adaptations that excuse them from taking those tests.

How are we measuring that achievement gap? I wish we had the data. We don't. We haven't seen any data. I believe that the gaps we see among our students are caused by poverty. They are caused by an inadequacy of resources and a dysfunctional Department of Community Services.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that this gap exists. This government has been entirely unable to explain how we get from this shaky premise that our kids can't wait - this is the evidence-based reasoning for this 60-page omnibus bill, that our kids can't wait. Okay, so how do we get from that to these changes? What is the causal connection, Mr. Speaker? School boards. Why is an entire level of democracy being eliminated without proven evidence that it is not working, without due process, without consideration of the consequences both intended and unintended, and without protecting our rights as citizens - midway through the mandate of these elected officials?

Mr. Speaker, elected school boards provide essential checks and balances to protect democratic rights, local access to decision makers and transparency behind how decisions get made and why. The minister asked whether, if we were starting from scratch, we would even create school boards today. Let's look at New Brunswick. They eliminated their school boards, they started from scratch, and guess what? They brought them back.

Would they look the same as they do now, Mr. Speaker? Probably not. Do you know what we should do if we have a problem with one of our democratic institutions? We should fix it. We should roll up our sleeves and do the work to reform it in consultation with the people in that system. Where is the causal connection?

What about what can only be described as the punitive actions towards our teachers, the disrespectful language throughout this bill? Again, Mr. Speaker, it's punitive. Where is the connection? We are removing administrators from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. We have repeatedly heard that this is because it will create a conflict. This is the causal connection that has been proposed. Our children will do better because there will not be a conflict between teachers and principals and vice-principals.

With respect, Mr. Speaker, I have heard about this conflict. I have heard exactly one example of this conflict from anyone in this House, including the government. I invite the minister to refute me. That one example was when this government locked students out of their school buildings and forced administrators into the uncomfortable position of having to figure out what to do about it. I might add that when this government did so, it did so within a legal piece of legislation that is still making its way through the courts.

In response to his critics, the minister says that he is not tearing apart a family but putting an addition on the house and asking one part of the family to live there. I have a different analogy. I believe that if schools are a family, then from the point of view at least of labour, grandmothers look a lot like the administrators, the matriarchs. Even those excellent men who find themselves in the roll of administrators fit here. They are holders of the wisdom. In terms of labour in this legislation, in language, process, and effect, it kicks grandma down the basement stairs, locks the door behind her, and takes out a power of attorney. Where is the causal connection?

The subtle but important, and clearly very intentional, change in language from administrator to manager - this is one about which I have made a very big deal, and one about which we've heard a lot. Let's unpack this. I heard the minister say a little bit in this House, but more out in the hall to the media, which is where the minister seems to enjoy being (Interruption). I didn't say he was there now, I said that's where the minister enjoys being.

We have heard that we need to use the term "manager" for clarity. We need to be clear about what the roles of principals and vice-principals are and, if they are not managing, who is? Well, I took the chance to look up the term "administrator" in the

Merriam-Webster Dictionary and guess what the definition of administrator is? The definition of administrator is one who administers, especially business, school, or governmental affairs; one who manages.

So guess what, Mr. Speaker? An administrator, as part of their role, is a manager. By changing the language of administrator to manager we are, in effect, narrowing their scope. We are narrowing their role. We are making them into a manager in the language of business as opposed to the much more robust and important role that they have now which is as administrator - someone who administers the entire system. Teachers are smart; they know this and they resist it.

We've won a few battles. With the participation of government, we have seen the language around inclusion reintroduced into this bill in its original form, with its original intent, and with its original strength. Based on our amendments, we now have a first voice representative to the Provincial Advisory Council on Education. This is something for which we have advocated for a very long time, and it is very important.

We were told yesterday in this House that three members of the African Nova Scotian School Board caucus would be on the transition team to that Provincial Advisory Committee. We also know that when principals and vice-principals decide to go back into the classroom - and we know many, many dozens, if not hundreds of them will upon the passage of this bill - that they are not being demoted, but rather they will be reassigned or moving. We have won a few small battles but, sadly, it seems we have lost the war.

Governments change things in the course of being government. As an optimist, I have to believe that the good changes stick and the bad ones don't. So, whatever the state of our public education system down the road, my own guess is that the history lesson on the great education wars of 2017-2018 will be much more about the method and the process, rather than the content.

Again, we heard this morning about the minister's commitment to democratic process. We have had seven days, including today, to digest a 59-page omnibus bill - a bill that rewrites our education system and, once again, forcibly rearranges labour relations in this province - seven days.

As many have pointed out, to properly digest this bill, one must not just go line by line through the bill, but do so with several other pieces of legislation at hand to compare. You need to know what is in those pieces of legislation, backwards and forwards, so that you can see what is or is not present in the new legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I am one of two members of this House who went to law school. I passed the bar exam and even if I wasn't in here until late most evenings, I still don't think I could do it justice in seven days. We need to do things differently.

Just three days after the introduction of this bill, the Law Amendments Committee convened, for a set period of time. It was curtailed. This is one of two opportunities that members of this House have to suggest changes in the form of amendments.

One amendment passed that day. It was a watered-down version of the missing inclusion language. It was watered down, and it was insufficient, but it passed. Why? Maybe because it was better than nothing. More likely because it looked like it was the right language. It seemed like it was replacing the guarantees that people had been so concerned about. But do you know what? It wasn't. No one in this House had time to do the proper analysis to figure that out until we adjourned that day.

I'm glad to see that language back in this bill, Mr. Speaker. The full language of Clause 64(2)(d) of the current Education Act was restored to this bill. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It's because a disability advocate - not just any advocate but one deeply knowledgeable about politics and the political system - and someone deeply knowledgeable about inclusion, with a child of their own with special needs, who had in fact been among the advocates for inclusion of that particular phrase in the current Education Act 20 years ago, caught the error. It's like a shooting star, Mr. Speaker, that he happened to wake up on Friday morning and decide that he ought to read Bill No. 72, all of it, and he knew what to look for.

After Law Amendments on Monday, we had 13 hours - 13 hours - to draft amendments which had to then be approved and made official by Legislative Counsel in time for the extraordinary morning sitting the following day. That is not enough time. We cannot do our jobs properly. This is democracy technically but not in spirit. We have to do things differently. How many other omissions will we find? I guess time will tell.

But this bill will pass, Mr. Speaker. Let me say this: going forward, these reforms will fail if the government cannot make peace with teachers. If this government cannot find a way to show respect and honour and kindness to the educators of this province, no legislation will achieve any positive influence at all.

Some aspect of our education system and the decision making therein must remain accountable to the public. There must be ways achieved going forward that the public, parents, and educators can understand and participate in the process by which decisions are made in the education system. It won't be a school board - what will it be? I challenge this government to find ways to respect not just teachers but the citizens of Nova Scotia and allow them to understand why they make the decisions they do. We must not go forward with a two-tiered system. The CSAP - and we'll see the Act that comes later in this session - importantly, has its rights protected in the passage of this bill. But what of everyone else's rights?

We must ensure that we have an education system that serves the people on whose existence it is predicated - our children and families. This bill is an effort to bend an entire

complex system serving our most special and vulnerable people to the ideological program of this government. Instead of listening, this government is forging ahead undaunted. As I had the occasion to say so many times in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, schools are not factories, and students are not widgets. Children are not amenable to being rationalized, as any of you in this Chamber with children of your own would certainly know.

I listened intently this morning as the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development defended Dr. Avis Glaze, and he should, because from our perspective, she has very little to do with these reforms. This is a program, and she provided cover. The criticism of the *Raise the Bar* report has nothing to do with where Dr. Avis Glaze comes from. It has to do with where we are borrowing our ideas from. This report, these reforms, and this legislation are not made in Nova Scotia, it's derivative. It's derivative of the worst examples around the world of education reform.

[1:15 p.m.]

I was at an announcement yesterday with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Premier that took place in a pre-primary classroom during school hours and it was amazing to watch. As the media took their places, and Communications Nova Scotia handed out their press release, and bureaucrats and staffers chit-chatted, chaos reigned. Even with a well-oiled team of experienced people, the environment in that classroom would not yield. Each time the media requested quiet to better hear the minister, a curious four-year-old would begin to climb a precarious hill of blocks or bang on a drum, as the media jockeyed to scrum the Premier, the tuba section started up in the class next door, and on and on and on it went.

It was beautiful, Mr. Speaker. Everyone wanted to be lifted up by the Premier, not because he is the most powerful person in the province, but because he is the tallest, and he could lift them up the highest. Of course, the kids were hams, happy for the attention and the cameras.

This is education, Mr. Speaker. It is messy and dynamic and beautiful, and its success should be not measured primarily in test scores, but in happiness. I have no idea how those kids would perform on a test, but I knew, being in that classroom for only a little while, that in that school, on that day, the system was working. They had a teacher who spoke with them respectfully, and engaged them, and made them smile. They were curious. We should place as much value on the look on our children's faces each day as they enter and leave school, as the grade on their report card.

Mr. Speaker, I will close these remarks by asking the government for the very last time to go forward with caution, to take the basic maxims of the classroom where my children are now: to treat others with respect, to share and to listen. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I spoke on this on second reading and I opened up with the comment that, to me, we are seeing mass confusion in the issue of education today in this province. We can only look at all of the media attention this proposed bill got leading up to this opening of the House. Now things have sort of quieted down, yet the problems remain. It makes me question the vision of this government with education.

Mr. Speaker, is the government leading with a vision, or are they deciding who to try to please at any given moment? I don't think we're seeing a clear vision.

Now, I do hear the minister and the government say they are trying to get administrative control, so they can make changes they want to make in the education system. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to go into the Glaze report here. The Glaze report, the government indicated it was accepting it, and it sounded to me like they were accepting it lock, stock, and barrel. But since then, things have changed.

I'm going to dissect this report right now, Mr. Speaker. The first recommendation was to eliminate school boards. Well the question - if I could distill it into one question with respect to school boards - is we have to define what control parents are allowed to have over their children's education. I think many people would suggest that school boards may have been, at least one of their purposes, was to remove MLAs from having to make decisions around things like school closures.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, school boards have been responsible for a lot of things but, to me, the school board is there for the community and for the parents. So, it comes to the question, what control should parents have over their children's education? With the changes in this bill, we see what they call the elimination of school boards, what we do see though is the elimination of the ability for parents to elect school board members. Are the school boards going to be eliminated, Mr. Speaker? Well, the boards - the elected representatives - are, but all of the people working at the school board office are still there. So if the government is trying to say that they are simplifying the administrative structure - the structure is essentially in place, minus the people the parents would elect to govern the school that they send their children to.

I'm asking the question, what control should parents have over their children's education? But I think I also have to ask, are parents going to have any control in this new system? Under the old system, they were allowed to elect boards. Under the new system, it has not really taken shape yet.

There has been discussion of school advisory councils, but we don't get into it as deep as saying, well, how are these school advisory councils going to be accountable to parents? Under the old system, members were elected; they were accountable, much the same way that we are accountable to the public.

So, the school boards, yes - for people who are watching this debate, and for people who are following this - I think a lot of people out there think that the school boards' elected members and staff are completely gone, and that's not the case.

I'd like to spend a little more time on parents. I think it's incredibly important. If you follow the newspapers, much of the debate you will see is between the government and teachers. Let's not forget the parents of the children, and how important it is for parents to have some say over the education of their children. That would lead to a more dynamic education system, a more responsive education system, and I'm not so sure that what's being proposed by the government here is going to accomplish that. I don't have confidence in it.

If we don't allow parents some say in their children's education, how can we expect parents to take responsibility for their children? In the classroom, in the education system, we need parents. We need parents to be engaged. It is the parents who the children leave when they come to school. If the parents aren't engaged with what's happening at the school, and don't feel any ownership over it, what condition are the children going to come to school in? What is their condition going to be? Are they going to be ready to learn?

I think it's incredibly important that parents have a strong connection with schools and that they have some say in what's going on at school. If they don't have say, they have no ownership, and no ownership, by extension, means that the children going to school are not going to be going to school in the condition they need to be going to school in.

The next item I want to look at is what I would describe as resiliency in students. In Recommendation 5 of the Glaze report, they're talking about "wrap-around facilities" for schools. I can see the value in wrap-around facilities, in that you're hopefully giving young people options that are not existing in silos when they need help, and that they don't have to figure out who to call, that they can have a one-stop shop. I think that's a great idea, but I want to say, will these wrap-around facilities promote resiliency in these young people?

One of the things we need to do for the children of tomorrow, who are going to be coming out of school - and we know how quickly those school years go by, Mr. Speaker - is to make sure those young people are coming out ready for the real world. We can't be creating a set of conditions for them where when they graduate, the world is a shock to them. We need to make sure that resiliency is promoted and strengthened, that young people have the strength when they come out of school that they're not going to be looking for special conditions or adaptations, let's say, from their employer. In the real world, some adaptations may exist but in the real world, the reality is, it doesn't have all of those adaptations. People have to learn to adapt and we need to teach resiliency in young people so they have that power to adapt so we empower them to be strong. That's something that runs through my mind.

I look at Recommendation 6 in the Glaze report - letting teachers choose the books and resources they use to teach. I think that's an incredibly good recommendation. I think that flexibility and creativity is critical for teachers. I couldn't imagine coming to work and not being able to create. I couldn't imagine being a teacher and not stepping in the classroom and being able to create and to be able to put my own stamp on the learning experience that I was delivering to students and to customize what I'm teaching based on the students that are before me. Creativity is critical.

I signed the petition that the Nova Scotia Teachers Union was putting around. I will say I had reservations about signing it because there were recommendations like this in the Glaze report that I thought were good and I didn't want to condemn the entire report. I did sign that petition and I think most of my colleagues signed it, as well, but I just wanted to highlight that the report was not all bad.

The next thing I want to talk about is the provincial college of educators which was pulled out of this bill. This is an example where I'm wondering, where is the vision of the government with education? They're planning this massive change just a couple of weeks ago to create a college for teachers, similar to what we would see for a college of nurses as an example. Now all of a sudden that's off the table. One of the concerns I had with this is, if such a college is created, would they be inundated with frivolous complaints?

Lots of things go on in a classroom. If you get 30 children in a classroom with a teacher, some perhaps with learning difficulties, sometimes these classrooms have less than 30 children, there might be 20 children but there might be seven adaptations in the class. There's a lot going on and it would be pretty easy for a student to come home and tell their parents that something is going on and for a parent to be sympathetic to that. My concern with a college for teachers is that there could be a significant amount of complaints about teachers and they may be frivolous, they may be unfounded. I think it's important for there to be a mechanism if there are complaints, sometimes they may not be frivolous, but to me that is one concern that I had. We see the government is not going ahead with that.

The next one, Recommendation 8, was to remove principals from the union. I will say this, I don't believe that schools should be treated like businesses. I am somebody who took business in university, I worked for a bank, I've worked for entrepreneurs in the past, but when I look at the classroom, I don't see it as a business. I think anybody who does has a very simplistic view of the classroom and I don't think everything can be broken down into economic theory, especially in the classroom. It goes back to what I was just speaking about in terms of creativity. We do not want an environment in schools and in classrooms where things are treated in a cold, antiseptic way, when we need those classrooms to be very warm.

[1:30 p.m.]

I just heard the member for Dartmouth - I'm sorry, I should know. There's so many Dartmouths, Mr. Speaker, there's only one Inverness. It's easy for me. When I get up to the city here, I can get confused - the member for Dartmouth North - when she was talking about classrooms and them being dynamic and being messy, and I agree. The classroom has to be a creative place; that's the best way to learn. We don't all learn in a linear fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I think about - school is not a business, and I say that as somebody who has worked in business. If we were to treat it so - and I know one of the big issues has been, do we remove principals from the union? One of the big concerns for teachers right now, if there is a problem in the classroom, if there's a complaint brought forward or something that needs to be fixed or improved - and maybe it's not even a negative thing, maybe it's an opportunity that can be worked on. Right now, we fix the problem - "we" being the teacher and the principal.

If we create classrooms and schools that are more like businesses with management and employees - management being the principal and employees being the teachers - in business, I would say in good businesses, management and employees can work together. However, teachers are not coming from those environments. They are not coming from business environments. I would say that we run the risk of creating a cultural dynamic in the classroom where it is no longer about "we" - the principal and the teacher - fixing the problem, but it is "you" - being the teacher - fix the problem without the help of the principal - or whatever we're calling them now, and as I understand in this legislation, it is technically "manager" under the legislation.

That is a concern and there could be issues as simple as - actually, I shouldn't say "as simple" but you could have issues that are subjective that need to be fixed. I'm thinking about marking. There are often complaints about a mark because marking is often subjective. You can also have situations where there may be friction between a teacher and a student or a parent. So, Mr. Speaker . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Madam Speaker.

MR. MACMASTER: Madam Speaker - they shouldn't be allowed to change the Speaker in the middle of your speech. (Laughter)

These are concerns that teachers have brought forward. I also want to mention on this issue - is school going to be treated as a business? Well, right now teachers have said to me they feel ignored and underappreciated. The question I had when I sat down with them was, I wonder how you feel after not being consulted for the Glaze report?

Madam Speaker, I'm going to move on to teacher mobility, Recommendation 11 in the Glaze report. The first question I had is, who is asking for improved mobility for

teachers? On the surface, one might think, well, that must be a positive thing, it's giving teachers more flexibility to move around throughout the province for employment. But I don't think mobility is going to help reduce turnover, especially in rural areas. I think for young teachers especially, who are going back to communities to teach and wanting to set down roots in a community, teacher mobility is not going to help them. It's not going to help students in the classroom who may be dealing with a high turnover of teachers, so that is something that I don't think is a positive, especially for rural areas.

The other thing I will say, Madam Speaker, is that a lot of young teachers may prefer to go to cities, and that's fine. I would never discourage them from that, but for teachers who want to go to rural areas, this may prove prohibitive for them to establish a career in teaching, and that's what we want for them: to come back to rural areas if they so choose. That is an issue that I highlighted out of the report.

I look at Recommendation 14 and the use of schools, and I know this is something that's been talked about for years. I think there have been improvements made but it's important for communities to be able to use the school, and I also think about the children who are home-schooled who sometimes wish to participate in school sports. We have a young gentleman in my constituency who was not allowed to participate and it was the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation that I spoke with, and I spoke with the government as well, and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development at the time was certainly positive. But at the end of the day that young gentleman - I actually played hockey with him just before Christmas; he is a great athlete; the coach of the team at the time wanted him to be able to play on the school team - he was not afforded the opportunity.

I was very disappointed with the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation and I expressed it to them. I said I can't believe the province funds your organization. We have a young gentleman who is a good athlete. He's home-schooled, yes, but here's an opportunity for him to play sports. They want him on the team, and he wants to play and you're getting in the way of it happening. I said I can't look at your organization the same way again after that. I was very disappointed with that.

When I see this recommendation come up about community use of schools and about schools being more open, I would highlight they need to be more open to home-schooled children. Now, you can get into insurance issues, but you know what? Surely, we, the adults, whether it's in the Legislature or at the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation or at the school boards that still exist for another little while, can figure those issues out so that we do not deny young people opportunities for personal growth. That was a fail, Madam Speaker, that was a fail, but hopefully things will improve in the future.

I look at school capital planning and the Auditor General has commented on this, about the need for - and I won't spend a great length of time on this.

HON. PAT DUNN: Go ahead, go ahead.

MR. MACMASTER: The member for Pictou Centre says I should spend a little more time - well, okay, I will.

Not so long ago, the Auditor General identified the problem of school capital planning and it was highlighted in the fact that there were two school capital planning lists, one which he audited and another which the government came up with to actually award school construction. The problem with that is that is politics coming into play and deciding who gets to have a new school. So, Recommendation 20 in the Glaze report was that we have transparent and non-political capital funding of schools. We should have that. The Auditor General says that we should have that. (Interruption) I'm not even going to identify the member over there because I don't want to get him in trouble.

We can't have politics coming into play in school construction. We have to be thinking about students and their needs, not the political needs of the government.

I look at Recommendation 20 in the Glaze report. It talks about the Hogg formula. They talk about the need to replace it to better reflect the priorities of today and the decade ahead. That causes me some concern because I think the Hogg formula is designed so that we're not purely based on a per-student amount for funding for schools. If we were, then the rural areas of the province - because they have fewer students and they don't have the economies of scale that the schools in the city have - they would greatly lose out on their education. I issue a word of caution, if there's a move away from the Hogg formula, that the government keep that in mind to ensure that rural schools are not left with a weaker education experience because of a change in the funding formula.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to do a little sidebar now. I spoke about this the other day, and I'm going to speak about it again. That is on Gaelic education for young people, thousands of which are in the province . . .

MR. DUNN: Was it in the Glaze report?

MR. MACMASTER: The member for Pictou Centre asks, "Was it in the Glaze report?" In fact, not a word, not a single word, and not a word in the government's response in this legislation either. But I want to keep this positive.

Madam Speaker, it is important, and I'll tell you why. It's because there are thousands of young people in the province who want to learn the Gaelic language, and they want to learn about their history.

It's very important for the government, but I want to go beyond the government members in the Legislature. I want to go into the departments where people are working in government. A lot of times, they are reading the reports before the politicians are reading the reports. Are they not noticing when there is a glaring omission like that, like we saw in

the Glaze report? I can appreciate that the Glaze report is not written by the government. It's written by a consultant.

However, I am saying it in here because I'm sure there are at least communications people in the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development or in Communities, Culture and Heritage who are listening today. They should go back to their executive directors and their deputy ministers and say, before we put out reports, maybe we should think about young people in the province who are wanting to learn Gaelic.

We're not talking about handouts here for cultural initiatives. I know some people see those as handouts, and they don't like them. I'm talking about education. I'm talking about some money for that.

The Education and Early Childhood Development budget now has to be over - I should know it off heart. (Interruption) It's \$1.4 billion. I thought it was about a billion and a half. Out of \$1.4 billion, Madam Speaker, surely some money can be carved off to teach the education of Gaelic in the schools. It's not necessarily pulling it away from - it's not new money, is what I would like to say. It's just refocusing existing money. Children can't go to two classes at once. They're going to go to a class. If they want to go to a Gaelic class, government and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should support that.

I want to give a little bit of a history lesson here, Madam Speaker, because this is history that I have been learning, that I wasn't able to learn in the education system. I don't want it to be seen as negative. I want it to be seen as just that - educational. This helps to support why we need this in the school.

When it comes to Gaelic, for hundreds of years, there has been an active effort to destroy it. Again, I don't want this to be negative, but I am going to tell some of the history, because I want people to know it and to understand it. The purpose of the history is not to feel bitter or angry. The purpose of it is to know it as a part of knowing who you are. Should we all not have an ability to know who we are and from where we come? We should. To me, there's a place for that in our education system.

[1:45 p.m.]

I'm going to talk about a number of things here, but I want to highlight - I don't want this to be negative, but this has been going on for hundreds of years. If the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development detects some people who are sensitive about Gaelic matters, this is why. I know there's no intent - I don't believe there's intent on the part of the government or the minister to slight the Gaelic community, absolutely not. But if people seem sensitive, it's because they're some of the few who know the history. It's easier to appreciate where they're coming from and why this is important when you know the history.

For hundreds of years, the Gaels have been attacked. I suppose we could say that Gaels have done some attacking themselves too - sometimes quite successfully - but I'm not talking about wars specifically. I'm talking about Acts of Parliament, as an example. I'm going to go into these efforts that were made to destroy the people. It happened on a number of levels.

I'll just go back to the 1500s. I'm not getting into the Catholics and the Protestants because I have all kinds of friends on both sides, and it's not an ideological matter at all. During the Reformation, there was great vandalism. I believe that religion was used even up until recent years to divide people. It wasn't because of what they actually believed, in a spiritual sense. Catholics and Protestants are Christians. They have very similar beliefs, but religion has been used to divide people, and during the Reformation there was great vandalism.

Why am I mentioning that? Because the antiquities of the Gaels were destroyed during that period, so a lot of the history, a lot of the valuable artifacts of the people, were destroyed. Those things are part of the people. Once they're destroyed, they're gone. We look at places in the world now, cultural places, that are being destroyed by groups in the world right now. It's no different. The loss is no different, being attacked that way.

We had penal laws. In fact, until 1823, a Catholic couldn't sit in the Legislature here. The first Catholic was a man by the name of *Kavanagh*. Until then, if you were Catholic, you weren't allowed to participate in making laws of the province. You were kept out of the establishment. You were held back. Those are real things.

Let's move to the 1600s. You have a people that are attacked spiritually, now we have financially - wealth and possessions. These aren't wars, these are Acts of Parliament. Acts of Parliament around the year 1600 required landowners to show title to their lands. At the time, we didn't have computers, so a lot of these records simply did not exist. Nor did they need to exist in the Highlands of Scotland, because it was accepted who owned the land, and there were no official titles on paper in many cases. So, quite deviously, Parliament in London enacted a law that said if you can't prove on paper that you own the land, we own the land. There's an example of theft, legalized theft, through Parliament - taking away people's financial possessions, attacking them.

