



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy**

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### First Session

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2018**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2018**

**Sixty-third General Assembly**

**First Session**

**1:00 P.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Kevin Murphy

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Mr. Chuck Porter, Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we begin the daily routine, the topic for late debate, as submitted by the honourable member for Clare-Digby, is:

Therefore be it resolved that the investment of \$120 million in improving high-speed Internet service will connect more homes and businesses, enhance service for the underserved communities, enhance rural economies, and create more jobs for Nova Scotians.

That is late debate, normally at 5:30 p.m., the moment of interruption, and on that note, I'll recognize the honourable Government House Leader on a procedural note.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the government side would like to pursue this late debate on broadband, we want to move that and ensure that we do that today. However, given that the Opposition has time to do their, I'm sure, riveting responses to our budget - very riveting (Interruption) I'm on a bad start.

Given the fact that we want to ensure that the esteemed honourable members across the way are given their full time, Mr. Speaker, we would like to move by unanimous consent of the House that the late debate begin after the Opposition Parties have done their Budget Reply in entirety.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Thank you very much.

### **PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

### **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

### **TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

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

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a copy of the additional appropriations for 2017-18.

MR. SPEAKER: The document is tabled.

As Speaker of the House of Assembly and Chair of the House of Assembly Management Commission, I'm pleased to table the House of Assembly Management Commission Annual Report for the calendar year 2017. This report was prepared pursuant to Section 11(1) of the House of Assembly Management Commission Act.

The report is tabled.

### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, may I please make an introduction before reading my statement?

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MR. INCE: As we all know, every person is entitled to human rights without discrimination. As we mark the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is a day for people around the world to renew their stand against racism, discrimination, prejudice, and related intolerance in all its forms, African

Nova Scotia Affairs and the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission are presenting a free lecture for the public tonight at Mount Saint Vincent University with prominent anti-racism speaker, author, and educator, Tim Wise.

Mr. Wise has been addressing audiences internationally for the past 25 years. I would ask that all members please join me in welcoming Mr. Wise to our great province, who is in the gallery opposite to me. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to add that Mr. Wise said he and his family are ready to move from the United States and come here. (Applause) He is a doctor by the way.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs has the floor.

MR. INCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nova Scotia strives to be an acknowledged leader in Canada as a place where cultural identity, expression, and economy prosper. Nova Scotia's culture is rich and varied reflecting the diversity and heritage of all our people and a strong sense of its past. Standing here speaking about our diverse province, I feel a deep sense of pride. However, systemic racism and discrimination are still faced by too many Nova Scotians today. I know first-hand the hurt that racism and discrimination has caused.

African Nova Scotians have a long, deep, and complex history in our province. It is a history of many diverse groups, such as the Black Loyalists, Jamaican maroons, Caribbean workers to Sydney, Black refugees, enslaved persons, and newcomers from the African diaspora. African Nova Scotians have called Nova Scotia home for over 400 years. Our communities are richer and stronger because of the ingenuity, resilience, hard work, and leadership of African Nova Scotians.

Government has committed to addressing the systemic racism and discrimination the African Nova Scotians and all our communities have faced for generations. Yesterday, as part of the provincial budget, we committed to strengthening the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs to help better meet the needs of African Nova Scotians, extend its reach into every corner of the province, and help it better address issues specific to the African Nova Scotian community.

Strengthening the Offices of African Nova Scotian Affairs, Gaelic Affairs, Acadian Affairs and Francophonie was a commitment made in the Culture Action Plan. Yesterday, we took a step forward in fulfilment of this commitment, and before I continue, I want to take a moment to thank the staff of these offices for their passion, commitment, and hard work. They play an important role in the work across government to ensure that the needs and interests of all three of these first cultures are reflected in the government policy, programs, and services.



I am proud to stand here today and say that our government is taking a responsible and committed role in addressing issues of systemic racism that affect African Nova Scotians. We are working to help African Nova Scotians in five communities to get title to their lands, as many of you are aware. Generations of African Nova Scotians were denied this right in Nova Scotia and around the world. We are correcting this historic wrong.

We are the first government to issue an apology to the victims of the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children and create a restorative inquiry. We know the wrongs of the past can never be undone but we can work together, and I mean all of us together, to make it a better place for our children and the next generation. (Applause)

Nova Scotia is the only jurisdiction in Canada that has an office dedicated to the issues and the priorities of African Canadians. This is something all of us should be proud of and can be proud of. We have created a deputy ministers' table to advance the work related to the issues faced by African Nova Scotians. They are guided by the pillars of the Decade for People of African Descent, which are recognition, development and justice.

[1:15 p.m.]

Our government is committed to ensuring all Nova Scotians see themselves in the institutions that provide important services to our province. In 2017, three judges of African descent, and Nova Scotia's first Mi'kmaq female judge, were appointed to the Provincial Court and Family Court. It is a step forward, but we have more work to do and we remain committed. We have advanced the Graduate to Opportunity program which provides support for the hiring of recent grads, and are encouraging businesses to hire diverse graduates, including those from the African Nova Scotia communities.

We have renewed our focus on employment equity, including representation of African Nova Scotians at all levels of the Public Service. Earlier this month, Nova Scotia was recognized as one of Canada's best diversity employers in 2018. This honour is thanks to our employees, who are determined to make our workplace more diverse and inclusive. We are rolling out programs under a four-year strategy on diversity and inclusion, like creating diverse hiring panels, establishing designated positions, designing programs to support career advancement, developing a census to collect more detailed demographics, strengthening our employee networks, and so much more.

There is much more work to be done, but I can stand here and say with confidence that these actions are making a difference in the lives of African Nova Scotians. Looking ahead, we remain steadfast in our commitment. Nova Scotia was the founding member of the non-partisan Canadian Caucus of Black Parliamentarians. This summer, on behalf of my community, and the Government of Nova Scotia, I will host this meeting again in this province.

In Nova Scotia, we will continue to work on the issues and challenges faced by African Nova Scotians. We are also developing a plan to mark the United Nations International Decade for Persons of African Descent. The strategy and the plan we are developing for the decade will further advance our work in addressing systemic racism, injustice, and discrimination. We expect to be in a position to share this plan this Spring.

This plan will also provide us with an additional opportunity to highlight and celebrate the contributions of persons of African descent whether it is the work of Dr. Clotilda Yakimchuk of Whitney Pier, who was the first Black graduate of Nova Scotia Hospital School of Nursing, and is a role model, mentor, and activist in our community. Or Viola Desmond.

Our work is making a difference in breaking down centuries of systemic racism. Mr. Speaker, eliminating racism from society takes a collective effort. It requires all of us - every Nova Scotian - to put aside our differences, to acknowledge the existence of racism and its impacts, and work together to address and eliminate it. Nova Scotia will only be the best province it can be if we work together to ensure all Nova Scotians are treated with dignity, equality, and respect while having access to the opportunities our province has to offer.

Today, as we mark International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I would ask each Nova Scotian to reflect on how we can work together for positive change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the minister for providing his statement well in advance.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I want to welcome Mr. Wise to the Nova Scotia Legislature and thank him in advance for his lecture tonight. As the minister said, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year's theme is promoting tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was born in tragedy. On March 21, 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, against the apartheid "pass laws". Proclaiming the day in 1966, the United Nations General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, this seems like a simple idea. Of course we should promote tolerance and have respect for diversity. Of course we should eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. But, as the minister said, it is not a simple thing to undo the centuries of

racism that plagued Nova Scotia and many other places. It is up to each and every one of us to stand up and speak up against racial prejudice and intolerant attitudes.

As the minister said in a recent debate, we must be allies of people and communities who face racism. Collectively we must all make the struggle against racism a priority in our communities, in our province, and in our daily interactions. As Reverend Desmond Tutu once said: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

Just as we know that racial and cultural diversity makes our province stronger and better, we also understand that an insensitive joke, a casual racial comment, or an unwillingness to treat another person as an equal diminishes all of us.

I want to echo the thanks of the minister to the dedicated public servants who are working so hard to make change. They are truly making a difference and making Nova Scotia a better place.

We have come a long way as a province, but there is definitely a long way to go. The more progress we make in eliminating racial discrimination in our province, the more likely we are to attract immigrants. They must truly feel welcome in order to stay. By not only promoting but by demonstrating that our province treats people of all races with dignity, equality, and respect, we will give immigrants confidence that they will find a safe and supportive home in Nova Scotia regardless of their race. They will not simply experience tolerance, but inclusion, and they will know they have access to every opportunity and they will make contributions that will strengthen the fabric of Nova Scotia, our culture, and our economy.

On International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I ask each Nova Scotian to think about how they could be more inclusive, and to take action to work for positive change. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for sharing his remarks.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination I want to share with the House a fresh clarity in my understanding of racism, specifically that racism does not begin with attitudes about members of an identifiable group but, rather, it begins with economic oppression.

I am a fan of podcasts - perhaps not surprising, given that I worked for so long in radio - and podcasts are basically radio whenever you want to listen to it. I binge-listened

to an excellent series called *Seeing White* by the Center for Documentary Studies this January.

It is clear that race is not a biological fact. The difference in the colour of our skin tells us no more about our abilities or our character than differences in our height or our shoe size or our eye colour.

The first time Black people were described as such was in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> Century. Africa is, of course, the cradle of all civilization and many different and distinct cultures. But in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> Century, Black people were described as a group by a chronicler of a slave auction. The writer was paid by the enslaver. Prejudice rationalizes and justifies oppression.

How could one enslave people without believing them inferior? In Canada, how could we take the land of Indigenous people without believing them inferior? In Nova Scotia, how could we give Black Loyalists poor rocky land far from good ports without believing them inferior? Attitudes and prejudice justify the unequal treatment. Then in a perpetual, perverse loop, some use poor economic and social outcomes as evidence that, see, the prejudice is justified.

On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we must challenge attitudes in our society that perpetuate inequality. That is work for all of us. That work will be woefully inadequate if we do not change the economic, social, and legal policies that structure the lives and opportunities of African Nova Scotians, Mi'kmaq people, and other people of colour in our province.

Thank you to the many people and organizations both within and outside government and in communities across Nova Scotia who are engaged in that work. (Applause)

#### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): Before I begin my motion, I just want to say thank you to the members who just spoke so eloquently and passionately, and unified as a common voice for this House, which doesn't always happen. I wanted to tell those members how proud I am to stand with you all in this House as we continue to move this province forward to be all it can be. (Applause)

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 1044**

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

Whereas March 21<sup>st</sup> is the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day for people around the world to take a stand against racism, discrimination, prejudice, and related intolerance in all its forms; and

Whereas the Government of Nova Scotia is committed to addressing systemic racism and discrimination and is actively working across government to achieve this goal; and

Whereas Nova Scotia will only be the best province it can be if we work together to eliminate racism and discrimination and to ensure all Nova Scotians are treated with dignity, equality, and respect while having access to all the opportunities that this great province has to offer;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly recognize March 21, 2018, as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in the Province of Nova Scotia and encourage all Nova Scotians to put aside our differences to acknowledge the existence of racism and its impacts and to work together to eliminate it.

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 Health and Wellness.

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Before my notice of motion, may I make an introduction?

MR. SPEAKER: Permission granted.

MR. DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw the members' attention to the east gallery to acknowledge Crystal Tobin Legere, the provincial manager of Vision Loss Rehabilitation in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

Crystal, if you could rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

[1:30 p.m.]

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

**RESOLUTION NO. 1045**

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

Whereas in 1918 the Canadian National Institute for the Blind was founded by veterans to support those who were blinded in World War I and the Halifax Explosion; and

Whereas the Canadian National Institute for the Blind has evolved, creating programs and advocating to change the lives of all people who are blind or partially sighted; and

Whereas the Canadian National Institute for the Blind has reached a milestone of a century of providing community-based support for people with sight loss;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize March 21, 2018, as the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1046**

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

Whereas barriers continue to exist that prevent many Nova Scotians from accessing programs, services, information, and infrastructure across the province - barriers we have committed to eliminating through the Accessibility Act; and

Whereas a dedicated group of 12 highly-motivated and highly-experienced individuals have come forward to form the province's first Accessibility Advisory Board and begin the important task of developing a roadmap for how we will achieve our goal of a barrier-free Nova Scotia by 2030; and

Whereas this dedicated group, representing people with different disabilities from across the province, met for the very first time last week in what I am told was a very productive and empowering meeting;

Therefore be it resolved that we all join together to congratulate the newly-appointed chair, Douglas Foster, and the remaining board members on their appointment to the Accessibility Advisory Board, and thank them for lending their expertise to helping us achieve a barrier-free Nova Scotia.

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 Health and Wellness.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 1047**

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

Whereas approximately 45,000 Canadians have Down syndrome; and

Whereas people with Down syndrome lead fulfilling lives as contributing members of our communities; and

Whereas World Down Syndrome Day celebrates the important contributions that people with Down Syndrome make in our communities and our province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize today, March 21, 2018, as World Down Syndrome Day.

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

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

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Immigration.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 1048**

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

Whereas today, March 21<sup>st</sup>, is the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day for us in Nova Scotia to reaffirm our focus on creating welcoming communities for the many new residents we welcome each year through our immigration initiatives; and

Whereas Nova Scotia is fortunate to have many new people from diverse cultures joining our communities every day and studying at our schools, and we are also fortunate to have exceptional settlement partners throughout the province who work tirelessly every day to ensure that newcomers are welcomed and to help break down any barriers that may exist to ensuring our new citizens adapt to life here; and

Whereas the Government of Nova Scotia is committed to ensuring that all newcomers who choose to live in our great province feel welcomed and respected, while having access to all the opportunities Nova Scotia has to offer them, and that in turn all Nova Scotians understand and appreciate the opportunities that newcomers bring us;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking our settlement partners today and every day for their essential role and work in strengthening our province through immigration and that all Nova Scotians stand united to ensure our province welcomes all newcomers in a manner that is free from racism, intolerance, discrimination, and judgment.

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 Natural Resources.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 1049**

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

Whereas in 2012, the United Day of Forests has been observed annually on March 21<sup>st</sup> to raise awareness of the importance of forests to people and their vital role in poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, and food security; and

Whereas around 1.6 billion people, including more than 2,000 indigenous cultures, depend on forests for their livelihoods, medicines, fuel, food, and shelter; and

Whereas this global celebration of forests provides a platform to raise awareness of the importance of all types of woodlands and trees, and celebrate the ways in which they sustain and protect us;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House recognize the United Nations Day of Forests and that forests provide important value to Nova Scotia's economy, our society, and the environment that sustains life.

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 BILLS**

**Bill No. 92 - Entitled an Act to Implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (Ms. Lenore Zann)**

**Bill No. 93 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 441 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Statistics Act. (Ms. Claudia Chender)**

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 West.

**WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY:  
POSITIVE CHANGES - ENCOURAGE**

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, in 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared March 21<sup>st</sup> as World Down Syndrome Day. The world comes together on this date to raise public awareness and create a single global voice for advocating for the rights, inclusion, and well-being of people with Down syndrome. It is so important to celebrate the meaningful contributions that people with Down syndrome make in our community and society each and every single day.

We need to continue to empower people with Down syndrome and reach out to stakeholders to make sure they understand, support, and promote inclusiveness and the right to all opportunities.

As public figures, it is central for us to encourage further positive change and celebrate the local volunteers who aid in making these changes.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**INTL. DAY ELIM. OF RACIAL DISCRIM.:  
STREET CHECKS - CEASE AND DESIST**

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: As I rise today on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we must all be attentive to the ways in which regressive policies continue to affect the daily lives of racialized Nova Scotians.

One such policy is street checks, where an innocent individual's data is collected, kept, and shared with various authoritative bureaus. We have seen the numbers. We have

heard from the community members and leaders. We have even heard from officers. We know that this practice discriminately targets racialized persons. This is nothing short of a constitutional violation.

The voices of those affected have been relentless and amplified enough for government to initiate a review on street checks last year. Yet while the review process is ongoing, so, too, is the practice. This government is still justifying the continuation of this discriminative policy while an outside analyst lays it out beneath a microscope.

It's my view and that of many others that if a practice carries even a whiff of constitutional violation, it should be halted immediately. Based on this government's commitment to racial equality, I would expect nothing less than a cease and desist on street checks.

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

**CASTLE ROCK (EAST CHESTER):  
OPEN HIKE (24 MAR. 2018) - CONGRATS.**

MR. HUGH MACKAY: I rise to congratulate the Municipality of the District of Chester for their acquisition of the spectacular hiking district known as Castle Rock in East Chester.

The hike and view have been well known to residents of the area, but this knowledge could not be shared with everyone because Castle Rock was previously on private land. Now the Municipality of Chester owns the land, and the recreation department has been busy marking the trails and paths leading to a spectacular, panoramic view of Mahone Bay. Hikers will be able to see all the way across to Blue Rocks outside Lunenburg on a clear day.

The municipality is planning an inaugural open hike day this coming Saturday, March 24<sup>th</sup>. Municipal staff will be on hand to provide hikers with information and offer guided hikes through the trails to the top of Castle Rock.

I invite the members of this House to join me for this inaugural walk and to congratulate the Municipality of the District of Chester on this special new addition to their active living programs.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**DEER TICKS: GROWING PROBLEM - AWARENESS**

HON. PAT DUNN: Although Spring has just begun, Nova Scotians should not have their guard down to the potential threat of deer ticks. Ticks are a threat year round.

When the temperature is four degrees Celsius or higher, ticks will be on the move looking for a host regardless of the amount of snow on the ground.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, in partnership with Merck Animal Health, has declared March as National Tick Awareness Month. May is Lyme Disease Awareness Month worldwide, a good time for everyone to review preventive measures which can be taken against this steadily growing problem. There is potential for 2018 to be a bad year for ticks and vector-borne diseases due to the relatively mild winter and increasing tick population.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**SIMMONDS, DEAN: COMMANDER, HFX. REG. POLICE - LEADERSHIP**

MS. LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate and recognize Inspector Dean Simmonds, the commander of the Central Division of the Halifax Regional Police. He was promoted to that position, the highest position ever attained by an African Nova Scotian within Halifax Regional Police, last September. From residents and community leaders, I have only heard very good reviews.

Inspector Simmonds spoke at Cornwallis Street Baptist Church on Sunday at the special annual service to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. It was inspiring to hear him say with such confidence that we all have a calling to do good in our world in some way. It was humbling for me to hear him share his experience as a Black man, getting up each morning and putting on a metaphorical suit of armour in anticipation of that day's onslaught of racially motivated insults, assumptions, and small acts of prejudice.

I thank him for his leadership and for speaking the truth.

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

**INTL. DAY ELIM. OF RACIAL DISCRIM.: AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIANS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES - PROMOTE**

MR. BEN JESSOME: I would just like to acknowledge and pay gratitude to all the members in the House who will and who have made remarks marking today as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Having grown up in a community like Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, I feel extremely fortunate to have been raised surrounded by African Nova Scotians in particular. We were home to Upper Hammonds Plains, one of the oldest Black communities in our province. Lucasville more recently had their historic boundaries solidified as an area within our municipality.

[1:45 p.m.]

I think beyond that, what I'd just like to say while I have time is that we, as leaders and as adults, need to make a conscious effort, an intentional effort, to ensure that we create policy and create opportunities for leaders in our communities, Black leaders in our communities, to be at the helm so that our children can see themselves in those roles at some point in time.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**MAILLET, MARC: PROMOTING FRANCOPHONE CULTURE - THANKS**

MR. TIM HALMAN: Merci, Monsieur le Président. La promotion de la francophonie et la culture francophone sont des sujets que je tiens à cœur. C'est pourquoi des gens tel que Marc Maillet m'impressionne.

Son travail chez Maillet Institut de Taekwondo ainsi que la création d'un programme parascolaire assure que son influence continue dans la communauté.

Mr. Speaker, for students to be able to receive homework help, take fitness classes, play games, and learn Taekwondo, all in French, this is a CSAP parent's dream.

I would ask all members of this House to thank Marc Maillet for his continued promotion of both the French language and francophone culture and for keeping our children active and engaged.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**INTL. DAY ELIM. OF RACIAL DISCRIM.  
- CONTRIBUTIONS OF RACIALIZED COM. - RECOGNIZE**

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, on this day, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I rise to recognize the historical Black communities in my own constituency of Dartmouth South.

In one of the many waves of Black immigration to Halifax, Loyalists from Chesapeake Bay arrived in Dartmouth after the War of 1812 and settled along parts of Crichton Avenue, Prince Albert Road, Park Avenue, and Victoria Road. Today, over 200 years later, some small pockets of these communities continue to occupy the same neighbourhoods.