We also had castles in Scotland - same thing, castles taken by the Crown and by Parliament through Acts of Parliament. The Statutes of Iona: think about some of these things. When I speak about ethnic cleansing, yes, it's in the past, but it relates to today because Gaels are struggling to hang on to their language. We're struggling to tell our young people about their history.

If we don't have the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development helping us in that, we are failing those young people. I don't want the young people of

today to grow up in the same school I grew up in, where I had Gaelic in Grade 1, and then it disappeared and I had zero history about my own people.

Look at the Statutes of Iona. Anybody of financial standing amongst the Gaels had to send their eldest son to be educated in English. So anybody who had any power in Gaelic society or any financial standing basically had to send their eldest son off to residential school. I don't want to make comparisons entirely with our Aboriginal population in Canada who went to residential school. But let me say this, residential school wasn't a new idea when it came about here. It existed back in the 1600s, and its purpose was to ethnically cleanse.

Another one of the Statutes of Iona forbade seanchaidhean. A seanchaidh was a storyteller. The seanchaidh was the keeper of the tradition and the history of the clan. Those people were forbidden under the Statutes of Iona.

Another feature of the Statutes of Iona was that any trade between France and Scotland was banned, again basically an economic sanction against the Gaels for the purpose of destroying them economically. Those are some of the financial attacks on the Gaels.

Let's fast-forward a little bit. Let's fast-forward to the time of Culloden. I know one of the members in the House here is, I believe, from Culloden; the member for Clare-Digby, of course likely named after the place near Inverness in Scotland. I know in the constituency of the member for Antigonish each year there is an anniversary on the date of the Battle of Culloden to remember what happened there. I think the member for Timberlea-Prospect as well probably had some ancestors on the field that day in 1746.

Culloden happened in 1746, and there was lead up to it in 1745. One of the things about the Highland clans is that they did not have a standing army. England had a standing army paid for through taxation and, of course, that army was used. We saw it here in the New World, but they used it around the world. In Scotland, it was no different.

The Battle of Culloden was interesting because you had all kinds of mixes of people fighting on both sides for various reasons. That is something worthy perhaps of discussion another day, Madam Speaker. What I will say is the aftermath of Culloden was an attack on the Gaels, on their very dignity. After the battle, terms of the battle were changed. If you go to Culloden to the visitor's centre in Scotland, you can see where the terms of the battle were changed to show that there would be no quarter. When I hear no quarter I think of the Led Zeppelin song. But no quarter means no mercy. There would be no mercy for anybody, and there wasn't.

We see the Cornwallis statue coming down. But after the battle, Cornwallis led a regiment through the area, actually through the direct area of all my ancestors in Scotland in the Moidart Lochaber area. The member for Antigonish will know those names because

they are names of communities in his constituency. I can tell you that most people in Inverness County are descendants of those people. Cornwallis led a troop - I believe it was of about 320 men - through those communities, burning houses, stealing cattle, and shooting people. At the end of the day - and it wasn't just a day - at the end of it, there were very few people left who were visible because they were either dead or they fled. That was the start of the pacification of the Highlands. That was the attack on the dignity of the people. So, you've lost the battle.

Now there is no quarter. Now we're going to show you who's boss. Now any wealth you had is going to be stripped from you. People would be shot. Maybe if they were found to be still bearing arms, they would be taken back and hung.

At the end of the day, we've had the attack spiritually and financially, as well as the attack on people's dignity and self-worth, through the pacification of the Highlands, which is the immigration story for hundreds of thousands of Nova Scotians. Again, this is why this should be in the education system. I would guarantee that all members should be listening to this because every single one of you has a constituent who has this history.

Now we have things like assimilation. I talked about Gussie Campbell the other day. Gussie was getting advanced in years at the time I went to see him, because he is one of the few people left in my community who could speak Gaelic, although there was, at that time, quite a few. Gussie told me that if you spoke Gaelic in school, you couldn't do anything worse. He remembers seeing people who were physically hit for it. There was great hate for Gaelic, and this has been building for hundreds of years. (Interruption) Somebody sent me a note - Cumberland, not Cornwallis at Culloden; but Cornwallis was at Culloden, as well. You don't want to question me on that history. Cumberland was known as the Bloody Butcher for some of his activities.

Back to the issue. Now we have the assimilation of the Gaels, and the education department played a role in that over a hundred years ago. Even until much more recently, the education department did not have any interest in having Gaelic in school. For whatever reason, who knows? Perhaps some of the old reasons that were back in the 1600s carried into our present day. Once people are assimilated - once they lose their history and their language, it is very easy to be assimilated. It is very easy to forget who they are.

Let's throw in appropriation of culture. Some of you will remember the debate around the Royal Gaelic College. Why would a simple term like "royal" put before the Gaelic College bother some of the Gaels? Think about it. Here we are, after all these things I've just described, and now we are going to call the Gaelic College "Royal." Why would we want - and I have nothing personal against the Royal Family. They seem like nice people. I don't know them, and probably never will get to know them. (Laughter) Knowing our history, why would we want the Crown, and what they represent today, emblazoned across the front of the Gaelic College? Our very language and culture that the Crown and

Parliament tried to destroy for hundreds of years - why would we want that attached to the Gaelic College?

I'll tell you how insidious it is. A young person going there might go to learn Gaelic and think that there is nothing wrong with that, or that's all good - but it is not good. I don't say that in terms of bitterness or anger, but I say it in terms of, you must know who you are and part of you is your history. If you don't know your history, you can misunderstand who you are. To me, it is important to be loyal to who we are and to our ancestors. I think anybody can relate to that.

It's confusing. If you go up to Citadel Hill, you see the kilts, you see the tartans, and you think that's British. I wouldn't say that it's British. That is the traditional dress - and even the kilt itself has been modified into becoming the kilt from more traditional dress. I won't get into that in great detail, Madam Speaker, other than to say that that in a way is an appropriation of culture because the tartan and the kilt and the bagpipes were outlawed after the Battle of Culloden. It was against the law to wear a tartan. Now you see it on Citadel Hill, and you think, well, gee, that must be British. Isn't that ironic, Madam Speaker? These are some of the reasons why this has to be in the education system.

[2:00 p.m.]

I think I have gone on a pretty good sidebar of history there. I hope it has been helpful to the members. I hope it helps them to understand why this is an issue. But it's an issue that's easily solved: work with the Gaelic community.

We have thousands of young people who are learning to speak Gaelic and learning their history. It's making them proud of who they are. It's important. It's important - not to be angry at the past, that holds no benefit - but it's important to know the past and to understand from where you come. Sometimes it acts as a motivation and a driver when you know that people were trying to destroy your ancestors. Sometimes it acts as a driver and a motivation for young people to learn Gaelic to fluency and to pass on the history, as I have tried to do here in this Legislature, to those who will listen.

Madam Speaker, back to this bill, and Gaelic is a part of it because it's not in the bill. There is support for other groups in the province, and rightly so, to be supported for their culture. We need to see that for Gaelic in legislation.

I think about some of the advisory committees. If government is leaving the Gaelic community out of these reports, maybe it's time for an advisory committee to the Education and Early Childhood Development Department, to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. In fairness to the minister, he has all kinds of things on his plate, and he needs support around him to ensure that these things are on the plate.

I cannot support this legislation. The government's vision for education is not clear to me. We have a classroom conditions report that has yet to come back. We have an inclusion report that has yet to come back. Yet we're moving ahead. The government is asking us to move ahead with this bill instead of a comprehensive fix for the classroom challenges that we hear about.

That's really what all of this comes back to, the classroom. The government has developed an antagonistic relationship with teachers. The problems that teachers and children are facing in the classroom, they are still facing. We don't expect them to be fixed overnight, but we expect a government to act on this in a comprehensive fashion. Again, the report on classroom conditions is not yet back.

Madam Speaker, last year I met with teachers. I put forward ideas to fix issues in the classroom and to help the teachers and to help the students. I'm just going to go through them very quickly. We have four-year-olds joining six-year-olds - at least we did at that time. Perhaps the four-year-olds are in pre-primary now. But they're started out together. There's a massive difference in developmental abilities, developmental stages of their minds and the contribution of their environment. Everyone grows up in a different home. We have children coming from very different situations being put into a classroom each year.

They are passed to the next grade no matter what they have learned. They are given custom-made classroom lessons to keep them moving through the grades. You have heard me speak about sometimes upwards of seven adaptations in a classroom. It doesn't matter if assignments are completed or if they attend class. This can lead to discipline problems. Then we are surprised when students are given standardized tests, and the results aren't what we would like to see.

That's the state of classrooms, Madam Speaker. That is what we need to fix. When I sat down with teachers and they described that scene to me, some of the ideas that came forward, you know some countries are having children start school at an older age, when they are more ready to learn. Some four-year-olds are not ready to learn, that's the reality, and putting them in the class with a six-year-old who is puts them at a tremendous disadvantage.

Madam Speaker, the attendance policy needs to be restored, and I think that is one thing that has come out of the classroom conditions, so that's good.

Require children to meet outcomes to be passed to the next grade - what favour are we doing young people if we pass them before they are ready to pass? We just have to put them into another adaptation next year, and when they get out into the real world is their employer going to put them into an adaptation? Maybe, but I would suspect, Madam Speaker, that in most jobs they are not going to have that luxury.

Give teachers the power to establish and enforce rules for homework and assignments - teachers have always had the ability to bring students along in their development, until, and as I said, the time until somebody got the bright idea to eliminate consequences. Consequences are a part of life, let's not shield young people from them, let's build resiliency in our young people.

If marks and attendance don't matter, why can we expect discipline to matter? If there are no rules around whether you're going to attend class, or whether you are actually going to do the work, why should students expect there to be rules around anything else, including their behaviour?

Technologies like Power School should be eliminated for the younger grades, I had Primary to Grade 6 here. I think there have been some efforts made on that, Madam Speaker, and I think that's good. I'm all for statistics, but let's get back to the idea of creativity in the classroom, and learning in the classroom, that's what matters.

Next one I have here is to eliminate testing and data collection designed for the purpose of measuring student performance for school boards. Well, if the school boards, elected at least, are gone I suspect this matter is gone, so that may no longer be relevant.

The last one I had was to eliminate standardized testing. Studies have shown standardized tests lead children to avoid risk-taking and can cause boredom and fear. I would say, Madam Speaker, that not everybody is wired the same way, and that's why we can't look at the classroom as a business, or schools as businesses. This is about learning and about bringing people along. Not everybody who goes to school is going to be a businesswoman or a businessman, nor will they maybe ever be in those environments.

So, Madam Speaker, those are the things that I believe to be important, that I have reflected upon in this speech, and to state for the record I will not be supporting this bill. I look forward to hearing the other comments of members, and I thank you for the time.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to Bill No. 72. There is so much in this bill and I haven't wrapped my head around all of it. My comments will be very much focused on the loss of school boards.

I guess first, just a reflection that it was sort of like a shoe dropping for me sometime several months after I was elected, after my first session in the Legislature which left me just kind of shaking my head, what was that, that I happened to stumble, as I am lucky to do sometimes, on a useful conversation on CBC and it was on Ideas. This political scientist from somewhere was engaged in a debate, and there was a sentence that just jumped out at me, and the sentence was "democracy is not efficient." I was both struck by it, and I was like, does everybody know this? Does everybody know that we are engaged in an activity

that is not efficient? Indeed, I guess, amongst people who study public administration and political science at levels higher than I have studied, it is widely acknowledged that democracy is not efficient.

You know what's efficient? At the polar opposite end of things, fascism is efficient. So, we are engaged here in an inefficient enterprise. That's okay. We don't need to rush and it is better for those of us, I think all of us, who maybe value democracy and people having some control and some say in their lives and in the systems that govern us that things happen slowly and imperfectly and through discussion and debate. Democracy is not efficient, but it is what guarantees us that our rights will not be stripped from us and what guarantees our voice.

I say that as a bit of a preamble and what is guiding my thoughts as I speak about the loss of our school boards. The minister, in various comments, has indicated that change will happen, change needs to happen, and he will have a more direct line to teachers or to superintendents, who now will be renamed into something else, because we're getting rid of this inefficient extra layer in the middle. But I want to register that I do not appreciate that deemed inefficiency because it's taking something away from me which I value, which is my vote. I don't need that vote or that voice as much as some other people in this province do.

I was elected in August 2016, some of you may remember when I showed up and it was a really fun time that Fall for me, it was a really fun time in my community. I actually quite enjoyed campaigning. It was summer, I had a great team. But also, right on the heels of that was the municipal election. I got to be in the campaign victory room at Alteregos on Gottingen Street when Lindell Smith was elected just two months later as District 8 councillor. That was a wonderful celebration.

In Alteregos that night, his campaign headquarters was actually shared by Suzy Hansen who was elected as the school board representative for District 4 or District 5 of the Halifax Regional School Board. And Suzy's campaign and her decision to run at all for school board really enlivened the whole discussion about democracy and voting in my district. I can't actually remember the exact time frame, but my sense is that I was talking a lot about school board elections even when I was campaigning door to door in my own provincial by-election because people were already getting the word out about who was running and so forth. Certainly, Lindell's campaign was well under way.

Suzy Hansen, who I have known for a number of years through a number of different contexts - I got to know her in particular because one of her younger children was at Veith House in the preschool when I was executive director at preschool, so we would see each other many days. Then she was a very active participant in the school options committee that happened over a series of meetings in the Winter of 2016. As in Eastern Passage and Cole Harbour, it engaged hundreds of volunteers, parents in particular, in conversations about what we value and what we need in our community in terms of schools.

[2:15 p.m.]

Suzy made a choice to run for school board not as the African Nova Scotian school board representative, and actually people applauded her, and people were very excited. I am one of many white parents who voted for her. For many African Nova Scotians in my district, it actually caused some consternation or indecision. They were perplexed. Which ballot would they vote on?

There were three excellent candidates for the African Nova Scotian school board seat - Melinda Daye, who went on to run against me for the governing Party in last May's election; Marcus James, who is the founder of 902 Man Up, an absolutely stellar guy who also lives in my district; and Archy Beals. People were faced with this decision, if they were African Nova Scotian, if they were qualified and eligible to vote on that ballot, which ballot would they vote on? Would they vote on the local school board ballot and possibly vote for Suzy, like I was going to get to do? Or would they vote on the African Nova Scotian school board ballot and choose amongst these three candidates? (Interruption)

The member opposite is acknowledging this real dilemma that people faced. I think many people actually chose to vote on their local ballot. Melinda Daye is from our neighbourhood, our community in the Halifax North End, and Marcus James is also from the North End of Halifax, the Halifax Needham area. Neither of them won, and Archy Beals did. He's fantastic, and that's great. But a whole bunch of people kind of had to choose where they exercised their enfranchisement, if that's a word. That whole conversation was great.

I had a series of conversations about this dilemma for voters. Did they vote on this ballot, or did they vote on that ballot? Why couldn't they vote on both ballots? That was my question. That was a question that many people asked themselves. If you think about what the role of an African Nova Scotian School Board representative was, or is, or was. (Interruption)

MADAM SPEAKER: Order. The member for Halifax Needham has the floor.

MS. ROBERTS: Think about the role of the African Nova Scotian school board seat, which has only been in place only since 2000. (Interruption) And now we're taking it away - only since 2000.

The idea, as I understand it, was to look at the school board in a systemic way to put that lens on all of the operations and all of the decisions of the school board. But people have multiple identities. They are also attached to their neighbourhood school. They are also concerned about what happens at the junior high or what happens at the high school. Even a person who wants to vote and is qualified to vote on the African Nova Scotian school board seat might also want to have a relationship and some choice about who represents their local district.

I was a new MLA, just coming to understand the scope of our power here, which again is not always efficient. Where in this Legislature our job is to legislate, it occurred to me, why don't we modify the Education Act? Why shouldn't people be able to vote on both ballots? For example, in an analogous situation, I chose to vote on my local district ballot and vote for Suzy Hansen, and that meant I could not vote on the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial ballot - which is actually where my children go to school - because I felt connected. I am connected in my constituency, and while I respect and value the work of the CSAP, I had more of a stake in my district contest.

Coming into this work as a new MLA, one of my goals became - and multiple people out there in the community will know this - to modify the Education Act and allow people to vote on the ballots for which they are qualified. I spoke about this when my colleague for Dartmouth South and I attended a gathering, a consultation related to the Commission on Effective Electoral Representation.

I have to say, I never would have anticipated that before the next election came around there would not even be a board for which to vote at all. I never would have anticipated that.

Compliments to the Legislative Library - as I was furiously drafting some thoughts to speak today to third reading, I asked for some of the Hansard debate on the creation of the African Nova Scotian school board seat. Like I said, that change was brought in in 2000 by the then-Hon. Jane Purves with the Progressive Conservative Government. I have here just a part of the debate, but it was supported by the Liberals and it was supported by the NDP at the time. In fact, it was, in part, in response to the BLAC Report from the 1990s.

According to the Commission on Effective Electoral Representation, as my Leader made reference, there are multiple purposes that have been served by the African Nova Scotian school board seat - to look back at their report, "at least five important functions:

- providing the boards and senior administrators with an African Nova Scotian perspective on education;
- helping to link the schools and the African Nova Scotian community;
- providing political experience to board members and even unsuccessful candidates, for the position;
- acknowledging the importance of the African Nova Scotian community to the larger community;
- symbolizing the priority the African Nova Scotian community attaches to education as a means of advancement while

simultaneously promoting education within the African Nova Scotian community.”

Then the authors of the commission’s report said, “. . . we urge the Department of Education to always consider the broader roles and significance of the African Nova Scotian school board seats.” I will table that.

I would add at least a sixth role that I have been aware of, thanks to my previous work as a journalist. I clearly remember interviewing Doug Sparks, who may have been the first African Nova Scotian school board representative over the years. Irvine Carvery has been one. Melinda Daye was one, and now, of course, it’s Archy Beals.

I mean, we all know this, because we are elected. Somehow, our communities have said, we give you the honour and the privilege of speaking on behalf of our community, and then that means that others treat us as if we have, because we have earned that. We have earned that through other people’s votes. So as a journalist, when there was an issue, that would come up - and issues come up - they’re in the news today, right? Where students in Nova Scotia are suffering from racist attacks in our schools. Who do we go to? Who do we go to, to speak? Who do we go to, to help us understand? Who do we go to for solutions? Who do we go to for voice? Who has earned the legitimacy to be a voice? We turn to people who have earned that through votes. So, I would say that that’s at least a sixth important role of the African Nova Scotian school board seats. (Interruption)

MADAM SPEAKER: Order. Order. The member for Halifax Needham has the floor. (Interruptions)

Order. Order. Order. Order.

The member for Halifax Needham has the floor.

MS. ROBERTS: So, why is the story that is in the news today there? At least in part it’s there because two school board members asked for a report back in November and that report came out of Halifax Regional School Board in January. Then there was a request for the same data from all school boards across the province, and that is what is being reported on today. If we don’t have school board members elected by the public, asking for that information to come to them, how will it come to us? This is what I’m concerned about today.

There has been an argument that the interest in African Nova Scotian school boards - and school board seats in general - that the interest is not very great, because the voter participation is not very great, because some are acclaimed. I think that argument has been refuted, in my view, quite strongly. The fact is that only a portion of our population is in schools. We have an aging population, many of the most engaged voters are not very connected to schools because they don’t have children. If you’re exercising a vote and

you're choosing between three names and you don't know the people because your kids are not in school, because maybe you're not a grandparent actively engaged in the school system. It is understandable that people do not always elect to vote on the school board ballot. But the people who do vote on that ballot are engaged in that system and for them, and for me, it has meaning.

When there is not a race, when there is an acclamation of a school board representative, I think my colleague from Sackville-Cobequid spoke to it from his experience, everybody knows who the school board representative is - Dave Wright, in his district - and he's doing such a good job, why would anyone want to compete for that job? Why would anyone want to take it away? There's no great reward involved in it, there's a lot of work, a lot of accountability, and there never was much of a stipend. So, the fact that in some cases, the position is acclaimed, does not necessarily mean that the person doing the job is not legitimate or that it's a weak link in our democracy. I don't believe that that is true.

The Nova Scotia School Boards Association, in February - just a couple of weeks ago, or four days before we entered the House - they released a School Board Governance framework that was two years in the making, partly funded and supported, certainly, by the Nova Scotia Department of Education, on which the minister and the deputy minister were briefed numerous times, to try to strengthen governance in school boards across the province.

They engaged academics in looking at the best models of school board governance and how they should be focused on student achievement. That report is now available, and it will not be implemented because the institution is gone. That strikes me as yet another piece of evidence that what we are doing here is hasty and, in and of itself, an example of poor governance - kind of switching approaches dramatically because it is the will of a majority government.

[2:30 p.m.]

Many of the recommendations in the Glaze report have been put forward over years by the Nova Scotia School Boards Association as resolutions to the minister. Take, for example, the recommendation for wrap-around services in the Glaze report. In its response to the Glaze report, the Nova Scotia School Boards Association cited resolutions to the minister going back to 2010. In 2010, there was a call for greater interdepartmental delivery of services to youth and families. In 2013, there was a call for sustainable funding for mental health resources. In 2014 there was a call to the minister to address the siloed approach of different departments and agencies that are serving children. In 2014 and 2017, the Nova Scotia School Boards Association asked the minister to make SchoolsPlus available to schools across the province.

That's basically the same thing as what Dr. Glaze called for in her report. It's one of many examples in the Glaze report of recommendations that were put forward by the School Boards Association. Actually, I'm going to read from their letter of February 7th to the Premier and to the minister, where they say it best.

"The NSSBA reviewed a significant amount of pertinent information with Dr. Glaze, including research . . . on school board governance as well as school district size and the impact of changes to governing school boards. Dr. Glaze was also provided with detailed information on NSSBA governance work in response to the Auditor-General's recommendations for improving accountability. Astonishingly, though this governance work was supported by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, none of it is referenced in her report."

Then they say, "School boards have long been calling for the same improvements that appear in many of Dr. Glaze's recommendations. Nevertheless, governing school boards are being eliminated in an effort to solve these same concerns." Thanks for your work. Democracy is not efficient, and I guess it's also not necessary.

Last year, we were here debating Bill No. 75. At the time, I likened blaming teacher performance and teaching excellence for academic achievement to blaming our health care professionals for obesity rates in Nova Scotia. Teachers are teaching in an environment that all of us together create. Children are growing up and trying to learn, are naturally inclined to learn, in a context that all of us together create.

That context includes many things, many loving relationships and some relationships that are challenging. It includes dramatic income inequality. It includes poverty. It includes iPhones and Netflix and iPads and all kinds of technology which we know from research that's not from here but is widely reported is sometimes robbing children of what they crave most, which is time and face-to-face attentive contact with the people who care for them most.

It includes a legacy of colonialism and racism that is still present today, and has been present for generations, and which has intergenerational impacts. Teachers are doing - I think as most of us are - their best in that context, which they do not create, and blaming them for the results, I keep saying it, the social determinants of everything. It's like you can't - just like a doctor or access to primary health only is maybe determinant of care 10 per cent of your health, teachers are determinant of maybe 10 per cent of our learning or 15 per cent, because if you arrive at school hungry, if you arrive at school scared, if you arrive at school stressed, if you arrive at school and you are not sure where you are going for lunch, if you are not sure where you are going after school. Teachers are doing their best in the time that they are taking care of our children.

There's a certain arrogance in thinking that direct lines of accountability and direct lines of control - I'm going to have a direct line down the system - there's an arrogance to

thinking that will make change because we don't control the context. We can try to influence it, and we can try to give the resources like Dr. Glaze called for in some of her recommendations that echo ones from the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, we can try to change the context.

Some of the things that my Party argues for are really about changing the context - let's lift more people out of poverty, for example. But arguing that change is necessary because there's an achievement gap, or change is necessary because we are not above the bar, is like saying okay, what I always picture when we've got to change something, what I picture is the minister grabbing a snow globe and shaking it and then turning it back and saying okay, we changed something.

It is not that easy, and just because you get to give someone an order doesn't mean that they are going to - people don't respond well to that. I don't know if you've noticed, people don't. I mean, somehow in this environment, through the mechanism developed over hundreds of years not necessarily in the most progressive way, in an environment of Party discipline, with Whips - of which I may be the wettest, floppiest, spaghetti noodle example of ever - in this environment people actually respond to command and control.

But in our society, which we are trying to be leaders to, people do not respond to command and control. They respond, as a number of colleagues have mentioned, they respond really well to great processes where trust is created and conversation is facilitated, the sort of work I saw happen during the school options committee process in the North End, which was remarkable, and hard, and long and also inefficient, but came up with great recommendations which this government has not spoken to us about, more than nine months. I would have a toddler by now, to refer to my colleague from Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage's comment.

People respond to invitations where their voices are genuinely welcomed and where their contributions are genuinely valued. That is when we can make change together. But the way that this bill attempts to make change in our education system I see leading to changes that I fear will only be negative for children.

I say that in particular having been at Law Amendments and having seen it. I sat at Law Amendments for only about four and a half hours. During that time, several of the witnesses, certainly three I can specifically think of - Drew Moore; Principal Savage, who a number of people have referred to; and also Susan whose last name I can't remember right now - referred to being either administrators, principals and vice-principals, or on a track to becoming administrators. Then very matter-of-factly, they said, I don't know that I want to do that. I don't know that I want to do that now. Now I don't think that is in my future.

That means that these changes are actually potentially robbing our children of the leaders that they need in their schools, where they can learn because environments are

created where they feel safe and where they have a sense that the adults are treating each other with respect, where their voices are valued, and their presence is important. I really do see the way that this bill was arrived at percolating down into the education system not at all in the very efficient way that I think is being hoped for.

Today it was heartening to hear the minister reflect back on what he heard in some of those small group meetings that he had across the province, that teachers are not necessarily opposed to many of the recommendations in the Glaze report, but they don't trust the government to implement them. It was heartening to hear him say that. What I question is whether he understands how important that is. Trust is a precursor for any positive change. People who do not trust the government will not work with the government, will not work with their employer, to make the changes that are mandated.

Further, so many of the people who spoke at Law Amendments had vastly more information, experience, knowledge, perspective, and context for making a change in our educational system than - all due respect - our minister does. Really, where should the change be coming from? Who is fit to lead the change?

I'm glad that the minister heard that. But I really do think that if this government is intent on pressing forward, on not pressing pause, then I suggest that the expectations for change be dramatically dialed back. The way we are right now with the relationships that are damaged, with potentially fewer quality administrators in our system and others kind of feeling like the style of leadership that is being asked for in our system is not the style of leadership that they hope to offer. Given all of that, I think our hopes for the change that our children will experience are likely to be disappointed.

So, thank you very much, and with that I take my seat.

[2:45 p.m.]

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HON. PAT DUNN: It's a pleasure to be able to stand here in my place and say a few words on Bill No. 72.

Certainly Bill No. 72 has some sweeping changes that are going across our province. My first glance at the Glaze report, my first reaction to it, I wanted to take a broom and sweep it down to the end of the street. However, having a second opportunity to look at it, there are some things in the report that are certainly positive. Other things I certainly don't agree with.

I'm sure we can all agree on both sides of the House that the students' needs are of utmost importance. Student achievement and success is very important and there are inconsistencies across our province with what's going on with our curriculum in various

schools. All these accurate statements have been mentioned time and time again in the House. Madam Speaker, hopefully common sense will prevail.

Now allow me to give you an example of what I would consider lack of common sense. This was a school situation indirectly connected perhaps to the classroom. This particular example would be something that happened a number of years ago when I was coaching a high school hockey team. I will not mention a year or mention the school because it was connected with the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation, so I'll keep those factors to one side.

It was early in the school year, Madam Speaker. I had a group of boys in the high school on the hockey team, actually 12 forwards, six defencemen, two goaltenders, and eight parents, and we decided to do something very different - let's take this group to Florida and play in a hockey tournament. There was a tremendous amount of excitement when that was announced.

Madam Speaker, we had a Student Athletic Council in the school and we had expectations of our players. For example, their attendance had to be excellent and they had to be passing their courses. If they were having difficulty in a course the council would arrange for a tutor and extra help to bring that particular player to where they were actually passing that course. There were times when a player wasn't able to play until such time that they could see that improvement.

Madam Speaker, we again applied early in September to the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation to make this trip, and we were denied. What ensued over the next many months was meetings, letters, conversations in person and on the phone, asking why, this doesn't make sense. The only reason why we couldn't: there was a ruling in the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation that stated that they didn't want teams playing after the playoff season was over because it might be looked upon as an advantage for that school going forward in the next school year.

I pleaded with the federation and said that this really doesn't pertain to us, there should be an exception because 12 of my 20 players were Grade 12 and they were graduating. The rules stated that even if they didn't graduate they couldn't play when they came back because they had their three years used up. So I said with 12 players, I can't see where our school was taking advantage of any other school across the province. The answer was no, you are not leaving the province, you are not going to play.

We looked at the school calendar, we looked at the school exams and tests, and we also looked at any needs of the students first, before we decided to select a particular time we would go, and we decided Easter weekend would be the time for us to go. It was too expensive during March Break.

Before we could start raising money, we had to have the green light. After many frustrating meetings and calls, we finally got word that you can go, one time only. That was probably one of the greatest trips these students have ever had. In fact, it was probably six months ago I ran into one of them in an airport, where this particular player came over to talk to me and it's the very first thing he talked about - what a wonderful trip he had back in his Grade 11.

We had players on the team that - actually one or two of them didn't even have the opportunity to leave the province. We had several that a passport was something foreign to them. Many of them never had the opportunity to leave the country and go into the United States, so we had a lot of catching up to do, getting passports and so on.

Madam Speaker, we made that trip, we played in a tournament, and the lasting memories and the closeness of these players and the parents that went with us, it was an overwhelming success. Again, we literally had to fight in order to get permission to go.

We tried the same thing the next year. They quickly reminded us that it was a one-time deal and the answer was no. We went through the same process hoping they would relent. They did not so we decided we were going anyway, but we left our gear at home and we didn't play down in Florida. Again, a very successful trip, the players just missed the fact they were not able to participate in games and so on down there, but they realized rules are rules, and we would not be covered by insurance if something happened. Just common sense - in my opinion - didn't prevail.

When I look at Bill No. 72, there seems to be a lot of questions without clear answers. Perhaps I can mention one glaring error once again, which was mentioned by my colleague for Inverness, and the fact the Gaelic community was completely missed in the whole document, and I am sure the government is very well aware of this right now and will take the necessary steps to make sure that is part of the document.

When we look at questions I think there are so many of them, I'll just mention a few: I can foresee busing problems - colleagues have mentioned courtesy busing; fair funding for all schools across the province - fair funding for all programs across the province making sure each individual school in each corner of the province have the same programs, have the same funding, and the students are getting a fair shake as far the curriculum provided for them - basically a level playing field; also, accountability across the province - having adequate facilities within their jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, another concern would be, where are the substitutes going to come from for managers? I have great difficulty calling an administrator a "manager," but apparently that is what's going to be taking place. Again, if a manager is unable to perform their duties for any length of time, where are these substitutes going to come from?

Are we going to be looking at a lot of scrambling in September due to the administration fallout - administrators trying to decide if they are going to stay as managers or if they are going to leave and go back into the classroom?

Another very important question is, who is going to be responsible for closing schools? If there is an emotional type of thing that can happen across our province, it certainly is when word leaks out that there is a potential school closure in someone's community.

Another question is, you may have a substitute teacher who has been substituting for several years, who is on the brink of securing a job in their community but may lose that opportunity to secure a permanent contract in their community because someone else can move from anywhere else in the province with a permanent contract and take that teaching position.

Another question that comes to mind is, who will handle suspensions that cannot be handled by the school or the manager?

As I mentioned earlier, it continues to disturb me when I have to refer to administrators as managers. What should we be focusing on? We should be focusing on many of the following: student accountability, student attendance, student marks, student assignments, student discipline, pass-fail. If we talk about erosion over the last number of years, there certainly has been an erosion in those areas.

The lack of student accountability in our schools is very evident. In some cases, student attendance was basically a farce. Teachers did not have the power to force students to attend class; therefore, they took advantage of that, in particular in high school and somewhat in junior high. The ramifications of that were very clear.

Student marks over the last number of years - I'm not sure why they gave marks. It didn't matter anyway because everyone had a pass. If you had a mark that was below the passing grade, there were all kinds of ways to overcome that deficiency late in June to get that passing grade and be moved on to the next level.

Likewise, with student assignments, I've talked to many students over the last number of years who said it was not relevant if they passed in an assignment or not, or when they passed it in. These are the types of things . . .

MADAM SPEAKER: Order. I'd like the chatter to quiet down a bit, please.

The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MR. DUNN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think when that happened, I was talking to student discipline. A lot of these things are starting to be looked at, and it is going to take time, but the pendulum swung way too far over the last number of years.

[3:00 p.m.]

When I think of the conflict between administrators and teachers that I've heard in the House, I would say that would be very minimal. I remember my days as an administrator, and I don't have a good feeling of the administrators being taken away from that collegial atmosphere, environment, that we've had in our schools for many, many, many years.

So, my preference would be to focus 100 per cent on the complex classroom environment. I think we should move everything to one side, focus on the classroom environment, fix the classroom environment, something that teachers have been asking and pleading for for many, many years. So, we should consult, collaborate, and listen to classroom teachers. Madam Speaker, I am anxiously waiting for the release of the report from the Inclusion Commission. I think that's where all our focus and attention should be today, and put the Glaze report to one side until the most important thing is completed and adequate, and that is the needs of our students in the classroom.

Madam Speaker, classroom teachers have been asking for help for numerous years. They wanted assistance to address the complexity of today's classrooms. Teachers have worked in classroom environments where they could not meet the needs of everyone in their classroom. Will removing school boards and administrators improve classroom environments? I'm not so sure, Madam Speaker. Will it lessen anxiety and frustration? Well, time will tell. Classroom reform is a necessity. During the past five years government has skated around the most important issue, and that is helping students in our classrooms, that are falling through the cracks.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, it would be very difficult to support Bill No. 72 because the government continues to ignore what teachers have been asking for for so long. Give us the tools and resources required to help our students improve the classroom setting. Madam Speaker, imagine being a teacher in a classroom with approximately 30 students. One-third of them are on individual programs, that is a different program for each one of the one-third of that group. Several more are in adaptations, four or five groups of different intellectual abilities, and that teacher is expected to walk into that classroom and teach all those various groups within a 50- or 60-minute class; a very difficult job, Madam Speaker.

Teachers need additional educational assistants in their classrooms to help and meet the needs of children, something that's been lacking for years. I can recall very vividly, Madam Speaker, in the early months of the school year, going to the supervisor of our family, basically pleading and arguing for additional resources, additional EPAs in the

classroom, to help teachers meet the needs of these students. Again, in the majority of cases, the answer is I'm sorry, we can't provide that for you.

Teachers in most cases, Madam Speaker, know they are not going to have mental health specialists to help all the students arriving to school suffering from anxiety and frustration, unable to cope with school life and, perhaps, life in general. That type of assistance and help from mental health specialists has to be a priority in our school system today, and that is from Grades Primary to 12. Teachers know in many areas of the province, they will not have the luxury of having a psychologist readily available to test children and provide recommendations. I would say, most years, guidance counsellors and administrators have long lists of students who need to be tested so the proper interventions can occur, but the psychologist attached to their school is responsible for many schools and just doesn't have the time to get the job done. So once again, students are falling through the cracks.

Teachers are faced with an increased number of students who exhibit severe behavioural problems. It's well known, Madam Speaker, that quite commonly teachers are pushed, hit, kicked, and even spit upon in some of our schools because of these behavioural problems, leading to an increase in the lack of respect in our schools. Will Bill No. 72 improve this? What do you think, Madam Speaker? I'm not so sure.

Teachers need speech-language specialists. Well, good luck with that one. Teachers need the assistance of a psychiatrist - often not available to help students. For example, in Pictou County, we have one psychiatrist. Presently, she's off work due to an overwhelming workload. She needs time. She needs some rest. That's for 46,000 people. What about our schools? There's certainly a need for that type of specialist assistance in our schools.

In the entire Celtic family where I live, a lot of these specialists are not available. I'm sure it's the same right across the province from Yarmouth to Cape Breton. In today's society, today's classroom environment, students need that assistance. Will Bill No. 72 cure this problem? Again, I'm not so sure it will. Life will continue, and teachers will be without the help they need to help certain students.

Teachers know the inclusion model they were asked to follow over the past number of years was a model that could not possibly work. Why? A wide range of students were being placed in the classroom. What went wrong? Inadequate resources to make it work. That's why teachers became frustrated. They have been asking government for help to make inclusion work. During the past several years, their plea for help has been ignored.

They continued to work hard to overcome the numerous difficulties they face each and every day. They knew help wasn't coming. That's why they became totally frustrated and started to speak out. They felt government was not listening to them. That's all the teachers wanted, all the teachers needed - what they have a right to have so all students under their care would have the opportunity for success.

As mentioned earlier by a colleague about class composition, so many students are in the wrong environment. It's very difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all the students if they don't have the resources and the help. There's a very high probability that the students would not succeed. However, as that trend continued over the last number of years, regardless of whether they were succeeding or not, they were moved on with their peers.

Again, in an average class, there are so many needs for the teacher to meet. You have a pocket of students with very high intelligence. You also have the needs of a middle group of students who are very capable of meeting their outcomes and you also have some struggling students who need some extra help, some extra attention, not to mention some others with behavioural problems. It's very difficult for a teacher to meet all these needs in a class during any given day. So many of these students, due to years of struggling and frustration, especially the groups of students that are struggling, become very frustrated because of lack of success. No wonder they don't like school. No wonder they don't want to come to school, they know it's just going to be another day of anxiety for them.

Teachers want to help students under their care who exhibit severe behavioural patterns. Teachers want to have the resources to help students with these severe learning difficulties. Again, Madam Speaker, it is virtually impossible for a teacher to do this, I don't care how good they are, to meet the needs of every student placed in their classroom.

Will removing school boards and administrators cure all these problems? Oh my, Madam Speaker, let's zero in on the heart of the problem. Government has ignored the most important elements that can improve student success. No wonder there is a toxic environment, as mentioned by the member for Dartmouth East, within our school system, as mentioned earlier. In other words, government continued to ignore teachers' pleas for assistance. In other words, be quiet, get in your classroom, and stop complaining.

Here we are debating Bill No. 72, and so far things haven't changed. Teachers are still without the essential resources to help all the students under their care. Nothing is more important than helping our students, and that is providing the required resources that teachers have been asking for years for. Teachers need them now. I'm not convinced that Bill No. 72 will cure the immediate classroom dilemma and, because of that, I will not be supporting this bill.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you to everyone who has spoken against this bill today. I am oddly grateful to have another chance to speak to it - not grateful that I have to speak to it but I'm glad I got one more chance to tell this House that I consider this to be a bad piece of legislation.

I'm sorry that it's going to pass. I'm sorry the government has not actually listened to the people of Nova Scotia and the government has not hit the pause button on this bill. But here we are, so I'm grateful I get to be on the record one more time to voice my opposition to Bill No. 72.

I've already spoken on a number of aspects of this bill, and again my colleagues have done such an excellent job talking about some of the more troubling areas of the bill so I'm going to try not to echo what they've said so far too much, but I will reiterate a few points.

Bill No. 72 disproportionately affects women and women's jobs. Happy International Women's Day. This government continually defends its record on women in this province and yet we know - what do we know? We know that this government continually defends its record on women in this province and yet we know that since this government has taken office that it has passed bill after bill which takes aim at occupations, professions, and vocations that are made up of a majority of women - home support workers, nurses, lowest-paid public servants, teachers, and now elected school board members.

The Premier brags about the fact that he has appointed more women to the Executive Council than any other Premier and that his government has appointed more women to the bench and so now there's gender parity on the bench, and these are both admirable achievements and incredibly important. But the difference here is that the school board voices are elected democratically. The people on these school boards are chosen by the people to represent them and they were not chosen by the Premier.

[3:15 p.m.]

This bill will remove principals and vice-principals from their union. This is shameful. This is not a decision the government should be able to make. Not only does it weaken the bargaining power of teachers who have a democratic right to bargain their contracts with the government, but it has the potential to create an us-versus-them relationship between teachers and administrators, and in schools we know that this kind of relationship is useless and harmful. Teachers and administrators all over this province have said we are a team and we don't want to be separated. What's worse, administrators will be called managers. I will echo my colleague for Dartmouth South and say schools are not businesses, children are not widgets, and principals are not managers.

This bill takes away the important voices representing the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq voices on our democratically elected school boards. This is very concerning. The minister has said he will address this by making sure there's a representative for each of these groups on the new PACE. It's only because of an amendment proposed by my colleague, the member for Dartmouth South, that there will be a representative from the disability community. But how does the minister justify going from these voices elected to

every school board in the province to just three individuals who are appointed by the minister? Black lives matter, indigenous lives matter, disabled lives matter, and the silencing of these democratically elected people representing these lives is an insult and a dangerous step backward in our democratic society.

This is a rushed bill. Why do we need to pass this legislation now? My colleague earlier said in such an eloquent way that we moved so fast through this process, so fast that amendments got missed or clauses got missed and forgotten. We think it's because of the speed, we're not totally sure and there's really no reason. The minister has stood up and said we need to make change now, our classrooms are in a crisis. And guess what? The teachers have been saying that for years and last year, when they were moved to job action for the first time in the history of their union, over 100 years, nobody thought that crisis was worth moving on at that time.

All of a sudden, now there's a crisis because the government has deemed it that and the Glaze report has deemed it that. Last year during the job action, that would have been a good time to address the crisis which has now only gotten worse.

With that, I want to talk about the other massive problem with this bill, and that is the simple but very critical fact that it does nothing to address the needs of the classroom that teachers have been crying out for for years now. By doing nothing it is actually very harmful. The needs of the classroom that teachers are talking about and begging for and the changes to these classroom conditions - these are the needs of our children. The teachers are the voices of our kids and for our kids while they are at school. I know that teachers want the very best for our children. They know them, they love them, they want to see them succeed, and they believe in them.

I am deeply grateful for the teachers, both early childhood educators and the teachers in the public system who have touched my children so profoundly even in their short lives. I am grateful for teachers and I believe teachers and, when I speak about teachers, I am speaking about children because they are connected. Teachers want what the children need. I believe the countless teachers who have reached out to me over the last couple of weeks. I have received millions of emails - okay, that's an exaggeration - I have received a lot of e-mails. I have met with teachers from my riding. I have lots of friends who are teachers, who have talked to me about this situation - my brother is a teacher and a principal - and then I heard the teachers who spoke at the Law Amendments Committee. These people are distraught. They are worried sick.

Some of them are quitting and leaving the province, and let me tell you - I don't have to tell you, but I'm going to anyway, because I like to talk - we cannot afford to lose any more people from this province, especially educated people who are making good salaries and who are starting families and putting down roots in this province. We can't do anything else to send them away.

I want to use my time today to bring the voices of teachers to this House as a last-ditch effort to pause this useless, harmful legislation and instead have the government make a real commitment to the needs of our classrooms and our students. As I said, many teachers have contacted me.

One teacher is Ben Sichel. He works at Prince Andrew High School. Ben would love to see the implementations of the 1994 BLAC Report implemented as fast as the Glaze report is getting implemented, in order to support the African Nova Scotian learners in his classes.

Another teacher is Drew Moore. Drew advises us and me that we need more BIPOC teachers, BIPOC administrators, and school board members besides the ones who are holding designated seats; more African Nova Scotian support workers and more Mi'kmaq support workers; better pay for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq support workers; culturally-responsive training for all teachers; antiracism training for all teachers, treaty education embedded throughout the entire curriculum; more restorative approaches; fewer office referrals and suspensions for students of colour; fewer students of colour on IPPs; and better connections with homes and communities. And all of that is just for starters.

Teachers have asked the government to address issues of poverty, lack of affordable and safe housing, food insecurity, and domestic violence that keep our students from reaching their full potential. So let's just talk about that for a minute.

In Nova Scotia, 22 per cent of our children live in poverty. We are tied with New Brunswick as the jurisdiction with the highest rate of child poverty in the country. It's shameful. We have a housing crisis where, in HRM alone, 25 per cent of people are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, and 12 per cent spend more than 50 per cent of their income on housing. We are desperate for affordable housing.

Every single day, there are people who come into my office and say they don't know what to do. They don't have enough money to get to the end of the month. Can I explain to them where they can get an extra \$50 to stretch out to buy some food for their family until their next cheque comes? Every single day that happens to me.

The other parts of the day - very often, almost every single day - I have mothers of families who are facing eviction because they can't pay their bills - often single mothers who have three kids and don't have anywhere to live at the end of the month or the end of the week. They can't make ends meet. There's nowhere for them to go that they can afford with their income assistance cheque.

Obviously, kids who are hungry and who are watching their parents worry about where they're going to live are going to bring those issues to school with them. It will and does affect their learning.

We know this, and yet our government's response to this is to talk about the great transformation which, number one, won't be implemented until 2019, and number two, won't shake down to an increase of supports for people on ESIA of much more than \$14 to \$30 per month, at most. The government also refuses to entertain a \$15 minimum wage, an amount we know will actually allow average minimum-wage earners to be able to put food on their table and have a tiny bit left over at the end of the month.

This is okay with this government. Instead of addressing issues of poverty and affordable housing, the government replies with, let's create a new office for standardized assessments.

Teachers have said that they want teacher-led and student-centred education reform that is based on current best practices and scientific research. They have asked the government to look beyond Ontario, to find education models that are proving to be successful, and the government responds with, let's take our principals out of the union. Teachers have been calling for better access for students to guidance counsellors, behaviour specialists, psychologists, social workers, and mental health specialists. The government replies with, let's change the name of the superintendents to regional executive directors, and administrators to managers.

Again, teachers have asked for more support for African Nova Scotian and Indigenous students so they can strive to help them overcome the effects of years of systemic racism and marginalization. The government seems to have heard "dissolve elected school boards."

In Nova Scotia, we have schools where there are students who have been waiting for speech assessments since September. The parents have given their consent and the students have not been seen once. There are students who need full-time Educational Program Assistant support but are not yet diagnosed and, therefore, do not qualify for support. We need to eliminate the wait times for these evaluations.

There are students who hit and kick teachers and EPAs. We have students who are being hurt, or scared of being hurt, by other children who lack the supports they need in the classroom. We need more EPAs. (Interruption)

I cannot quite believe that this is a humorous thing that I am talking about now. This is serious. (Pause) I know these are the lives of the future of this province that we are laughing about right now, ladies and gentlemen, and that is not okay.

There are many students who go to their teachers with concerns about depression and pregnancy, bullying, suicidal thoughts, gender identity questions, anxiety, and hunger. We need supports for these students, for these teachers who are receiving these issues. We need counsellors, we need social workers, we need mental health nurses.

Teachers are desperate, and this government has turned its back on them with this bill. It could have addressed these issues in education reforms and, instead, it has turned its back on these issues.

Earlier today I put out a message on social media. I didn't know what would happen but I put out a message saying, are there any teachers out there who want to be named in this House today as opposing Bill No. 72? Probably if I opened my email right now, there would be 50 more emails, but I was quite shocked by how quickly the names started piling in, and so here are some of them: David LeBlanc, Jennifer Wallace, Basil Rose, Nicole Conrad, Eric Ogden, Lisa Mansfield, Ian Kay, Anna Barrett, Abby Ferguson, Amy Mercer, Denise Friars, Chris Trenholm, Meghan O'Neill, Paula, Ben Sichel, Drew Moore, Angela Gillis, Karen McSweeney, Tanya Chislet, Lois Landry, Linette Rankin, Marilyn Skinner, Sonya Forman, Adrienne Kelawee, Jessica Roache, Julia Grady, Christine Emberley, Linda MacKay, Susan Collins, Amanda Hernandez, Jennifer Logan, A.G. MacRae, Candice Murphy, Angela Wisen, Scott Calnen, Mark Chiasson, Timothy Kennedy, Jennifer Gouthro, Phillis Wiler, Rebecca Franklin, Dana Hayward, Janet Burbee, Duncan Cameron, Yvonne Lapierre, Melanie Duffy, Ken Marchand, Nicole Whiteway, Leanne MacDonald, Tonya Brennan, Daniel Forsyth, Lisa McIntyre, Shawa Dusman, Sara Wellwood, Sarah Petrie, Carol MacKay, Doreen Kolkay, Janet Dornin, Raymond Aucoin, Adam Boyd, Shannon Wolf, Ryan Lutz, Michelle Savoie, Rhea Thibault, Amy Laird, Nancie de la Chevotiere, April Cross, Lori MacDonald, Sarah McCann MacLeod, Susan MacKay, Donna Benigno, Colleen Dafoe, Megan MacArthur, Denise Bridgewater, Andrew McIntosh, Jennifer Barro Ralph, Carrie Veinotte, Kevin Farrell, Trent Raynard, Leah Ann Cameron, Jennifer Hines, Michelle Langille, Christine Bullock, Luisa Hernandez, Charity Buchanan, Theresa Nickerson, Lynda Sutherland, Tracy Webb, Denise Cameron, Ann Raffine, Carolyn Nickelo, Coralie Cameron, Amy Hawkin, April Butler, Melanie Van Poelgeest, Andrea Heans, Ruth Reeves, Margaret Miles, Tim MacLeod, Catherine Lever, Darlene Bereta, Cherie Abriel, Tammie Landry, Rosemarie Perry, Gilles Boudreau, Kathy Walters, Tyler MacIntosh, Elisha Boutilier, Keri Butler, Tanya Pin-Crowe, Mary Anne Alley, Jill Copley, Tim McLeod, Peter Day, Bill Murphy, and Angela Stewart.

I apologize to those teachers who have sent me their names, and I am now up on the floor and not able to read them. I also apologize for anyone's name I have completely butchered. These teachers have sent me their names from all over the province, from Cape Breton to Yarmouth to Amherst and everywhere. They are passionately opposed to Bill No. 72. We should be listening to them. They know what is best for our classrooms and our children, and what our children need to succeed.