While the presence in history of Black communities like North Preston, East Preston, Cherrybrook are widely known, the communities and legacies of these early settlers are not. Many have been forced to move due to the systemic racism, bureaucratic

punishments, and economic oppression that are and have been endemic in our institutions, including a constituent of mine who just recently was required to sell her family home after her mother passed away and she couldn't afford to pay an outstanding home improvement debt to the Department of Community Services.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to a time when we recognize, support, and celebrate the legacies and accomplishments of all our racialized communities, not just on this day but every day.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**GABR, GHADA: OWNER, SHOPPERS DRUG (LACEWOOD):  
DIVERSE WORKPLACE - COMMEND**

MS. RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I would like to recognize an exceptional woman who is fostering diversity and inclusion in my riding. Ghada Gabr is the owner of Shoppers Drug Mart on Lacewood Drive. Some of her employees are from Russia, China, Pakistan, as well as Syria, making it one of the most diverse stores in Halifax.

As an immigrant and pharmacist, Ghada is committed to welcoming newcomers to Clayton Park West. She works with ISANS to help internationally trained pharmacists prepared to work in Canada and offers newcomers work placements in her store. Ghada was recently named one of the top 25 immigrants in the Maritimes by My Halifax Experience magazine for her contributions to the community.

Mr. Speaker, racism and intolerance has no place in Nova Scotia. I ask the members of this House of Assembly to join me in commending Ghada for her leadership in fostering a more diverse and inclusive society.

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

**COLCHESTER HISTOREUM HERITAGE NIGHT:  
AWARDS RECIPIENTS - HONOUR**

MR. LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, I previously mentioned the importance of preserving history, and I'd like to mention several individuals who were recently honoured for helping to do just that.

Recipients of Heritage Awards at the recent Colchester Historeum Heritage Night included Nan Harvey, Historeum archivist, recognized for achievements in historic activity; Francis Collins and Nevin Jackson, who gathered information about the history of Black hockey players in Colchester County; Janet Maybee, who researched the Halifax

Explosion and Colchester County's contribution to relief efforts; and finally, to Linda and James Finnie, accepting on behalf of the Colchester Highland Games Society.

This award in recognition of the First Annual Colchester Highland Games and Gathering in 2017 is proof that history is not static but constantly in the making and we must do what we can to ensure that this is not lost.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston-Dartmouth.

**INTL. DAY ELIM. OF RACIAL DISCRIM.:  
ONGOING STRUGGLE - SUPPORT**

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which is held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March each year to remind us of the importance of the ongoing struggle to eliminate racism in our province and our country. This year's theme of promoting tolerance, inclusion, unity and respect for diversity in the context of combating racial discrimination is an important reminder that there is still work to do in all our communities.

I call on all members of this House to join me and support many groups and individuals that are working to eliminate racism and discrimination, not just on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, but each and every day.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**ANNAPOLIS VALLEY: EXPEDIA.CA TOP 10 - VISIT**

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I've always felt that one of the best places in the world to live and experience the beauty of Spring is in the Annapolis Valley and now the famous travel website Expedia.ca agrees with me.

On March 7, 2018, a blog post on the website entitled "Best Places to Experience Spring in Canada" lists the Annapolis Valley as one of the top 10. The author, Carolyn Albee, stated that travelling the roads through the Valley to view the apple orchards as they are just beginning to bloom is a highlight. She also mentions the Apple Blossom Festival, which this year runs May 23<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, and in particular, the Grand Street Parade on Saturday, May 26<sup>th</sup>.

I invite all my colleagues and their families to beautiful downtown Kentville that weekend, or any time, to experience one of the top 10 places in Canada to be in in the Spring.

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

**INTL. DAY ELIM. OF RACIAL DISCRIM.:  
CULTURAL DIVERSITY - GRATEFUL**

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was established by the United Nations in 1966. As the UN General Assembly continues to call on the international community to fight racism globally, we as a province have a very important role locally. It is up to us to make sure the message of racial equality is being received by every Nova Scotian. As we speak, in Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie, there are numerous teachers, officers, community members, parents, and students alike that are being very vocal about the absolute rejection of racism, and I couldn't be prouder or more grateful.

This province is growing faster than it has in years, thanks in part to an increase in the number of people arriving from outside the country. We boast a wide variety of different ethnic groups from all over the world, and we are better for it. Cultural diversity is one of Nova Scotia's greatest strengths, and I commend all who take time to observe the importance of today.

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

**YURCHESYN, KATHLEEN (SYDNEY RIVER):  
CEO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - CONGRATS.**

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Kathleen Yurchesyn from Sydney River on her recent appointment as the Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce new chief executive officer.

The NextGen Leadership Society, in connection with the Cape Breton Partnership, honoured Kathleen in December with a Vital Cape Breton Excellence Award. She was one of five people recognized in the employee category. The Chamber calls Kathleen a progressive and strategic thinker who will bring a strong voice to the Chamber.

I stand today to wish Kathleen the very best of luck as she embarks on her position with the Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce. I am confident that she will bring new enthusiasm to move the Chamber in a strong direction.

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

**BEECHVILLE, ENCROACHMENT:  
RACIALLY MOTIVATED - ACKNOWLEDGE**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, today on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I rise to recognize the resilient community of Beechville, formerly Refugee Hill, and the families from this historic community - a



community that was once much larger, stretching from the Armdale roundabout to about the Tantallon area.

This rocky land was granted to former slaves who fought in the war of 1812, but unfortunately over time experienced geographic encroachment, and economic depression. There can be no other reason for this than racial considerations with predominantly white settlers expanding across Halifax to what was once considered marginal land.

On this day I want to acknowledge in this House this historical injustice and as the provincial representative for Beechville, I will continue to work with the community, African Nova Scotian Affairs, and Communities, Culture and Heritage, to support protecting lands ostensibly owned by the Government of Nova Scotia for what the community wants to see happen. I will also continue to call on HRM to rename the Lakeside Industrial Park to the Beechville Industrial Park. I thank council for passing a motion to consider this last September.

These are merely steps forward, but let's do what we can to acknowledge discrimination in order to ultimately eliminate it in Nova Scotia.

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

#### **WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY - CELEBRATE/ADVOCATE**

MS. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, on this World Down Syndrome Day, I rise to celebrate and recognize the many meaningful contributions that people with Down syndrome bring to our communities and to our lives.

The challenge to educate and inform those with negative attitudes and lack of information is ongoing and essential. We must take on this challenge and become active advocates. Today many of us are wearing the hashtag Lots of Socks, and we will take to social media with our hashtags like What I Bring To My Community and World Down Syndrome Day 18.

As leaders in our communities, we must go above just using hashtags. We must do all that we can do to support and advocate for individuals' rights and opportunities. We must commit to effecting real change.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

#### **WHYNOT, NATHAN: OWNER, WALT'S LAUNDRY - BEST WISHES**

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Today on World Down Syndrome Day, I wish to honour a young man from my home town of Mahone Bay, Nathan Wynot.

Nathan was born 27 years ago, just days before my second son Sam was born. Nathan grew up with my son and his peers in our local schools and in our community, where he thrived.

Recently, Nathan has moved to Wolfville, where he lives in a small options home, independently, and has started his own business, Walt's Laundry, named after his idol Walt Disney. Through the development of the trust of his peers and social interactions, Nathan's progress has kept on going.

I wish that all members of this House of Assembly join me in wishing Nathan the best of luck with his business, Walt's Laundry, and much success in the future.

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

### **SOCIAL WORK MONTH (MARCH): ADVOCACY - THANKS**

MS. ALANA PAON: March is Social Work Month in Canada, where we recognize the work of social workers in society. When things are most challenging in our lives, it is often a social worker who steps in and brings order to chaos.

Social workers are trained and qualified individuals offering strategies that empower us to make changes in our lives. The theme of this year's Social Work Month is Bringing Change to Life.

In front-line community-building policy, advocacy, and research roles, social workers are social justice professionals, outspoken advocates for the people and communities they serve. They are champions for positive change.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask all members of this House to join me in thanking social workers for their role in helping to make society healthier and more positive and seem a bit more bearable for some.

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

### **INTL. DAY ELIM. OF RACIAL DISCRIM.: UNIFOR - DIVERSITY**

MS. LENORE ZANN: I would like to rise to my feet today and acknowledge the International Day to Eliminate Racial Discrimination.

On that note, I want to thank Unifor for inviting me and my colleague from Cape Breton to come and speak to the members today. It was wonderful to see so many faces of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and races in the room, and to talk about a day when there

will be more such diversity within the walls of government, both here in the Chamber and also throughout the system.

Without changing the systemic racism that is in our society, we can't move forward, but we look forward to the day when we can do that.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**KINGS CO. BURIAL GROUND CARE SOC.: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

MR. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the important work of volunteers of the Kings County Burial Ground Care Society.

Since 2001, the conscientious, caring, and committed volunteers of this group have generously given of their time and energy to research and locate neglected grave sites. They then reclaim, repair, rejuvenate, and sometimes if required, re-erect gravestones throughout Kings County.

I ask all my colleagues in the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly to join me in thanking the Kings County Burial Ground Care Society including current members Lana Ashby, John Nichols, JoAnne Bezanson, Richard Skinner, Roberta Bishop, Kim Troop, Patti O'Neill, Carmen Legge, Anne Strong, Wayne Baltzer, Janet Herbin, Marshall Rand, Bev Huntley, and Don Tupper for their commitment to the history of our community and their deep respect for those who are no longer with us.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount with 30 seconds.

**BAGS OF LOVE: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: I rise today to salute a handful of senior ladies with a passion for quilting who decided to use their talents to help child protective services in our community.

They make bags of love for children taken into foster care. Each bag contains a homemade quilt, stuffed toys, books, and other comfort items for the child. Sometimes the ladies make full-sized quilts to help families and victims of fire. This is what community is all about - people supporting others with love.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank these ladies for their hard work plus the love they put into each bag for special children who need this love.

[2:00 p.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

### **ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

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

#### **PREM. - OFFSHORE ROYALTIES: SPENDING APPROVAL - EXPLAIN**

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Last week the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board announced that, after a windfall from an offshore-royalties dispute, there would be significant unbudgeted spending in the dying days of the fiscal year. This spending was approved without the scrutiny or approval of the Legislative Assembly.

Once upon a time, though, when this Premier was the Leader of the Third Party, a future Minister of Finance and Treasury Board introduced a bill that would have prohibited this type of manoeuvre. Specifically, it would have required that any sum supplemental to those approved in the budget must be referred to the House for debate.

I know this bill was a few years ago, but could the Premier explain his change of heart and why he now feels that bringing supplemental spending to this House is not necessary?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all Nova Scotians for giving us the opportunity of a second majority government in the Province of Nova Scotia. I want to thank them for continuing to show confidence in our government. I want to thank those public servants, who, over successive governments, continue to work hard on behalf of our province to make sure that we were treated fairly when it came to the offshore revenue.

That revenue came in, and we identified serious priorities. Members opposite have continued to ask us about high-speed Internet. We're very proud of the fact that we have the trust that will be spent over a number of years that will leverage both federal and private sector money to actually deal with the very issue that has been here for far too long.

The issues that we have invested in - many of them have asked us about more health care providers and treating doctors more fairly. Part of that money was used for that. We have had lots of debate in this House about these issues, and we listened to you.

MS. MACFARLANE: As the old saying goes, I think where you stand depends on where you sit.

As I said earlier, the windfall came from the resolution of a dispute related to offshore royalties. We know the award is expected to be in the range of \$250 million, but

beyond that, little information has been provided as to the nature of the contents of this settlement.

Despite many requests outside of this Chamber, the Premier has declined to offer any additional detail. Will the Premier please provide this House with additional detail on the royalty settlement and allow members to reach their own conclusions regarding the Province's success in this arbitration?

THE PREMIER: She stands in opposition of everything, and we stand with Nova Scotians.

The reality of it is, if she goes back to the offshore agreement that was negotiated decades ago, there was arbitration in that. If the two parties had disputes, that would go to the arbitrator, who would then work their way through this. This has been an ongoing process. An independent arbitrator, picked long ago when the agreement was signed, ruled on behalf of the people of Nova Scotia.

She should celebrate the fact that good public servants have worked very hard through successive governments. She should celebrate the fact that we have listened to the high-speed Internet conversation, and we have listened to their call for more money for doctors. Mr. Speaker, we're really listening in this House. It's amazing how well we work together.

MS. MACFARLANE: I want to thank the Premier for his answer. To be honest, I've never been accused of not listening.

The Westminster System is designed to be an adversarial system, where our leaders are subject to examination of the people and their representatives, and where our government's actions can and must be subject to scrutiny in the interest of the public good. To say this information cannot be shared is not in keeping with the spirit of our system.

Surely, the confidentiality and the privilege associated with this particular settlement can be extended to capture the Auditor General. Will the Premier refer the settlement to the Auditor General to offer a higher-level opinion on this settlement?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for her question, and she is very right. Our system and governments are there to be judged. Quite frankly, Nova Scotians have judged our government. Young people have judged our government by staying here in record numbers. When we look at the credit rating agencies, they have judged our government by continuing to increase the credit rating in this province while they're downgrading credit ratings in every other jurisdiction in this country. People around the world have judged this government and this province by coming here in record numbers. Our tourism agencies have had a record year. I am looking forward to the new numbers that are coming out in the very near future to build on the great work.

We are being judged each and every day, Mr. Speaker. What we're seeing is that people have confidence in this government.

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

**PREM. - BUDGET: LONG-TERM CARE BEDS - LACK JUSTIFY**

MR. GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last five years, long-term care patients have occupied 718,230 hospital bed days in our health care system. Here is another fact: the cost of those bed days to the province over that period has been more than \$933 million.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier justify not opening a single nursing home bed in this budget when his failure to invest in long-term care has cost our province, over this period, just short of \$1 billion?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again I want to remind the honourable member that when we came into government following his Party being in power, we reduced the long-term care wait-list by over 50 per cent, providing more options to Nova Scotia families.

We've heard very clearly from seniors, Mr. Speaker, people in this province who want to be at home, being cared for by their loved one as long as they absolutely can. It's why we continue to invest in the caregiver allowance program, which is working with families and with home care which has been substantially increased in every one of our governments.

Again, I want to go back to the numbers that the honourable member is using. He is not accurate. Not all of those people are waiting for long-term care. Some of those people are in palliative care, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of reasons why they were there - they were trying to transition to home. We needed to put in place supports for them to be able to transition to home. These are important factors he is leaving out when he takes the numbers and cherry-picks to make his argument.

The fact of the matter is we continue to reduce the number of people waiting on the long-term care list, and we'll continue to look at the alternative. If the requirement is more beds, Mr. Speaker, it will become part of our capital plan.

MR. BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, what the Premier has said about inaccuracy and cherry-picking numbers is not the case. These are not my numbers, they are not the NDP's numbers, they are the numbers of the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Mr. Speaker, if every person waiting in a hospital bed for a nursing home placement over the last five years in Nova Scotia had gone directly to a long-term care facility, the province would have saved \$750 million.

Mr. Speaker, when the Premier took office five years ago, he inherited a plan to open over 300 new nursing home beds. This would have taken all kinds of pressure off our health care system. It would have saved us millions.

Can the Premier explain why it is that he did not act on this plan to open new nursing home beds, which was sitting on his desk when he came to office?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. One of the challenges when we came into government was we had a \$0.5 billion hole we had to deal with because the honourable member and his Party wouldn't represent all Nova Scotians when it came to the bargaining table. He gave a 7.5 per cent raise across the public sector, which is \$700 million cost embedded in delivering the services to the people of this province.

The fact of the matter is, is that every credit agency, when they saw government continue to look in this province in a negative way - private sector people were leaving, the population was going down, young people looked for hope elsewhere. The reality, Mr. Speaker, is you need to strike a balance. You need to ensure that we provide opportunity to young people to grow the economy, to provide governments with more money to be able to invest in the very things he is talking about.

He should listen to actual Nova Scotians who say, I would like to be home as long as humanly possible in my home. It's why we invested in home care, Mr. Speaker. It's why he should listen to families who say, when I care for a loved one I should be treated appropriately. That's why we've expanded the caregivers allowance. This is striking the right balance to ensure that we can live within our fiscal means.

MR. BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has demonstrated how fond he is of attempting to control a conversation, but there is something that neither the Premier nor this government can control, and that is the fact that none of us is going to get any younger. People in Nova Scotia are going to need nursing homes, whether the government likes that or not.

I want to ask the Premier, Mr. Speaker, why can't he see that by not opening a single new nursing home bed in our province, all he is doing is putting off and deferring inevitable, necessary spending, and putting us in a place where we're going to have to make massive expenditures down the road?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, he is going back in a time when the New Democratic Party were governing this province. No one is ignoring the issues facing this province today. This government has responded to the needs across this province.

I want to remind the honourable member that in every budget we've invested in home care. More Nova Scotians are telling us that they want to stay home as long as possible. We've heard from families who've said to us, we want to care for our loved ones.

If I had followed the recipe that the New Democratic Party had left on the Premier's desk, this province would be in a hole, Mr. Speaker - unrecoverable. Our children would be looking for hope somewhere else.

The reality is that not only our children seeing a future here but young people from around the world are seeing a future here at the same time. We're striking the right balance of providing care to those individuals, providing quality education to our citizens, ensuring vulnerable Nova Scotians get looked after, and creating an economy that the rest of Canada is (Interruptions)

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

**PREM.: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET: FUNDING LACK**

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, all members in this Chamber, and in particular the members of Pictou County and Cape Breton, have watched access to mental health care decline under this government. It's a simple fact. Everyone is aware. Everyone's aware that the Aberdeen unit was closed for mental health and the overworked remaining psychiatrist left.

When we raise these questions here on the floor, though, it's the same answer. The Premier thanks a number of people and then announces some fancy-sounding programs like the practice-ready physicians stream.

My question to the Premier is, if this programming is the answer to the government's plan to alleviate suffering and wait-lists for physicians, why did he re-announce it in this year's budget but allocate no new money for it?

THE PREMIER: It's a great question. I want to thank - it's part of the plan, Mr. Speaker, working with our partners - if she would follow when we talked - we require the Dalhousie Medical School to implement that program. She would know that we've created funding that's been available - that the money would be there. She would know that (Interruptions) No, that's actually not accurate. Whoever your researcher is should look that up. Don't listen to the former minister. Listen to the current (Interruption)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind the honourable Premier not to address members directly.

The honourable Premier has the floor.



THE PREMIER: Thank you. I appreciate the advice, but I want to remind the honourable member that we rolled out that program with Dalhousie Medical School and it's adding to the other programs that we're doing with them. We're looking forward to ensuring that those physicians who choose to come to this province and need some requirements for practice-readiness will have that opportunity in our province.

MS. MACFARLANE: The public perspective out there is that the trend under successive budgets from this government is to basically announce, under-spend, and then re-announce. In no area is that more cruel than support for mental health services.

Two days ago, two parents laid their hearts out on the floor in this foyer below after losing their two sons to suicide.

Where in this budget of re-announced funding is the money for suicide prevention in Nova Scotia? Obviously a 1-800 number is not acceptable anymore.

THE PREMIER: First of all, Mr. Speaker, to the family who came here to continue to have their personal anguish as part of them and to continue to share that with us - to continue to make sure that we stay focused and committed to providing services to families who - we are all indebted to those Nova Scotians who continue to show us the challenges.

I want to tell the honourable members that the increase that we've made in investments in and around adolescent mental health - the issues I believe will be part of the report that will be coming in around the inclusive school environment, which will provide a wraparound support for providing supports to those families, are all part of this budget.

We now spend \$300 million on mental health. Today the current budget that is before this House to be debated will increase that by almost \$90 million. That is a substantial increase over a period of time.

We're continuing to work with those partners to try best practices. Dr. Stan Kutcher worked with us when we were in Cape Breton to provide some strategies. We're continuing to make those, but again, I want to end with how I started, Mr. Speaker. We are all indebted to those Nova Scotians who continue to remind us of the importance of making investments into these programs.

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

### **H&W: EHS INVESTMENT - CONTRACT COMMITMENTS**

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. At three o'clock this morning, when I couldn't sleep, there were no available ambulances on Cape Breton Island - three o'clock this morning, not one.

Yesterday, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board told this House that the province would be investing in EHS to ensure that more ambulances are available. However, upon further scrutiny, it appears that this new investment is in fact simply the government meeting its contractual obligation to our paramedics to deal with increased call volume - not new money. It was part of their contract.

[2:15 p.m.]