I have a little more time, so I am going to tell you a little bit about my favourite teacher. No offence to all the other teachers that I had. I grew up in a sort of rural-ish area, and I went to Atlantic Memorial School. I had the same teacher for Grades 5 and 6: Alan Dawe. In Grade 5, I had a split class of Grades 5 and 6, but I was in the Grade 5 class. Then I also was happy to have him in Grade 6.

When I was in Grade 5, one of the best parts of the year that our teacher gave to us was photography. Part of our school had a little two-room schoolhouse, an annex building, and our class was in there. In the little back room, which would have been the teacher's office, was a darkroom. He set up a darkroom there. Our music teacher, her husband was a photographer for the Globe and Mail, and they moved to Toronto. He donated all his photographic equipment. This was in the 1980s, so we're talking photographs. Mr. Dawe took it upon himself to teach us how to use 35 millimetre cameras and gave us the project of going out and shooting the world with our cameras. It was quite something.

March Break of that year, the annex school burned to the ground, and all the photography equipment was lost. I was devastated because, after March Break, it was going to be the Grade 5 students' turn to use all the equipment. It never happened, which is probably why I am still not a very good photographer. However, it was really awesome.

In that same year, the Grade 6 students learned about Newton's laws of physics by building rockets. They went to the hobby shop, and they got rocket kits. They all built them, and they did projects on Newton's laws of physics. Then we would all go out into the schoolyard and we would shoot off the rockets. It was like the highlight of the year.

The following year when I was in Grade 6, for some reason our teacher was not going to do that lesson with us. I asked him. I was like, listen, I have been looking forward to building a rocket. He let me take on my own project, go and do my research about Newton's laws of physics and then build my own rocket. He brought the whole class out because this was something that I had wanted to do. We all went outside, and I shot my rocket off in the schoolground of Atlantic Memorial.

That was only one of the things that he did to respond to the students in his class. I also learned from him to jive dance, and I learned about the Beatles, and I learned about cross-country skiing. We went on a ski trip to Gittens Lodge, and he would lead the cross-country ski trips through the woods. And at the end he would break out a pile of orange slices and smoked mussels, and we would eat that at the end of our excursion. We were the only class in the school that had a computer in our classroom, and he taught me and a couple of my friends how to do the accounting for the school on the computer that was in our classroom - I did the milk accounts. Other people learned how to use Logo. He was setting us ahead because he cared so much about us.

He taught me about democracy. One day he came into the classroom and he said, okay, this is the book we're going to read now; this is the novel we're going to read as a class. We're all going to get a copy of the novel and we'll move through it together and you can write your reports. Well, I can't remember why I challenged this, but for some reason I didn't like his choice of novel. At the same time we had a book fair at our school and he said, well listen, you go and choose some other options.

So, I went to the book fair, and I got three different novels and I presented them to the class. I gave them a little précis of each novel. I'm making myself out to be a very smart little Grade 6 kid, but this is actually all about this amazing teacher who allowed all of this learning to happen. I presented these three novels to the class and the class voted on them - sorry, there were five novels, and we voted on them and the top three were chosen. Then the class broke into three groups and we all did individual work on our novels. The one that I did was *The Treasure of Alpheus Winterborn* by John Bellairs - great book, great book.

Mr. Dawe also taught us the word "meticulous." He was also an incredible painter and brought art into our classroom. And, on the day that the Challenger Space Shuttle exploded, he brought a TV into our classroom and we watched that happen.

I only want to mention him because I believe that he had a profound effect on my life, in fact so profound that at my wedding my brothers made fun of me because I would always talk about Mr. Dawe instead of the man I was marrying.

Mr. Dawe was also the school vice-principal and he was a respected administrator and teacher to his colleagues at that school, which is probably no different than most administrators in our system now, respected colleagues, teachers first, but respected administrators. So I just wanted to use a bit of time to talk about him and talk about how important our teachers are to the learning of children, but also how important they are to each other, and how they support each other, and how, once again, principals are not managers.

I just want to close with a couple of lines from an essay by Mary Oliver, and I have a copy of it to table - I don't have it in my hands at the moment, but I will table it. Mary Oliver, who was an American writer says this:

"Teach the children. We don't matter so much, but the children do. Show them daisies and the pale hepatica. Teach them the taste of sassafras and wintergreen. The lives of the blue sailors, mallow, sunbursts, the moccasin flowers. And the frisky ones—inkberry, lamb's-quarters, blueberries. And the aromatic ones—rosemary, oregano. Give them peppermint to put in their pockets as they go to school. Give them the fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the lords of profit. Stand them in the stream, head them upstream, rejoice as they learn to love this green space they live in, its sticks and leaves and then the silent, beautiful blossoms.

Attention is the beginning of devotion."

Thank you. (Applause)

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

MR. BRAD JOHNS: Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate that. I'd like to start my remarks today by doing a couple of things. First of all, I want to thank our member for Dartmouth East because I think he has worked very hard in regard to this bill and this legislation. He was very good at adequately conveying the concerns our caucus has.

I also want to take the time to recognize the member for Dartmouth South. I do so because I think that I watched yesterday and I learned some stuff yesterday as I watched as that member brought forward attempts to make amendments to this legislation, and I was struck at the time that that member is a very intelligent person - much more intelligent than I may ever be. I listened to everything, and although I didn't agree with a lot of the things that I heard that member say, I did agree with some of them and I changed my views based on what I heard that member say.

What I want to say today is this is where I have the biggest problem. I don't want to reiterate and rehash things that I talked about during second reading, and I'm sure many others have talked about, but I do want to highlight why I personally have some concerns around this legislation and won't be, on a personal level, supporting this bill. It's for many of the reasons that people have talked about here. For me, fundamentally, it's that lack of public input, that lack of consultation, that lack of listening.

I want to share with the members that it was funny - years ago I started saying to people, I said the smartest thing I ever learned was when I learned I am not as smart as I think I am. I say that because at that time that was when I started listening, that's when I stopped talking. We're always in a rush to talk and let everybody else hear what we want to say. We want to say our piece and we don't listen to what's being said by people. It's when we stop and listen, and all of a sudden our views start changing. We see other opinions and we start to really think about things.

One of the problems I have with this piece of legislation is - and I did talk about this before - this is a significant piece of legislation. It's thick, it's taking four former pieces and consolidating them into one piece. We've been working on this as a Legislature, as a House, for just a week, and yet the significance of this and the impact of this legislation, don't feel there's any way you can fast-track something the way this piece of legislation has been fast-tracked and for it to turn out to be good legislation. I just don't feel that.

I think that by showing this, similarly when I listened to the member for Dartmouth South, I learned things, I changed opinions, I looked at things from a different view, and although I didn't support everything, there were things that member brought up that I changed my view and I would support. I think it's similar, when we go out to do legislation, when we go out we need to have public consultation, we need to listen to the people. There is absolutely no way that this piece of legislation that the appropriate amount of consultation, the appropriate amount of public meetings, the appropriate amount of

discussions and dialogue have happened here. That's why I can't support this piece of legislation.

There are a whole lot of other reasons I can get into: what's it going to do to school boards, what's it going to do to busing, and what's it going to do to unions? I get all that too. But at the end of the day, if we had gone out and listened to what groups had to say, regardless of whether or not we agree with them, at least we could say that we listened, we were consulted, we were educated, and maybe we looked at something from a different perspective.

I don't feel that has happened here and that's why I have a problem with this piece of legislation. When I hear - and I did raise this the last time and I want to touch on this again - the largest school board in Atlantic Canada (not just in Halifax, not just in Nova Scotia, I mean Atlantic Canada) the largest school board in Atlantic Canada was not consulted, that blows my mind. We didn't have them consulted.

When I hear during Law Amendments Committee, during the public hearing, and I hear the representative from the - and I hope I get this right - the NSSBC union who came forward and said that he represents the second-largest union that is dealing in this province, with education in the schools. That's the library technicians, the support workers, the teacher workers.

[3:45 p.m.]

When he comes forward and says he wasn't consulted - nobody even talked to him about it - and when we have representatives from our African Nova Scotian community coming forward, saying that they're not being consulted - how can we make good legislation if we're not out there consulting and talking to people?

At the end of the day, it's the collaboration, it's consensus, it's agreeing and coming up with good legislation and moving forward. I think that, fundamentally, everybody in this House cares about education. I think that, fundamentally, we care about our children, but only in order to listen are we going to be able to make good recommendations.

That doesn't mean just listening to the report that is done today. It means going back and looking at some of the reports that are sitting on the shelves. It means waiting, and slowing down and waiting for the report that's coming - the inclusion report. We're making decisions without all the information. We're not making informed decisions here and, because of that, I can't support this legislation.

You know, I'm sitting and I'm listening to everybody in this room talk, and it reminds me that, for many years over across the street, I had a quote on my desk. I need to print it off and put it in here. It was, "When all is said and done, more is said than done."

That's what I'm hearing here today. I'm hearing a lot of talk. I'm hearing talk from us. I'm hearing talk from the other Opposition Party. I heard some talk earlier from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. I'm hearing a lot of talk, but I'm not hearing a lot of listening. I'm not hearing a lot of dialogue. People are talking for the sake of talking, and they're not listening to what people are saying. They're not listening and they're not learning. I think that when we listen, we do learn, and I come back to my comments about the member for Dartmouth South.

I think that, as I said, too fast - much too fast on this - I fundamentally think that it doesn't address the issues. It doesn't address mental health in school - I mean, it does exactly - ironically, in my opinion, this legislation does exactly what the Avis Glaze report says not to do, and that is that it cherry-picks things. That's exactly what that report said not to do, yet that's what we're here doing.

I have one other fundamental issue, and that is in regard - it was suggested in an article I read in the CBC yesterday, and I don't remember who suggested it. I don't want to quote it, but I know that it was somewhat along the lines that people felt that the current government is being somewhat vindictive in this legislation, and that part of this is to show teachers and administrators who's the boss and who's in control.

I don't think that people are really that vindictive. I do give humans the benefit of the doubt when it comes to a lot of things. But at the same time, I have got to question, when the teachers and the principals who are in a school come forward - I believe there was an amendment that came forward around wording - an issue that obviously has some significance and is important to administrators in the school, that's important to principals.

There was a motion that was brought forward, instead of referring to them as "managers" - and other speakers have spoken very adequately about the importance of terminology - but instead of supporting and talking about them as managers, they want to be referred to as "administrators." That is in the depths of this bill, in the depths of everything we've talked about - such a small, little, tiny thing to the overall legislation, but something that's very important to one of the invested groups, one of the groups that are here, being the principals; yet, it didn't pass.

I don't understand that, in the overall thing, it's such an insignificant thing to everybody in this room but it was important to principals and teachers and schools, but yet that failed. That, to me, is when I start wondering whether or not that CBC article has some validity to it, whether or not there is some vindictiveness going on or not. To me, when you start being that nitpicky on little, tiny things - what we want to do is collaborate, we want to bring people in, we want consensus, we want buy-in. At the end of the day, when we all work together, we get good legislation.

There have been many points that have been brought up by members on this side of the House and, as I said, some of them I agree with and some of them I don't. There

have been points brought up by members of my caucus I don't agree with. At the end of the day, I think that - not all of them, but one or two. Eddie brought up a point. (Interruptions) No, no he's not. What I want to say though is by working together we get the just legislation and that's where we need to go.

Even in review, not just consultation, but I brought this up last time, in review of what has been looked at we're not looking towards best models in education in my opinion. I've heard this from numerous people, I've heard this at public meetings. I believe our member spoke earlier about this, this is not based on best practices. I think that instead of looking towards legislation - I brought this up last time - countries like Finland or places like Alberta, I think we're looking at and comparing this legislation to other provinces and other places that are either equal to or less than what we already currently have.

I did have an opportunity to sit down and speak with one of the union members and he gave me some statistics, and I have no doubt those statistics were true. I have no reason to doubt what he presented me was good. He showed me the facts and the figures and gave me all the places that he got it from. At the end of the day, if we're not going to listen to people, we're not going to look at good role models or models that we want to base legislation on, I just don't feel we're coming out with good legislation.

Finally, the transparency - it fundamentally bothers me that we are going to create a new entity that is not going to be open and accessible to the public. Fundamentally I have a problem with that. The same way, we're not going to consult the public because nobody cares what they think. We're not going to consult the union, we're not going to consult the teachers, we're not going to - nobody cares, because when all is said and done, a lot more gets said than done. It's the exact same thing with that, the exact same thing.

With that, I'll conclude my comments. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Madam Speaker, today I rise, as you can all imagine, to express my extreme disappointment in this government with the soon passage of Bill No. 72.

I'd like to start with the definition of democracy. Democracy is defined as a system of government in which the citizens exercise power directly or elect representatives from among themselves to form a governing body. Nowhere in that definition does it say a government comes in and wipes that elected body out.

Sadly, this is the definition this government doesn't understand. Dictatorship is how this government has dealt with issues that have been met with resistance on behalf of those that are affected. Rather than listening to the residents - in particular, teachers and school board workers - to the real issues and concerns in education, this government has pushed

this legislation through in order to dictate once again their agenda. If you questioned that, look at what happened during Law Amendments Committee. This should be a procedure that takes place as long as the people want it to, as long as there are residents here to speak, but not with this government. This government dictates the hours and the number of people permitted to speak. How undemocratic is that?

This government only welcomes opinions when they know when it dictates their desired outcome. I'm sure, and I said before and I'll say again, that the Law Amendments Committee procedure on Tuesday was very discriminatory to those residents on Cape Breton Island. For school board workers and teachers to get here, after working a full day, probably well beyond three o'clock, was almost impossible. So for me, this government predetermined who speaks, when they speak, how long they speak and if they don't want you to speak, they cut it off.

We heard so many passionate speeches at Law Amendments Committee by teachers begging for this government to hear them. Did these pleas, too, fall on deaf ears? A lot of members on the government side didn't even pay attention, didn't even lift their heads. To watch so many who were moved to tears was absolutely heart-wrenching.

Although my daughter has finished school, I am so glad we have teachers in the classroom who truly care. I only wish that this government cared nearly as much. I am worried and I am concerned about the kids who are in the system now.

Teachers and all school board workers need our help. They need to be heard and they need answers. Bill No. 72 does not provide those answers. It is the answers this government wants, not the answers the teachers were looking for. I've asked over and over again if someone on the other side of this House could please show me where the improvements to the classrooms are with this bill. I have not had a response. The only ones answering me are the teachers and school board workers; no answers yet from government.

What a sad day today on International Women's Day to enact legislation whose effects attack primarily women. Bill after bill this government has pursued a direct attack on women in this province and to completely dismantle the elected body of school boards, the only elected group to currently have gender parity. Why take away their local voices, the voices that have direct contact in conversations with those in communities? What is this government afraid to learn? What are you afraid to find out?

By taking away these local voices and replacing them with appointed bodies changes the outcome. Let's look at that for a second. If you have generally elected school board officials from all over the province that the residents of Nova Scotia vote for, who can speak freely and clearly on issues in their area, as opposed to government-appointed people on this council, I'm thinking that the government-appointed officials on this council will not have the same freedom to say anything that does not follow and toe the Party line. With an elected group, the government doesn't have that control.

The theme throughout these decisions seems to be that of a dictator. When things go against the way the government has already decided they should go, they swoop in and dictate their agenda. This is not how we end up with positive results, happy workers, or happy workplaces. Teachers, and especially support staff, do not feel respected. Decisions were made without their input at all. Sure, some selected teachers were spoken to - none in Cape Breton that I've heard of and absolutely none of the support staff. I have made a commitment to my constituency that I have two town hall meetings per year in every community.

They're not predetermined, they're not pre-invited. It's a public notice. It's a public invitation and good, bad, or ugly they come, they give their opinion, they ask their questions with no predetermined outcomes because to me, that is our job as elected representatives, to take the good with the bad, to take the lumps when you've got them coming. Not to have preselected people to answer questions the way that you know that they're going to.

Sadly, I've said before and I'll say again, a wheel doesn't turn unless all of the spokes are in place. In order to have this wheel turning, we need to include everybody that is involved in the education process and that, Madam Speaker, does include support staff. This government only wants to ask questions when they absolutely know the answer, but I have to wonder has this government not learned its lesson with the current health care crisis, and the profound effect taking away local decision-making authority has had, especially in areas like Cape Breton. The outcry is quite clear actually from every area of the province and, now, the same is being done to education. Why does everything fall on deaf ears with this government? It shouldn't be that difficult. We should learn from whether we want to say mistakes or experiences - we should learn from them.

There are many times in all of our lives where working together to come to a consensus would give us the best results for everybody involved. Why do the members on the opposite side of this House not see that? Why can we not work together for every Nova Scotian and work to attain the best possible outcomes for the students because, at the end of the day, the students are the ones that are being affected? How many times do we need to go down this road before this government realizes it's a mistake?

Health care has lost its voice, education is losing its voice, so where does that leave us in Cape Breton? Everything else is centralized in Cape Breton, so I guess that appointed council will be here as well. Well I'll tell you, here's one that won't be quiet over that.

Now, let's talk about the teachers, the support staff, the employees directly affected by these changes. Teachers are begging for help. This bill does nothing to address their cries. Again, I'll ask the question, how can members of this government answer their constituents when they are asked directly? I'm on Facebook, I see the social media conversations and questions. I know when my constituents ask me, and they are very, very

upset that other MLAs are either not giving them an answer, period - trying to avoid the question - or saying they really believe that this is a good bill. So they're speaking the speak, they're toeing the Party line. I think sometimes we forget why we're here and who put us here.

Teachers do not only teach. They care for the students in ways that are not talked about very often. As I've said in this House, they buy boots for the child who is unable to attend school when it snows. It's about the teacher who spends thousands of dollars on snacks and supplies so that all the children feel equal and not made fun of when one has any less than the other. It's about the teacher who buys the basketball sneakers for the young boy who can't play in the upcoming basketball tournament because he doesn't own a pair of sneakers.

Teachers care, and they're invested in the kids. Why does this government not think that they should at least sit down and listen to what they have to say? The countless hours they spend at concerts, grading, coaching, and chaperoning field trips go unnoticed - not to the parents, but to this government. They wouldn't do all of this if they weren't invested, if they didn't care. So when they speak, we should listen.

Once again, I have to ask my counterparts across the floor how they are handling their constituents. I know that in Cape Breton and across the province, I've heard from teachers, at every opportunity, who are very upset. As I said the other day, they've risen the sleeping bear.

When it comes to labour relations with the NSTU, you have heard time and time again that this is the first time there has ever, in over 100 years, been any labour unrest with the history of this union.

From the lessons that should have been learned in health care, trying to circumvent the collective agreement already in place, as well as the Trade Union Act, results in lawsuits and spending unnecessary money - money that could be spent in the classrooms. This is the only place where the lines are clear, and blurring these lines results in money being wasted in courts, and time being wasted.

The government believes the concern for the union is the dues, but that is the farthest from the truth. The union's concern is always, and will continue to be, its members and the students that they are there to serve. However, current administrators now are concerned with who or what will be their protection when they are out of the union - when they are left alone with a student, as I'm sure many times they are. We all know things happen, stories happen, and when that administrator currently needs help or advice, they go to their union because the union is there. Their union is there to defend them, to protect them, and to assure that their rights are looked after.

I'm wondering now, will we just have a direct line to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development when these current managers need help, because I don't know where else they are going to go. As managers, they are on their own. If the school closes, where do they go? Their bumping rights under the collective agreement are gone because they are managers. I guess, again, they will just call the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. I don't know if he is committed to looking after them, but their rights under the collective agreement will now be gone.

The camaraderie is gone. When a manager goes into a classroom, it may not be to work with the teacher, but to direct the teacher, and there is a big difference there. We have repeatedly heard it at Law Amendments how teachers and principals and vice-principals work together for the betterment of the students to improve classroom conditions and work on learning plans. Now, when a manager goes into a classroom, I would strongly suggest that it will be somewhat different. Teachers, principals, and vice-principals are very worried, very scared about how all of this is going to play out.

I think it is important to refresh the memories of everyone in this House on the following question, what have unions done for us? They have provided us with a two-day weekend, an eight-hour workday, maternity leave, retirement ages, occupational health and safety protections, pensions, equity law, pay increases, minimum wage, collective bargaining, and vacations, to name a few. Many of these we all enjoy in this House and I am very thankful to all unions for taking on these fights to ensure better working conditions for everyone, not just union members. Unions do not discriminate - we give the same benefits to everybody.

Thank you to the public sector workers in this province who have suffered so much at the hand of this government. Never before have we been dealt with such anti-union legislation as with the current government, but I digress. We will continue on. We work together to resolve issues, bargain collective agreements, and work with all parties on every side of the fence to improve the lives of every Nova Scotian, not just union members.

Thank you, particularly to teachers and support staff for all of Nova Scotia who have managed to continue to care for our kids and our schools, and to teach our kids during the absolute mess this government has enshrined on our system for the second year in a row. Albeit, it was my honour to walk the line with the teachers in my constituency last February and would do it again in a heartbeat.

Thank you to the members of the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board: African-Nova Scotian representative, Lorne Green; District A(1), Fred Tilley; District B(2), Jack Toomey; District C(3) and Chair, Stephen Parsons; District D(4), Joyce Lind; District E(5), Stewart Matheson; District F(6), Joan Currie; District G(7), Liane Burke; District H(8), Yvonne Kennedy; District I(9), Gary Fraser; District J(10), Charlotte Shaw; District K(11), Lorne MacNeil; District L(12), Sandra Margettie; First Nations

Representative, Darren GooGoo; Victoria North of Smokey, Jackie Organ; and Victoria South of Smokey and Vice-Chair, John Berk.

Thank you to these school board members for everything you have done for our kids. I am sorry I haven't been able to work with you for longer.

Now I must apologize. I am truly sorry to everyone who is affected by this disgraceful legislation, specifically teachers, support staff, school board members, students, parents - pretty much everybody in Nova Scotia. We tried. We are seven, but we are steadfast. We are mighty and we will continue to fight the fight.

I am sorry there wasn't more we could do. I'm sorry this government doesn't care to listen. I'm sorry that currently we are forced to follow what has been dictated to us. I'm sorry that what I believe to be democratic is not the belief of this Liberal Government.

It is a sad day for me to realize this. Respect is gone. Trust is gone.

We will pick ourselves up. Each and every person in Nova Scotia will remember this. The fire that has been ignited must stay lit, and I can guarantee you that I will do my part to make sure that fire burns bright.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

MS. KIM MASLAND: I am happy to rise today to join with members on this side of the House to speak briefly to the third reading of Bill No. 72. It truly is moving to listen to my colleagues of this House as they share their passions for the education of our children - Nova Scotia's children.

For years now, teachers have been trying in vain to explain to this government that changes are required in their classrooms. Parents continue to be concerned, and although I no longer have children in the public education system, I am a grandmother, I am an aunt, and I am a voice for the people of my constituency, Queens-Shelburne, and I share their concerns.

I was sent a photo last evening from a parent. The photo was of a little guy all bundled up, sitting in the back seat of his parents' vehicle. With the photo was a note. The note read, "This is Angus. He has autism. He is proud of you and so am I. Keep fighting for him and all of us."

Madam Speaker, this bill does not provide hope for children like Angus or for his friends. It does not provide meaningful and positive change for the amazing teachers in our province. It does not improve the learning conditions in our classrooms for our children. It does not provide the extra support for a young student in my constituency who is not permitted to be in school for a full day because of the lack of supports needed. It does not

give me hope for my grandson, Easton, who will be attending the public education system in Nova Scotia.

What the bill does do is place our teachers and parents and students in a period of great uncertainty and chaos. We needed to have all the pieces of the puzzle in order. The fact that we do not have the report from the Commission on Inclusive Education and we are moving forth with this huge complicated bill concerns me, and I'm not alone.

The report on inclusive education will provide the government with the framework to reconfigure the way education is delivered in this province. Why has this government moved forward with such drastic measures with governance and administration, without all of the pieces of the puzzle?

[4:15 p.m.]

Madam Speaker, I have listened to many teachers; in fact, my aunt is a teacher, and so is my sister-in-law. My aunt went back to school in her late 40s to become an educator. I remember being so proud of her, as she fulfilled a dream while facing many obstacles and challenges. I witness both these family members and the struggles that they face daily in their classrooms, the evenings and weekends spent writing special programs, and the lost family time because of their love and dedication to their profession and to the children. It pains me.

My very own constituency assistant, who is taking a year's leave of absence from teaching, her students stop into our office on a daily basis to see her, saying, Ms. Burke, we miss you, when are you coming back? I see her eyes brighten every day those students enter our constituency office, and I see those same eyes well up with tears as they leave. Here we have an 18-year career educator, a Grades 5 and 6 teacher, choosing to take a leave of absence because she's tired. She's tired of being made to feel inadequate and undervalued and she's tired of feeling guilty for not being able to do a job because of lack of supports. One of the most respected teachers in Queens County, and she's not in the classroom because this government is not listening.

Madam Speaker, I stated in my remarks on second reading of this bill that today more than ever, in addition to being educators, our teachers are being asked to be psychologists, parents, police officers, counsellors, security guards, and nurses, in an ever-changing and challenging classroom. I think it is very important to mention that again. We have students who are not able to cope in classrooms, yet they are being tossed into a classroom with 25 other kids, and little to no support staff to help them out. The emergence of highly complex behavioural and mental health issues are going through the roof. Yet, our schools are seeing fewer supports given when there is a much greater need than ever before.