Does this minister think that his department deserves to be celebrated for adhering to a collective agreement?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. As has been discussed already, the budget process and being transparent, acknowledging where new money is being spent - this is new money going forward to meet the increased call demand of our EHS system. That's exactly what the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said yesterday: this new money is being made available to the service provider of our EHS system.

MS. MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago we heard reports of nearly 20 ambulances backed up for hours outside both the Halifax Infirmity and the Dartmouth General Hospital. We know that paramedics are struggling to transfer these patients into the care of the hospital because there just isn't space. More ambulances won't help when the paramedics are waiting in the hospital hallways for 12 hours at a time. We could put on 100 more ambulances and it's not going to move the flow of patients.

Anyone working in the system will tell you that the shortage of nursing home spaces is paralyzing our major hospitals. Just ask any of the staff.

My question is, why has this minister refused to invest in long-term care beds?

MR. DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for drawing the House's attention to the needs of Nova Scotians, particularly our aging population, for continuing care services and support.

As I've mentioned many times before, we've listened to Nova Scotians. We know the preference for our aging population is to continue to receive care in their community, in their homes, for as long as they can. That's why in each of our budgets we continue to invest and expand our investment for home care services and programs. We've essentially eliminated wait-lists in much of the province around home care. We've reduced the long-term care wait-list by over 50 per cent since coming to office.

We listened to the requirements and needs of Nova Scotians, and we work to achieve and move forward.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **H&W – AMBULANCE OFFLOADS: WAIT TIMES – REPORT UPDATE**

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, on the same note, last Monday, 17 ambulances waited for hours at a local Halifax hospital. Many of them waited with their patients up to 10 hours before they were able to offload their patients to the emergency department.

Last month the Minister of Health and Wellness did tell us here in this House that he was going to ask for a report with recommendations on how to solve this unacceptable wait time. Could the Minister of Health and Wellness please update those of us here in the House on when he expects this report?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. As the member has an extensive background herself in the health care profession, I think she would recognize and appreciate the complexities of addressing complex challenges like this.

The work is under way. Staff are working diligently to bring forward some recommendations. For me, my goal is to get appropriate recommendations to move forward with when those recommendations come forward to me, but I haven't yet received that report.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer. I think this is an urgent matter and we need to be putting pressure on those who are developing this report and recommendations so that immediate action can be taken. Paramedics are highly skilled and they have a target of trying to reach people within nine minutes of someone calling 911. Nine minutes. They cannot achieve this with the current situation.

Again, I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness, can he please make this an urgent matter, and based on making it urgent, when is the earliest he could provide this House with a report and recommendations on this urgent situation?

MR. DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her concern and interest in this very important area. I can assure the member opposite and all members of the Legislature - not just for myself but for this government and the public servants, the professionals who work in our health care system - that addressing these concerns is a priority already. They recognize the importance of addressing and moving forward in these areas, we also recognize the complexity that there is no single silver bullet. That's why we recognize part of the solution is multifaceted. We see our investments in primary health care, we know some of the pressure in our emergency rooms relates to people that are

showing up in emergency rooms because they don't have primary care access. We've seen significant investments to improve primary care.

So, we're already moving on initiatives that we believe will help address part of the concerns Mr. Speaker, while waiting for the report to come forward.

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

**H&W - SYDNEY AREA: NEED A FAMILY PRACTICE REG. -  
NUMBERS EXPLAIN**

MR. EDDIE ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Monday, I read with great interest an op-ed piece in the *Cape Breton Post* from the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He had quoted some staggering statistics on the state of family physicians in the Sydney area. According to the minister, 1,900 people in the Sydney area have been removed from the Need a Family Practice Registry, leaving only 83 people from that area in need of a family doctor. Eighty-three, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs went on to state that there were more than a dozen additional health care workers on their way. Mr. Speaker, my books - and anyone who is keeping track - that's one health care worker for every six people.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is, does he stand behind the numbers stated by his colleague that only 83 people in the Sydney area need a family doctor?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member bringing attention to this. I believe the data brought forward based upon the latest data we have from the 811 Need a Family Practice Registry, that that is consistent with the data that we have.

That just goes to show again, the tremendous work and the value for Nova Scotians when they do register, as family practices are available to take on new patients. Again, Mr. Speaker, with the investments that we've recently announced to encourage existing family practices to take on more patients directly from the 811 list, to provide incentives, both through their remuneration on a salary basis for their fees, but also through one-time registration fees.

We're taking a multifaceted approach working with our physicians and primary care providers to move forward, and this just demonstrates some of that value.

MR. ORRELL: Mr. Speaker, it sounds to me that if those numbers are correct, then I don't know why we're bringing in more people, they're saying we have enough now on Cape Breton Island. According to the people that come to my office, that's not actually the case.

If this minister and the Minister of Health and Wellness know that this need is greater than 83, why would they use that number? Mr. Speaker, the health care crisis in this province is real. The health care crisis in Cape Breton is real. The Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness and everybody who lives in Cape Breton knows this is real. So, if we're going to deal with real problems, can we deal with real numbers?

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is, will the Minister of Health and Wellness please tell the House what numbers he's using to assess these family practice needs in the Sydney area?

MR. DELOREY: I just want to clarify in the member's preamble there, he made reference to two different types of data. Mr. Speaker, he's talking about Sydney and he's talking about Cape Breton. I don't live on Cape Breton Island, but I live right next door, and I know Richmond and Inverness are part of Cape Breton. So, I just want to clarify if the member is talking about Sydney or Cape Breton Island when he's talking about Cape Breton.

So, Mr. Speaker, within that context as I said before, the data that the member brought forward was from the 811 registry list information that we have specifically referencing Sydney, is my understanding of the data that is being referenced here. So, that's what was being spoken about there.

In terms of the resources, as the member brought forward that question, was the additional doctors and health care professionals going to Cape Breton, that would be the entire region of Cape Breton Island in the eastern zone.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

#### **H&W – SCHIZOPHRENIA SOC.: ZERO FUNDING - EXPLAIN**

MR. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Our office has been in contact with the Schizophrenia Society regarding yesterday's provincial budget. If there is good news in the budget for the Schizophrenia Society, it's that their funding from the Department of Health and Wellness wasn't reduced. The bad news of course is, that it remains at absolutely zero. The Schizophrenia Society provides important support for individuals suffering from schizophrenia, and for their families as well. They work to provide supportive housing and accept referrals for acute care.

Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister is, how can the department claim to be making investments in the treatment of mental health when an organization as dedicated as the Schizophrenia Society is left out in the cold?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I think the member may appreciate that I too have a very direct and personal interest in the work of the Schizophrenia Society. I recognize the value of the work that they do with families and individuals who are suffering from and diagnosed with schizophrenia. We do recognize the importance of it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify for the member opposite that not all organizations that receive funding are recognized in a line by line item. We have several programs, grant-based programs and supports, that do support our community partners like the Schizophrenia Society. I believe they received significant funding last year for some programs they are working on, and we'll continue to work with them to ensure that they can continue the good service they provide across Nova Scotia.

MR. LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister for that answer. In fact, we know this government has made significant cuts to the Schizophrenia Society in the past.

Mr. Speaker, the Schizophrenia Society is an enormous supporter for those with mental health concerns and substance addictions. They support 4,500 people a year and receive more than 1,000 additional calls from those seeking assistance. They are reaching a lot of people already, but are hoping and willing to do more. They receive about \$40,000 from Community Services, but it pales in comparison to the needs they face.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Health and Wellness is going to continue to rely on community organizations like the Schizophrenia Society to provide mental health supports, shouldn't he at least chip in and help the Schizophrenia Society?

MR. DELOREY: I thank the member again for not just bringing forward the question around mental health. We all know, I believe, on all sides of the Legislature for all Parties, Mr. Speaker, the interests and the concerns. I can't imagine that a single one of the members in this Legislature doesn't know someone who has been afflicted by a mental health diagnosis or its impacts.

As I said in my first response, Mr. Speaker, we do work with our community partners, including the Schizophrenia Society. We have a number of avenues where financial supports are provided, including our numerous grants programs through the department and also through our Health Authorities as well that have grants and supports that are available.

As I've said, I've met with and they meet with the staff on a regular basis. If they need help seeing where programs are they can apply to, they know they just have to reach out and we'll work with them.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**JUSTICE: POLICE STREET CHECKS - MORATORIUM**

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. On the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination I'd like to ask the minister about street checks. We know police street checks disproportionately criminalize Black Nova Scotians. As Sergeant Robyn Atwell recently said, echoing many others, this practice is wrong, it's not effective, we should end it - and I'll table that.

Given the known harm associated with street checks, there is no reason the practice should continue while we wait for the conclusion of the Human Rights Commission. We know harm is being done and the government is letting it continue. I'll table that - it's a troubling message.

Will the minister explain why he won't put a moratorium on street checks now, pending the outcome of the Human Rights Commission?

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I do want to acknowledge and recognize how important it is that police interaction with the public at large is a priority and important to each and every one of us. The work that Dr. Wortley is doing will help inform our decisions.

I've spoken in this Legislature before about evidence-based decisions. I will continue with that practice. This particular issue has been brought front and centre and it has to be addressed. We value the work and look forward to the outcomes that Dr. Wortley will provide us.

MS. CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, this isn't about interactions, it's about data collection. With respect, whose evidence are we listening to? We have an abundance of evidence from our most vulnerable communities that this practice is wrong.

It's frustrating, Mr. Speaker, to hear that data collection is justification for systemic racism. It makes me especially sad that this government is so keen on collecting data in a way that marginalizes African Nova Scotians because I know that in contrast it drags its feet on collecting data that could help bring justice for the same communities. For instance, we know that Indigenous and racialized people are overrepresented in the provincial prison system. We suspect that they are overrepresented in solitary confinement, but we can't say for sure because the department still does not collect that data.

In 2016 in response to our questioning, the Minister of Justice at the time made a commitment to provide us demographic data by 2017. I'll table that - we have yet to see it.

Will the minister table for this House the demographic statistics for Nova Scotians placed in solitary confinement?

[2:30 p.m.]

MR. FUREY: Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs, spoke earlier today, eloquently, about the priority in addressing systemic racism. We have undertaken a number of issues to address this systemic racism that has taken place across the province. We have implemented strategies within our Public Service, within corrections facilities, across multiple government departments, about a journey that we all have to take using his word “together.” We will continue that work.

I’ve invited my colleague to the correctional facility; she participated in a tour there and she saw first-hand the circumstances that exist in that community. We will continue to work towards solutions in each of these areas.

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

### **H&W - PATIENT DIGNITY: LACK OF - RESPONSE**

MS. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness, and I welcome his applause if so. (Laughter)

An 84-year-old senior was experiencing severe breathing issues. Fortunately, for her, she was able to be transported by ambulance to the South Shore Regional Hospital where an emergency room physician treated her for pneumonia and congestive heart failure.

However, her medical condition was not the only problem she would face. Instead of being admitted to a hospital room with a bed, she was left lying on a gurney in an emergency exam room for an unbelievable five days - not a reflection of the health care professionals.

The gurney had to be shoved against the wall to ensure she didn’t fall out of bed - but it gets worse, Mr. Speaker. She had to share this small space with another individual. When the medical professionals did their observation of the second patient, they had to wear a mask and take other precautionary measures to protect themselves.

My question to the minister: How is this infection control, and is this the kind of indignity that people should be accustomed to when being admitted to hospital due to lack of available beds in our local hospitals?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. Of course, that’s not a scenario any of us would endeavour to want our hospital system to be operating towards. What we do know is, there’s been a lot of public recognition of this fact that we did have a higher, more intense impact of the flu season this year which did increase



the pressures on our hospital systems, especially amongst vulnerable populations - that is, those populations more vulnerable to the flu this year.

The flu vaccine wasn't as effective in this season, but, again, we continue to work - as the member mentioned the health care professionals do - with the standards for training. They put together programs to treat all patients who come through those doors.

MS. MASLAND: Sadly, Mr. Speaker, for this lady, she was too sick to be home and too sick to be in hospital under conditions that she was placed in. If the story only ended here it would be bad enough, but the indecencies only continue. Day sharing an exam room with another contagious patient unprotected wasn't the only exposure to this elderly woman - to add insult to injury, the only washroom facility available was an emergency room public washroom down a long corridor where this elderly patient was required to walk in a johnny shirt. This lady deserved better and Nova Scotians expect better.

Is this what the minister means by quality health care for Nova Scotians?

MR. DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, as the member would know, we recognize the need to put a priority on our health care system. That's why it has received significant investments in the budget we brought forward. We know that much of the pressure and concerns of Nova Scotians have been around primary care access.

It's been a priority for us. We've made significant investments there to improve access both to collaborative care practices, which provides an opportunity to bring together a variety of primary health care providers, nurses as well as physicians and others. In addition to that, we continued with major investments to support our family physicians, because we know they are critical team members as part of these collaborative practices in our communities to encourage them to take on more patients across Nova Scotia. But it will also work to enhance both recruitment and retention of these physicians to provide more care to more Nova Scotians.

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

### **H&W - HEALTH CARE: BROKEN SYSTEM - CRISIS**

HON. ALFIE MACLEOD: Mr. Speaker, my question through you is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Yesterday, my colleague from Cape Breton Centre identified the number of closures of emergency rooms in Cape Breton Island.

The Cape Breton Regional Hospital has 33 beds in its emergency department. On March 19<sup>th</sup> at 3:30 p.m., 27 of those beds were tied up with admitted patients with no beds to go to because beds were tied up with people who should be going to long-term care. They were waiting for placement in other areas of the hospital. As a result, there were only

six beds available in the emergency department to look after the overflowing crowd of individuals who needed help.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister still stand by his statement that there is no crisis in health care in Nova Scotia?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: I think, as the member recognized, the demands on emergency rooms throughout the province this particular winter were higher than normal, based upon a more aggressive flu season this year, Mr. Speaker. We did see more people presenting.

We also recognize that again, as that situation would also afford, a response to that - having stronger and more access to primary care, Mr. Speaker, would be an important way to reduce the pressures on our emergency rooms. That's why we continue to invest in and expand collaborative care practices, bringing together health care providers to support Nova Scotians, as well as a recent announcement of significant investment to our family physicians and to family practices to provide more care to more Nova Scotians when they need it.

MR. MACLEOD: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I do recognize is that this minister has no compassion for the individuals who need health care today. (Interruptions) I could be a lot cruder.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm going to ask the honourable member to retract that. I'm going to take that as a personal shot at the opposite member.

MR. MACLEOD: I will retract that statement, Mr. Speaker, in respect for you.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister rightly observed that we have top-notch medical professionals working hard in our province, and we all agree with that. Unfortunately, they are working in a broken system. It's a system that isn't serving Nova Scotians well.

My question to the minister is, will the minister explain for the patients who sat in the Cape Breton Regional Hospital's ER for hours on end how well his integrated health care system is working?

MR. DELOREY: I believe the honourable member made reference to what he referred to as a broken system. I would like to suggest that the member reflect back to a month or a month and a half ago, when we were in Cape Breton, in Sydney, at a public forum that was hosted there. There was a panel of three individuals, two physicians and a former head of the Cape Breton District Health Authority.

If the member reflects back to that, there was a comment that was reflected at the other public forums hosted in Halifax, as well as down in Yarmouth. They made reference to the fact that the challenges facing our health care system today did not start yesterday. They started decades ago, and successive governments failed to take action to resolve these issues.

This is a government that has taken the initiative to focus on our primary care, work with our health care professionals and move the system forward. (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm really hoping the honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley has a question. (Laughter)

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

### **COM. SERV. - HOME CARE: FAMILY PROVIDER - COVERAGE**

MS. BARBARA ADAMS: My question is for the Minister of Community Services. I had a call last night from an amazing constituent of mine who agreed to take her older brother into her home when he was failing in a small options home close to home. He is blind, and he has intellectual disabilities and behavioural problems.

Under the Alternative Family Support Program, she was given just under \$1,000 to cover rent, food and other expenses, but she was working three jobs on her own, and his expenses outpaced what she could keep up with. So she went to Community Services looking for help. She asked them, and they said the only thing they could do was to move him into the Independent Living Support program, so he had to move out. He is now getting more money for his rent, more money for his food, he has V.O.N. coming in every day and a C.C.A. His expenses for our government now are approximately \$4,000.

My question to the minister is, has she looked at options where family members can be the paid care provider at a lower cost than what was paying the health care system and the Community Services Department?

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. Yes, there are programs that do provide support to families to look after family members. In any individual case, I'm happy to sit down with the honourable member and take a look at what the options are that would in fact support this individual to be able to live with his family without having him to move out.

MS. ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her answer. Since moving into his own apartment, this gentleman has had a number of falls and each time he falls, it's harder for him to get back up again. I am told that his caregivers don't show up 10 to 20 per cent of the time, and he's going to give me the documents to support that on Saturday. He goes days without having his home cleaned, he's gone a month without having his bed

changed, he's legally blind, and they've left things on the floor that he's repeatedly tripped over, left the stove on. They've made calls constantly to the department that's looking after him, in terms of the company.

My question to the minister is, we want to keep people in their home but, when it's not safe for them to do so, can the minister look at providing family members with the ability to be the paid care providers?

MS. REGAN: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. We do have money available for that. It's about \$400 a month, as I recall, so they can do that. I recognize that does not replace a salary. In any case, where the honourable member has a concern about the care that any of our folks we support are receiving, I invite her to reach out to me and we'll be happy to sit down.

We also have a new program where we are linking up families with care providers, because sometimes it could be difficult to access appropriate people to look after folks. So we do have new money for that in this budget as well.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**COM. SERV. - CHILD SUPPORT: PAYMENT CLAWBACK - END**

MS. SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was pleased to see the Minister of Community Services take action on the clawback of child support payments after our caucus raised this concern about this issue last Fall. This is a simple change that will put an average of \$2,000 annually per child back into the pockets of single parents receiving income assistance. (Applause) Wait for it.

Unfortunately, parents will have to wait until August for this change to take effect. My question to the Minister of Community Services is, why do these families have to wait another five months for the clawback of their child support payments to end?

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question and I do share her impatience waiting to see this new program come into effect, but it does take some time to work through the process, to train people, et cetera, and we feel that August is when we'll be able to be ready to launch that successfully.

MS. LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, other child-related amounts, like the Canada Child Benefit, have not been deducted from income assistance payments. I don't see how it would take five months for this particular change to come into effect. We have often heard the Premier speak about his commitment to strengthening maintenance enforcement to collect the millions owed to children and he has called the practice of clawing back child support unfair. It seems doubly unfair for the government to know this and to continue to take millions of dollars from children in need.

My question is, will the minister agree to make this change retroactive to the time when her department became aware of this unfair practice?

MS. REGAN: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I would note that when the Canada Child Benefit came into effect it did not come in at the beginning of a budget year, it came in partway through the year, and we're doing the best we can, we will have it ready when we are able to. We're very pleased to be able to roll out this significant improvement in the lives of Nova Scotian families. We want young Nova Scotians to be able to grow and succeed here, and that's exactly what we're doing.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

### **TIR: COBEQUID PASS TOLLS - REMOVE**

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed yesterday to see in the provincial budget a windfall of over \$9 million net profit, mostly off the backs of business owners, commercial truckers, and citizens of Cumberland County.

[2:45 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago the Cobequid Pass put tolls in and the government of the day promised the people of Nova Scotia, and particularly Cumberland County, that those tolls would be removed once the debt was paid.

Under the leadership of Progressive Conservative Leader John Hamm, the debt was scheduled to be paid off in 2018. I'd like to ask the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal today, will he live up to the promise given 22 years ago, in 1996, to remove the tolls from the Cobequid Pass?

HON. LLOYD HINES: It gives me great pleasure to stand and talk about the Cobequid Pass and the tremendous success that that has been as an example of a P3 project for all Nova Scotians. This provincial government is committed to taking the tolls off the Cobequid Pass for Nova Scotia motorists once the bonds are paid off, which we are hoping to see in the next 12 to 24 months. Thank you.

MS. SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Well, that is great to hear. I would like to have the minister just confirm, when I'm done here, that the tolls will be removed completely for all drivers, including commercial truck owners in Cumberland County.

Another issue I'd like him to address is the Wentworth Valley. When the tolls were put in, the speed limit was artificially lowered by 30 kilometres an hour. Trucks are not allowed, they are prohibited from going through there, they must go over the Pass to pay those tolls. When the bonds are paid off, will the minister also do a speed study and restore the best safety for the Wentworth Valley so the people there are not penalized?