The number of students on modified programs, or individual program plans, has never been higher, and teachers having to do special programming for up to 10 to 12 kids in every single classroom. I've said it before and I'll say it again: we are asking our teachers to do an impossible job. My office phone has already started ringing - constituents and parents looking for answers to questions with respect to their child's education and, Madam Speaker, I have a new number added to my speed dial, and that number belongs to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

This government needs to do what we were taught at a very young age, and we were taught this in school: we were taught to listen to the teacher, or in this case, listen to the teachers. Madam Speaker, this bill misses the mark. I will not be supporting Bill No. 72. I ask that this government please get it right - our children get only one education. With those few remarks, I will take my seat.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Madam Speaker, I usually start by saying it's great to stand up and talk on a piece of legislation but it's been a long week. I've talked to some of my colleagues outside the Chamber and it feels much longer than a week.

I think it's important for government members to recognize why almost every single member in the Opposition is standing up and trying for the last time to get across to the government about the approach they've taken not only the last couple of weeks but the last couple of years when it comes to education. About how they have engaged the people who really will have the most effect on any change in the education system as we go forward - the teachers, the educators. Those who are at the front line.

I've said this often in speeches throughout the years how important it is that we make sure we hear the voice of those front-line service providers when we make changes on the floor of this Chamber. That was one reason why I ran in 2003. In the years prior to that, paramedics for example were not at the table for one. The word "paramedics" was rarely used on the floor of this Legislature, especially when the talk of health care was the topic of the day. I committed myself to make sure that changed and to try to bring forward the experiences I had as a front-line health care worker.

The same goes to any debate we have, especially education. The government needs to make sure, in their attempt to change the make-up and delivery in the education system as a whole, that the front-line educators are heard. I'm trying to recall if we have any teachers in the House now or former teachers - yes, we do in Opposition and there's a couple in government. I would hope that the current front-line educators should have a priority when these changes are coming forward and we're hearing criticisms or you hear opposition against the proposed changes. I don't think that has happened over this process.

I think many things could change in the way we proceed in passing legislation to allow for that to happen. As was stated a few times, it's pretty quick. We're going to have a dramatic change in how education and the make-up of education - especially the administration of the education in our province. All that is going to take place after about a week of debate on those changes.

It was a little more than a week ago when we first saw Bill No. 72. We didn't see it prior to the sitting of the House. It was introduced and our role as MLAs, as elected officials, is to go through that piece of legislation and try to figure out exactly what it says. I think MLAs recognize when you look at a piece of legislation, we get lawyers to write it and most of us in the House aren't lawyers so it does take some time to get through it and make sure we understand exactly what's written in the proposals, in the clauses and the schedules. I have to say, Bill No. 72 is a large piece of legislation, one of the largest that I recall going through and I've been here just shy of 15 years.

I think the government should have realized that there was concern from those front-line educators. I know much of the attention and much of the conflict and much of the - I don't even know how to describe it - much of the argument has been the government and the teachers' union. I don't know if this was on purpose that it's the union that's the voice of the teachers and we understand that. But the union represents those front-line educators, Mr. Speaker, and those in those positions in the NSTU had the opportunity to be here during the last week, trying to get the concerns of those front-line educators heard by the government, heard by Opposition members, heard at committee.

Far too often with the speed of how we pass legislation, educators aren't able to have their input; they're not able to get to Law Amendments Committee. We're very fortunate in our province to have that. I hope the government, as we move forward - that we may look at how we can improve that system. I think a lot of the anger and a lot of the criticisms that we've heard, especially last year and this year, is the fact that people were not able to get to Law Amendments Committee, they weren't able to have their opportunity to present, to get their feelings, their opinions, across and on the record and heard.

I think it's time we look at how we pass bills in Nova Scotia. I know other jurisdictions have more of a schedule. I think in the House of Commons if a bill goes to a committee it is weeks before it gets back to the Members of Parliament. Maybe we should have more of a set schedule on when we sit in the Legislature so that, at certain points in the year, those who have an interest in public policy and legislation know they need to pay a little bit more attention and hopefully have an opportunity to get in to present to the Law Amendments Committee.

I know we don't have committees like the House of Commons where that's really the only committee we have where the public can come in, unless you are invited from the other committees, but most of the other Standing Committees that we have don't sit while the session is on - it's just Law Amendments Committee, Public Accounts and maybe

Human Resources. In Human Resources for example, Mr. Speaker, we don't allow for presenters because we're usually busy in the House with long hours because we don't really have a set schedule.

It seems like the schedule is set in this Chamber and in this House on how controversial the piece of legislation is that the government is trying to pass. And it's not just the current government - that has been the history throughout, Mr. Speaker. You have longer hours if you think the policy you are going to change is controversial; we're going to sit longer.

I think we need to do a better job at making sure that people understand the legislation first. If it's difficult for me and for some of my colleagues to go through the 60-plus page legislation, how is someone who is working maybe 40 or 45 or 50 hours a week to kind of go through there and understand it?

So there is a lot of misconception, there is a lot of wrong information out there. We try our best. I have to say social media definitely helps us as MLAs, I think, to get our message out there but often there is a lot of misinformation out there. I think if we had a better process that people feel they could be engaged with, then we may have a better way of getting changes to public policy, getting buy-in on pieces of legislation from the public. I mean, we're elected to serve them - we're not elected to serve our own interests. I think all political Parties are guilty of that at some point in their existence.

I think over the coming months, we really need to look at a way to change that so we can encourage more participation so that we bring policy forward that is really going to have buy-in from the general public. With Bill No. 72, we just don't have that.

I have to say I think I've only received two emails in the last couple of months in support of this and I've received a lot more that are not. I don't know what the number is - I know my constituency assistant is working every day and making sure that I get a response back to everybody who tries to get hold of me. I mean, there's a lot of people getting in contact with my office, just like I think everybody here, including the members in the government.

[4:30 p.m.]

I think especially - it has been brought up a couple of times today - that if we improve the system and improve the ability for people to be engaged, I think it would go a long way in seeing better results in elections for example, in voter turnout. There isn't a great opinion about the job and the work that we do, for the most part. I think the general public thinks that once the decision is made, it's just over and the government does whatever they want. I'll give the smallest amount of credit I can right now to the government for making some changes through the Committee of the Whole House on Bills

process, Mr. Speaker. I know that there were some amendments and we're proud to be able to do that.

We stated right from the start, we didn't like Bill No. 72. Some of my colleagues called it unparliamentary words at points in the discussion over the last week, and I won't say what they were.

I think we wanted to at least attempt to try to address some of the serious oversight, maybe, or concerns that people brought forward in Law Amendments. That's why we took the time the other day to go through a number of amendments, I think it took us maybe six hours to go through that the other day, trying to go line by line. Even one word - here we are up debating to try to change one word in a 60-page document because we knew that that one word would make a difference to someone who came to Law Amendments and presented their concern, Mr. Speaker.

We have a challenge in front of us. It's International Women's Day, and I know it's been commented on a number of times here today, that it's so important that we change how elected officials are elected, and that we need to make sure that we have a gender balance in our process, not only here provincially and federally, on a municipal level - we know on a school board level, the majority of those selected positions were held by women. They do amazing work, Mr. Speaker, and often they come to those positions because of their concern of what's going on in their local schools, and what's going on for the most part with their own children who are in the education system.

I know that there have been some concessions around the changes initially proposed after the Glaze Report, but the one that hasn't seen any backing down from the government is the elimination of the school boards. I would be the first to agree that there have been issues with school boards. It's sad, every Party has gone in at one point and fired or eliminated the current school board, and replaced it sometimes with a single person, and that has been the case. But that wasn't forever. That wasn't from now until the end of time. That was for a short period of time so that you could address the issues that you were dealing with at the time. Then of course, once the elections come around, there were new school board members elected to those positions.

By eliminating these positions, Mr. Speaker, as was said, we see the elimination of over 50 per cent of those positions that were held by women in Nova Scotia, and that's a shame. So many people have said it way better than I have over the last couple of hours, but it's a shame that we're at that position. I don't think if there's an issue with something, you just get rid of it. You try to fix it, you try to work with them, you try to make improvements to it.

I think that has been one of the criticisms that I've heard the most, and I've had a very active school board member from my area. Dave Wright was a former chairman of the Halifax Regional School Board, and he has worked hard over the last five years. He's

definitely hurt by this. He knows how hard he's worked to try to address the educational issues in our region of the school board. I said this - I don't know if it was during Committee of the Whole House on Bills, or on second reading, or at Law Amendments Committee - since Dave was elected school board member, not once has anybody called me back after contacting me with a school board issue, or education issue, where I said listen, Dave Wright is our elected school board member. I'll forward your name, number, and issue on to him. Not once have I had anybody call me back saying that he did not address it, that he did not pay attention to their issues. Not once, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to say, let's get rid of that.

Being elected for almost 15 years, I know what's going to happen now. When they call, the MLAs are going to have to try to figure out how to address those issues. Some of them are very small. To be quite honest, because we have had that system in place for so long, I don't have the first clue who I'm going to call in the coming weeks to address issues. I know the minister wants me to call him but, I have to say, I don't usually get a call back right away. I try hard to be liked in the House, but I don't get a call back right away.

Often with the school board member, the issue is solved by the end of the day. I don't know if the minister or the government will commit to having the system that's going to be created be as effective as I have experienced over the last 15 years. If he can, then I will be the first to stand up down the road sometime and say, okay, the system you have brought in seems to be addressing the issues when people come to me. But I'm afraid I'll be writing more letters and more emails and making more phone calls to the minister's office and telling the concerned citizen, we'll wait and see what happens.

I'm concerned. I more than welcome taking that responsibility on if that's what's going to happen, but I'm concerned that there is going to be a delay in addressing the issues that come forward. As I said, sometimes they're very small and very easy to fix, and there are many that are complicated and take much more time.

I know one of the concerns we have seen is just how this will all be implemented once this bill passes, and the requirement from those front-line educators is going to be there to try to implement this. The relationship is not a good one. The relationship between the government and the educators in this province is not a good one. Many of them that I have engaged with over the last year were very supportive of the government, very supportive of the Liberal Party. They're mad. I don't know how else to explain it. They're mad.

They feel like the government has treated them with disrespect. You don't have to look any further than a year ago when we had the first ever - not first in a couple of years, not first in 20 years, not first in 30 years - teacher strike in the history of our province. I believe the union is over 100 years old - I'm not 100 per cent sure, but I think it's over 100 years that they have been able to negotiate contracts with the governing party.

They were able to negotiate with John Savage, John Hamm, Darrell Dexter, Rodney MacDonald. I don't know if there was a negotiation in there or not, but there was no strike when he was Premier. It says a lot. There have been really terrible Premiers in the province in the past history, and the teachers have been able to negotiate with them and their Party. The names that I just said were not Premiers who were terrible. There's one in there that, as a health care worker, I might say was pretty terrible. I won't get into the name-calling and calling those people out.

It shows that that relationship is not really good. I thought the government were going down a path to try to repair that with the committee they had that tried to address some of the concerns that the teachers were bringing up last year. Kudos to the government - there was money attached to that. Normally there is not, but I think the public saw that the teachers were willing to work and the union was willing to work with the government to try to see improvements. Then this just comes out of left field in my opinion. It really does nothing to repair that relationship, Mr. Speaker.

There has been a lot said around the provincial advisory board and the fact that it won't be an elected board or advisory committee - I think it's going to be called a board. It's not going to be elected. It's going to be appointed. It's going to be a council, I believe. To me, that is just not the way you want to do this.

If they want to appoint the initial board or council, I could see that, if they need to implement some of the things that Bill No. 72 will need to have implemented. But after a certain point, that should somehow be elected or a fairer way of doing it, because the cynicism of the general public will be when the Liberals are in, the council will be Liberal-friendly appointees - or any of the other Parties. That's just how the public is going to see that. If the NDP come to power in the next election and they appoint council members, because it's a government appointment, then the public will say, look.

To me, we need to try to encourage engagement with the public, and the more we take away a fairer process, then we're not going to achieve that, Mr. Speaker.

I know there are other speakers on this bill. It's discouraging that we are in this position, but I know there's a lot of work that's going to need to be done on the government side to repair the relationship with our front-line educators but also with the general public.

I hope we don't see the same results after this amalgamation or dissolution of the boards and the education system as we've seen with the amalgamation of the district health authorities. By no means do I think that move was the right one. I was against it when they proposed it, and I'm against it now.

I do not think that we have a better health care system, a better delivery of health care services, after the amalgamation. I am afraid the same thing is going to happen in

education. I guess that will add to future debates around education, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East on an introduction.

MR. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. Up in the gallery we have Dartmouth East resident Amelia Fenyvesi. Amelia is in Grade 2 at École Bois-Joli. She is very much interested in politics, and she is also good friends with my youngest daughter, Ella Halman. I'll ask the House to please welcome Amelia Fenyvesi. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to say a few words on Bill No. 72. As my colleagues have said, a comment I made previously in the House, and I'll make again, is that it has been two years in a row now during Teacher Appreciation Week in February that the teachers have gone through this type of situation of anguish over what was happening here in the Legislature and with their careers and the way things were being negotiated. I would suggest that we change Teacher Appreciation Week next year to October, maybe, to help them out.

I realize that a lot of the anguish that happened last year was about conditions in the classroom. There was a lot of discussion then and a lot of frustration from my teachers in Kings North about working conditions for them. It really wasn't about the working conditions for them as much as the frustration about them being unable to do their job effectively. Their frustration that when they were dealing with a classroom of 25 or 30 kids and there were a variety of demands and needs in that classroom and the reporting demands being placed on them and all the different things that were coming at them from different directions - in that classroom, they felt unable to do their jobs.

I think that a lot of the frustration that we heard expressed was them expressing the frustration of not being able to do the job that they wanted to do for this child or that child, just feeling like there were too many things happening at once in that classroom and it was slipping away from them.

I think the government, in fairness, heard that message last year. There were two committees - a committee on inclusion and a committee on classroom conditions - formed, and those things are working their way through. I recognize that a lot of this bill is not about classroom conditions but about management.

I will say that everything has to be seen in context, and having gone through what we went through last year to now have a bill that is just sweepingly changing the management structure has, again, been traumatic for the teachers.

[4:45 p.m.]

Partly because we all realize we're on the cusp of these committees reporting and maybe some significant changes, I think it's quite clear that the government has a mandate, based on last year's events, to make significant changes in the classroom. But I would question if right now is the time to make significant changes in the leadership of our education system, given the changes that we are expecting to come out of these other issues, the committees, the different things that are happening. There are just a lot of moving parts, a lot of things happening at once, and I guess that's probably my most profound concern about this.

I just want to say how much I appreciate our teachers and how hard they work, and it's more than just what happens - I mean, we can all go back and talk about a significant teacher in our life and I can talk about a couple of them, but when I think about what I hear when I see our teachers and when I meet with them, it's not just about - and I know they're making that type of significant impact on students in their lives, I know that, but they're also dealing with problems that we never saw when we were in school. The teachers in my schools are providing hats, mittens, and winter clothes and boots, and they're scrounging and looking for these basic - they're buying the basic necessities for many of their children.

In one of my schools, 50 per cent of the parents are on income assistance in that school, so those children are coming from homes where poverty is a huge issue. How do you deal with that? How do you have an effective SAC, school administration council, when 50 per cent of the parents are on income assistance and when many of the students are homeless, actually. When I was told that by the principal, I said, well, how does that work? How does an elementary school child who is homeless get to school? Apparently, the Department of Community Services will pay the taxi for wherever that child ended up. They're couch surfing.

We have huge social questions and social issues, so our teachers are not only teaching, they're addressing these huge social issues, and I want to commend them for how much effort they put into it. They put their heart and soul into it. Part of the frustration that the teachers voiced last year, and I believe are voicing to these changes, is not because they want more money. It's not because this is theoretical. It's because their hearts are breaking for their children and they want these children to have their needs met and they realize that it's slipping out of their ability to do it because of the variety of demands being placed on them.

This whole situation that we have now threatens to change or significantly alter the leadership. I would suggest to you at a time when we are at the cusp of, I hope, making significant changes in the way the schools operate in terms of classroom improvements and dealing with inclusion and all these demands, at that time, I would hope that that's not the right time to make significant changes and totally reorganize the leadership.

I do want to say a few words about the AVRSB. The Annapolis Valley Regional School Board has been one of the best and most functional and effective school boards in the province, and we've been very proud for many years that the AVRSB has always met its budget. It has been a very well-managed school board going back to the days of Dr. Jim Gunn and Margo Tate, who I had much contact with. Our school board members have been very effective, and as my colleagues have said here, very few issues have come directly to me that the school board members have not been able to deal with.

One of the things I will tell you about the AVRSB is that this year's budget is \$155 million-and-change; \$155 million is a lot of money. The amount of money that the elected school board officials were pulling out of the \$155 million is approximately two-tenths of a per cent, so the budget for the school board in that was \$358,000 which presumably includes some per diems and mileage and meeting times and maybe some professional development. I don't know what that all includes but it wasn't \$358,000 that these school board members were getting themselves, I'm sure. The cost of the school board itself was approximately \$4 million, so what we're cutting is the elected portion of the school boards. We're not actually cutting all that other administration in the AVRSB. I'm not sure that the public really understands that.

One of the things the public has been concerned about and communicated to me is, what will happen about this? What will happen about that? The guy who plans the school bus routes, and I could tell you his name, but I don't think it's pertinent - has a demanding job planning the school bus routes, and he's still there. The superintendent, under a new name, is still there. Mainly, the only thing that has been cut is the elected portion of it, and I think that's a shame.

Was there room in the province to say, you know what? This is 2018. Do we need seven school boards? Could we get by with five or two or three and maybe still have elected school boards? I think there was room for that. I don't think anybody would argue that. In 2018, we have instant communication. Most of us can be dealing with emails and doing all kinds of work even sitting right here in this Legislature. Clearly, transportation is much, much better than it was 50 years ago when these school boards were formed. Things change, and there's room for change, but having lost this elected portion, I think democracy has suffered in the province.

Was there opportunity for some change? Absolutely. But I want to say that I believe the AVRSB, the school board that I'm directly connected with, has been a very functional, well-run school board.

I will tell you one of the things that these elected school board members have dealt with and that I have been very impressed with is that they have a committee to deal with discipline. They have some students who have climbed up the ladder of disciplinary problems. I'm sure it starts with the teacher in the classroom. When the teacher in the classroom can't deal with it, it goes to the vice-principal. When the vice-principal can't

deal with it, it goes to the school board. These elected school board officials have a committee to try to sort out the really hard core cases, the really difficult ones, and they spend time with them. Every time they have told me what they do on that front, I have been impressed with what they do.

I met with the school board. We have an annual meeting. I'm sure most of you have that same annual meeting. Usually it's in the Fall, but for one reason or another, I missed the annual meeting in the Fall. Several of us did. We had the annual meeting in early January. The Glaze report was being discussed at my most recent meeting with the school board. The school board was actually fairly optimistic about it. They had met with Avis Glaze and thought she was a wonderful person. They didn't see the fact that the school board itself was on the chopping block. They didn't really foresee that possibility, I don't think.

I did tell them that I believed there were two ways in which the school board had been undermined in the past couple of years by this government. I have stated these before, but I'll restate them again for the record. I told the school board, when I met with them, that there were two ways they had been undermined.

One way was in 2013, when this government had decided, in a December 23rd press release, to announce five schools, which the Auditor General later showed in 2016 or 2017, and which we knew at the time, were not the priorities of the school boards. They were anywhere from, I believe no. 14 to no. 25 on the priority list, but they happened to be in the constituency of the Premier and several other members of the Liberal caucus here. Announcing schools for yourself, I would suggest, was undermining the school board, and I told the school board that. I said, your job of deciding where new schools go was seriously undermined at that moment, I believe. It was a low moment for democracy in Nova Scotia when that happened, when an elected body's evaluation of their situation was undermined by an elected government.

The second way that they had been undermined, in my opinion, was in the debate last February, not this past February, but February 2016. They hadn't really been present in those decisions about the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions, and the Commission on Inclusive Education. They had not really been a participant in that. They were aware of that. They saw that as a low moment for them. The school board itself is very committed to the management of the classrooms and felt that they had been undermined. They recognized that. They felt they had been undermined.

So here we are. We have a report, the Glaze report, and we have a bill. Effectively, this is an Ontario plan. I know my colleague from Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg called it the Ontario plan. I know my colleague for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg called it the Ontario plan and I call it the Ontario plan. We're on an Ontario plan for education. I question the logic of that.

One of the parts of that Ontario plan was the College of Educators and I can't tell you how pleased I am that is not being included in this because I think that having a "third" player, having the NSTU and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development or the government, and then having a new third player, the College of Educators would have not served the debate any great value. It would have further muddied the waters, created a new voice in this situation and would not have benefited our teachers or the government.

In fact, it's my understanding that it's only in Ontario this College of Educators exists, and teachers in Ontario are not particularly happy about it. One of the things that the College of Educators in Ontario does is, anytime any complaint comes before them about a teacher - which can happen, right, parents can complain about teachers. Any parental complaint goes to the College of Educators and gets published whether there is merit to it or not.

I know our teachers didn't want to be living in that kind of fear of having their name published in the College of Educators' report about a complaint a parent may have made which may have been totally misinformed; often they are. Often the student doesn't accurately convey the information about what happened to them that day. Everybody sees it through their own lens. So what happens? Well, the parent takes the side of their child and complains about the teacher and right now our principal and vice-principal have to deal with that. If there were a College of Educators - from what I understand, I may be incorrect about that - in Ontario every one of those complaints was published, which would be very detrimental.

I wanted to say that the principals and vice-principals that I know in Kings North have the respect of their teachers. They have risen through the ranks, they've earned the right to be there, and they are a very strong administrative group in my opinion. I've never failed to be impressed by their professionalism and their commitment to their job. One of the unfortunate effects the bill was going to have - I don't believe it's going to have that now, was that we were going to see a turnover possibly in that leadership there. I'm not sure I can explain to you how it works that the government believes they got what they wanted and the principal and vice-principal are out of the union, and how the union believes it got what it wanted and the principal and vice-principal are still in the union. I don't have that all figured out in my head how both of them can be happy with that compromise.

Nevertheless, one of the things that we know was that in my opinion, having the principal and vice-principal out of the union was going to trigger a significant number of those principals and vice-principals stepping down. Some of them would have gone back to teaching. Some would have looked at the math and said, I'm one or two years away from retiring, I'm going. Some of them would have accepted being out of the union and stayed, but we would have seen a 20, 30, 40 per cent turnover in our senior administration in these schools.

I believe that would have been a very detrimental thing to have happen. At this moment in time when we have the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions, the Commission on Inclusive Education, we have SchoolsPlus being implemented in many places and we have pre-Primary going in too many places - all things which involve a tremendous amount of change, so I believe it's not the right time to have the senior administration have a huge turnover. I'm happy that however that compromise worked in everyone's minds, that it has happened and that we will see most of our principals and vice-principals stay right where they are and continue to do the stellar work they do in dealing with all of the demands in the education system.

I believe we are seeing at a time right now a lot of things in the mix. We have the Commission on Inclusive Education, the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions, SchoolsPlus and pre-Primary - all of those things happening at the same time, and we're adding a fifth thing with this school board change. I know one of the hard things I had to learn when I started farming - I would often have four or five things happening at the same time and sometimes you can't control that, you just have that going on in your life. I would say, what should I do now - this, this, or this? My father would say, finish the job you're on, John.

There was always value in finishing and getting something cleared away first. I would suggest to you that the job that we are on was the job we engaged in approximately 13 months ago, and that is the changes needed in the classroom.

[5:00 p.m.]

We are waiting to see the reports from these committees on inclusion and classroom improvements. Those reports are going to need to be acted on. At the same time that we're going to have those reports, we are making significant changes in the administration of our school system, and I question the logic of that. I would say to the minister, finish the job you're on. That would be my main message to this administrator.

I do want to again express the same concern that others have expressed about democracy being lost in this appointed advisory board. I believe we would have been better off with maybe one or two or three school boards and have some consolidation of school boards. I don't believe the saving is as significant as the minister has suggested it would be.

The final thing I want to comment on - and again I refer to one of my colleagues here who mentioned yesterday - we debated changing the term administrator to manager, and that amendment was not passed. What is the cost of a term or what is the meaning of a term? For us in this House, for us to say to the principals and vice-principals that you're managers now, you're not administrators, I would suggest to you that is a very small cost for us to suggest. That costs the government approximately three or four letters in a word, but in reality, the term means something to them. To have respect for them, I believe that

would not have been an onerous change for us to make but would have shown them that we do appreciate what they are doing.

I think it's unfortunate that even that small change could not have been made, yet I do respect that the government did make some changes in this bill. As my colleagues have said, this is a huge bill. It is again going through in a rush. My constituents in Kings North still cannot fathom the hours in this House, that on a Monday we would meet from 9:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. When I tell people that, they scratch their heads.

Probably the most enduring and biggest surprise for me coming here has been the hours of the Legislature. I never thought anything about working from 9:00 p.m. until 12:00 midnight, that was no problem, so I don't mind doing the work, but I'm surprised that in this environment we cannot simply recognize that things are going to take time, and if we needed to have more time to do this bill, we could have come into the House a week earlier and done it on more regular hours.

There have been a number of times we have been in that situation. I think it's called planning, and maybe it's called artificially rushing for reasons that I do not understand. With those words, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

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

MS. LENORE ZANN: I am rising to my feet today to speak yet again to Bill No. 72, the Education Reform (2018) Act. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, I'm getting really tired of this and I'm sure that many in this House are as well, all for various and different reasons.

In fact, the people who have been watching these proceedings at home or from their schools, on breaks, they are also very tired of having to watch us and do our antics while their lives are in the balance, while their very workplace environment is hanging, they don't know what to expect. They're hoping with bated breath that perhaps something may change. They have been going through this now for the last couple of years.

I have to say I'm really, really sorry - I am very, very sorry for all of the people in Nova Scotia who have been dragged through this nightmare. Most of them feel it has been a nightmare, they're still in shock. They're basically, I would say, in post-traumatic stress right now. Many of them are just shaking their heads, they can't believe that this is happening and that a government in this day and age in Canada, in Nova Scotia, would be treating them with such disrespect and treating them as if they are just servants, indentured servants like in the old days, hundreds of years ago, while the Lords who purveyed this House of the People make up their own minds, make up the rules, and be damned to the people.

So, with that I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that as the NDP Labour and Advanced Education Critic, having taken a look at this bill, and having been the Education and Early Childhood Development Critic last year for Bill No. 75, I have to say that we here with the NDP completely oppose this legislation.

We agree that changes are needed in a school system, but ramming them through in this way, without real consultation with the people involved - real consultation - is just plain wrong. We have great reservations with Bill No. 72 and we need to ask, why is it that government is excluding the voices that are fundamental to the advancement of the education system? We could do so much. We could create an amazing education system, like the one they have in Norway, but no, we're going to go back to the 1950s, go back to the drawing board, and bring up something that has not worked in other jurisdictions.

Good old Nova Scotia, what do we do? We bring back something from the past that other people have done that hasn't worked, and we feed that to our children, to parents, and to teachers.

The elimination of the English school boards across this province will exclude many voices from many communities, and we here are worried about this. We're worried that this is a plan, in fact, to perhaps move towards a more private education system in Nova Scotia. Perhaps even the same, or similar kind of charter school system that the Republicans in the United States are so enthralled with. A system that creates a two-tier system of education, one for the wealthy, and those for the less financially-endowed. Is that the way we're going, Mr. Speaker? Some of us are concerned that perhaps it is.

We are concerned that the Glaze report that was written by Dr. Avis Glaze. A report written by somebody who the minister did not tell people in the beginning - Dr. Avis Glaze was the founder and CEO of Edu-quest International Inc. Now, for those of us in the NDP and those of us in the labour movement, this is a red flag because when these reports begin, often a process begins that will see private entities start to make money, and where private schools start to creep into the system. It seems odd that 11 recommendations will be implemented at this point, of the 22 suggestions by Dr. Glaze. She also said that her report should be implemented in whole, not gradually. Well, that's reason enough to stop this right now.

So if we follow these little clues and these red flags - or follow the money, as we like to say - it soon leads us to another confusing and concerning spot. It leads us to the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, or AIMS. Now, for those who are not aware - I know a lot of Nova Scotians don't really know who they are, but some of us do - AIMS is a lobby group for big business. They are here in Nova Scotia, and they often undermine the confidence in our public sector institutions.

The AIMS director is a well-known Liberal supporter, as reported by the media, and apparently good friends with the Premier. In 2015, the former Minister of Education

and Early Childhood Development put forward an action plan on education that had included several recommendations on improving the system, which came directly from the AIMS report of 2014, written by - wait for it - Paul Bennett. Aha, surprise, surprise.

So, now let's consider the Liberal Government's buy-in on a resolution about abolishing elected school boards from the Liberal Party's 2016 AGM. Aha, let's follow the money. Let's follow the little red flags, let's see where it takes us. (Interruption) Isn't it interesting that they're starting to chirp up now on the other side, Mr. Speaker. They always seem to chirp up when I hit a sore spot. I don't know why that is, but they suddenly get very excited. So let's continue on.

Frankly, I have to say it is very hard for those of us here in the New Democratic Party to accept that Bill No. 72, and Bill No. 75 last year at this time - the blizzard bill - are actually about improving the education system. We really find it hard to believe that this will improve things for kids and classroom conditions for teachers. You know why? Because it won't. It won't, and most people realize that.

Education privatization would mean that kids from families who cannot afford private tuition end up in a public system that is underfunded. That's right. Underspending the Nova Scotia education budget last year makes one wonder if this is the start of the dismantling of the entire public education system. That's often when private enterprises just swoop in to provide for-profit solutions. These entities make money off the public purse, and then we see these private schools flourish, just like in the United States today. Just as New Zealand tried several years ago and have come to the conclusion that it does not work. They have halted that and they're going back. It doesn't work.

Why are we doing it? Do we think, oh, this is good enough for Nova Scotia? Why do we always feel that Nova Scotians don't deserve the best? They do. Nova Scotians are wonderful people. This is a wonderful province with all kinds of possibilities. So why does this government continue to give them something that is less than great? I don't understand that, Mr. Speaker.

Education privatization, again, means that families who can't afford the private tuition will end up in a public system that's underfunded. We think that Liberal MLAs need to ask some fundamental questions about these points to themselves. While they are in the recesses of their own private homes or offices, think about these points that I'm saying, and if they start to realize, as time goes on, that in fact this is the direction their government is taking, then I would say, why not call for a halt, just as we are doing? A quick check on what's happening in the United States and the United Kingdom will show some surprising facts.

MLAs need to ask ourselves, what's wrong with working with unions who represent workers in Nova Scotia? What's wrong with that? You know, I asked that of a member from the Liberal Party a few years ago. I said, "Why are you doing this? Why are

you slamming unions constantly? Don't you realize you have union people working in your own riding, living in your own riding? Aren't you concerned?" He said, "Oh, it's just a small percentage. It doesn't matter. That's not going to affect my vote. That's not going to affect my vote," is what he said.

Well, I find that very crass. I don't like to look at people as votes. I like to look at them as people. People are people are people, whether they are union workers or whether they are not union workers.

I have to say that in the countries where they have the best education and the best quality of life, like Norway - 92 per cent of the workforce is actually unionized. They're unionized and, guess what, they work with government. Government works with them. They work very well together, because the government there, which is social democratic, believes in unions, believes in equality, believes that the working people should make enough money to make a living wage. That's what we need here in Nova Scotia too.

Bill No. 72 will do little to make classroom improvements. It will do little to build on the success of students. It will do nothing to build the confidence and trust of our public school teachers, a relationship which was badly ruptured over the past couple of years, first with Bill No. 75 and now this one.

The loss of local voices has been devastating in health care already, and we are seeing the results of that. It is a crisis. The doctors, the nurses, the health care workers in Colchester County who I've spoken to are extremely concerned.

The new data that the NDP managed to find out through a FOIPOP, that there are more people dying in hospitals before they get to the seniors' homes - especially in the northern zone, which is my area - is extremely concerning and saddening. People are not happy about this, and now here we are, and we're going down this road with education.

[5:15 p.m.]

I am absolutely shocked that the government is failing to recognize that the centralization of health care has created chaos and crisis in the health care system and this centralization of education is going to do the same thing in the education system. Just wait, Mr. Speaker, it's just barely starting today, the front page of the newspaper, there's all kinds of issues - racist graffiti, threats that are being investigated, parents worrying about the odours in their schools. Who are they going to call now? They won't be able to call the school board, they'll have to call the Education and Early Childhood Development Minister. Who are you going to call? The Education and Early Childhood Development Minister, that's who you are going to call.

Well today every person in this province is living with the consequences of that poor decision about health care and the 100,000 people without a doctor or the thousands

who face a closed sign in their local hospital emergency room are living with these devastating results. Why can they not see this, Mr. Speaker, and why can they not admit they made a mistake and fix it? The thousands of seniors in our province, waiting for a bed in a nursing home, live every day suffering in a broken system. The centralized Health Authority that was supposed to give us these huge advances in health care - where are they? It's not working, so come on folks, let's step back, take some time, put a pause, as the teachers union says, and get this right.

How will the centralizing and abolishment of the English school boards of the public education system produce better results for students? The decision made today by the Liberal Government will greatly impact the lives of our students and their families. Many of these students are living in poverty, as we know, and it's difficult enough as it is. This is going to make it worse.

I have to say I want to do a shout-out to all the teachers who have worked so hard with the poverty in our provinces, the ones who bring clothes to school, who bring feminine hygiene products to their schools, who bring birthday cakes and make them in their schools for the children who have never had a birthday cake before.

It's really sad, Mr. Speaker, and I really don't understand why we're not putting more attention on dealing with the poverty that is at the root of why our education system is not better than it can be. If you can feed all those children and you can take the time and have enough teachers and enough specialized teachers and enough EAs to help the children who need it the most, then our province would be flying even further than it is now. We have many bright students and many great teachers who are trying to help them. Again, I just want to say thank you to all those teachers who take that extra time to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I wanted to bring up is, why do the Liberals not see that there is a huge opportunity we have to work together to ensure we use this opportunity to get it right? Education has many moving parts, as we have all heard before, and we owe it to all the kids in Nova Scotia and their families to make sure their questions can be answered before we forge ahead. Think of it this way, teachers had to put forward a threat of illegal job action to get this government to do two things: (1) meet with them, and (2) ask for a pause and make necessary positive changes. That's what they are asking for and it took the threat of job action to bring that about.

Well people want to see government working together with the unions to ensure better decisions get made. People want to understand what the government is trying to achieve because believe me, it is extremely difficult. Most people don't understand what they are trying to do.

As I've said, in Norway they have a great education system and we should be looking to places like that instead of doing what we are doing here. When the government stands up and says don't worry about it, we don't need to hear what you've got to say, we

know best. We've done enough consultation, we've got people writing in on the Internet, that's good. We've got a teachers' council where we've made sure they basically say whatever we want them to say, we're good, we know best, don't worry about the details because we'll just figure that out later.

Well I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that is not good enough. Together with our kids and their families, we want changes that are well thought out, that are well planned, that are not rushed through like the way this bill is rushing through the House and the way the one last year rushed through the House. That's why so many people feel disrespected, because their concerns actually are real. The government doesn't seem to understand that, and no one will listen to them or answer their questions.

Dr. Glaze's report has some good points, but there is also a lot of information that is under dispute. What matters in the classroom is the teacher who is in front of the room. It's the bus driver who gets your kids to school. It's the teaching assistant in the classroom. It's the janitor who keeps the school clean and tidy.

Perhaps school boards may not be the answer, but this move leaves many unanswered questions, and we just don't understand the rush. Actually, I guess we do understand the rush. If you use shock and awe tactics - shock and awe, as Naomi Klein likes to write about - then you would understand why they are rushing this through. So that they can create the chaos, then control the situation, control the teachers, and get rid of the school boards - just control, control, control. That is what this government likes to do.

There is nothing in Bill No. 72 to reassure parents that things will get better for the kids in school with better supports for the classroom. If you look at the Glaze report recommendations, Recommendation 5 actually suggests making all schools wrap-around facilities where students and families can access support from any government department, which I think is a very good thing. Sadly, Recommendation 5 was not one that the government chose to implement quickly. They left that one for some time in the future.

Workers and employees in our schools are teachers, cleaners, bus drivers, teaching assistants, groundskeepers, and supervisors. All of these people are front-line education workers, and they deserve to be respected and to be consulted and to have their collective bargaining rights upheld. Sadly, this has not been the case.

These past few years have shown the writing on the wall when it comes to this government and its attitude and ideology about unions. I would be remiss if I didn't say at this point that the evidence I have observed has shown that the PC Party is not that different, especially when you observe the way that they reacted to the union amendments and labour amendments in our NDP amendments yesterday.

As I have said before in this House, I wonder how our sisters and brothers in the African Nova Scotian community feel. Do they feel consulted and does the Indigenous

population feel consulted when, at the end of the day, their voices as school board members go from seven or eight down to one? Will the newly appointed council representatives be chosen specifically by government as a political arm so that the government can just push through whatever it wants? I have a feeling that I am not alone in that suspicion.

As I have said a few times in the last number of days, women represent over 50 per cent of the members of elected school boards. We need more women in politics, not less. We don't need a government that diminishes those women and silences their voices from elected positions. Nova Scotia is losing 57 elected women from local decision-making in 2018 - on International Women's Day, no less. I have to say that is a sad statement.

I remember this day 34 years ago. I was sitting up there in the gallery watching as Alexa McDonough was speaking on the floor of the House. She was the only woman in the Legislature at that time. There were 52 members, and she was the only woman and the only NDP member. As I have said publicly a number of times, the men around her were not listening to her at all. They were making paper airplanes and throwing them at each other. That was my introduction to the House of Assembly. That's what I saw on International Women's Day.

I can tell you, it made that young woman - I was 24 at the time - say, my goodness, I think that woman needs some backup down there. Someday when I have a little bit more weight, some more gravitas, some more age so that people will actually take me seriously, maybe I should get down there and help her.

I have to say I am very proud of the fact that we do have five women in our caucus now, and only two gentlemen, who are allies, and I'm glad that we do have 17 women in the House, that is a step forward. However, taking the women's voices out of another elected body is not progress, that is going backwards.

So, we've repeatedly heard from this government that there is no money, the province is broke. Well, that's funny, because around election time suddenly they had all this money to spend on all of their ridings. They didn't seem to be broke at that time; I don't know what happened there, Mr. Speaker. So, we know that this change that they're planning now is not going to save money. It's not going to save money at all, in fact, it's going to be costly. Has it been costed out? Let's just remember that the 39 P3 schools cost taxpayers upwards of \$1 billion, and those were implemented by the last Liberal Government.

So, we agree the status quo may not be the answer, I and my colleagues in the NDP think the answer is to bring unions and the stakeholders to the table, and work out education reforms together. That's what we feel is the answer.

Then the Education and Early Childhood Development Minister called this the single-most important educational reform in Nova Scotia's history. So, if that's true, then

why does it need to be rammed through in one week? Is it so that the Liberals can all wipe their hands, and go off on their March break, the job's done, and then just not answer their phones for a few months? Is that why we're doing this?

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development says that people can call him when problems arise, well, so that means the public should just take him up on his offer, and I suggest that when a problem comes up with your children, who are you going to call? The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. When teachers have problems, or the NSTU has problems and they need advice, who are you going to call? The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Right, and guess what his phone number is? 902-424-5168 - that's 902-424-5168 - for anybody who has any problems, call the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

So, this Liberal Government as I said, has not been listening. They haven't been listening to us, they haven't been listening to teachers, they haven't been listening to parents, and they haven't been listening to students. So because they've already decided what they already know is best - this is what I believe, they've already made up their minds. In fact, they probably made up their minds before the Glaze report - that \$75,000 was just paid to somebody because they wanted her to come up with the report that she came up with, and then they can just go along their merry little way.

So, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and his colleagues have not only drunk the Kool-Aid, Mr. Speaker, but they're making it, and the NSTU, teachers . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind the honourable member that that last phrase was definitely unparliamentary, and I will ask her to retract that.

MS. ZANN: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Okay, I retract that. Orange juice, maybe? Drink some orange juice? No? Okay, I retract that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, at least we have a bit of a sense of humour today.

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union and to the teachers, to the parents, to the school board members, and to students right across the province, I apologize. My NDP caucus and I have tried. We are only seven members, and we have done our best for the last four years now, to try and make this government listen to our pleas, to our advice - we've tried everything. We've told them what we feel, we've told them what you feel, and it just hasn't been working. There are only seven of us after all, and you know, we've tried our best to halt this runaway train, but we want you to know that we are with you, and that we will remain.

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. I'd like to remind the honourable member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River to keep her comments addressed through the Chair and not to people who may be listening or watching directly.

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

MS. ZANN: Yes, we have tried our very best to halt this runaway train - I call it a runaway train because that's how it feels. It feels like people are just getting on it, they don't care where it goes, they don't even have their bags packed, they're just getting on the train because they don't know what else to do, because that's what they're being told to do, and I'm telling you, that runaway train, there are many different problems in line for it, including broken bridges and mountains that may not be climbable.

[5:30 p.m.]

We are with the teachers. We are with the Teachers Union. We are with the students. We are with the parents. We will remain with the parents and the students and the teachers and the Teachers Union as long as we can, Mr. Speaker, because we want to give them the chance to have a great life here in Nova Scotia and to create a wonderful education system. We have a vision, and unfortunately we are alone in this vision at this point, but I'm sure that many people will join us. Thank you very much.

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

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: It's my honour to stand once again during debate in this House of Assembly to talk to this bill - one that we reject, as we talked about throughout the day and throughout the stages that we've debated this bill in this House of Assembly.

I'm very proud of where we have been when we've talked about the classroom and why we're here in the first place, all coming from last year, when we had one of the largest protests that we've ever seen in this House of Assembly, when we had teachers and parents and students all fighting against the bill, the back-to-work legislation that was before us at that time.

Since that time, of course, we would have thought that the government would have been working to try to repair some of that relationship. In my estimation, and I think in many of our estimations, in order to do good policy, to have good management, to have good government, we need to have relationships with the people who provide the services that we have.

I can say that I would have thought the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development would have spent some time working with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, working with teachers and administrators and principals across this province to make sure that they have the tools they need to work with our students, to work in our communities to make sure that they are providing the services and the education that our students need.

I would have thought that, but instead they seem to be working hard to find ways to break unions. They've been working on ways to focus on things that might not be exactly what we need, to actually try to create distractions from the things that they are not doing, which is truly helping our students in the classroom or working to find doctors for Nova Scotians, working on mental health and all those things.

I want to thank the member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River for her comment there. Quite honestly, I really wasn't going to go there, but I also want to thank the previous NDP Government for the \$65 million they took out of the classroom when they were government. Do you know why? Because had they not taken the \$65 million out of the system, we might not be discussing some of the things that we have here today. They are not the saviours of education, they are not the saviours of the NSTU. They are but the Third Party in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, \$65 million would have been a lot of money to make sure that we could have invested back in the classroom for our students, for my kids, for your kids and everybody else. That would have been a nice thing to be talking about in this House of Assembly.

All right, let's talk about what's happening in southwestern Nova Scotia. I want to talk about my schools.

AN. HON. MEMBER: Spin, spin, spin.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: It's not a spin at all. Let's talk about my schools in southwestern Nova Scotia. I want to talk about Forest Ridge Academy. I want to talk about Clark's Harbour Elementary. I want to talk about Evelyn Richardson Memorial Elementary School, or ERMES. I want to talk about Drummond Heights. I want to talk about Plymouth School.

All of them belong to the Tri-County School Board, with wonderful teachers and administrators and with great children who want to make a difference for their community. I want to thank them for the hard work they do every day, and I'm sorry for the work that this Liberal Government seems to be imposing upon you. I have a hard time trying to explain to those parents what benefit this bill will have towards the education of their children. I can tell you there is none.

I can say that many of the students that I've talked to, many of the parents that I've talked to, many of the teachers and administrators are quite confused in most cases of why the government seems to be acting in this way. They can't see how this kind of bill, this kind of change in administration can truly impact the lives of the children. We can't quite make that line between it, these aren't the recommendations that we heard from the people that are providing the service.

I want to thank all of those teachers for the hard work they do every day. I want to thank the Tri-County school board members who have worked hard for the education of our children in the Tri-County for a long time, and I want to thank Michael Drew, Dolores Atwood, Michael Alden Fells, Donna Frison-LeBlanc, Sandra Fitzgerald, Janice Francis, Faye Hayley, Andrea Huskison-Townsend, Donna Tidd, Pat Nickerson, and Melanie Surette-Kenney for their dedication to the education of our children at the Tri-County Regional School Board who had their last meeting this week as a school board, who were duly elected to represent our area. They will no longer have that duty, I'm sure they will be concerned about the education of our children and will participate in any way they can, but I wanted to thank them personally on the floor of this Legislature for the work they have provided and the guidance they have provided over the last number of years.

As a matter of fact, some of them had been in the school board for a long time but a friend of mine there, Melanie Surette-Kenney was just elected in the last election, so a little over a year and a half that she's been a school board member and she was joking the other day saying it's got to be one of the shortest elected positions that she's ever heard of in our area. But I do thank her for her time, for her concentration, for her dedication to the education of our students, and in a year and a half hopefully - sometimes we're elected for a lot less. I hope she comes back and tries to find ways to impact the lives of our students.

We had a meeting the other day where we got to hear from members of the NSTU, some of these school board members, they had lots of questions at that time so it was probably three weeks ago now when we didn't have all the answers to what was happening on the Glaze report and what the bill was going to look like at the time. Even at that time, people were just saying slow down, take your time a little bit with this. Tell us what your proposals are, consult with the community, with the union, with people who know how education is done in this province, and then maybe adapt it, and together we can all come with a change to our system that would truly make a difference for Nova Scotia.

But that's not what happened. We're debating a bill in hyper speed in this House of Assembly with all the extra hours and all the things that are going on. Yes, we're all taking our time speaking to this bill because that's a part of democracy, that's a part of the process here in the House of Assembly. Quite honestly, we know the inevitable piece is that in a few hours when everybody has had their say, we will have a vote and the majority Liberal Government will win the vote. We have no illusion that that's not going to happen. But we will continue to ask the question, why so fast and why without truly building relationships that you need to do?

Since I do represent part of the Tri-County board and part of CSAP schools, they're not necessarily impacted by these decisions as much as the English school board, but I do want to thank the teachers, students, and parents of École Pubnico-Ouest, École Belleville, École Wedgeport, and of course École secondaire de Par-en-Bas for all the work that they've done through all this process, all the concerns they've had, and again I apologize

to them for maybe the confusion that they've felt over the last number of weeks as this has gone on.

The CSAP is something that is near and dear to my heart and I want to make sure that when the minister brings the next piece of legislation forward, which is to protect the rights of Acadians and the CSAP, that it is done correctly. It worries me that this bill was done so quickly with all of its faults. I hope that all of those faults do not show up in the CSAP bill and that maybe they can actually consult a little bit on what that bill is, what's going to be contained in it, and truly have consultation with it. It does concern me though (Interruption) I don't believe you have it covered, minister. It shows with this bill . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to remind the honourable member for Argyle-Barrington to keep his comments directed through the Chair.

The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I will try to keep it through the Chair. But when some other people aren't keeping comments to themselves, it's very hard not to answer them.

MR. SPEAKER: It is, in fact, a two-way street.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Listen, I have been in this House of Assembly for 15 years. I have had the great opportunity to sit on that side of it as well. I have seen lots of legislation come before this House.

I have never seen a government that doesn't want to share anything, that comes at the last minute and tries to sneak things through. (Interruption) Maybe "sneak" is not a parliamentary word. I'll retract "sneak" from that - to quickly run legislation through this House before anybody notices.

All I ask is for consultation. All I say is that we represent the same constituents that you do and that we want to have at least a view of what is going on. Maybe if we can change this or that, a "shall" or a "may," then at least, we have done our work as legislators when it comes to these bills.

I do worry about what's happening to the CSAP. I'm a little worried of the division that was created when the CSAP put a press release out acknowledging and celebrating the changes of the Glaze report. I did understand why they did that, because their teachers are affected the same way as the English teachers. The only difference is, of course, that the school boards are completely are completely gotten rid of, while the CSAP maintains at least that upper structure.

But the teachers are affected the same way. The administrators - sorry, the managers - are affected the same way. That's what they're going to be calling those people from this forward. They are affected by the bill that is before us today.

Finally, I'll say this. We normally don't get a lot of questions about school issues. Once in a while, we get a busing issue. Once in a while, somebody will call about a TA, a teaching assistant. Sometimes it's a concern about bullying in the school and those kinds of things. We don't get a lot. A lot of times, Mr. Speaker, it's very comforting that I can always call my school board member, and the school board member deals with it and makes sure I know what's going on. I have been very lucky with my school boards. I have been very lucky with my school board representatives.

The calls are going to come to us. All I ask the minister as this goes forward - well, I ask him not to do this, maybe to reject the bill. But since they do want to run the bill through, and I know this is inevitable, I hope that he gives us a number that we can call when that happens.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who are you going to call?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: We're not going to call Ghostbusters. We're going to call the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, at 1-800-education minister or whatever that may be. Make it easy for Nova Scotians. If we're taking all of these things away, at least try to find ways to make this easier on everybody.

With those few words, I thank you for the opportunity. Again, we reject this bill in its entirety.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: May I make an introduction or two?

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MS. LEBLANC: As the gallery begins to fill up with people watching these events unfold, I wanted to draw the House's attention to several people up in the gallery opposite. Some are teachers for sure.