MR. HINES: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the House and tell the people of Nova Scotia how pleased I am that this particular piece of infrastructure has saved over 40 lives in the history of this facility. It has reduced the fatality incidents by over two fatalities per year consistently for 20 years. That's what the highway twinning program is about, it is to make Nova Scotians' safety the number one priority.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the CAA driving costs, which clearly illustrate that the cost of the toll for commercial and residential drivers taking the Cobequid Pass represents a saving for those people who take it, because of time and distance.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

### **TIR: TRENTON CONNECTOR INTERSECT. - SAFETY OPTIONS**

MR. TIM HOUSTON: My question is for the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. The junction of the Abercrombie Road and the Trenton Connector is a dangerous intersection and the scene of many accidents, sadly many of them fatal. Residents travelling down the road towards the connector have a posted speed limit of 100; it drops to 80 just before coming to the level junction at the Abercrombie Road.

The high speeds approaching are sometimes part of the issue as well. Local concerns are mounting for the safety of this intersection. People in the community would be keenly interested in any additional measures that could improve the safety of the intersection, whether it is improved signage, changes to the speed limit, changes to the length of the light, whatever it might be. Any of these measures would greatly improve the safety and alleviate some concerns.

My question for the minister, is the minister aware of any study or any options that could be considered to improve the safety of this intersection?

HON. LLOYD HINES: I can assure the member opposite that all 2,200 employees of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal are keenly interested in safety as a primary, fundamental part of their work. When they go to work every day it's all about safety. As a department, that's what we're concerned about.

I appreciate the member bringing that matter forward at this particular intersection. It is a signalized intersection, Mr. Speaker. There's a significant amount of industrial traffic there which accentuates the importance of it. Recently, the signals were inspected and found to be in top working order.

MR. HOUSTON: Would the minister consider putting the intersection on the list for a roundabout?

MR. HINES: Last Fall, we did brush cutting at that intersection. We put new signage in, and we will consider looking at that for future improvements. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much. That concludes the time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We'll now move on to the order of business, Opposition Business.

### **OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

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

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 88.

### **Bill No. 88 - Mental Health App Act.**

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

MS. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to stand in my place, but in particular I am pretty excited about this bill. This idea actually came about a year ago from a number of teenagers who were just sitting in my household with my teenagers. We were talking about an individual who was their age who was going through some mental health challenges and coming up with ideas and what we could do to support this young person during some of their darkest days and during some of their challenges. One of the young people who was sitting in my kitchen had mentioned that Newfoundland had a mental health app and that it was quite successful over there. So I started doing a little investigating into that, and I thought, if Newfoundland can do it, why can't we?

I want to start off by just reminding those members who are in the Chamber who may not have been here Monday about one of my friends from the Pictou County area. Robbie Weatherbee is someone who I have got to know quite a bit over the last number of months because Robbie's son-in-law took his life a little over a year ago. I know how brave it was for Robbie to come here on Monday and share her family's painful story and tell the details around why her son-in-law, Bryan, committed suicide.

It's a situation that devastated her family. Her daughter was married to Bryan, and Bryan left behind a young son who dearly misses his father. It's an absolutely heartbreaking

story to share. We know that one in five individuals deal with mental health issues, and Bryan happened to be one of those individuals.

Bryan was very talented, very athletic. He loved to cook, loved people, and loved to help out. He didn't want to die. He didn't want to die, Mr. Speaker. Bryan had expressed his symptoms, what he thought were symptoms of depression, to his family. He had a great network of family who loved him.

I think that's wonderful, but even when someone who has that network of loved ones who care, sometimes you can't receive the help that you are requesting. Bryan went to the Aberdeen Hospital to the emergency department seeking help, begging for help, telling them that he had all intentions to take his life, that he had no reason anymore to feel like he even deserved to be on Earth. It was so obvious that this young man did not want to exist. However, Bryan was turned away. Bryan was told that he has a great family that can support him and basically that there was nothing more they could do and for him to go home.

Unfortunately, Bryan went home, and Bryan never had the opportunity to go back and ask again for help. Bryan took his own life, and Bryan's father-in-law found him. That was actually Bryan's second attempt. The first time, his father-in-law found him, and that's when they started to seek help but were turned away for help.

It's a sad story, it's a sad reality, but want to commend Bryan's mother-in-law for having so much courage to come forward and tell the story, to share the story. Through her, I have met so many other incredibly courageous and brave individuals who are also sharing their family's stories, and they're heart-wrenching.

They're heart-wrenching because we know that suicide is preventable, especially if we can get it at the younger ages. If we can get into the schools between Primary and Grade 6, if we can tap in and help them at that age, usually the results are very positive.

In yesterday's budget, there was a small investment made in community-based mental health supports to help those areas without quick access to outpatient clinics. I would say that this bill that I introduced is a perfect complement to that small investment.

The bill that I'm introducing is also an initiative that is not going to cost a whole lot for this province. I know that we're under fiscal constraints. I honestly, truly, and sincerely, look for ways that we can find efficiencies and be effective without it having to cost the taxpayers too much money. I really, sincerely try to angle things that I look for and solutions without having to cost a lot of money.

This mental health app is one of those initiatives. It really is not going to cost that much money. Literally, what it would cost is being able to find a really reputable, good



marketing company to simply put together an app. I really know that we have the resources out there to collectively pull together to apply to this app.

It puts contact information for those community-based health supports literally in the hands of every Nova Scotian. Our 950,000 people - and I think it might be above that now - would have access to this app. We all know that the majority of us do have a smartphone or a tablet. It would absolutely include an array of self-help resources, as well as a searchable directory for mental health and addictions services.

Right now, in Canada, we have British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, and most recently, Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, that's how I heard about it, from a bunch of teenagers sitting around my island on a weekend talking about one of their friends who needed help. One of those youths just happened to be from Newfoundland and said, we have an app in Newfoundland that we can just click on.

It's amazing, and I hope that everyone will actually go. It's a simple app. It's called [www.bridgethegapp.ca](http://www.bridgethegapp.ca). I would suggest that you go on right now, Mr. Speaker, if you don't mind me asking, if I may. If you have your phone, go to it right now. It's an amazing app. It's modern. It's anytime/anywhere technology that provides a portal to critical resources for people who are in need. Again, it's inexpensive. It doesn't cost us anything. It's modern, and it's definitely needed. Nova Scotians like Bryan should know that these options are out there waiting for them.

The initiatives in all these other provinces that I have just mentioned were basically incentives for youth, but it's not just designated for our youth to use. Anyone can use it. It would absolutely put that contact information for community supports all in one place. It provides information about dealing with things like bullying, depression, stress and anxiety, and suicide.

I even think there might be a weight loss connection to it. There are amazing things. You can even hook up and check your physical activity because sometimes when you're down in the dumps, some of us go and we call a friend. Well, look, a lot of you have your Fitbits on, right? I don't need one of those. In truthfulness, it's an opportunity for when you're alone, and you don't have that network of friends and family to go to and say, hey, you want to go for a coffee, I'm kind of feeling down, or you want to go for a walk, I just need to blow off some steam and I need someone to connect with right now and help me through a day. We all know that those random acts of kindness - we need to be doing more of that because those random acts of kindness actually can get someone through a day. They really, really can.

[3:00 p.m.]

It's amazing how your day can be turned just with a switch of someone holding a door, someone smiling at you and asking how was your day, or just starting a conversation

with maybe someone who looks lonely to you. We have to be more observant of each other; we have to be kinder to each other; and we have to reach out more to each other. But sadly, there is a big rural part of Nova Scotia and many of our youth and many people are alone a lot. They are alone and they're struggling with mental health issues and they need services to be available to them.

This app will allow all the services that Nova Scotia provides to be under one umbrella. Again, it truly is an uplifting, an inspirational and modern incentive for people to go online and click the app and see what sections would identify with maybe the issue or challenge that they're dealing with at the moment.

It's useful, very useful information and, more importantly, it provides hope in the moment. It provides hope, and too many of our communities in our province have no psychiatrist - and we all know that; we know the struggles in that, and I think that this could be one of the solutions. I really do. I do believe that we have to continue maintaining our interests and making sure that we can hire more psychiatrists and clinicians and psychologists, but again, this is a tool. Just like when someone is struggling with mental health issues, they don't always need a psychiatrist; they don't always need a drug to help them. It's a combination of tools that sometimes helps someone with their challenges.

I think this app would definitely fill a gap in the services because we know that there are very long wait times. We know that right on the Health and Wellness Department's website it's from 45 days up to - we might as well say a year - I think it states 363 days, but it might as well just say a year. It's not going to be the answer for everyone, but I do know that it won't leave desperate Nova Scotians alone with nowhere to turn. They know that they can tap on this and just reading it might lift their spirits.

I know that most of us - I think, often, that sometimes we're embarrassed to admit how reliant and how dependable we have become on our phones. I know that, but it's our lifeline. We all live by these phones. It's ridiculous. I'm worse than my children; I hate to say that, but I'm worse than my children.

All of us who are parents have definitely scolded our kids about using their phones at the supper table or when we're out at family events, and using our phones for almost every aspect of our lives has become our regular routine, but that is why I believe an app like this that connects people to the mental health services would be well used and would be most welcome and, in particular, with our youth.

Unfortunately, we all know someone whose family has been impacted with mental health issues and I cannot, and I will not, stand quietly and just let people suffer. I have to keep trying; I have to keep trying to find solutions that will be accepted by this government.

I know that I have introduced some bills that would end up costing but, Mr. Speaker, again, this bill - in all honesty it's an app to go on a phone. I ask you again, please

go to it - Bridge the gApp - it's under Newfoundland and Labrador, but you can look at it for Alberta, B.C., Manitoba, Quebec, and I again say we are only as happy as our saddest child. I will say that time and time again - this is for our children. It's simple. Please give this all consideration for these reasons.

I will take my seat and I welcome any other input from any other members in the House.

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

MR. HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Speaker, the member for Pictou West has introduced a bill that assuredly attracts great interest for advanced improvements in our health care system and that's for supporting Nova Scotians who are seeking improved access to mental health resources, and I applaud the member. I applaud her young Pictou County friends for this suggestion of computer-aided technology to better improve access to mental health support and I share the loss, as do all members of this House, for any Nova Scotian such as Bryan who, out of desperation, took their own life, and we all ache for Bryan and his family.

Yesterday, in this House, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board presented, on behalf of government, and in the best interest of all Nova Scotians, the 2018-19 budget, our third consecutive balanced budget. Since coming to this office, the government has acted consistently to strengthen our health care system. The 2018-19 budget continues our record of working with our health care partners to build a world-class health care system. This includes steps we are taking to provide more mental health supports, and to provide better access to mental health services for all Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotians recognize we're facing grave mental health challenges and that Nova Scotians need our support and we recognize that need. The 2018-19 budget does contain millions more for mental health services in Nova Scotia. That increase in funding is representative of our recognition of the needs of Nova Scotians. It is representative of our recognition of the expectations of Nova Scotians, and it is representative of our prioritization of addressing mental health issues on behalf of Nova Scotians.

Communities in Pictou West, communities in Chester-St. Margaret's, and communities throughout Nova Scotia need improved access to the crucial services that provide support to those Nova Scotians facing mental health issues. Our budget, presented just yesterday in this House, funds an expansion of community-based mental health supports to help those areas without quick access to outpatient clinics. The IWK and the NSHA are expanding capacity and access for evidence-based mental health care across Nova Scotia. A telehealth-based function will link multiple primary health care clinicians with mental health specialist teams and academic medical centres in hub-and-spoke models, and this will enable collaboration to improve child and youth access to mental health care and build a community of practice among providers. The Kids Help Phone,

which is called Good2Talk, helps to ensure youth receive the support they need in a timely way and in a format with which they are comfortable.

These are all good measures but we cannot and will not rest on the status quo. We agree with the member for Pictou West that today's technology allows us to go beyond 1-800 numbers.

This year, our government will provide funding to pilot new technology-based solutions to provide essential mental health support for Nova Scotians, and in particular, support for young Nova Scotians. More young Nova Scotians than ever are struggling with mental health problems. Student groups and other organizations have asked us for technology-based support, and we have listened, and we will act. As mentioned yesterday by the minister, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has endorsed the use of online tools as a way to access mental health supports.

I am delighted that the member for Pictou West is in agreement with government that online, computer-accessible applications are a validated approach to serving Nova Scotians, young and no-so-young, who are facing mental health challenges. I'm glad she brings to our attention the support that is being offered through such applications in the other provinces and calls our attention to the need for this in Nova Scotia.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the SchoolsPlus program, which provides mental health support resources to students in our schools. To date it has been available to 87,000 students - 74 per cent of our student population. We will continue to expand this program until it is available to every student in the province.

Let me bring this back to the technology-based solutions for mental health support for Nova Scotians. Today we can find and download a myriad of mental health apps that incorporate proven techniques such as cognitive behavioural therapy or acceptance commitment therapy to address everything from depression to eating disorders, anxiety, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, PTSD, and more.

The member opposite mentioned programs specific to some of the provinces, such as Newfoundland and Labrador. I took time last night to look into this online. There are probably hundreds of mental health support apps out there. These mental health apps have the potential to reach people who would otherwise not receive help by removing barriers to treatment.

It's a sad fact that only a small percentage of people actively seek professional help for their mental health problems. This could be for any number of reasons. They may not have the physical or psychological ability to leave their home or they may not have the financial means. Mental health apps may provide access to help these people in need.

Another benefit of these apps is that they allow for privacy and confidentiality. Apps can be a safe intervention for individuals who are reluctant to admit their mental health issues in person. This private method allows these individuals to have the sense of separation they need while still being able to find answers to their questions and solutions to their needs.

We must also be cautious in moving forward on such an initiative. We must engage and listen to the professional mental health community. Divided opinions exist within the health profession regarding the proper development and deployment of mental health apps. Most professional therapists agree that apps are useful for accessing information about resources and support, but they caution that they should only be used as a supplement to mental health diagnostics and treatment.

Mental health therapy requires vulnerability on the part of the patient in the presence of another person who can professionally and empathetically promote change and acceptance. However, other mental health professionals suggest that remote therapy is better than no therapy. Patients who are isolated are better off with distance therapy provided by apps or by other computer-based distance treatments.

Another concern on the part of mental health professionals is that many apps come to market without rigorous study through clinical trials, but developing a made-in-Nova Scotia app under the direct supervision of the Department of Health and Wellness is a useful suggestion for dealing with this concern.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been laser-focused on creating an environment in Nova Scotia that allows innovation to flourish. Under the guidance of the Department of Business and through our excellent Nova Scotia innovation hubs, entrepreneurs, including apps developers, have an amazing support network with which they can access the development of innovative solutions.

We have in place an exceptional environment for the development of an app to connect residents of this province with the guidance and support required to address some of their mental health needs. It is the intent of this government to continue to examine options for raising public awareness and access to mental health supports. This includes the use of technology-based platforms such as computer apps.

However, further legislation is not required to address the development of such apps. We have the required legislation, we have the required resources, and we have the required programs to develop and deploy such solutions, to add this as a requirement of government adds another administrative burden. The private sector, the entrepreneurs in our academic world, combined with the oversight of government through the Department of Health and Wellness, are more than enough that such an app could be developed without having to be legislated.

I agree with the member opposite that this application is something, its time has come, it's an opportunity for us to advance care for our young people, and our not-so-young people, and that through initiatives like this we will provide better support for those of our families, of our neighbours, of our communities that are facing challenges with mental health issues.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the member opposite. I give her full credit for bringing this forward. The fact that it was generated over - when she said island, I didn't know if she meant Pictou Island or an island in her kitchen, but I suspect it was a kitchen island. I applaud her and her family and friends for bringing this initiative forward.

In the near future, in the months ahead our government will be speaking more about the technology applications and solutions that we are seeking. We will be liaising, we will be engaging with the professional mental health community, with acknowledged experts in the developments of computer applications, and with the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, to ensure that we can bring a made-in-Nova Scotia solution for consideration here in this House, at a time to come.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the time given to this issue, and I look forward to continuing the dialogue with the member opposite and other members of this House. We all acknowledge that our health care system has many, many components that have to be dealt with - be it doctor recruitment, be it more orthopaedic surgeries, be it better access to mental health services and solutions - we're all in this together. I applaud the member opposite for bringing this forward, and I'm sure we'll hear from the Third Party, that they also are looking for solutions in this area, and I can assure you that here on the government side of the House we are certainly, certainly dedicated and applying energies towards bringing better access to mental health services to all Nova Scotians.

This is new for me, learning how to keep talking for five minutes after my prepared notes are finished. But it's a good intro because it is a subject that I do care about. As the member mentioned, and other speakers today have mentioned, there are very few of us who have not been touched by mental health tragedies, mental health issues within our families and friends, and I know many in this House have, as my own family has as well, and I spoke to that last Fall when the member for Kings North brought forward a bill.

We all agree that throughout this House, we're all dedicated towards supporting increased access, increased solutions for mental health. I applaud the member for Pictou West and I look forward to comments from the NDP on this as well. Thank you very much.

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

MS. TAMMY MARTIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say a few words about this, and how I would think that an app could help the age group that it's attempting to assist. As we've all said, teenagers and young adults are definitely in need of some mental health

assistance, and far too often, that assistance is not readily available, especially in Cape Breton.

The premise of this bill, however, must take the responsibility for connecting Nova Scotians to the mental health supports. On the surface, it's a good idea. However, in my experience, we have a long way to go before we can direct Nova Scotians to mental health supports that have any hope of meeting their needs. I would love for my constituents to have a community-based mental health organization that could provide preventive care. We should be looking at prevention - we are always reactive instead of being proactive, and I think that's one area that we need improvement to help deal with this issue.

I'd love to know that organizations are properly funded and not at the risk of closing, and I'd love for my constituents to be able to turn to the health care system for support, but the wait-lists are so long that people are dissuaded from seeking help in the first place. In my community alone, I could probably name five or six young adults who have taken their own lives in the last year to year and a half because of mental health and drug addiction.

There were no services available to help them - and I am so disappointed in the budget yesterday that our call for a facility in Nova Scotia, particularly in Cape Breton Island, has fallen on deaf ears. We just keep losing our young ones.

The wait-list has not gotten smaller, people just can't be bothered waiting any longer. In some cases, they die; in some cases, they just deal with it themselves. Sadly, the wait-lists have not gotten any smaller because of the help they've received.

This bill calls for an application that includes self-help resources and a comprehensive directory for local services for users. I fear, given the state of our mental health care system though, there won't be very much there to direct people. Outside of Halifax, patients experiencing mental health crises do not have access to a mobile mental health crisis unit like they do here in the city. The NSHA website directs them instead to their local emergency department or the 1-800 number - and we all know when three or four emergency rooms are closed on Cape Breton Island there's no sense directing them there.

A local emergency department won't help anybody in mental health crisis when it's closed. Imagine taking your loved one who is attempting suicide or who has attempted suicide to a local emergency room only to find out that it's closed - I wonder if we would be talking about this differently if more people could relate to that, because I couldn't imagine it - and hoping then that you have the time to get to the next emergency room.

A local emergency department won't help anybody experiencing a mental health crisis if it's stuffed to the brim with other people seeking medical help because they don't have a family doctor. I will say to that end, as I've said here many times, my daughter is

an emergency room nurse at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital. She worked an overtime the other night, a 12-hour overtime, she came home at 10:00 a.m. She went to work from 7:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. and because there were four closures she got home at 10:00 a.m. the next morning. She didn't work a 12-hour shift, she worked a 15-hour shift. I'm sure when they are worked, as my colleague for Cape Breton said, when you have 26 and 28 people in 33 available beds, I would dare say the mental health treatment is bare bones.

We have experienced that with constituents who would call time and time again on a Friday afternoon wondering what they could do for their daughter or their son who was threatening suicide. We have to say, you get to call the IWK, you get to talk to them over the phone and we hope that helps. A 1-800 number is only a number that directs the individual to seek care at their local emergency room, and that just starts the cycle all over again.

We need to be providing preventive mental health care before people reach the point of crisis. Unfortunately, we're not doing that very well either. In November, the Auditor General noted that the government does not have a clear plan for how mental health services should be delivered across this province. We are still waiting to hear the results of the mental health strategy to show us the plan that was supposed to be available in March 2016.

In Cape Breton especially, the situation is dire. As an adult, it takes more than 300 days to get into a mental health treatment or to see a clinician. I've said it before, and I'll say it 100 times: you'd be long since dead when you are waiting 300 days to get in to talk to somebody when you are feeling suicidal. That doesn't even make sense.

Anybody who thinks that's okay - the wait in Cape Breton was 80 days in 2013. It increased to 90 days in 2014, 160 days in 2015, and nearly 200 days in 2016. We see there's a pattern here.