I don't know everyone up there, so I'm just going to name the people I do. Ben Sichel and little Atlin, we're very happy to see you. I saw Drew Moore earlier. There he is. There's Bev Cheverie, who is a retired teacher from Dartmouth North, and Helen Macneil who is a retired teacher as well. We're happy to have you here, Rob Wigle, and Grant Frost. I'm sorry. I don't know everyone else - Liette Doucet. So, thank you very much for being here, and welcome to the House.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Who will speak for me? I'm a six-year-old child. I go to a rural elementary school. There's only 52 children in my school. My cousin is my best friend, and after school I get to go to my grandmother's because she just lives down the road. My dad tells me that my school is closing and I'm going to have to go to a school far away. I have to get up earlier and I have to spend an hour and a half on the school bus every morning, and an hour and a half on the school bus every afternoon, and I'm scared.

Who will speak for me? I'm a single mother, my child is eight years old. I live in Dartmouth, and my son has a disability and is unable to walk to school. There's no sidewalks, and I don't have a car to drive my son. The bus drives right by my house, but I'm told by the bus driver that he's not allowed to stop and pick up my boy. I've called the Department of Education, I've called my MLA, but no one can do anything. No one is listening.

Who will speak for me? I'm a French School Board member, and I don't understand why the government got rid of the English School Boards, but left mine. Now, people are getting angry at me and only further dividing the English and the French, and we don't need this right now. We don't ever need this. We need to always be working towards equal representation and building relationships rather than dividing.

Who will speak for my community? I'm a warden of a municipality in Nova Scotia, and I have several schools, but four of them are very small, and I'm worried that they're going to close. Each of the schools provide a hub in my community, a meeting place where healthy communities can meet. I'm worried that the bean counters will decide to close my schools. Once the school is closed, I will never be able to rebuild my community.

Who will speak up for my families? I'm an English School Board member, and I was elected 10 years ago. I get calls everyday from parents with concerns. My board takes care of 75 schools. Who will take care of those families now? I'm feeling worthless. I loved serving these parents and these families and my community, and I was elected by my community. Now, I'm told that I'm no longer needed. I worry about the people that used to need me and call me for help.

Who will speak for me? I am a teacher and I can't do it anymore. I told my MLA and I tried to tell the government last year. My colleagues and I are done. I love my students like my kids. I care for them, but it is too much for me. I need help. There are too many children that need more than what I can provide, and I don't know what to do anymore. My husband tells me I should just quit. He sees me cry, he sees my stress and my anger, and my sadness.

Who will speak for my community? I'm an African Nova Scotian, and I have suffered from racism my whole life, some of it subtle, some of it direct. I've worked hard with my community to ensure we had adequate representation on the school board. I worry about my African Nova Scotian daughter. Who is going to ensure the continued work of the African Nova Scotian community? We need to reduce these continued problems of racism that we see in our lives every day.

Who will listen to me? I'm a father, and I'm a volunteer on the School Advisory Council. I've heard that now, since the school boards have been dismantled, I'm going to be accountable. I don't want that kind of responsibility. I'm a parent volunteer. I hope other parents don't really think that I can have a responsibility here. Don't they know that I am just in an advisory role and that really doesn't have any power. If advisory volunteer councils were really accountable, maybe we should ask the MLAs and the Premier to resign and volunteer for the greater good of the province. That's just foolish.

I know that other parents will know that the school advisory council is just for optics. I've seen the local volunteers on the community health boards, what has happened with them. When they've tried to stand up for their community and speak out about the health care problems, they're told that's not their role. I am not a fool.

Who will listen to me? I am an MLA. I am the voice for my people but who is listening and, therefore, who is listening to my people? It saddens me, Mr. Speaker, to see that alienation of people and the erosion of community-ship and erosion of the people's power.

What is my role as a legislator? One of the roles is to scrutinize government bills and spending. Well, what is the cost? No one has really talked about that. How can we adequately debate a bill without knowing the costs and the additional expenditures. What are the expected outcomes and how will they be measured? While this is not a business, we do need to be fiscally responsible and look at the costs involved.

What will the cost be to rebrand, to repaint the school buses, to repaint the school board vehicles? If each of the eight school boards had 10 vehicles that needed repainting, at a cost of \$5,000 each, that's \$400,000 along on that one item. What are the other costs? What will it cost to paint the insides of all the schools when they paint over all the mission statements of the school boards? What is the cost to reorganize, to rebrand - the cost of changed management?

I can't make informed decisions without the facts, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the facts and the financials, but I know from my business experience that change costs money. With no local school boards, there is going to be additional travel costs. I know if this is anything like what happened with the health boards, there are going to be huge additional travel costs. An example with the health boards - they have an obstetrician managing the

obstetricians in Amherst from Bridgewater. They have a manager from Hantsport managing the family physicians in Pugwash.

Who will trust us now? As a MLA coming into this job, I knew already that many people didn't trust me because now I am a politician, and I wasn't used to that as a nurse. I was used to always having the trust of people. It saddens me because the way that this bill was rammed through and the lack of collaboration and the lack of listening to people, it just further legitimizes people's lack of trust in politicians.

Bill No. 72 seems to be all about the power, versus serving our people. I believe governing should be about the people. I've seen the side effects of dismantling of nine health boards, and centralization has taken away the local democratic voice. It has taken away the rural voice but it has also taken away the urban voice.

Who will speak for the child? Who will speak for the parent? No one is listening. As an MLA, I do care and I will listen and I do believe this style of governing is wrong. It's about trying to gain power, and that power is trying to be gained by stripping it from the people, stripping it from the parents, stripping it from elected school board members and stripping it from communities. What my colleagues across the floor fail to recognize is that real power comes from within, it is not attained by changing government structures, but by changing our education system for the better. You do it one child at a time. You do it by supporting one teacher at a time and supporting one community at a time.

True power comes from within. It cannot be manufactured by rearranging administration into a central body that is disconnected from its limbs. A heart with no circulation system means the oxygen does not get to the cells that it is trying to provide. Cells die and then eventually so does the heart.

I believe this too shall pass. I believe and I have great hope that the day will come when those holding the reins of power of this Nova Scotia Government will once again make the people the priority. The people that we serve will be the focus. As John Maxwell once said, "Leaders become great, not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others."

I, along with my colleagues, reject Bill No. 72.

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

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I can't say that it's a great pleasure to be able to speak to this bill today because it's not. It's not because this bill has yet to show any of us how it's going to improve the education of our children.

We are talking about governance, we are talking about administration but at the end of the day we should be talking about the child in the classroom. This bill, like so many

other bills this government has brought forward, doesn't address the need that's required by the people of this province.

I said the other day when I spoke about this legislation that it was a stupid piece of legislation, and I stand by that. (Interruption) I can change the word from stupid to obtuse, silly, not needed, not necessary. Nothing in this bill is going to improve the quality of the education for those little children out there, for my grandchildren, for your children. None of it is going to make a difference because we haven't given the tools to the right person.

We went through this whole thing last February and, at that time, person after person spoke to us in the Committee on Law Amendments and told us of the challenges and the needs they had and what they needed to make education better for our children. The result of that is the government has decided that we're going to do away with an elected school board, we're going to change the role of a teacher, of a vice-principal and of a principal. We're going to do all this and yet the government hasn't in its heart had the ability to show all of us, what is the plan? What is the plan that at the end of the day is going to make a difference for the children?

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is not a bad person. However he is living in a world similar to Disneyland if he believes that, indeed, "trust me" is the kind of an answer that this province needs. If the government is so sure that this legislation is going to make a difference for the children, if the government is so sure that there's a path to be taken, why is it they haven't taken the time to share the plan with all of those people concerned?

[6:00 p.m.]

Why is it that we don't know what help is going to be there along the lines of teacher's assistants? What is the mental health strategy for the young people of our province who are facing many, many challenges in our schools? What is the end result going to be, by doing away with the school board, so that a parent has no opportunity to have some input?

We've stood in this House and we've seen legislation that was brought forward to us. Legislation that combined our health care system, and we've seen the result of that. Over 100,000 people in this province still without a doctor, and still no plan by this government. The only plan is, let's ram through the legislation, because you can trust us. Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't trust them with the future of the education of my grandchildren, and I dare say there are a lot of people here who don't trust them with the future of the education of their children.

So this bill makes no sense, as I've said before, and it's going to pass. Not because I'm going to vote for it, not because my colleagues are going to vote for it, because democracy says, they have a majority, and they can do that. Do you know how they get the

majority? They were voted in, Mr. Speaker. Very similar to how school boards were voted in. People put their trust in their school boards to help give guidance on the education programs of this province, and when that didn't match the will of this government, they decided, we're going to do away with them.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on, but there's no need. This is still a stupid piece of legislation, and I believe . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. I will remind the honourable member that the term "stupid" in reference to legislation is unparliamentary.

MR. MACLEOD: I would classify that as a difference of opinion between two members, Mr. Speaker. However, I will be voting against this piece of legislation, for all of those reasons that I'm not allowed to say publicly.

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

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak this evening briefly on Bill No. 72. We've heard from each and every speaker on this side of the House today speak on the negative implications of this bill, and I thank each and every one of them for their thoughts and their concern. What everyone has stated is that all aspects of the bill prove that it doesn't help the system that's supposed to help students.

When I spoke on Second Reading, I started off by saying, what happened to democracy and the democratic process? Then I went on to talk about my time as a school board member, the 15 years that I served, and I talked about the element of trust that was created. Well, I'm sad to say, Mr. Speaker, that the element of trust has gone out the same door as the democratic process in this case.

So, Mr. Speaker, rather than repeat all that's been said, I'd like to take the opportunity to read some segments of an editorial, by Tom Urbaniak, political scientist at Cape Breton University, and it appeared in yesterday's Cape Breton Post. Mr. Speaker, after I finish reading the segments, I will table the editorial. Mr. Urbaniak says:

"Two words of Bill No. 72, the Education Reform Act, hint at the ideology behind this sweeping bill. Those words are corporation sole . . .

'Corporation sole' is a term found most commonly in civil laws to incorporate the dioceses of top-down churches. Bishops were worried that lay people might claim a direct stake in supervising clergy or properties. So the bishops asked politicians to make them corporations sole, as if they were the only member of the diocese.

The bishops were authorized to decide and dispose without formal debate or scrutiny by parishioners.

Under this Education Reform Act, when it comes to, say, closing a school, no deliberation or voting will be required. The corporation sole can just do it. In practice, that will mean the decision will fall on the desk of the regional executive director (the new name for superintendent), who will be chosen by the minister . . .

The bill removes independent scrutiny and public deliberation from the system . . .

Consultant Avis Glaze recommended that the school boards be partly replaced by an arms-length education ombudsman. That's not in this bill . . .

The bill states that school advisory councils 'may' be constituted, but their duties and composition will be spelled out by some future regulations. These regulations will not go back to the House for debate; they will be approved behind closed doors.

Nor does the bill contain Glaze's suggested five-year review to determine if elected boards should come back in some form. Let's recall that boards were reinstated in New Brunswick, which had experimented with eliminating them.

Even New Brunswick's centralized system of the late 1990s was less top-down than what the Nova Scotia government now wants. Regional parent councils in New Brunswick could pick who served on the provincial advisory council on education. Nova Scotia's provincial advisory council will be hand-picked by the government for two-year terms (renewable once). The advisory council will not elect its own chair. The minister will make that appointment too.

The heavy-handed way this bill is being pushed through the House does not bode well for the future oversight of schools . . .

This government is obviously not comfortable with the democratic heritage of Nova Scotia. As a citizen, I am very concerned."

Mr. Speaker, those are not my words. Those are the words of Tom Urbaniak, and I hope it's something that the government considers as they move forward.

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

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to comments being made now for a little over seven hours. My colleagues have taken the legislation, they have gone through the legislation, and they have pointed out a lot of things that need consideration.

I really do not want to rehash what has already been said, but my colleague the member for Halifax Needham said a lot of what I wanted to say, because not much positive is going to happen in a negative environment. I have spent a lifetime, and I mean a lifetime, working in and for a positive environment.

I grew up in a home where I had loving parents. I grew up in a church that was just like a second family. I lived in a community where everyone kind of cared for each other. I was extremely lucky, and when I got out on my own, I wanted to carry that positive atmosphere over into my own family, in the church I work in, and also in the communities where I lived. I just learned very early that people will be at their best in a positive environment.

I would invite you to think of a child going to school, walking through the door, and having the teacher greet them with a negative feeling. That child is going to absorb that kind of energy and they're not going to learn well. You take another child and bring them into school and is going to be greeted in a positive atmosphere, that child is going to learn at a whole lot better rate than the other.

I am a firm believer in making changes when changes are necessary. We got the message that our education environment needs to make changes. We saw that passion last year at the Law Amendments Committee. My goodness, the passion that was exhibited here this afternoon by my colleagues was really warming to watch.

How will we find out what changes are going to be of benefit? We find out from those who have to work day in and day out within the system. If administration changes need to take place, then we go to the administration that is in place and listen to them. If changes need to take place within the classroom, then we need to go to the teachers who work there day in and day out and find out what changes are needed in order to do their job well.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? I don't get any great thrill in coming into this Legislature and criticizing whatever it is that the government is doing. I find no thrill in that, but I would get an enormous thrill in being able to be part of a process that's going to make the atmosphere better for all those concerned. I really believe that the teachers are more in need of change than the administrators.

I will do whatever I can to help create a more trustworthy and caring and learning environment for teachers and students. I was hoping that the concerns of the teachers would come first. I was hoping for that.

That didn't happen, so now I'm hoping that the government will start to address the concerns that were expressed last year and throughout this process and start to really concentrate on the classrooms and the needs of the teachers.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, somewhere in Nova Scotia there's a child who has difficult days, a child who tries their best but still struggles. This child may be fortunate to have some loving parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and the support of caring teachers. Some of us know such a child. Some of us were that child. We all know those caring teachers.

Today the things that I say, I am saying because I am worried about that child and I'm worried about those teachers and all the other students out there. I am, and our caucus is, willing to fight for them. That's what we're doing here today.

We do need action in education, but this bill, this piece of legislation, isn't the right action. For that reason, I will be not supporting this bill and will be voting against this bill.

The Premier and the minister and the government have been dancing around the edges of education now. Teachers, parents, and students have told them that there's a problem, but they haven't listened to what those problems are. They tell the government the problems, but there's no response back until the government gets a brown envelope with a report. A report crafted in three months by a person who is obviously well-respected, but has no experience with our education system.

That report comes and it sets the stage for this government to act on their agenda. It's another attempt to put forward a poorly thought out, harsh remedy for what this government feels ills our education system, but it only shows that they don't understand the ills of the system.

[6:15 p.m.]

When we look forward to the future after this bill, which teachers will want to be administrators? Which are the ones who will want to lead the change and prepare students for the future? Will the fact that they will now be managers, and people who will probably be forced, under what we've seen, to take their marching orders from above. Will that change the desire of people to lead the change from within the system? I think it will. What we're seeing is a system that won't listen and we're seeing a system that is being more and more designed to be led by one person, the minister.

The minister who was so bold as to say that if you have any question at all about education you should call them. Imagine that. We do not need just one voice in education, we need many voices, and those voices are those of teachers and students and parents and

administrators and they are speaking up. Those voices are getting louder and louder, and yet still, remarkably, they're not being heard. We have many voices calling out and we have few people listening.

This isn't the only example of this Liberal Government forging along on their own path without listening. We've seen it in health care, we've seen this exact situation in health care. Where are we in health care today? What is the result of the not listening? I asked Nova Scotians to watch very closely, pay very close attention to what is happening here in this Chamber. We have seen solutions proposed by this government that don't necessarily work. We see a juggling act by this government as they juggle from one issue to the next, doing what they think - and only them - what they think is right, without listening.

I think these changes do set the system up for failure. I worry that they set the system up for failure. There's nothing in this bill that will help improve the education of the students of Nova Scotia. There's nothing in here that will remotely help our children. It's the shuffling around of issues. I sometimes say that this government is famous for distraction techniques, don't look here at the real issue, look over here. The fact that the issues being discussed have nothing to do with the issues of the classroom is just another example of them exercising on their mandate of distracting away from the real issues. It's getting old.

I again see that child somewhere in this province wondering why, worrying about their own education and how they're doing in the system. They're looking to this Legislature, they're looking to the people who have their hands on the levers of government to make the proper changes. They're looking for help and they're not getting it. That's what drives me.

I can tell you the reasons that I'm here is to fight for those changes - good changes, positive changes, input from the people on the ground is what's necessary in this system. In these changes, we haven't seen it. I don't see it getting us to where we are today, and I think this is a huge missed opportunity. It's a huge missed opportunity for students, for teachers, for parents - it's a missed opportunity for Nova Scotia. Most of all, it's a missed opportunity for this government. They could have taken the time to listen to the stakeholders that are actually involved in education. They could have taken the time to listen to them at this critical point.

But they haven't. Instead, they've taken their own form of action. They've taken action to take away elected officials in a specific governance structure that is designed to meet the needs of a specific community. They've taken away an organization that was set up to deal with local concerns and needs. They've taken away an organization that was the focal point for discussion for citizens to raise concerns, and they had options. They had options, but they chose just to take it away.

I think my colleague for Dartmouth East referred to it as disintegrating or vaporizing. So what will tomorrow look like? Is tomorrow call the 1-800 number? The minister says call him now, but eventually, it will be a 1-800 number, probably answered by somebody not even in Nova Scotia. Is that what tomorrow looks like? Are we going to be calling an 800 number somewhere else with somebody else answering the phone who doesn't have to share the concerns of the person on the other line, who is disconnected from the person on the other end? Is that what we're looking at?

We are seeing a decline of caring. We're seeing a decline of caring with this bill. We're seeing an increasingly larger distance between those who are responsible for making the decisions and those who suffer the impacts of the decisions. The gap is getting wider and wider, and it's no wonder that so many people are concerned.

That child somewhere in Nova Scotia is counting on us, and it is time to listen. It's time for Nova Scotians to be heard. I ask the ministers with the ability to make change, will you listen? Will you listen? Listening means taking this piece of legislation seriously.

My colleague from Dartmouth North had to stop today during her remarks because there was so much chatter and laughter in this Chamber. It wasn't a good example of listening. Do you know what my colleague was talking about at the time? Mental illness, students living in poverty. Shame on the members of this Chamber for not listening. It's one thing to not take this legislation seriously, but it's another thing to disrespect those who are.

Is there a plan for education in this province? That is the question that cannot be answered by this government. Is there an actual plan linking all of these reports together? There should be. I haven't heard that question answered.

I had an e-mail from Lynn who says this bill has so many issues, and the clause on inclusive education was only one of them. Citizens of Nova Scotia trust their elected representatives to go positively forward not regressively backward. Parents, students, and all people in public education do not expect to repeatedly have to defend their rights to access. She's right.

Charlie sent a letter to the editor that he sent to me. He said people care about education. People in this province care about education. Eighteen thousand people responded to the Freeman report. Eighteen thousand people gave submissions on the Freeman report. Some people may remember the Freeman report. I think it's on a shelf somewhere. People care about education.

He said what they don't care about is politicians, and he referenced voter apathy and voter turnout. He reminded me that this government is using their privilege as a majority government to make the changes that they see fit without consulting Nova

Scotians. They're backing all of their decisions off their impressive majority mandate where they were supported by less than 25 per cent of possible voters in this province.

We had dismal voter turnout, and I wonder why when people feel like there's no room for them, that their opinions don't matter, and they're disengaged. That is why voter turnout is the way it is. Yet we see a government backed by this strong majority, supported by less than a quarter of eligible voters in this province whose voices can't be heard. We will see continued voter turnout like that.

The sin of the omission of inclusion in this initial bill before it was amended - the sin of omission is a scary thing when you think of the speed at which this bill is going through the Legislature and the complexity of this bill, what else might be missing? What else might be wrong? What other unintended consequences might be lurking below the surface? And yet here we are, passing this bill through.

Laura Duggan emailed, reached out to me, and she said, I'm concerned about Bill No. 72. I do not oppose educational reform at all. In fact, as a teacher, I support it, but not this educational reform.

She specifically referenced her alarm at the speed at which this legislation was going through the House and the lack of respect and willingness to listen to voices of Nova Scotia - rural voices, those from diverse communities.

She's right. People are concerned about this legislation and the process that has brought us to where we are today. They are concerned about the process that has led us to this point where they haven't been listened to, and they are concerned about unintended consequences that may be lurking below the surface.

There has been a lot of talk in this Chamber about the administrator/manager issue. What are the implications of changing that definition? We know the government was steadfast in their desire to change it. What are the implications of changing that? It's hard to say exactly what the implications will be. There's some obvious ones, for sure, but are there less obvious ones that are unforeseen? By changing the definition and the job description to "manager," has this government potentially created some liability issues for the people filling those roles? It's possible that they have.

We know that managers have a certain standard, and this government was stuck on that. When you look at the responsibilities of managers, even under the Criminal Code of Canada, everyone who undertakes or has the authority to direct how another person does work or performs tasks has a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent bodily harm to that person or any other person.

I just wonder, what does that look like in our schools where we have overcrowded classrooms? I wonder what that looks like. Has the government thought about that? Is there

nothing to see there? We don't know, Mr. Speaker. It goes through the Legislature so quickly that it's hard to.

I will say these are the types of reasons that should give the members of this Chamber pause for thought. Let's take some time. Let's look at these things. These reasons alone should indicate to everyone here today that this is happening awfully quickly, and I wish we would pause.

People are relying on us, as elected officials, to do what's right, to make the right changes. They don't want to be focusing on what is going on. They want to trust us to do the right thing and assume that we are understanding all the facts and have all the information and understand the ramifications of the decisions we make. They want to trust their elected people to have that, and under this process, with these types of hours and the quickness with which a complex bill like this goes through, how can we? How can we really understand all that? That's not good process at all.

We should not be where we are today with this piece of legislation. Teachers realize that the education system is in a state of crisis. They see it every day. They've tried to use this as their opportunity to stand up and ask for the government to work with them, to begin to fix it. That's all they've asked for: work with us to begin to fix it. That's what the teachers of this province are saying.

Parents feel they don't have the means, I'm sure, to influence the process. They are left to sit back and hope that we get it right, and we should get it right, but we are not, not with this piece of legislation.

Now, maybe in time on March 20th, the government will table their budget, maybe there will be a big bag of money for education, to address some of the issues that need to be addressed. I hope that those issues do get addressed. I hope there is a plan for that, but today, we're not seeing the plan.

This is the wrong legislation at the right time. We should have education legislation before this House, but not this bill. It's the wrong legislation at the right time, and we've gotten here through a lack of consultation. Ramming this bill through has only increased the uncertainty - the extreme uncertainty - that many Nova Scotians are feeling about it. The omission of the inclusion language from the initial draft of this bill should signal problems ahead. That's what the signal should be for Nova Scotians on this. The fact that that could be omitted is a remarkable warning sign that we should heed, and it has created an incredible amount of uncertainty. The government might say that it was not well-placed, but it was well-placed. The government might say that they've now fixed it, but the fact that it happened is a warning to the rest of us about this piece of legislation.

This piece of legislation does not improve the classroom, and yet here we are, a mere couple of weeks from the report on the commission of inclusion. Why aren't we

waiting for that? That's the question that needs to be answered. Why aren't we waiting for that?

There are over 9,000 experts in the field in Nova Scotia every single day: teachers in our classrooms. They understand the system, and they understand the issues as good as Dr. Glaze, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and yet, they haven't been listened to. We can do better, we can do better in this province. We can raise the standard of education in this province, we could be starting that tonight. In fact, this morning in Question Period, the minister said he's open to suggestions, he's open to ideas. My colleague, the member for Pictou Centre only had 45 seconds at the time that that offer was made. I have a little bit longer right now, so if the minister will indulge me, I'll be happy to give him some suggestions, and some advice on where we could be going with education in this province.

I would like to make some recommendations for the minister. I'd like to provide some recommended changes that the government should be making, in order to improve education in this province, and maximize learning, and just improve the overall classroom experience in Nova Scotia. If the minister has his pen ready, I'll start. He's ready? Okay, good.

Number one, rebuild trust. The trust must be rebuilt. Education reform cannot happen without a good working relationship with teachers in this province. The trust has to be rebuilt, and that responsibility belongs to the minister. I wish him well on that.

Number two, focus on easing the substitute shortage. That's a major issue facing our education system, and I haven't heard any discussion of that by this government. Minister, please focus on that. Consider changing the Bachelor of Education program to be scaled to a one-year program, because it might help alleviate the teacher shortage, and I do worry that this legislation and this environment and the lack of trust are going to lead to a teacher shortage in this province - it's happened in other jurisdictions. This is not a happy place to be a teacher right now. The morale is incredibly low around the schools, and around the system, and why shouldn't it be? Why shouldn't it be?

Minister, you could consider empowering . . .

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind the honourable member for Pictou East not to refer to members opposite directly, but to keep your comments directed through the Chair.

The honourable member for Pictou East has the floor.

MR. HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, we could be empowering our teachers to make a final decision on promotion to the next grade level. These are the real issues in the education system. These are the things people are talking about. They're not talking about

taking the administration out of the union. They're not talking about doing away with school boards. These are the things they are talking about.

So, why aren't we? We should be talking about these things. Imagine if this government would place mental health professionals in all our schools and aggressively expand the SchoolsPlus program. Imagine that.

Dr. Glaze talked about wraparound schools. I have heard a lot of positive comments from teachers on the wraparound schools. This government could be creating facilities where students and families can promptly access support from any government department. These are things that can be done and should be done.

This caucus often talks about implementing expanded vocational training in high schools across the province.

When I think about the school board situation, there were a number of options that could have reduced the number of school boards, changed the structure of school boards. This government decided to do away with them. There were options available to them, and this bill will pass without any real understanding of whether those options were analyzed and assessed. Those are the things we could be talking about.

This government could be focusing on hiring more educational assistants and enhancing their training in order to better support the teachers in the classroom. There's a lot of things this government could be doing, yet here we are talking about a piece of legislation that does nothing to improve our classrooms.

I have more suggestions for the minister, but I want to be conscious of the ability to consume the information that is being delivered, so I'll save some for a later day.

This legislation does not equip our kids for the workforce after graduation. It does nothing to improve that. It's a rush job. It's a piece of legislation that people realistically didn't even have time to properly review. It's a piece of legislation that is designed to do one thing: divide Nova Scotians. That's what this legislation is designed to do. That seems to be the agenda that we're working with. We have seen it in health care, we have seen it in the film industry, and now it's happening with educators.

On this side of the House, we will continue to fight for enhanced supports for education. We will continue to fight for the things that will ensure that our children have a brighter future, have more opportunities. Those are the things that matter, and it's time for all of us to believe that we can do better. It's time for all of us to show Nova Scotians that they have the right to expect better. It's time to set a new standard for education in Nova Scotia. It's a shame that we're not doing it now.

We have weeks left in this session of the Legislature. We have a budget. We have other commission reports that will come out. I hope that they deliver better results for our education system than this particular bill is.

I am not supporting Bill No. 72. I can see no reason to support Bill No. 72. With those few words, I'll take my seat.

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

MS. ALANA PAON: I would like to start by saying that when I become overwhelmed with the volume of work, I oftentimes take a little bit of a breather. Usually that breather happens in Cape Breton-Richmond. The two people that I usually go to to ask for advice are my parents, who have been my very good friends my whole life, and one of those individuals is no longer with me.

This weekend when I was trying to sift through all this vast amount of information that had been imposed on us last week with Bill No. 72, I was feeling as if you really needed to be a lawyer to be able to get through all that information and all the intricacies and details. I actually took a drive as I was home, j'étais chez moi à L'Île Madame, I took a drive and I actually went to the site where my own education began, North Isle Madame Elementary, and behind the school therein lies the graveyard. In that graveyard is buried my dad.

So, I went up there and I asked him for some advice, as far as what I should do here, because there are definitely details in this bill - for which I think can actually afford a great deal of reform that's needed within the school system - but also, it's the entire idea that this bill takes upon us, or brings upon us, that takes away the very democratic right of the people of this province - the first thing that I saw going through this bill.

I'm not a lawyer, but I'm an avid reader, as are many people this House - we have to be - but in taking a look at this bill the first thing that I saw was basically the erosion of our democratic process by eliminating a democratically-elected institution, which is the school boards. Going back to my basic civics class of Grades 7 and 8, Mrs. MacLean - bless her heart - this is not the democracy that I was taught in junior high. I would have never, for a moment, thought that we, in a democratic system, as we have, and we are so proud that we are a responsible government, that we could ever be in the position, a government could ever be in a position to completely abolish a democratic institution.

Now, whether or not you actually agree or disagree with the efficacy of the school boards, that makes no difference here. That's not what we're discussing here. What we're discussing - and I want to actually make certain that everybody takes away from this - is that we are giving away something that we will never be able to get back today.

We will never be able to get back this democratic institution, and I believe it's a very slippery slope - it's a very slippery slope. As I was driving here today, and the wind was howling on Hollis Street, and I thought my Jeep was going to take off because the wind was catching it so badly underneath, and the snow was starting to fall, I actually started thinking about all the teachers who came and marched on this House in ways that we have never seen before in the history of this province, to let us know - or I should say, let you know because I wasn't here at that time - their displeasure in the way that this government was treating them.

Teachers have become politicians, they've become politically active in ways that we've never seen in 120 years. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that beside the erosion of democracy, for which I believe the people of this province should be yelling from the rooftops to say, stop, you will not take my right away, to be able to actually elect a school board member. You will not take away an elected body of officials that are only halfway through their mandate. You will not take away an institution that we had fought for - we have fought wars over these types of things, and we are giving it away today. Today will be the last straw. It's a slippery slope.

I would like to ask the people of this province to stand up, be brave, find your voice, and yell from the rooftops if you have to, and in this House, and say no, you will not take my democratic voice away.

Why are we not yelling this? Why are we allowing this to occur? Apathy, I think, Mr. Speaker. We feel as if there's nothing that we can do to stop it. How is it that we've become a people in a democracy that feel that we have no power? We do. We do have power. We have power through voting, but we also have power to be able to say no and we can stop this. The people of this province can stop this.

[6:45 p.m.]

As far as I'm concerned, there's a hole that exists within our so-called democracy in this province because something that is so valuable and that is irreplaceable, I believe, should be put to the people in the way of a binding referendum in order to be able to decide to completely abolish an elected institution.

It should not be a government that has a majority to decide such a thing. It should be all the people of this province, because as my colleague here has mentioned, I believe that only about 20 per cent or 25 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia actually agreed that this government should be the government of this province.

It's a little bit concerning to me, as it should be concerning to all people in Nova Scotia, that a government that only represents the voice in a vote of 20 per cent to 25 per cent of the people get to make the decision for the rest of us in how we want to actually see our democracy progress, or should I say, regress. I think today, on what extraordinarily is

International Women's Day, that we are taking such steps backwards. We are taking steps backwards today.

It was not that long ago - in fact, I think it was probably about 100 years ago - that I wouldn't have been able to come into this House and take this seat. I didn't have a voice. I wasn't considered a person, and more than that, I and my family were Acadians. We are Acadians. That makes it even worse.

If you want to talk about inequality, let's talk about some of the minority people in this province - some of the founding members of this province, granted, and the hardships that we, that they, have had to go through in order to get their voices heard in a democratic system.

It's not that long ago - in fact, it may be 100 years ago - that women were enfranchised in Nova Scotia, but I believe it was only in the 1960s that Indigenous people, First Nations people, were actually able to have a vote in this province. I'm afraid I am not familiar with when that occurred for African Nova Scotians, but I'm sure there was probably a great deal of difficulty getting their voice to the table as well.

It's the first time that I mention this because for years it has been hard enough to be an Acadian in this province, let alone - and I'm sorry I'm going to use this derogatory term, but it's what actually was utilized at the time - being seen as a half-breed, Mr. Speaker. It is a part of my family heritage, which has had to have been hidden in order for us to be able to be accepted and seen as equals to people within our community.

It's very difficult to stand up - you're a woman, you're seen as an Acadian. I'm not asking for accolades, but where have we heard in the media that the first woman Acadian has taken her seat in the Legislature? If I was a man and the first Acadian man, do you think that it would have made the news? I am a woman, and as much as we think we have come a long way, it's surprising to me - and I think it was quite surprising to the librarians here at the Legislature - to find out that, indeed, I am the first Acadian woman to take her seat in this Legislature. (Applause)

It may look today as if I come from a place of what I believe we now call white privilege, but I can assure all of you that I grew up in a community of very little means. I was a lucky one. My father left at 13 years old on the back of a coal truck to come up to Halifax to be a bellboy at the Lord Nelson Hotel. He started working and never stopped from there.

I can assure the good members here in the New Democratic Party caucus, I want to assure the member from Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River who mentioned earlier that the Progressive Conservative caucus is very anti-union, and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this Progressive Conservative is not anti-union. I will say, it's pretty difficult

for me to be anti-union when my father was part of the union that, in fact, made certain to have a roof over our heads and food in my belly.

It would have been a very different experience for me if my father did not have job security that was provided by unions and a medical plan that was provided by unions as well as an excellent paycheque. Granted, we paid for that, because he was away in Ontario working on the lake boats for nine months of the year. We paid for it, but thank goodness for that. So, I will say thank you, actually, to the unions. My son is also a member of one. He's a member of the ACTRA union.

It is astounding to me, considering that we seem to have something called the right of free association in this country, that a government can also make people administrators - no, I believe we're supposed to call them managers - extract themselves from a union of which they have been members for 120 years or more. There has never been any conflict within that union between administrators - as I will continue to call them - and teachers because they're one and the same, Mr. Speaker, as much as this government would like us to believe that they are not. They are one and the same. They are all teachers. They are all trying to do their best for the children within the classrooms.

I don't believe that it's fair and just that you force people who have had no conflict with one another to separate from the same established union - force them out and get them into an association. They have no idea whether or not they'll have benefits after they retire. They have no idea right now, these administrators or managers, who's going to negotiate contracts on their behalf. They have no idea if after February of next year - or whenever it is that they're supposed to decide - whether or not they want to stay within or affiliated with the NSTU. What will happen after that if they decide that they don't want any affiliated? What will happen? We don't have answers to that.

It's a little bit like this morning when I was going down the stairwell to get to the underground parking in my apartment complex, and the lights went out. The lights went out, and it went pitch black in the stairwell. I had to feel my way around. It's a good thing I actually have good visual memory to be able to get myself get down the stairwell safely and then go through the garage and find my vehicle in the dark.

It feels a little bit like we're all flailing in the dark right now trying to feel our way around as far as how this imaginary system that this legislation proposes is going to work. Right now, that's kind of what it is. It's all imaginary. This association doesn't exist. It's starting up from scratch. Yet they're supposed to be a part of it sometime very soon.

The package of information that we have in front of us as far as a new, centralized school board - that's all imaginary as well. We have no idea how that structure is actually going to be outlined, what it looks like, what the governance model is going to be. It's all imaginary. Like a child's storybook, right? Imaginary land. That's what it feels like, it's imaginary land.

I was actually at one of the schools, very privileged to go to one of the schools, and I apologize, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take a drink right now - of water, that is.

AN HON. MEMBER: We could get you something else if you'd like.

MS. PAON: Later. Later.

I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, I felt very privileged recently to go into a school within the Strait Regional School Board, and read to one of the classes there, and I read in one of the early French Immersion classes, and how much joy it brought to me to be able to actually participate with children and read with them, because one of my greatest joys in bringing up my son was reading, storytelling. I'm happy to say that he has become a lifelong reader. He's as voracious a reader as I am.

I had brought some storybooks with me in French, and the children were very excited, it's obvious their teacher takes a lot of time to be able to read to them, and in fact, when I arrived, they were all sitting very quietly at their desks and reading their own individual books.

Now, I asked them if they could actually come up and see the selection of books that I brought with me, and I asked them, which one would you like for me to read? They kind of hesitated a little bit, hemmed and hawed, and then they said, well, Madame Paon, I would really like for you to read this story to us. It was a story that the teacher had actually read to them several times, and yet they wanted it read again. The book was actually in English, and I'm so glad that the students asked me to read it, it's called *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*.

It was quite a moment for me, Mr. Speaker, that young children really understand the value in being able to stand up, in being able to be very forthright, to show bravery and strength and conviction; that even though someone is trying to take your rights away, someone is trying to oppress you, you will stand up for what you think is right even though it may not be the popular vote. It may not make you popular. In fact, you may have to stand up and say, you know, there's some things that I won't even agree with - maybe with the rest of my mates here. You may actually hear me screaming every once in a while, in the back Chamber - I'm French, I'm very passionate.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, as elected officials we all need to keep our focus on who it is that votes us in. It is the people of Nova Scotia that asks for us - in fact, should demand of us - to make certain that we are representative of what they want, of what they want to see as changes in this House, in the Legislature, which will affect Nova Scotians for gosh knows how much time to come.

It's 60-page legislation we're looking at here. I wrote my LSATS when I was doing my internship at the National Capital Commission years and years ago. I had thought about

going to law school - my father was very happy with thinking that he'd have a lawyer in the family. I probably should have gone, Mr. Speaker. It would have made it a lot easier to go through 60 pages within a couple of days. No, don't do it - my colleague here is telling me not to do it. It would have made it a lot easier to go through this legislation.

We really need more time, we need more time to be able to ingest all of this information, to be able to make responsible decisions, and to respond in a way that reflects what it is the people are asking of us. How on earth are we to make responsible choices when we only have such a short period of time to make decisions about legislation that will affect the very citizens who are the most vulnerable: our children? Do we not think that that was worth taking a bit more time to hash it out? I do, Mr. Speaker. We need to be given more time when legislation that is so vast comes across our desk.

[7:00 p.m.]

I want to say that in my case, and in the case of many young girls across the world - and again, today is International Women's Day - for the Acadians, for the Indigenous population, for the African Nova Scotians, for the Gaels, for the English, for the Scottish, and anyone else I have forgotten to mention here today, I want to tell you this: education equals freedom. It has given me my freedom.

If anybody has taken a look at my website, they will see a picture of me now and a picture from my first day of school, or maybe the second. I have a lunch can in one hand that has a big piece of string holding it together - it used to be my dad's lunch can - and a satchel in the other that used to belong to my sister. That's being held together with a piece of rope, too, because that's all we could afford, and I was happy to get it. Never would I complain once. In fact, I was very proud that I had the opportunity to take my sister's schoolbag to school.

Education is equal to freedom, Mr. Speaker, and democracy is equal to freedom. We should never permit, as members of this House, any aspect of our democracy to be stolen away - stolen away with a stroke of the pen.

Stand up. Stand up, Nova Scotia. Stand up and do something about it.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I am quite moved to respond to some of the comments that have been made in here. It has been emotional for me to listen to some of the criticisms today and the past week. If you look at me, you can see that I am African Nova Scotian, so I will speak to that.

I know the Opposition is opposed to the bill. They are against it. They bring some great arguments, but that doesn't make you a champion for the community. African Nova Scotians have heard this over the last number of years. Educators have heard it for years. It's a challenge we've had to face for a couple of hundred years.

You don't know what it's like to be me. I was a child in that education system. I've had great educators in the system. I am a product of some of those educators. (Applause)

Unlike many of my colleagues, in my community, I've had not one educator who looked like me, so that's a testament to those educators. My colleagues, my community members, many of them had at least one. I've never had one, so I will tell you that I am very proud of those educators who gave me some tools and provided me with the confidence to be who I am. There are many educators in my past who have, over the past couple of years since I've been in this position, been proud and disappointed in me. This is not a role I take lightly. There are people who came before me - Wayne Adams, Yvonne Atwell, Percy Paris - whose shoulders I stand on.

Mr. Speaker, I have been really challenged and bothered by what I say to some degree is a bit of - and I use this word cautiously - theatrics. I have people in the Chamber here who have called out my community, who have talked about those individuals in the community as I started with.

Take your blinders off and look at me. I am African Nova Scotian. I've taken this role and many people in the community know that I have taken this role to advocate on their behalf. Many of them have been around the table long before I got into this position, talking to me about those challenges that are within the system - a systemic system. We are looking at dealing with a systemic issue here.

When my colleagues in the Third Party were in power, they were privy to some of the challenges that my community had faced. One, for example, the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children - that issue sat around for years. Where was the advocacy then? I can point to many other issues, but I'm not going to stand here and give you a litany and a list of all those things.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind all that often the Opposition begins with: this government doesn't listen. Let's not try to divide things and put things into a different perspective, because when we talk about government, that includes every one of us sitting here. Government, whether you're the ruling Party or not, you're sitting here and you are making decisions as well.

Government has not listened. It came from their words: government has not listened. Government hasn't listened for years. The education system, those issues that everybody keeps raising, aren't new issues. In 2012, the NSTU went after the Opposition

for decisions they were making. This is not new and to try to paint it all as a current picture is wrong and disingenuous.

Mr. Speaker, we, all of us sitting here, all of us have a part to play in this play. I got involved in this because of some of the antics I've seen in this House for years. I vowed, and I will keep that vow, that I would not do this and become involved in this without sitting down and really consciously thinking about some of the decisions that I make. You may not agree with them, but do you know what? Isn't that what democracy is about?

You may not agree with all my decisions, and you know what? I've learned, especially from some of those earlier educators who have taught me, that we can learn to agree to disagree. Mr. Speaker, African Nova Scotians and those whose names have been thrown around this floor, and one used it in Law Amendments Committee, the gentleman stood up and spoke about my mother, spoke about how she encouraged him. He also didn't tell you that I also supported him. He also didn't tell you, and many others, that whenever they've come to me, I said I would ensure - I don't take this role lightly - I would ensure that I bring your concerns and your issues to the table.

That doesn't mean that I can fix them; I said I would bring them to the table. This is a group effort. So, Mr. Speaker, we've come a long way. There's still a lot of work to do, but that work will not get done if there is loaded language thrown around this floor not enabling us to try to come together and try to understand those issues that are really being laid out before us. That language isn't helping us at all.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are good people on all sides of this floor. I believe within my heart that there are individuals in here, from the short period of time that they've gotten to know me they know that, regardless of what political stripe you are, I will try to work with you. But I had to get up today because I had individuals make comments like they are tired.

The member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River mentioned she was tired. Imagine how I feel. Imagine how my community feels. You don't think I am tired, too? We've got to find a way to work better together. I can assure you that the only difference - and this is what I've said out there in the community to many people and I truly believe this right now, you may say whatever you want but I believe - the only difference between me, Percy Paris, or Wayne Adams is - now hear me, folks - I've got colleagues who are listening to me. I've got colleagues who are hearing me when I bring those community issues to them. That's the difference.

[7:15 p.m.]

Mr. Paris, Yvonne Atwell, and others - and I can go on even municipally - many of them have talked about the challenges of trying to be here. It's not an easy task when you're a visible minority, sitting in a place like this. The community doesn't trust you and within

this government - not just my Party - there are people who don't trust me either. They're wondering what my agenda is. Well, I am going to ask all of you, what's your motivation?

Mr. Speaker, there are challenges within the system that, as I've said out there in the communities, the true story, the true history of people of African descent, of Acadian, of Mi'kmaq, have to be told. We are sitting in a situation where systemically, if those stories aren't truly told to their fullest degree, we will continue to have this debate and play this game for the next 100 years. (Applause)

I ask you to please make your points, express your opposition, but I also ask you to stop acting like you are protectors of the community, because look what protecting us has done to us. We don't need protectors, we need allies. If you think that this approach is helpful, to be protectors for African Nova Scotians, you have much more learning and listening to do. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to leave you with a couple of quotes and then I'm going to take my seat, because as most people know around here, if I get going then I'm going to get too emotional, and too mouthy.

I'll leave you with a couple of quotes, I ask you to really consider what I've had to say today, and I'm talking to anybody, Mr. Speaker, who might be listening, anybody who is up in the gallery who thinks that there is only one way - I'm speaking to the unions, all of you. You have got to wake up because you talk about waking the giant. If we continue this, you guys haven't seen what I can be like.

Mr. Speaker, the first quote I will leave with you is by Dr. Mae Jemison, "Never be limited by other people's limited imaginations." The last quote I will leave with you is by James Baldwin, who said, "Those who say it can't be done are usually interrupted by others doing it." (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the passionate debate that's happened on the floor of the House today. I want to thank my colleagues for their thoughtful comments, for their arguments, and for allowing their passions to carry forth in their representations today, as it should be.

Education is something we should all be passionate about. This is about our kids; this is about our future. It's about a fundamental component of our society that, as many members today have said, lift those up from one end of the province to the other. I think fundamentally the disagreement revolves around an understanding on the role that governance and administration and the actual structure of the system plays in the system. I

think the arguments that have been presented opposite have suggested those things do not matter for the classroom, that the structure of the system does not matter for the classroom, that the administrative model does not matter for the classroom, that governance does not matter for the classroom.

We have a very different opinion on this side of the House. We do think that the structure matters. We do think that the system of governance matters, and we've actually seen how this system has played negatively in terms of student outcomes from one region to the next, in terms of how mental health supports are implemented from one region to the next. This, at the heart of it, is what we are trying to fix.

But again, this is not the be all and end all of everything this government is doing in terms of addressing the many challenges in our education system. We are moving forward with classroom conditions. We know that teachers' attentions have been pulled away from educating because of paper work, assessments, reporting - burdens that have been put on them. We do know that we have needed to upgrade the curriculum. The previous minister did a great job in terms of ensuring we had robotics; coding; brilliant labs; the courses that our graduates not only need to have to participate in our current work environment but also to participate in the jobs of the future.

The member for Pictou East has mentioned a lot of important things that need to happen in our education system, a lot of which has happened already under our government. We have expanded our SchoolsPlus program; we are now at about 70 per cent coverage across the province, 100 per cent in Cape Breton. That will continue over the course of the next two years to ensure that we have access to these important mental health supports.

We have implemented class caps and attendance policy. We restored funding. This is the first time that there's actually been an increase in teaching positions during a time of enrolment decreases. These are all important steps that we have taken as a government to work to address the challenges that we know our teachers are facing. For the first time in 20 years we're actually looking at the model of inclusion, the supports that are in place. We know that we have asked our teachers to take on an impossible task in some cases, to do all that is required to give all our students the attention and care and challenge that they need to be successful.

I do look forward to having the Commission on Inclusive Education Report that will be provided to government by the end of this month. I think that will be something that we will enjoy talking about in this House. We had mentioned around funding and what funding will look like. Actually, eliminating the regional structure in our education system allows us to look at funding in a brand-new way. We won't be tied to the Hogg funding formula, which is only based on enrolment. We'll actually be able to do what we'd like and what's needed from a needs-based perspective in terms of how we fund education. There's great opportunities there as well.

I do want to recognize that change is hard. It's not only Dr. Glaze that has challenged us to change in a number of different ways. This was also part of the Freeman Report. I think that's important. I know the member for Pictou East had suggested that report was put on a shelf, but in fact this administrative review came from the Freeman Report; that was a recommendation. In the thousands of submissions that were actually provided to Myra Freeman and her team, there were consistent themes there around administrators, their role in the union, that conflict of interest; that was a recommendation that came from the Myra Freeman report. This is the second independent report that has suggested that that's actually important for our schools and for the system and for our kids.

Also, the theme of structure and board governance was a consistent point of feedback for many Nova Scotians. I know it's easy for all of us to assume that the feedback we're receiving from Nova Scotians that is consistent with our beliefs is reflective of the whole, but of course, we live in a province of a million people. Even in the teaching workforce, there are 9,300 people. There's not necessarily a consensus on all these points. There's disagreement.

I think the way that we talk about the disagreement and actually engage in productive public discourse is important in terms of moving forward even through periods of conflict and tension. We really do believe that these changes will help us implement other changes that are important for our students and their success. We really do believe that these changes will have a positive impact on the lives of kids in this province. I think that that will be experienced over time.

But at the end of the day, we are held accountable. This is a democratic institution, and Nova Scotians will have their say in terms of whether we were successful in this endeavour or not.

With those short words, I will move passage of third reading of Bill No. 72.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 72.

There has been a call for a recorded vote. We will ring the bells until the Whips are satisfied.

[7:26 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll now proceed with the recorded vote on Bill No. 72, the Education Reform Act.

I'll just remind all members to remain completely silent, as well as our guests in the gallery, while the Clerks record your vote. When your name is called please stand tall and state clearly "Yea" or "Nay".

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[7:35 p.m.]

YEAS

Mr. Churchill
Mr. Furey
Ms. Regan
Mr. MacLellan
Mr. McNeil
Ms. Casey
Mr. Glavine
Mr. Delorey
Mr. Colwell
Ms. Miller
Mr. Kousoulis
Mr. Porter
Mr. Gordon Wilson
Mr. Hines
Ms. Diab
Mr. Ince
Mr. Rankin
Mr. Mombourquette
Ms. Arab
Mr. Maguire
Mr. MacKay
Mr. Jessome
Ms. Lohnes-Croft
Ms. DiCostanzo
Mr. Irving

NAYS

Mr. MacMaster
Mr. MacLeod
Mr. Dunn
Mr. Bain
Mr. d'Entremont
Mr. David Wilson
Mr. Burrill
Ms. Zann
Ms. Roberts
Ms. Leblanc
Ms. Martin
Ms. Chender
Ms. Smith-McCrossin
Ms. Paon
Mr. Houston
Ms. Adams
Mr. Lohr
Mr. Johns
Ms. Masland
Mr. Halman
Mr. Harrison

THE CLERK: For, 25. Against, 21.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that concludes government business for today. I move that the House do rise to meet again tomorrow, Friday, March 9, 2018, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

After the daily routine and QP, we'll move to second reading of Bill No. 76, the Mineral Resources Act, and Bill No. 79, the Property Valuation Services Corporation Act.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to adjourn to meet tomorrow Friday, March 9th, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 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 9:00 a.m.

[The House rose at 7:38 p.m.]

RESOLUTION NO. 1028

By: Hon. David Wilson (Sackville-Cobequid)

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

Whereas Dave Wright has served as Halifax Regional School Board member for District 8 since 2012 representing residents from Lower Sackville to Upper Sackville; and

Whereas Dave is from and still lives in Sackville, has attended the local schools that he represents, and is well known in the community; and

Whereas residents have received prompt and efficient support from Dave Wright as they navigated the education system in search of the best resources that any parent would want for their child;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize the valuable contributions that Dave Wright has made to the quality of education in Sackville as their elected school board member.