Over that period of time, the number of patients served by mental health adult community-based service dropped by half. Again, it's not because they received treatment; it's because they can't be bothered waiting a full year to try to get help. That's how we get into the other issue, especially with the young people in Cape Breton - then they turn to drugs. It's just a vicious circle.

We are also losing many of the professionals who deliver this care. Of the eight psychiatry students who graduated from Dal, only one chose to practise in rural Nova Scotia. Of the 169 psychiatrists listed as practising in Nova Scotia, two-thirds of them are located within the HRM. Everything takes place in the city centre. The outlying areas, like I said, call 1-800-IWK and hope you get an answer.

In rural areas, it's not uncommon to have a psychologist position go vacant for years. They are part of the chronic vacancies that I know of in Cape Breton. Those have



consequences for the people in the rural communities who are not receiving any care. These vacancies go for years, in some cases, and rural Nova Scotians are suffering because of that. Youth are being sent to Halifax for mental illness treatment - taken away from their families, their friends, their comfort, to be seen in Halifax because we can't get treatment for our youth in Cape Breton and in rural Nova Scotia.

We need to be thinking about preventive care, about early intervention, about investing in programs and services that will help our youth before they get to that point of no return. We need to be addressing the social determinants of mental health that underlie so many of these issues that face our youth in the community. We need a province-wide strategy and adequate funding for community-based mental health organizations. We need stronger mental health crisis services both inside and outside of Halifax, because these issues are quite prevalent in all areas of the province, not just in the HRM.

When we have those things in place, it's a place to start. Then this proposed application will direct Nova Scotians to a system they can actually trust.

Right now, this system is broken. Nova Scotians know it. Our youth know it. They give up, they turn to their own medication, so to speak, and more often than not we are losing our young people. I think it's high time that this government wakes up and pays attention before too many more lives are lost.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MS. ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I'd like to speak in favour of this bill that my colleague here has presented. I am very thankful for her willingness to bring this great idea forth to the House.

I think we always need to be focused on what our end goal is. Our end goal as MLAs and legislators should always be what is going to be best for the people. In this case, when we are looking at health care, we always need to be patient-focused - on what is going to give us the best outcome for our patients.

We all know that in this day of new technology and access that everyone has a smartphone, especially our young people. It just makes sense for us to be looking at innovative ways, such as this bill, to be looking at a possible solution with our mental health crisis here in Nova Scotia.

I want to share a few statistics. In 2010 - and I do have this that I can table - Statistics Canada documented that there were 102 deaths from suicide here in Nova Scotia. It gradually increased. In 2015, there were 126 recorded deaths from intentional harm, suicide. I'll table that document, Madam Speaker.

In 2016, Dr. Michael Teehan reported there was a 74 per cent increase in suicide rates and suicide attempts. We can't ignore the numbers, Madam Speaker. We are looking at serious, significant problems.

[3:30 p.m.]

Sometimes when we share numbers, it's easy for us to just put up a wall, put up a boundary - it's just numbers. But each one of these numbers is a person. For each one of these numbers, this person had a family that was affected, and for each one of these numbers, there was a community affected.

When we look around our province, we can't ignore the impact of mental illness. Our worst nightmare, the worst outcome of mental illness is suicide, a successful suicide. We can't ignore the impact that this is really having in our communities.

Let's talk about real people. Let's talk about real families. Let's talk about real communities. Two days ago, we had an event, a press conference downstairs. It actually took me a few hours to kind of emotionally push through it. We had two women who were willing, courageous, and brave enough to speak up publicly about the nightmare that they themselves experienced. I have to say, it was really tough. I'm a mother myself of four amazing children, but any parent here knows that children struggle. It's the hardest thing to see them go through their struggles.

To meet two mothers who have had to live that nightmare of going through that loss - I hold them in the highest respect and highest regard. They're willing to speak up about the real impact on their own hearts, the real impact on their families, and on their communities. I think we need to be always, every day, looking at new opportunities, new innovative solutions for how we can address the problems that are very, very serious in our communities.

I also met another amazing woman who was there supporting them. She herself has experienced the devastating effects of depression and mental illness. Thankfully, she has gone on to victory through the proper supports. Now she is using her life powerfully, to impact others and to help others. I don't think there's any more valuable way for us to use our lives than when we take our own life experiences, especially the most challenging ones, and we use them to better other people and to support other people. I just can't say enough how much I respected these women I met on Monday, Madam Speaker, who spoke out publicly about the need to make changes in our mental health system. So again, I support this app.

Losing a child is a parent's worst nightmare. I have seen it. Just last night, Madam Speaker, I was on social media, and a friend posted a comment that his cousin took her life yesterday. I reached out and I asked, did she try to access help? He said, no, she didn't.

I make that point because there are some people who never access the health care system, asking for help. There are some people who, maybe in the privacy of their own home, their own bedroom, might benefit from something like an app that my colleague here has brought up. If this woman had had access to this app that showed all the different supports and services, and maybe some solutions to what she was going through - if it prevents one person from taking their life, Madam Speaker, then it is well worth it.

It is a small financial investment now to build an app, very small. I don't understand why anyone wouldn't support this great idea, knowing how much all of us, including us adults, are on our phones every day. It's one way that we can improve access to support services and to information, and I think, looking again at the crisis here in Nova Scotia with mental illness, and looking at the increase in suicide attempts and rates, we need to do everything we can to address this problem.

I will speak as a nurse having worked in the health care system for 26 years and seeing, in particular, young people - and I don't know if it's because I have four young adults as children - but when you see young adults struggle when they start to leave home and start university, that actually seems to be a time when a lot of young adults are first diagnosed with mental illness. When they go off to university and are away from home, and under just that extra level of stress, is often what is a tipping point. It might have been a mental illness that had been brewing since earlier teenage years, but it's when they get to that university setting, that often is the tipping point, and they seek attention and they seek help.

I don't know if anyone here in this House has ever struggled with any form of mental illness or any form of depression. My guess is yes, because it is recorded that one in four people now will experience some form of mental illness in their lifetime, but anyone here who has ever experienced that knows the darkness. The darkness can be overwhelming, and when someone gets to that depth of darkness and they finally get the courage to tell someone - and I've been that someone in a family practice, when somebody for the first time tells you that they have thoughts of wanting to harm themselves - you want to get them help as soon as possible. Your main goal is that you want to prevent that from happening. As a nurse - and I know my colleagues, whether in nursing or in medicine, - when we then look for the therapy and the help for these people and are told that it's going to be a year's wait-list, it's very discouraging and it's very scary.

It's not enough and, thankfully, one of the things is that I will do everything I can to advocate for people. I think one of the things that we don't often tap into enough is the private system. Anyone who has private health care insurance with coverage for psychology or a social worker - if there is anyone who is listening to this - I encourage you to reach out and use those services.

I think we could be doing more and helping more people access individualized therapy if we looked at making that our first priority. Ask that question, do you have private

health care coverage? Let's find you a private therapist, let's get you in. Most private therapists can get people in within one to two weeks. That is something that is often untapped, and there are a lot of workplaces that also have EAP - Employee Assistance Programs - where therapy can be accessed.

When you look at mental health, there's a whole spectrum. I talked a lot today about suicide, which is the far end and which is the worst. It's what we are all trying to prevent. Everything starts with a seed, Madam Speaker. Most people start with symptoms. It might just be random thoughts. It might be brought on by a situation in their life like a family breakup, family breakdown. A lot of mental illness is brought on by situational - certain situations a person has experienced, like a break-up of a relationship or a death in the family or a loss. For many women, when they go through a miscarriage, they struggle with a form of depression. A lot of women, after they have a baby, struggle with postpartum depression. It starts small and, if the person doesn't get the proper supports in early days, it often goes on to worsen. So, we need to always be looking at how we can first prevent, but then what we can be doing better when the symptoms first start.

I would like to just talk for a second about prevention. There are a lot of social things in our society that I believe are contributing to this increase of darkness, increase of depression. Access to the Internet - there's good and there's bad. One of my colleagues in the past here in this House spoke about pornography and access on the Internet.

Whether it's pornography or whether it's just evil, we all know that whether it's on television or on the Internet, our young people as early as they can get on a computer have access to this trash, for lack of a better word. I do think we need to be looking at ways of preventing our young people from their minds being harmed by some of these evils that do exist here in our society.

I do want to speak in favour of this mental health app. We need to be looking at ways of improving access to knowledge, to information, to supports for anyone in our province who starts as early as that first day when they have that first thought, when they have that first day of darkness. We need to be there for them, Madam Speaker. If we can help one person in this province and prevent one death and one suicide with an app on phones here in Nova Scotia, why would we not do so?

I do have another document here I will table. It is from the University of Kings College. They did a little study and they talked about needing to have innovative solutions in mental health. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health prioritized a mobile app as critical to breaking through to youth with mental challenges. I will table that document, Madam Speaker, just to reinforce that the leaders in mental health throughout Nova Scotia and throughout our country are saying we need to be using apps and technology as part of our solutions here in our mental health care system.

Madam Speaker, again I want to thank my colleague here for Pictou West for presenting this bill. I do encourage the government to support this not for us but for the people of Nova Scotia, to show them that they are open and that they are collaborative. I would love to see that, because I do believe that we are a more effective government when we work together and when we share our ideas, whether it's good ideas from them or the NDP or from us, that we're willing to work together for the betterment of Nova Scotians. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: I'm very happy with the round of debate that we just had.

Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 90.

**Bill No. 90 - Education Act.**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

HON. PAT DUNN: Madam Speaker, perhaps I'll start with the reason why I'm standing here in my place today and why I introduced the private members' bill yesterday.

I talked with a few guidance counsellors and, after that, talked to students who graduated from high school and were in the Nova Scotia Community College presently, and other students who were in university, on the topic of their experience in high school with regard to leaving and having many life skills that I believe they should have. In the next 15 minutes I hope to trigger the minister's curiosity that he may take the opportunity to also speak to some guidance counsellors or teachers or students just to see if they are on the same playing field that I found them on.

I am referring to skills like the value of money, the responsible use of credit cards and debit cards and the difference between both cards, options for loans for pursuing higher education or simply creating a budget.

[3:45 p.m.]

Remember, students who have graduated and are going out either to work, post-secondary schools, or whatever, the importance of paying bills, retirement savings, tax-free savings accounts. What about insurance, the importance of wills, mutual funds, or simply filing a tax return? Most of them are working part-time, some full-time, even information on a house mortgage, not to mention scholarship applications and, often, Grade 12 students while circling out scholarship applications they'll find out, Madam Speaker, that there are parts of that application they cannot fill out. Why? They didn't know that part of that application will be all the volunteer work that you did, all the groups that they belonged to

in the school or the community and, as a result, they were dropped down in that pecking order when those applications arrived at a post-secondary school.

I know some of these skills are introduced in a Grade 9 course, and in a Grade 10 course called Mathematics at Work, and we also have a Grade 10 course that's a clear development course, but that course is an elective. I would like to see it as a compulsory course because, being an elective course, you may have one third of your students taking that course, which I believe is a very valuable course if it's taught in the right content.

A good education should involve learning life skills that a person will have with them after graduating in order to navigate relationships and careers and be simply well-rounded, successful individuals, and helping students learn the skills for success such as setting goals, making decisions, solving problems, teamwork, communicating effectively, and respect for others - very important skills that many of the students are not getting the opportunity to experience in their high school education. All students need a life skills education. What is the best grade level to teach these skills? Once again, talking to guidance counsellors and talking to students who have finished their high school careers, they thought at the earliest, Grade 10 in their opinion.

You cannot assume that young people are learning these skills from their parents. Some are; however, many are not. If we want all students to have these essential skills, then we'll have to make that course compulsory, either a semester course or have the content of it in a core course.

Our current academic curriculum doesn't teach many aspects necessary to succeeding and thriving in life in general - such as financial responsibilities and investments; how to think logically; retaining information and not merely temporarily memorizing information; and how to apply such abilities to real-world scenarios which often occur. Again, what I've been saying and will continue to say in the next ten minutes I'm just reiterating what grads have mentioned to me, what some guidance counsellors from different schools have mentioned to me.

The lack of life skills permeates every area and aspect of life - such as mutual respect, give and take whether it's face to face, by e-mail, social media, or telephone. One can say that young people's personal communication skills are being hindered perhaps due to mediums that do not require actually speaking to anyone - such as texting, social media messages, e-mail, and so on. Knowing how to connect with others, being empathetic, when to speak, and when to listen is of great value in the workplace and in interpersonal relationships. Students need to be equipped with the ability to think through scenarios and situations that are definitely going to occur in their lives.

Making the right choices could literally mean the difference between . . .

MADAM SPEAKER: Order. I would like the chatter to come down a bit, please.

The honourable member for Pictou Centre has the floor.

MR. DUNN: Thank you. Making the right choices could literally mean the difference between happiness and remorse, success and failure. The importance of handling money responsibly is obviously very valuable.

Accounting, finance and business classes do explain accounting procedures, financing arrangements, and business structures, but I feel they do not focus much on personal finances, saving, or investing. The main focus of these classes is to prepare students for working environments and not necessarily for managing their own finances.

Advice for money management, getting out of debt, is important to know. High school education doesn't spend much time teaching students actually how to be self-employed. How does one set up their company structure and manage the finances, pay taxes; reinvesting in the company is essential and can mean the difference between failure and success.

What do students know about home repair and homeowners insurance? Very important to know the types of damages and what amounts are covered and included in the policy. Or if they're in an apartment because they're going to post-secondary school, what type of insurance does the landlord have? Are they covered?

Madam Speaker, things simply as knowing a few tools. I'll give you a few examples. Just this past weekend I was helping someone fix a faucet and I said, go get me a Phillip's screwdriver. The person looked at me - this person is in their late 20s - they had no idea what I was talking about. Knowing these types of things just makes life much easier. Basically, learning how to read a measuring tape and how to use it.

I'll give you another example. I remember a couple of years ago helping someone build a deck at their cottage. I was busily pretending I knew what I was doing, and I asked the person who owned the cottage, will you go get me a 2x4? - because there was a lot of wood dropped off by Central Supplies. I waited three or four minutes, and I turned around and looked, and the person had a measuring tape out and they were measuring all kinds of pieces of the wood, 2x6, 2x4, and he hollered back and said, there's no 2x4 here. I said, your foot is on one.

Again, this particular person didn't know a 2x4 today is actually 1.5x3.5, and they were looking for something exactly 2x4. Just common-sense skills like that - I must say also the part I built is still standing. Imagine them trying to paint inside the house and trying to figure out what kind of paint to use.

There are so many skills that we can teach students. Car insurance would be another one. It's important to have full coverage on a vehicle. Do they know what happens in the event of an accident? Do they know how to file an accident claim? Knowing what your

coverage consists of is important, what about the deductible? They probably think you're talking Gaelic there if you mention deductible. (Laughter)

MR. ALLAN MACMASTER: There's no word for deductible. (Laughter)

MR. DUNN: My good colleague for Inverness said there's no such Gaelic word as deductible. What dollar amount will your insurance pay for fixing your vehicle or the other person's vehicle if it's your fault in having that accident?

As we go on about skills, personal credit or credit cards; learning how to establish and maintain good credit is a very valuable skill that's not taught in high school. I'll say that again: maintaining good credit. You would not believe the number of students for whom that's not even in their thinking. Good credit needs to be established. We all know that. We all start with no credit, and that's probably a good thing. However, lenders of money prefer you to have some kind of credit. So getting a credit card may be a good option. Not for my kids, Madam Speaker, but for anyone else.

A lot of them have some credit cards, of course, in high school, but a lot of times parents are paying the credit card bill during their high school years. Having a credit card carries a lot of responsibility. They must learn not to max out that credit card, and they must learn not to miss payments, because we all know there's consequences. Always pay on time. It's a good way to build your credit rating.

Students would benefit from being taught how to successfully go about finding a job - applying for a job, building a resume, a cover letter, the interview process, and basically understanding and negotiating contracts. Students should be exposed to mock interviews in which they go through a simulated interview process and learn what is beneficial and detrimental to their interview. Two of my older kids, Madam Speaker, both living in California, had interviews with very large health companies. It was a very interesting process that they had to go through with interviews, and not only going through the interviews but negotiating their salary with the companies.

Students need to be taught at least the basic, rudimentary facts about obtaining and maintaining health care and health insurance, which can be a very confusing process to the learner, due to this ever-changing system.

Madam Speaker, I think this is probably the most important thing I will say during my 15 minutes here, learning how to deal with failure. The trend in recent years is to preserve students' sense of self-confidence, and as a result, students are not being told that their school work is substandard and worth a failing grade. We think about the lack of accountability over the last number of years in our schools with regard to attending class, passing in assignments on time, and earning a passing grade. There are examples where sport teams stop taking score so there can be no winners or losers.



However, there is no such environment in the real world that is sympathetic and concerned with an individual's sense of self-esteem. In the real world, substandard work results in negative consequences, such as losing one's job. This practice of over-protecting students has a tendency to make students mediocre and fearful of taking risks. Learning failure teaches tenacity, gumption, and character, and makes one more capable of navigating life's ups and downs.

We can mention many other skills, Madam Speaker, like CPR. Time management is another very valuable skill that many students do not have when they leave high school. This skill is increasingly more important the older we get.

Madam Speaker, I could go on here for many more minutes, but hopefully, the minister will look at this particular bill with regard to how to handle money, the importance of handling money. I think we owe it to the students that this should be a compulsory course in high school.

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

MR. BEN JESSOME: Madam Speaker, the honourable member for Pictou Centre was talking about the screwdriver with the flat head, right? Just kidding.

My thanks go out to the member for Pictou Centre for bringing up this very important topic of conversation. I think we can all agree as legislators and as adults that it's important for us all to play a role in ensuring that we enable an environment through the support of our teachers and our Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the next generation of leaders to be prepared to, perhaps one day, step into the role that we're in today and into the private sector, the public sector and beyond. It is our responsibility as legislators to ensure that we're doing our very best to construct a framework to enable opportunities for them as the next generation to put their best foot forward when the time comes.

[4:00 p.m.]

The member for Pictou Centre brought up a number of different extremely relevant and important subjects that are critical for young people to be exposed to at an early age. Listening to his comments, I'd like to acknowledge that his motivation for presenting this bill in the House yesterday and discussing it on the floor today was inspired through conversations with constituents, with young high school graduates, as well as guidance counsellors. Through you, Madam Speaker, my hat's off to the member for bringing forward an important topic on behalf of his constituents and guidance counsellors.

We appreciate the work that guidance counsellors do. They're in a position in our schools where they're dealing with some of our most challenging circumstances, or their students' most challenging circumstances, dealing with students' mental health, dealing

with troubles they have at home - and on top of that, they're expected to be career counsellors in addition to those responsibilities. They do have a tremendous amount of work on their plates, and the work that they do should be recognized.

Today we're here to talk a little bit about a career-development course at the Grade 10 level. I know the member for Pictou Centre indicated in his remarks that, through conversations with people outside the Chamber today, Grade 10 was an appropriate time for this conversation to be had. I say this very humbly, considering that the member is a former educator, and I say this as someone who is not an educator: it is my personal view that this type of a conversation, when to introduce these very important topics, should come at an earlier age.

I say that fairly confidently and passionately because, to go back to the days when I was in junior high at Madeline Symonds Middle School, my classmates and I participated in a program called Junior Achievement. This was a program that was initiated to support students at a younger age, to introduce them to financial literacy - how to appreciate the value of money, how to be responsible for the use of credit cards, managing budgets. It also helped us to consider how to be ready for the workplace.

In junior high, you're not quite at that point of applying for your first job just yet, but given that we want students to be exposed to as much information to make them ready for the workforce as soon as possible, I believe that that program lent itself to preparing myself and my classmates.

It has an additional component to the program - which, I might add, is largely run by volunteers. Friends of mine in the Hammonds Plains-Lucasville community, where I grew up, continue to participate in that program - visiting classrooms to have those conversations, to be mentors for the next generation with respect to, as I previously stated, financial literacy, workplace readiness, and entrepreneurship. Again, this takes place at the junior-high age.

Another way that I think we're obliged to engage in this conversation - and I will add that, in conversation with the minister, he's indicated to me that this is an important conversation to have. As the member for Pictou Centre indicated in his remarks, there are examples of courses that presently exist in our system that can have an impact on exposing the next generation to these types of life skills, but they are not necessarily a compulsory course. There's an ongoing concern that students who don't opt into this course are going to fall between the cracks and miss an opportunity to learn about what we all acknowledge later on in life as very important skills.

As I started to say, I know the minister sees the value in preparing our students generally but, more specifically, in relation to this bill, it's an important conversation to have alongside educators, alongside guidance counsellors. We need to ensure that we're not perhaps overburdening students. Maybe for that reason part of my rationale for

introducing it at an earlier age is that it doesn't add to the already lofty requirements to graduate high school. We want to do our best to enhance their opportunities to be exposed to this information, but we also want to ensure that first and foremost we're not overburdening students who are already extremely focused and stressed about getting into university and whatnot.

It's important to teach this stuff but we want to make sure we do it in the right way and, additionally, ensuring that educators are part of that implementation and that framework, that curriculum adjustment that I think is very critical that we, as policy-makers, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as policy-makers, take the time to ensure that if we are implementing new requirements of teachers and of students with respect to curriculum, that we have that conversation about how functionally and practically that takes place, Madam Speaker.

I guess I would like to move through the remainder of my time here and indicate that as a member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, through successive election campaigns and through four years in elected office, this topic of conversation has certainly come up in my community as well. We are made up of predominantly young families who have grave consideration for empowering their kids to be the next generation of leaders, to be soundly prepared to go into job interviews, to understand what it means to apply for post-secondary education, what it means to save for post-secondary education, what it means to move out and have their first apartment, take on a first mortgage - which, for the record, I have yet to do. I'll get there; I'm not rushing it, folks.

In saying that, I'm not too far from the importance of fulfilling that requirement to enable opportunities to learn about those life skills, as the member has brought forward today, with respect to my role as a legislator representing Hammonds Plains-Lucasville - young families. I'm in a position in my life where a lot of this is taking place, quite frankly, in real time for me. Looking back, there could have been many more opportunities throughout my time in the education system, throughout university, throughout high school. I think back to when I would have specifically had an opportunity to structurally learn about these life skills like financial management, entrepreneurship. It would have been in my time at Madeline Symonds.

Certainly beyond this Chamber, Madam Speaker, we as a general public - I was going to say we as parents but I guess I'm not a parent yet either (Interruption) I'm not rushing that either guys. It's very critical that society as a whole plays a role in ensuring that we enable more opportunities for young people to gain more information about life skills. There's a tremendous amount in referencing Junior Achievement. There is a tremendous amount of young professionals and senior professionals who at the drop of a hat, make that concerted effort, go that extra mile on top of their busy schedules to take the time to reach out to young people, to invite them in to have a conversation about maybe starting a new business or gaining some more insight on whatever particular thing that they're dealing with in their life at that point in time.

It's really wonderful to live in a province where there are so many people out there who are willing to go the extra mile, who are willing to take that added time, who are willing to be intentional about supporting the next generation outside of all of their obligations in life. Again, it is an added burden on their schedule, but I think the value in taking that time for the next generation is invaluable and it really doesn't take that much time for us as members of the community, specifically, to just simply be a listening ear.

I still do it. I still reach out to people that are senior to me, which in most rooms that I go into is most people. I guess I should add that it's important that students and young people are confident enough to ask for that help because there are so many people throughout our respective communities in this province who are willing to take that time.

I agree with the member. I look forward to continuing this conversation and I look forward to the remarks from the New Democratic Party caucus. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 90. I'm glad it was introduced. The New Democratic Party caucus agrees that the lives of students in our province is very complex. There are certainly many skills that they require and probably don't have. As important, they deserve access to all of the supports and skills that they need to have healthy, productive lives.

This bill certainly highlights some of those skills that I suspect many Nova Scotians would expect that our students are already being taught. It's somewhat interesting to find out that they are not.

I remember taking a different version of this course myself in Grade 9 - PDR, personal development in relationships. My two recollections of that course were actually learning some really important lessons about what healthy relationships look like, and how to write a cheque and how to balance a chequebook. So, the first one has stood me in very good stead, the second I don't use very much anymore.

[4:15 p.m.]

With respect, Madam Speaker, I don't actually believe that the core skills our children need right now are to understand the value of money. With the highest rate of child poverty in this province, something many speakers have spoken very clearly about, both in this Chamber as well as the many teachers who presented to Law Amendments recently, I would say rather that many of our children know the value of money very acutely - they just don't have any. So, it's my view that that might be where we might put the balance of our energies as a government.

Nova Scotia universities have seen the highest increases in tuition in the country and many of our students who are starting university now are expected to start out with an average debt load of around \$40,000. Of course, it's important, as the member pointed out, to know how to apply to university and how to apply for loans, but again with respect, I'd prefer to see a path to affordable or free post-secondary education than to educate students how to best initiate themselves into a lifetime of debt repayment.

You know, along those lines as many will recall, our Party introduced a bill mandating free tuition to Nova Scotia Community College, and you know there's an economics lesson in there - something north of 90 per cent of graduates at the Nova Scotia Community College stay in Nova Scotia, they find gainful employment, contribute to the tax base, buy homes, do all of the things that the government member was speaking about aspiring to do. If we could in fact, provide them with that education I think it's pretty clear that it would pay dividends down the road.

Again, is it important to understand debt? Absolutely. I think many of us, and those close to us, understand all too well the importance of establishing and maintaining good credit. As we move throughout our lives this becomes an important thing that many people have not previously paid attention to but, that being said, if your choice is irresponsible credit or food, I don't penalize the folks who choose bad credit - they don't have a choice. So, again, for my money - pardon the pun - I would choose to alleviate poverty and the conditions that children find themselves in, rather than teaching themselves how to painfully manage through it.

Along the same lines, I think it's pretty unlikely that most young people in our province are neglecting their RRSPs out of ignorance. More likely, and this is borne out by the young people I know and speak to, and are in my community and in my family, they're doing so because they're precariously employed in low-wage jobs, and they are saddled with tens of thousands of dollars of debt coming out of university.

I remember the first time that I contributed to an RRSP and I felt like a billionaire. I mean, it felt so amazing that I could be putting - you know, that was sort of a grown up right of passage for me. So, are RRSPs important? Absolutely. But, again, I think that as with many other elements of financial security in the world today, they're becoming more and more of a luxury.

We know that many, and we've talked a lot in this Chamber, about how many high school students are dealing with severe mental health issues without adequate access to timely supports. In fact, this was clearly the inspiration of the bill we just debated, that was introduced by the Interim Leader of the Official Opposition. We know students are experiencing sexual violence and that they lack access to culturally appropriate, province-wide, community-based services. Can we provide this kind of skill development in our schools? We're all waiting for the findings of the Commission on Inclusion, but in this case

we're talking about pedagogy - could mental health and mental health awareness not be part of the content of what our children are taught?

Now, Madam Speaker . . .

MADAM SPEAKER: Order. I'd like the chatter to lower a bit.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South has the floor.

MS. CHENDER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure if it's the business of the members of this Chamber to legislate pedagogy. I appreciate the impetus behind this bill. I don't take issue with any parts of this bill, but I think this points to an issue around the way that this government runs the core functions over which it presides, namely education, health, community services. There is a shocking lack of transparency. We know that in education, with the passage of Bill No. 72, that has become all the more acute.

I would prefer an open and accessible Department of Education and Early Childhood Development where we could have some dialogue with, or access to, the pedagogical experts and we could suggest, or understand with more depth, what is going on in terms of pedagogy. Respectfully, Madam Speaker, if it is the business of this House to determine pedagogy, another one of my personal votes would be for civic engagement. Right now, students have a choice about whether they want to learn about government, about how government works, and about how to engage with government. That knowledge is available, but it isn't mandatory. In my view, all high school students should graduate with a robust knowledge of the political systems by which they are governed.

We've seen abysmal voter turnout, we've seen the challenges of civic engagement. Where do our students learn about effective organizing? How do our students learn how to most strategically wield their power as constituents and taxpayers? When, and how often, are they instructed about the power, privilege, and import of their vote?

I know these courses exist. I firmly believe that my Grade 12 political science class put me on the path to this very Chamber, and I know that some of my colleagues have spent the better part of their careers, including my colleague from Dartmouth East, engaged in this exact pursuit. But if we're going to make something mandatory by a law of this House, why not this?

Many of our students are struggling, Mr. Speaker, they are watching adults in their lives struggle to make ends meet, and to provide care to young children and aging family members. They see their own teachers increasingly demoralized and disrespected by government.

We want young people to thrive, Mr. Speaker. Career development is one small part of that. For my money, though, they need real investments in their future - in post-

secondary education, in health care, in adequate wages, and social services and, most important, they need to be taught how to demand them.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MR. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to speak on Bill No. 90. First, I'd like to take a moment and thank the honourable member for Pictou Centre for coming forward with this private member's bill. Many of my friends who were born and raised in Pictou County, and had the member for Pictou Centre as a teacher and an administrator over the years, can certainly testify to the great impact he had in the classroom and in the schools of Pictou County. I want to thank the member for Pictou Centre for coming forward with this bill.

I'm really pleased, Mr. Speaker, that we are taking some time this afternoon to talk education, which those in the House know is my passion. It's something I've devoted my life to as others in this House have. I think it's fantastic that the member for Pictou Centre has come forward with a bill that promotes something that we've lost in our education system. For many years - when former students would come and visit, or if I ran into them in my community of Dartmouth East, they will often tell me, "I wish I felt more uncomfortable in school, because I'm feeling really uncomfortable now," they'll tell me. I asked them, what do you mean? They would indicate, "Well, you know, it's tax time, and I have no idea how to do my taxes. I wish time had been devoted in school to focus on those fundamental skills."

Now let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, I believe what we want as parents and grandparents for our kids and grandkids is for them to be independent in very sense of the word: independent emotionally, financially, independent so they're strong and able to stand on their own two feet and face the challenges that come to us every single day. The students I have spoken to, the recent graduates, will often indicate that they feel in the curriculum that they were exposed to - while it certainly had its merits and while it certainly did promote independence to some degree - there were missed opportunities to transmit and facilitate and practise some fundamental skills in order for that young person to be independent.

I ask this House, why have we removed, to some extent, a fundamental part of growing up from our public school systems? That is failure. Oftentimes, young people, when they get out there in "the real world," soon discover that the skillset that has been transmitted to them through the school system doesn't meet their situation in their early 20s.

Here's the good news. We already have in place in our school system today the tools available to help promote further independence for our students. They're there. We simply need to listen to the advice of the member for Pictou Centre and move what is now an elective course, whether it's Career Development 10 or 11 - we as a province will say

to our youth, we want to make sure you are exposed to these skills that you are going to need to navigate through this thing called life.

I have had the privilege of standing in front of a lot of students over the years to teach about and facilitate the very things the member for Pictou Centre was talking about. In many regards, I see a lot of inequities in our school system. We know that. One of the things I observed was students who went through the Options and Opportunities Program, where Career Development 10 and 11 are compulsory courses. They learn about career awareness, they learn about personal development, they learn about workplace readiness, they do a co-op, and they will, over a period of two or three years develop a life/work portfolio. They'll come back and visit, and they're confident. They're ready. Yet those who have gone through the mainstream, some will come back and say, I feel as though a fundamental part of my education is missing.

What are they really saying? They're saying, I don't feel independent. I don't feel as though the curriculum I was exposed to put me in a position where I know that I can navigate this situation, that I can take out a loan, and that I know how to file my taxes. These are critical things that we need to further expose our students to because that's the name of the game. We want our students to be independent in every sense of the word.

The proposal put forward in this private member's bill, I believe, takes a holistic approach. The proposal here in this bill is to take an already-existing course in our high schools and move it from being an elective to something that is mandatory. I can tell you, you can sign me up to teach that course. When you are able to stand up in front of students and present to them material that is meaningful in their lives at that given moment, the teacher is set up for success, and those students are certainly set up for success.

Let's get specific. What are we talking about? What types of things do we need to communicate to our students in a life skills course? As I have said, that content is already there. We just need to move it to the next level. First and foremost, when we talk about life skills, when we talk about any type of career development course, we're talking about personal development where we put students through exercises, activities, that get them to think about their individual decision-making skills. What goes into problem-solving? What are your values? What are your values? What do you hope to achieve in your life? What are your dreams and aspirations? You could spend an entire year facilitating and talking to students about those amazing things.

When we talk about personal development, we are talking about encouraging our young people to be effective communicators - communicators with their body language, communicators with their words, communicators that are attempting to find their voices, and to find the type of relationships that they want to live in.

When we talk about personal development in courses like this, we are talking about promoting some fundamental values we have in Canadian and Nova Scotian society: values



for respect for diversity, an appreciation for cultural diversity. When we talk about personal development in a course like this, we are emphasizing the importance of tolerance and acceptance - the foundation of any multicultural society.

This proposal in this private member's bill has much promise. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. It's there. We simply need to elevate it to the next level.

One of the things that already exists in our career development Grade 10 and 11 courses is the emphasis on career awareness and career exploration. Students are sitting in those seats with the desire to find themselves, to find their voices, and to find the paths they wish to go down.

Mr. Speaker, we need to talk further about their personal interests. What are their attributes, their personality attributes? What are their skill sets, and what are their learning styles? Many students I've seen sitting in front of me, they very much wanted to get up and move around. It's a system that is often designed just to have them sitting when they need to be up moving around.

When we talk about career awareness, we are talking about evaluating the different career information that is out there, and to analyze and see the different jobs that will exist in the future.

The proposal in this private member's bill put forward by the member for Pictou Centre - we also need to emphasize workplace readiness, to get students to understand that the world of work is often very different than the world of school. What is tolerated in schools, where you will get third or fourth chances to redeem yourself - often in the world of work, those opportunities are not afforded.

So workplace readiness is a fundamental component that we need to talk to our students about, and certainly, at the high school level. I believe that is the appropriate time to do that because it is meaningful at that point in their lives. They need the skills and the understanding of workplace health and management systems, workplace culture, relationships of the workplace, etiquette in the workplace, and all of these things.

When I look at the ideas outlined in this private member's bill, I see many teachable moments there for our public school teachers. Why is it only a select few, through an elective, get exposed to things like personal development, career awareness and, of course, workplace readiness? Why just a few? Why would we not expose all Nova Scotian students to those fundamental topics that they should learn about?

The member for Pictou Centre talked about the fundamental importance of financial management or financial literacy, economic literacy. That is so key, to discuss financial values. The importance of saving your money is certainly a value that I've tried to pass on to my daughters - that the purpose of money is not to be spent at this point in your life. I

tell my daughters it is to be saved. Building up that capital so that you can be independent by the time you are 18 or 19 - Mr. Speaker, that is the name of the game. Education is designed to create independent, autonomous individuals who go forward through life with strength and tenacity and the desire to face the obstacles that come at us.

The member for Pictou Centre mentioned strategies for managing money in life and in work. It's so important. In no way, shape, or form do we expect our students to be masters at that topic. At minimum we need to expose them to that, expose them to interest and how, if you have a credit card and you are paying only the minimum payment, it could take you 10 or 15 years to pay that off. Why do we deny the majority of our students this topic? Only a select few get that, in Options and Opportunities, and those who choose to take this as an elective.

We need to talk about consumer rights in courses like this, along with, of course, the entrepreneurial spirit - the entrepreneurial spirit that the Ivany report talked about, as all of us in this House know, which is so important for Nova Scotia to move forward.

In a course like this, there are so many opportunities for hands-on learning where students can practise developing a resume and a cover letter, can practise interviews. The opportunities, the teachable moments, the learning moments - you can't count them. There are so many great opportunities to see students really connect with the material.

If I can say this, Mr. Speaker, I taught many subjects while a public school teacher. The subject proposed by the member for Pictou Centre, to move it from an elective to a mandatory course - I believe a lot of teachers and a lot of guidance counsellors are in favour of that, because we are seeing skills gaps. Our employers, our small business owners, are telling teachers that at times we can clearly see a skills gap when it comes to math, when it comes to financial literacy.

We have a responsibility as elected officials to make sure that the curriculum reflects what is needed in our society. What is needed is a life skills course at the high school level that exposes our students to the very things that I've talked about: discussing personal development, discussing career awareness, discussing workplace health and safety, and discussing financial management so that they leave high school knowing how to do a resume, how to do a cover letter, how to do an interview with confidence and, of course, if we can, to build in a mandatory co-op program in a life skills course because, as we all know, the greatest educator in life is experience. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Opposition business for today. I want to thank everyone who participated in the debate on both bills. I turn the floor over to the Deputy Government House Leader.

**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

**GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 1004.

[Res. No. 1004, re Estimates - CW on Supply: Referred - notice given Mar. 7/18 - (Hon. Karen Casey)]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East with 32 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: I thank the minister for that resounding applause there. I know it was promised to be a riveting reply tonight. It is a pleasure to take my place and continue my response to the budget.

As I thought about the budget overnight and I listened to feedback from the community members on social media and calling the office and emailing me, I was struck by some of the comments I received. I wanted to share some of those with the House tonight as well. In particular, I have to give credit to my friend Terry from Pictou who spent quite a bit of time going through the budget and providing some feedback.

I think when you cut through all the noise, Mr. Speaker, you have to ask yourself: a surplus of \$29 million, when close to 100,000 Nova Scotians don't have a family doctor and most of the province's unions have been working without a signed contract since 2015 - for three years - is it really a surplus? Is it really a surplus when that's the situation that the province is facing? When you try to break down what's happening in this budget and if you start with health care - and we talked quite a bit about health care yesterday as we always do in this House. I was struck by the so-called incentives to get doctors here, which could be a good start but, as Terry described, they could be described as trying to fill your sink by running the water without putting the plug in.

I think we see that a lot from this government. I think we see that a lot: a lack of plan, a lack of vision. I think we really see it here with the strategy around doctor recruitment and with the strategy specifically around the incentive to take patients on, off the list, the \$150 amount.

The province has hired a recruiter to recruit foreign doctors and make it easier for them to come here, and there's some of that in the budget. There's money for recruiting for doctors, but I'm specifically thinking about the program where for every new patient that a doctor takes off the 811 list, they can get - if that patient is without a doctor and they take them off the 811 list, they can get \$150. So, if you want to come to Canada to be a doctor, Nova Scotia may be your easiest option to get in the door. Maybe that's the goal of this government, to make this the easiest option to get in the door and, if you do that, you can take patients. You can collect \$150 for taking patients off the list. Maybe you take 1,000 patients off the list, Mr. Speaker, and get \$150,000 bonus for coming to Canada and setting up and those would-be patients who didn't have a doctor, now do, and we have a doctor set up in Canada.

Well, what's to stop that doctor from then moving down the road to another province in short order, one that pays more, which is pretty much every other province? They all pretty much pay more than Nova Scotia does. So, maybe there's a plan to get here, to get doctors here but there's no real plan to retain them. In fact, I'd say that there's the opposite of a plan to retain them. That is the atmosphere in which doctors are working, the adversarial atmosphere between government and the doctors.

It's too kind to say there's not a plan to retain them. It could be better stated as there's a plan to drive them away. In many ways, that's true, but if you look at that fund, the fund where it's \$150 bonus for taking a patient on, that fund I believe was \$6.4 million. With 100,000 people needing a doctor, wouldn't that fund be better placed at \$15 million?

You have to ask the question, what is really behind the numbers? I know oftentimes yesterday the government said there was a lot behind the numbers, a lot of work and the numbers are the numbers they said. But when you start to see these types of things, you have to wonder because if there are 100,000 people without a doctor and the bonus to take on a person who doesn't have a doctor is \$150, then \$15 million is your number if you were ever serious about that famous 2013 election promise we all remember - Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you do as well - a doctor for every Nova Scotian.

People in this House may remember that promise and I'm sure many members opposite knocked on doors and promised people, if we form government, there will be a doctor for every Nova Scotian. That was the promise. We don't hear that promise too much anymore because, despite being in Opposition for quite a few years before taking government, and arguably should have understood the situation, we heard the Minister of Health and Wellness in Question Period today rail on the Opposition - the crisis in health care has been decades in the developing he said. Not his fault, he's only been there for five years - not his fault. So you would think, you would have known in if you were in Opposition how serious it was. If you were at all serious about a doctor for every Nova Scotian, then today, when you put the bounty out there for new patients, you'd make it a sufficient amount so that everyone who doesn't have a doctor would have a doctor.

Wouldn't you do that? That's what I'd do if I were serious about that, but that's not what's been done.

So you have to ask yourself, what is really the end goal? Hiring more surgeons to deal with the backlog of hip and knee replacements is a good thing. It's a good improvement. If the government can do that, why can't they hire more doctors? What are the real challenges behind getting the doctors here? There are challenges, but we have a \$30 million surplus. Maybe that might help towards it, right?

When you look at \$2.9 million for health care, including more support for youth mental health, that's a good thing. We talked about that yesterday, how they underspent last year's \$4 million and replaced it this year with \$2.9 million. But if the \$2.9 million is there, what's the real plan to use it? Let's at least start there. You had \$4 million last year and it was underspent, it wasn't properly, effectively used - and now this year there's \$2.9 million. What's the plan? Are we going to be back in the same situation where we have \$2.9 million that wasn't spent because there was no plan behind it?

We have zero psychiatrists in Pictou County right now. Zero psychiatrists. That's a pretty disheartening thing. This government should be concerned about that, they should be ashamed of it. You can allocate the money. Anyone can allocate the money, but good leadership comes from properly managing the investment. That's the important part. The \$2.9 million is there, what's the plan? There's \$5.5 million more for seniors to stay in their homes - that's great. But what about those who can't stay in their home? No new long-term care beds opening under this budget. None. What about those who can't stay in their own home?

I want to talk about the \$15 million to begin to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Inclusive Education. It's still a pretty vague promise. We heard the minister yesterday when questioned about the \$15 million, as to whether it was enough, the minister said, you have to remember that the budget year is different than the school year. That may be true, I will concede that point to the minister. But 12 months is still 12 months. To insinuate that the \$15 million is not for the whole 12 months - is not for the whole year - is a falsehood, it's unfair.

There is \$15 million here, but what's the plan? What supports that number? That's the concern of members opposite here, and myself, of course. But not just to people in this Chamber. If we look at the statements the stakeholders have made, they know it's questionable too. In a scan of the media last night, we know that they're concerned the funding is not adequate. Adequate funding should be a top priority. The stakeholders last night were saying that inclusive model needs a full redesign, and when the final report comes out from the commission - which I think is next week - it will include a new provincial model. It will include a new definition, and it will include a new policy for inclusive education.

Is \$15 million going to cover that? My colleague, the member for Dartmouth East pointed out that it's roughly \$40,000 a school. Is \$40,000 a school going to be enough to implement a new provincial model for inclusive education? It's hard for me to imagine it is. But I'd just like to see something that supports the \$15 million. I'd like to see the minister table a little schedule that says this is how we got to the \$15 million.

I think if the minister were to table the analysis of how they got to the \$15 million to begin to implement the recommendations on the Commission on Inclusive Education, if the minister were to table the document that showed how the \$15 million was calculated, it would go something like this: eeny, meeny, miny, moe, and it would land on \$15 million. I don't actually think there's much more to it than that, Mr. Speaker. That's not the way to govern, so we'll see what is behind it. I've heard numbers that could be \$30 million, \$40 million, or \$50 million. The government will be faced with picking and choosing which recommendations they want to go with, that they want to implement.

Where have we heard that before? Perhaps, you're familiar with Bill No. 72 and the Dr. Glaze report. The government picked and chose which recommendations they wanted to go with.

I remember the one thing that stood out to me when Dr. Glaze presented her findings. When she presented her findings, Dr. Glaze told the media that was gathered to anxiously hear the report that while she recommended doing away with the provincial school boards, if we change our minds down the road in five or so years, we can just reinstate them. I remember how I felt when I heard that - if we do away with them, we can just reinstate them. Not only does that beg the question as to whether Dr. Glaze was absolutely certain with herself that shutting down the school boards was the right decision - it puts that into question when you hear somebody say that - it also raises serious concerns over the government's long-term strategy for education.

It raises the question as to whether the government understands the cost and resource implications of playing dominoes with the school board model only to try to set those dominoes back up when the gamble with students' education doesn't pay off or go that way. Reinstating the intricate, democratic model of the school boards once you have recklessly chosen to do away with it is a costly exercise, and it pulls important funding and resources away from the very places that need it the most.

Mr. Speaker, we're smarter than that. But perhaps, the Premier and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development need it explained in a very simple, succinct way for them to understand. I'll put it very simply. This is a case of no backsies. Backsies is a game that ended for most of us way back when we were in school, yet it appears that it might just be starting here. It might just be starting here. We are trying hard on this side of the House to protect this government from itself in many ways. We're trying to point out the lack of foresight, the lack of planning, and the issues that could come from that.

Alas, we weren't successful in pointing it out to them with Bill No. 72, but undeterred, we will carry on as we point to issues with this budget.

We need to know. The government often stands - yesterday they stood many times in the scrums and in the House and said, there's a lot behind these numbers. There's a lot of work that goes on behind the numbers. Basically, in some instances, they just said that the numbers are kind of the numbers. Time and time again they said that. But the numbers are only the numbers when the numbers lead to the numbers. We need to know, is there anything behind it? Is there any substance to any of these things, like cannabis - \$20 million in cannabis revenue and zero expenses against it? There's nothing in the budget to identify the potential additional health care costs associated with the legalization of cannabis. There's nothing in the budget to cover the cost of the education system with respect to the cost of legal cannabis.

We know those things are coming, we know there will be a cost. We know it, presumably the government knows it. Yet the very government that, time and time again, said that the sale of cannabis will be revenue neutral or maybe cost a little money - those were the words they used time and time again - it wasn't a money maker for the province, Mr. Speaker.

Words are one thing, actions are another. The words that it is not a money maker, when they are completely at odds with the actions of booking, in your budget, \$20 million of profit from the sale of cannabis - if \$20 million of profit is the deal that is neutral in the eyes of the Premier, I'd love to see some of the profitable deals he pulled off in his career.

What is behind the \$20 million and why does this government not think there will be any associated costs? Those are the questions that are hard for Nova Scotians to understand. What is behind the \$15 million for inclusive education? People want to know that. I don't think there's much substance to it, and that's what concerns me.

The \$1.7 million in the budget to further expand the Graduate to Opportunity program to connect new grads with employers, is an added incentive for hiring diverse graduates and women in non-traditional careers. The minister often speaks about this program. The reality is that it is a failing program. It certainly appears to be a failing program. Youth unemployment is up in this province, Mr. Speaker. Last year alone it jumped from 15.8 per cent to 17.3 per cent. Youth unemployment is on the rise. You wouldn't get that from listening to the minister in his discussions. You would think that there's no youth unemployment, that he's so proud of his accomplishments.

There is a reality of his accomplishments that goes beyond his words. The reality of the government's accomplishments is that youth unemployment is on the rise, and it might be time for this government to stand back and reassess what they are doing.

They didn't take any time in blowing up the health system, Mr. Speaker. They didn't take any time in dismantling that, and the education system that we've been talking about, there's no delay in their minds with that. They are completely convinced of that. Why aren't they so quick to look at their own program and assess whether that's working? That's what we should be doing. Are we just growing a program and putting more money into a program and hoping that maybe, apparently, some day it will pay off? That isn't good leadership, that's not good government. Good government is assessing every policy that is before you for what it is, on its merits.

When the government came in, they got rid of the NDP program that was there. Maybe they are afraid to look at their own program because they see that it has similar or worse results. But we can't govern that way, Mr. Speaker. We can't worry about that. We need to do what's right today, what is in front of us today.

There are good aspects to this budget, there are good things in this budget, but there are a number of things that concern us with this budget. The number one thing that concerns us is the lack of support for many of the numbers. Maybe we'll get a chance, maybe we'll get some of our own questions answered as part of the Budget Estimates process, and I welcome that opportunity when we speak to the ministers about their department and ask them questions. That's a heads-up for some of these ministers that some of these questions are coming their way.

[5:00 p.m.]

We don't support a process that picks numbers out of the air simply for the benefit of allowing a minister to go to a podium and say, here's what we're doing, here's the investment we're making. We want to see the plan for the investment and we want to see that the investment is being analyzed and reassessed on an ongoing basis. Those are the main concerns that I have with this budget - is the validity of the numbers and how it will all shape out.

I hope Nova Scotians start to see the benefit of three balanced budgets in a row. We haven't seen it from the prior two. It hasn't been a good couple of years for Nova Scotians, despite the talking points we hear in Question Period. The reality on the ground in Nova Scotia is different than the flavour you would get from hearing the ministers respond in this Chamber.

With those few words, I would take my seat and welcome hearing from my colleague, and I also look forward to the Budget Estimates process. Thank you.

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

MR. GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, may I begin by wishing you and all members, and members of the staff, a happy first full day of Spring.



I would like to begin by telling you about a conversation that took place recently in North Sydney. Last month, a man named Lawrence Shebib from North Sydney was interviewed by the *Cape Breton Post*. For the past 14 years, Mr. Shebib has been a volunteer at the North Sydney Community Food Bank. The subject of the interview was the decline of food bank donations so far in 2018 and the consequent decline of what the North Sydney Community Food Bank is able to provide.

Mr. Shebib said, “We’re down probably as low as it has ever been since the food bank has been in North Sydney.” I’ll table this copy of his remarks. Then he was asked about his view of the reasons for this and Mr. Shebib identified two factors: “. . . people are getting poorer, the community service payments haven’t kept up to the cost of living.” Then Mr. Shebib was asked how the food bank is coping with this changed situation. He gave this reply, “. . . we usually give three cans of soup, but now we’re down to two . . .”

I would like to hold Mr. Shebib’s sentence here before this House: we used to give three cans of soup but now we’re down to two. Mr. Shebib’s comment provides a way into evaluating the proposed 2018-19 budget that is before us. It provides a way of summarizing the budget’s shortcomings and the budget’s absence of constructive vision: we used to give away three cans but now we’re down to two.

What I want to suggest is that what we have before us at the moment here in this House is a two-can budget. What we have is a two-can budget: a budget that does not address significantly the situation Mr. Shebib describes; a budget, which in the midst of escalating an ever-sharper need, fails to provide what is required; a budget which is deeply of a piece with the overall situation in which people who used to reach in the bag and bring out three cans of soup, now reach in the bag and draw out two.

We are examining, we are evaluating, we are speaking to a two-can budget, the authors of which are a two-can government who have a two-can understanding. It’s a two-can budget from a whole range of points of view, but there are two that bear particular mentioning.

The two angles from which we can see this budget as a two-can budget that bear particular mentioning are: one, the fact that the budget is such a betrayal of the young people of Nova Scotia; and two, the fact that the budget is such a betrayal of the old.

It’s certainly a two-can budget if you are a young person starting out in Nova Scotia today with a \$40,000 debt from a first degree, which is the average level of indebtedness of the graduates of this province.

It’s absolutely a two-can budget from the point of view of the young person in Nova Scotia who looks to New Brunswick where, if your family income is under \$60,000 a year, your in-province tuition is entirely paid for; or for the young person who looks to Ontario where tuition is covered for the students of all families making under \$50,000 a year; or

the young person who looks to Newfoundland and Labrador where average tuition is \$2,600; or for the young person who looks to Quebec where average tuition is \$3,100. The young person having looked at all this registers the fact that here in Nova Scotia our average university tuition of \$7,726 is the fastest rising anywhere in the country.

It's a two-can budget for the one-in-three residents of our province who did not, or who know someone closely who would not, apply to a post-secondary institution because it would mean incurring too much debt.

Over and over again, when the deep pain of this betrayal of a generation has been raised here in the Legislature, the government has offered its stock replies about increased amounts students are now allowed to borrow, options for loan forgiveness, about jobs opened up by government's programs to graduate through this and that. This is all fog; this is all mist - cloud - a shroud of obfuscation.

There is a question on this before us and it's this, are those who do not come from money more likely to be able to open up wider opportunities for themselves through post-secondary education as a result of the budget the government has placed before us? That is the question that we have on this angle before us.

There is an answer to this question that was being resonated loud and clear by students outside on the street while the Budget Speech was being read yesterday, and the answer to the question that they were registering was unequivocally a no. Since that's the case, young people in Nova Scotia are entirely justified to say today that this is a two-can budget; what we have in Nova Scotia today is a two-can government. The problem with this two-can government is that it has a two-can point of view.

It's a two-can budget, for sure, for the 7,000 people in Nova Scotia who live in nursing homes, who have seen a net nearly \$5 million reduction over the past two years to the funds that sustain diet, recreational programming, and staffing in the institutions where they live - a net reduction that remains unreplaced and unrectified by the present budget.

A two-can budget for sure to the 2,000 people who lived in hospitals in Nova Scotia last year while they waited for placement in a nursing home because the waits are long as a result of the fact that in five years not a single new nursing home bed has been opened anywhere across the province. Now, as a consequence of this budget, these waits stand to be lengthened because it is a singular failure of the government plan put forward in yesterday's budget that by means of it not one new long-term bed is going to be established.

What does that mean in practice? In practice, I have a pretty good sense of what it means from having spent the majority of my adult life as a United Church minister, and having spent what often feels to me like a few million hours visiting in nursing homes. What this means in practice is that there are going to be a whole lot more of those Sunday afternoon family visit conversations, that are going to follow what has by now become the

familiar pattern. The family is there and the person in the hospital bed says, “Well, have you heard anything from them this week about how much longer?” The answer comes back, “No Mom, no Dad but look, I keep calling them every week.”

Every time that our Party has raised this matter in the House, the government response has been about home care, and about the unquestioned value of people being able to remain as long as possible in their homes. But this is to compare an apricot with a spruce tree, because every one of those people living in alternate level of care in our hospitals is there because a professional care assessment has been offered and concluded and given to them which has said to them, it is no longer tenable. It is no longer safe for you, you must go to the hospital and wait for a nursing home because it’s not tenable or safe for you any longer to be living in your home.

So, the nursing home people who haven’t yet made it to a nursing home, living in hospitals, and the nursing home residents, who are living in nursing homes now, where they’ve had the cutbacks, all of them - and it’s a large number of people in Nova Scotia - are absolutely justified in assessing the Finance Minister’s proposal before this House as a two-can budget, from a two-can government, with a two-can understanding.

Now Mr. Speaker, before I continue, would it be in order for me to ask you to re-establish the floor for me?

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

MR. BURRILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, let me say with a little more precision what I really mean by the phrase “a two-can government.” A two-can government, in my estimation, is one that is so singularly obsessed with creating and hoarding, and gathering, and proclaiming the surpluses of its budgets that it misses out on the signature investments in our people - our incomes, our opportunities, our care - the signature investments in our people that would fundamentally uplift the life of our province.

A two-can government, in my judgment, is one that will only countenance, will only consider those investments that can be made within the fiscal limits of an annually surplus-generating budget. This means that it fails to make the very investments that would have the capacity to comprehensively address the crisis of income inadequacy and of opportunity, the crises that are so fundamentally holding us back in Nova Scotia at the moment.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard here in the Legislature many, many times the government’s response to the call for such investments - whether that call has been a call to eliminate poverty or to wipe out tuition at the Nova Scotia Community College, or a call to provide care to those who have come to a point in life where a higher level of care is

what's required. Every time, in some form or another, when the call for those investments has come from this part of the people's House, the response has come from the government in some form or another, something like this - I quote, "we are too responsible," the view is offered from the Liberals. We are too responsible to address those kinds of investments because by means of that we would pass a debt on to our children, and our grandchildren, and we will not do that.

But it is a moment for us, as we look and evaluate the budget that has been placed before us, to call this pseudo-argument out for exactly what it is. It is an over-focus on the short-term. It's an over-focus on the present, on that which can be accomplished within the electoral cycle, disguised, paraded, masqueraded as though it were a concern for the generations of the future.

[5:15 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, we can think of our province as though it were a house. Let us say a person had a house, and the roof leaked in 18 different places. You ask the person, what are you going to do about all those leaks in your roof? Now if the person replied, I might patch up one or two of those holes, but as far as the roof in general goes, my household economy doesn't generate enough surplus this year to fix it, and I'm not one of those people who would leave a debt to their children and their grandchildren, so I'm just going to let it go. Would not most of us, if we were in such a conversation at that point, have a look at the damage that is being done to the gyprock, have a look at the damage that is being done to the ceiling, have a look at all the water that was running in and filling up the 18 buckets and say, for heaven's sake, you fool? That's exactly what we would say.

I want to say this as carefully as I can. Do you see those young people who aren't going to school beyond Grade 12 because their families can't afford it? Do you see those children growing up in homes where the income isn't ever enough to think about anything except survival and scarcity? In Nova Scotia, they are our roof, Mr. Speaker. They are our roof. They are the trusses of our roof, they are the structure of our roof, and they are the chimney in our roof. They are the whole thing. It would pay us, and I say that absolutely literally, if we would make the investments that we require on this front, notwithstanding the fact that that could mean some medium- to short-term debt for us.

Mr. Speaker, this is precisely what the governor of the Bank of Canada, Stephen Poloz, was talking about last week when he spoke about how Quebec's major investment in a universally accessible child care system provides a successful model for economic development. The governor of the Bank of Canada explained that the growth-related benefits of women's improved participation in the labour force as a result of the investment exceed the costs in the longer term of the investment as a whole.

This is exactly what the major studies on the effect of child poverty on economic growth are talking about when they demonstrate the now widely accepted view that

childhood poverty exerts a downward effect in the area of around 4 per cent of GDP on overall economic health.

This is exactly what Dr. Ryan Meili, the newly elected leader of the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party is talking about in his book on health care reform. He points out that every medical student and every nursing student, at a very early point in their training, is taught the first rule of the field of the social determinants of health, namely that the leading ultimately deciding factors in a person's life that determine whether that person is going to be healthy or ill in life, whether they are going to require hundreds of thousands of dollars in health care and treatment over their lifetime - it is not smoking, it is not diet, and it is not exercise. There are two determining factors all the medical students and all the nursing students are taught as they begin their medical formation, the two things that decide that are (1) income and (2) education.

This is exactly why so many jurisdictions across the western world, the States and other places, have now stepped forward to eliminate community college tuition. They have seen and comprehended the economic numbers. They know that, while investment certainly is needed up front in order to achieve the goal, the returns in terms of expanded tax-paying capacity are such that in Nova Scotia for every dollar we would invest in eliminating the tuition of an NSCC student, we would get \$7.20 over that student's taxpaying working lifetime.

We ought not to need economists to help us understand any of this. Our own experience and the experience of the people we know makes it clear. We hear so much about our demographic challenges and challenges posed here by an aging population.

Let us think for a moment about a young couple who graduate, who complete their post-secondary education. Let us say that between them they have three degrees. Let us say they didn't come from a privileged background, so they owe somewhere around \$100,000 or a little better in student debt. Does anyone think that this couple's net purchasing stimulative effect on our economy is improved by the fact that they have a new car payment which is going to be less than the monthly amount they owe on their student loan? Does anyone seriously think that their level of indebtedness is not going to have a real and serious impact on the age that couple will be when they decide to start a family?

Yesterday the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board bragged - I think this is an appropriate word - about how Nova Scotia is one of only two provinces which share our province's current fiscal path. We are presumably to infer from this, to draw from this, that there is some level of skill or prudence, some level of fiscal competence in the Government of Nova Scotia that is not apparent in all those other jurisdictions. But in fact, the very opposite is the case.

Jurisdictions across our country and around the world are recognizing this present moment, when governments can make investments at locked-in historic low interest levels,

as a moment not for fiscal retraction but for expansion and stimulus and investment in creating a broader future. This, in fact, is the prevailing consensus of the best thinking available in economics at the moment.

The world has moved to a new place, and the Liberal Government of Nova Scotia has failed to have its eyes opened to the new prevailing reading of the situation: the view that public investment in the public creates economic growth. It magnifies government revenue, and the medium-term benefits of that resultant growth exceed the costs incurred in aggregate interest output. All of that is not even to speak of the enhancements of productivity that are affected by comprehensive improvements in educational attainment of the sort that can only be achieved by comprehensive improvements in children's household family income.

To proceed, as this budget does, on a basis that does not acknowledge any of this truth is the work of a two-can government with a two-can understanding. Let me tell you a little more precisely what I mean I say "a two-can understanding." I mean a certain defining smallness of vision, of character, of spirit in combination with the absence of a sense for humility and a capacity to listen.

Clearly, this is a government whose tone is set by a certain overabundance of self-satisfaction and all the insensitivity and arrogance that tends to go hand-in-hand with that. I mean, what incredibly self-focused insensitivity to have passed through third reading and into law a bill that obliterated the only level of government in Nova Scotia where women are adequately represented - school boards - and to have done it on International Women's Day? Where would you have to be to do that? What would have to be your defining frame of mind?

You might wipe out the school board positions of 57 women on International Women's Day if you were in fact just so enthralled with your own excellence that you thought yourself beyond such considerations. What would make you think, a year after the government's epic confrontation with the teachers of the province, which led to the single, greatest diminishment of morale and motivation in the history of the teaching profession in Nova Scotia - where would your head be to think that this might be a good time to unilaterally change the terms of who does and who does not have membership in the Nova Scotia Teachers Union? One could only come up with such an idea if the place where you were was some kind of a hyper, self-satisfied uber-entitled bubble.

When the legislation to abolish school boards and change the terms of membership in the teachers union came to the Committee on Law Amendments a couple of weeks ago, the social media conversation - as members, I'm sure, are aware - was all about how many educators didn't really see the point of coming there to make submissions because they'd been there the year before and they'd found the government members of the committee disconnected and inattentive and unengaged and rude - and what would lead you to conduct

yourself in such a way toward the public unless at some deep, self-defining level you'd come to enjoy the mirror a lot and thought of yourself as something really special?

I think about the other day, Mr. Speaker, when the member for Dartmouth North was addressing here in the Legislature income inadequacy issues and, all of a sudden, in her mid-explanation she stopped up short when she realized that a couple of government members were sharing a little joke or laugh as she was speaking, and she said let's just hang on a minute here. I'm talking about people who can't get their rent; I'm talking about people who have run out of food before the end of the month, and I see people laughing, and the member from Dartmouth North said that is not okay. Well, of course, it's not okay but it's what you get when you have a two-can government, with a two-can character, with a two-can understanding.

We can anticipate certainly the shape of the coming discussions about the budget. Our Party will raise in debate after debate after debate, in discussion after discussion, format of estimates after estimates format - we'll raise the places of need. We'll raise the places of pain, the places where we've fallen far behind in Nova Scotia and, in many such cases, a minister will then respond with a certain energetic self-righteousness about something in that particular area that their government has done - not, mind you, some place where the need has been met or the pain has been addressed or the crisis has truly been dealt with, but rather some corner of public policy where some manner of initiative has been taken sufficient for that ministry in effect to be able to tick that box.

The existence of that particular box ticking will, in many cases, be sufficient to trigger the great sanctimoniousness machine at the Liberals communication centre, and then we will be exposed to that minister's view of the epic wonderfulness of the government she or he is part of and that will be one component of the response.

Another component will be gratuitous, nefarious comparisons between whatever little they have done and their assessment of what was done by the government elected nine years ago in Nova Scotia. Some of these comparisons will be within the realm of fair comment but a great many of them will be below the standard of integrity that the public have a right to expect in democratic discourse.

Following all of this, there's going to be a vote and the budget will pass and there will be an outpouring of the Liberals' self-defining self-congratulation. On that day, the same 40,000 people will continue to go to food banks, and the same \$40,000 will continue to be the average amount owed by Nova Scotia's graduating students, and the Department of Health and Wellness will continue to have more than 40,000 people registered as needing a family doctor. Why is that? It's because we're stuck in Nova Scotia for the moment with a two-can government.

This upcoming year is going to be shaped by a two-can budget and whose contribution to the good of our province is severely restricted by their two-can point of view. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The Estimates are now referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Supply unto Her Majesty.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that does conclude the government's business for today. (Interruptions) I know it's sad, but we'll be back tomorrow.

I move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow, Thursday, March 22, 2018, between the hours of 12:00 noon. and 10:00 p.m. Following the daily routine and Question Period, we will move into Estimates and, following Estimates, with time permitting, we will move to second reading on Public Bills Nos. 82, 84, 85, and 87.

[5:30 p.m.]

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to adjourn to meet tomorrow, Thursday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, between the hours of 12:00 noon and 10:00 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 12:00 noon.

We'll now move into late debate, as submitted by the honourable member for Clare-Digby:

"Therefore be it resolved that the investment of \$120 million in improving high-speed Internet service will connect more homes and businesses, enhance service for the underserved communities, enhance rural economies, and create more jobs for Nova Scotians."

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)**

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



**GOV'T (N.S.) - INTERNET ACCESS: INVESTMENT OUTCOMES - POSITIVE**

MR. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Speaker, it's nice to rise here after this lengthy day and hear some positive messages from our government on things that are going forward. (Interruptions) I struck a note already.

Truly on a serious note, Mr. Speaker, this is a positive message. It's one that I think a lot of us have been waiting for and working for, for a long time. It's important that we note that it isn't just for typically those people who live in rural Nova Scotia, it's for all Nova Scotians.

Quickly, I just want to say how rare an opportunity it is for me to stand here and speak about how we got here. Our books are balanced, and we've learned at this time that we have an opportunity to invest money.

We were criticized just recently by the speaker who just sat down as not being innovative in looking to the future. This is looking to the future. This is a result in our opportunity to invest in Nova Scotia's future, and it's an opportunity because we had a solid fiscal plan.

I want to start off by thanking not only the minister and the Premier, but certainly the public servants who had the vision at the time when the offshore accord was created, to understand there would be a point in time when money from the accord was going to have to be looked at. They had the vision at that time to put in place an agreement that put us where we are now.

We know that developing these offshore resources are important for all Nova Scotians, and this is truly a chance for us to be smart, it's a chance for us to make some sustainable decisions for a prosperous future and inclusive province. Projects such as this have an opportunity also to pay dividends.

In saying that I am going to get to the point of the Internet. Internet access is an economic game changer for businesses, for students, and for delivering government services faster, and to those that matter the most. It impacts things like home sales, it impacts things like our children's ability to learn. I don't think there's anybody on either side of the House who won't speak and say how important it is for us to grow our Internet services. It drives innovation, it helps with health care, clean tech, investments in research and development, and it helps to create products and services that solve real-world problems.

The Internet has a huge part in driving our economy from a lot of different ways. These decisions also that we are making, investing this money, help Nova Scotians now, and it puts us in a positive position to do things even more down the road. We are able to

do all this and maintain a surplus for the current fiscal year, which I think is something that should never be overlooked.

Our financial plan, Mr. Speaker, is working and now is the time to invest in a more prosperous Nova Scotia. This money is not for raises or artificially creating jobs that cannot be sustained, it's a chance to invest in products that will have a lasting impact and that have a potential to pay dividends for decades. For too long in rural areas, including mine, we have been held back by poor, if any Internet connections at all.

Today, Internet access is essential for businesses, students, and delivering services that matter to Nova Scotians. We're also investing in research and innovation. Research drives innovation and plays a role in every aspect of our lives. Our investments reach urban and rural areas and touch Nova Scotians regardless of their status. We're able to do all of this, and as I have mentioned and I am going to mention again, maintain a surplus for the current fiscal year. Our financial plan is working, and now is the time to invest in a more prosperous Nova Scotia.

Some of the history of rural Internet - first off, I would just like to note where this money is coming from. I had touched on it briefly. It's our offshore revenue, which again, was negotiated decades ago. It was very insightful of the public sector to see, and even more importantly, we listened. When this money became available, we knew that there were key areas out there.

This is a one-time opportunity, a key opportunity for us to invest in things like Internet funding trust, \$120 million; Research Nova Scotia Trust, \$20 million; Offshore Growth Strategy, \$11.7 million; Saint Mary's University's innovation hub, \$11 million; DeepSense data innovations for oceans, \$5 million; innovation team, \$1.5 million; and another \$850,000 in sandboxes, which I'm proud to say, is going to create a new sandbox in my area at Université Sainte-Anne in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Community College. I'm sure that will be delivered and accepted very well within my community. Those are some of the benefits that we're seeing out of this.

But again, back to the Internet side of it. The history on this is something that I can say I worked on for eight years when I was with the Municipality of Digby. When I left there, it was one of the largest files that I had. The history of it was interesting. I have to commend the government, not previous to us but the one the one before that, Rodney MacDonald and the vision that he had to try to develop a broadband initiative.

That's the interesting and complex thing about this Internet business, that the technology in it is so complicated. It's so hard to spend that money in the right place, and that's why I'm proud to see what we have done. We have taken a different approach. We started back with Brightstar. We started back with money that was spent to try to find where we can best put the limited money that we have.

Back in 2016, the Government of Nova Scotia spent \$2.8 million and in 2017 another \$14.5 million. We're looking at tapping into the federal government's commitment of \$500 million. This was done mainly to try to build a foundation on how we can spend money, hard-earned Nova Scotians' money, on trying to put something in place that not only is going to be effective, but also that's going to last. So, we moved towards engaging Brightstar, which I think was one of the key things that we did, to try to find a foundation on how we can build on what we have. Where is the low-hanging fruit? What's the best way to go forward? In doing that, we found that there were several alternatives. That's what we're facing right now: working on what they call the middle mile and working on the last mile, trying to develop those hard-wired situations which are not cheap.

I mentioned the fact that we have \$120 million. It's going to take \$500 million, Mr. Speaker, to finish this. It's going to take \$500 million of hard-earned money, working together with the federal government and our municipalities for communities that are going to need this for the future to move them down the road.

I know it's hard in 10 minutes to sum up what this means. It takes a long time to not only develop the strategies, but also to try to explain to your communities how challenging it is to spend the money the right way. The message that I have for everybody out there is that that \$120 million is probably going to have one of the biggest impacts in my community for dollars spent for the future to leverage other dollars. As I had mentioned to start - and it was mentioned in the resolution - this is to enhance rural communities, and to create more jobs.

Our fiscal plan is on the right path, and it's only because we have the opportunity and the privilege to be able to make decisions that allow us to put money in key areas like this that we can afford that luxury today - and it is a luxury. It is an opportunity for us to see our future. It's an opportunity for us to build on that \$120 million.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to stand here. I'm proud of the fact that we are doing this today.

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

MS. ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, while the investment in rural Internet is welcome and it's good to see that we do have a beginning investment of \$120 million into broadband service across this province, we all know that it is a drop in the bucket, comparatively, to what is going to be needed to get this entire province wired up.

Part of getting the province wired up is also speaking about cellphone service. I know that this House has heard me speak again and again about the lack of cellphone service across this province. This is a grave issue. This should not be, in this day and age, a privilege or a luxury, as the member across had mentioned. This is not a luxury. This is

a basic service in this day and age. It's 2018, as many of us like to say, and for most people, cellphone service is replacing being connected to land lines.

In my constituency in particular, there are many places where we do not even have proper landline coverage. Not only are we talking about no access to Internet service and cellphone service, we are actually speaking about the fact that we don't even have proper access to land lines in many places in Cape Breton-Richmond.

This is ridiculous. I'm going to use that word, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolutely ridiculous issue to have in 2018.

The CRTC is the regulator for cellphone coverage across Canada. We did invite them - or I did invite them to come to speak with me directly. I understand, obviously, that they are very far away, but at least they did get back to me regarding the issues in Framboise and Fourchu and Grand River - St. Esprit is included in there - as well as Loch Lomond.

We recently saw the issue of not having cellphone service in Loch Lomond regarding some bad flooding that happened and a vehicle being caught in that flood. Had they not had backup radio service - because it was a Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal vehicle - those people would have been in a lot of trouble.

They would have also been in a lot of trouble if it would have been a small car, because a small car could have easily been carried across the road to a hole on the other side of the road, where an old mining site is located. The hole is 20-feet deep and about 40-feet across. You wouldn't have found those people for days. It could have been seniors stuck in that vehicle or it could have been a family with children in a vehicle, with no backup service such as radio service, as the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal is so lucky to have. Those people wouldn't even have had access to cellphone coverage.

Speaking about land lines, we don't even have a basic right or service to be able to call 911 if there is an emergency in that area. That needs to be rectified, Mr. Speaker. The CRTC seems to not recognize or understand where on the map Fourchu, Framboise, St. Esprit, Loch Lomond, and Grand River are located. I will put it on record today that CRTC wrote me a letter to basically respond - and I will table that letter. They did respond to my plea to ask Bell Aliant why on earth they cannot seem to correct their issue with basic landline coverage. My response from them was this:

The CRTC has reached out to Bell Canada regarding the outages described in your area. In order to better understand the issues and to inquire about how it was resolving the situation, Bell Canada indicated that this past summer, because of road construction in the area, a chain of telephone poles were moved. The road construction required significant blasting and the telephone poles

were impacted several times, therefore downing lines in the area at various times over the course of the construction between August 2017 and January 2018.

[5:45 p.m.]

I want to make it clear that I believe that if anyone in the areas I just mentioned had seen road construction happening, considering the condition of the roads down on the Fleur-de-lis Trail, we would all be doing backflips. This letter is actually a regulator relating to road work that was happening in Victoria-The Lakes, not in Cape Breton-Richmond. We have a severe problem if our regulator doesn't know where to find an area in Nova Scotia that is being affected chronically with land line issues, they're not doing their job properly. I'm sorry, we need to do better in this House for these people who are without land line coverage and cell phone coverage, but the CRTC also needs to do a better job as well.

I've heard from many residents who are fearful in these areas as well as the area in Dundee where I just received a letter today from a business owner who has made a massive investment in a tourism operation down in Dundee. They're very concerned about the lack of Internet coverage. Again, I will say it's positive to see there's an investment by this government for Internet service, however, I would like to know where the priority is going to be, where that money is going to be invested. (Interruptions) Well, that's what it sounds like - I heard Clare-Digby is probably going to be on the list, but I have a list here myself that I'm more than happy to put forward.

There's a lack of Internet coverage in Cape Auguet, in Martinique, in Cap La Ronde, in Rocky Bay, in Dundee, in Janvrin Island, the list goes on, and definitely in Dundee from what the letter here describes from this business owner who has made, again, a massive investment in a tourism operation in Dundee and has no access to cellphone coverage. Can you imagine trying to operate a massive tourism business, a resort, without access to cellphone coverage, and without access to proper Internet coverage?

That puts that person at a massive disadvantage in rural Nova Scotia in trying to actually compete with the rest of the province. These are basic services that need to be made a priority. So, as much, again, and I will continue to come back to this, it's wonderful to see that investment in broadband services, where is the investment in cellphone coverage? There is nothing in this budget that even touches on an investment for cellphone coverage.

The CRTC put out a report in 2017 to talk about the fact that cellphone coverage and Internet coverage, broadband coverage, are pretty much on par as far as the increase in usage across Canada. In fact, that report even states that cellphone coverage surpasses the usage in Internet. Cellphone coverage is in fact well ahead of broadband service as far as it being an important and basic service in the province.

I'm not sure about anyone else in this House, but I'm fairly certain that most of us have our cellphones attached to our hip almost every single day. I utilize my cellphone almost as much, if not more than my desktop computer or my laptop. Most of my data is on my phone - it puts you, again, at a massive disadvantage not to have basic cellphone coverage. This is a real issue across Nova Scotia, it's a real issue, Mr. Speaker, in Cape Breton-Richmond. I have heard from so many residents on this issue, and I have to say I'm so proud of them for sending me, within just a span of a couple of weeks, almost 70 letters from business owners, 70 letters from residents.

We had a petition that was tabled earlier in the session that had - let's see - I think it was 857 people on it. There's 60 people that live in Forchu, Mr. Speaker. The fact that we have a further 274 people, as well as 327 on change.org - people are looking for help, and this budget does not provide the help that we need in Cape Breton-Richmond for cellphone coverage.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

MS. CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, thank you to my colleague, the member for Cape Breton-Richmond, as well as the member for Clare-Digby for bringing this issue to the floor of the House.

We all know, at this moment in time, that it's crucial that Nova Scotians have access to reliable, high-speed Internet. With respect, I would agree with my colleague from Cape Breton-Richmond and say that, it's a bit false to call this a luxury. I think we all know that this is in fact, a need. So, while somewhat overdue, we will not take any issue with the fact that we are slowly addressing this need. Ideally, as was pointed out yesterday, this is a decision, the details of which would be, ideally, subject to the scrutiny of the duly elected members of this Assembly. Sadly, that is not to be. It was a one-time spend that we have no notice of, and no details about. Now, Mr. Speaker, we're getting used to that, but it doesn't make us any happier about it.

I won't take any time to criticize the substance of this investment, although I know that this comes after multiple online engagements in recent months that have purported to canvass, and take the views of all Nova Scotians on very key issues that we debate, issues like cannabis, issues like education policy. So, with respect, Mr. Speaker, I would say, which is it? Is this a luxury that the government has found in their budget to slowly address, or is it a need and a right that Nova Scotians have, in order to have their say with government? I think it has to be one or the other.

What I want to talk about today is the form of this Internet connectivity. The way that this has come out, and with the information that we currently have, it looks like this will in some way, take the form of a subsidy to a large telecom company. So, the Brightstar Report, which has guided this work, has essentially suggested that for it to be profitable to run the rural Internet infrastructure, a company would need a monopoly. So, the only way

that a company could make a financially reasonable decision would be if it's a single company that provides all that middle-mile infrastructure. I will note that this report assumes a private provider solution. It focuses on the middle-mile of Internet, which is this backbone of Internet infrastructure that gets us out into the rural communities. You know, it's like the highway - the local roads that get you from the highway to your house are the last mile. So, this is focusing on the middle mile, and the argument of the Brightstar Report is that the capital investment and maintenance costs are just too expensive for private companies to bring high-speed Internet to rural communities, there's a market failure.

This is where it gets interesting. So, there's a market failure, it's too expensive, therefore we should give a private company a boatload of money and a monopoly in order to do this. With respect, Mr. Speaker, it's my opinion that where there's a market failure, or a natural monopoly, we shouldn't give a boatload of money to a for-profit company and hope that they do the right thing. We have a lot of examples of where this has gone wrong. I would suggest that the current situation with Nova Scotia Power, its poor service, exorbitant profits, and high rates, are one example of this. We're looking at a P3 model, and as all the members of this Assembly have heard us say before, we think that a P3 model is bad. We think it's bad because we think it's inefficient, and we think it's a bad deal for Nova Scotia taxpayers.

We know from P3 schools, and we know from the Cobequid Pass that P3s end up costing the public more. A 2015 briefing note by the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness on P3s said an estimated more than \$300 million in tolls were produced in the Cobequid Pass for a deal in which private financiers put up \$66 million. The government is paying an effective interest rate of 10 per cent for 30 years, twice its rate of borrowing.

Mr. Speaker, if we want to look at economics, they don't seem very sound here. Obviously, this is why it has taken this long to find a solution. It's a complex issue, and it's one where it's going to cost money. There's no question.

The best part of this particular opportunity is that we don't need to hire some expensive Ontario consultant to show us how we can do this in a way where the community actually benefits. Communities in Nova Scotia are giving us examples and blueprints of how we can do this in a very different way by having community-owned Internet provision.

Our argument is that a publicly owned middle mile will provide rural communities with more affordable rates, more community skills and control, job creation, and community ownership of and pride over a true community asset. In case this seems like more pie in the sky from the NDP, I would like to share an example of where this is happening in the Premier's own riding.

In the village of Lawrencetown, there is a high-speed Internet co-op. The co-op is the Lawrencetown Community Economic Development Co-op. They launched in April 2017 with immediately high participation rates from the community. They wanted to

improve the computing environment to drive economic development, including the ability to attract businesses, maintain village infrastructure via the Internet, improve tourism opportunities, and improve residential and student access. They were tired of waiting for government to act, so they took it into their own hand.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? There is no planned subsidization of this service once the service is set up because subscriber fees will pay for the maintenance. In addition to that, they will have the existing community infrastructure of a co-op which will offer Internet service free to organizations that promote the community like the youth arena, the Annapolis Valley Ex, the recreation commission, the pool society, the library, and the fire department. They will also make free Wi-Fi available at select events such as, the exhibition and upcoming 4-H pro-show. This is what I mean about community ownership. Some of the funding will come from village utilities that will use the service for security and infrastructure management.

How revolutionary is that? Instead of paying a large telecom provider and taking the profits out of Nova Scotia, not only will they keep the profits in the province, they'll keep them in their very own community. The speed of this Internet is 20 megabits which is above the wireless service target from the Brightstar Report but below the target of 50 megabytes. The cost is \$60 or \$100 per month, which I assume is similar to what the rest of us pay, but the best part, for those of us not familiar with the co-op model, is that subscribers become owners of the co-op. They also host workshops on a variety of related topics including setting up your business on the Internet, community co-operative start-up guides, and Internet security.

This isn't the only example. Pictou County is doing something similar with a non-profit called i-Valley. There are many examples of community-owned Internet networks throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to draw people's attention to is that we begin this conversation with this huge investment that comes with no notice, that comes with no debate, and that comes with no prioritization from the members of this House, with the assumption that the solution lies in private business with profits that will flow out of the province. We welcome the long-awaited investment in rural Internet infrastructure. We know how important it is. We hear from people across the province every day, as I'm sure, do many of you. It's important, and it's overdue.

But this is the important point: with this March madness splurge comes a great opportunity to extend the value of the investment, the opportunity to give rural communities more than just a service but active participation in the future of their communities and the services in it through community ownership of the resource.

In closing, I would ask the Minister of Business and the members of the government to consider this alternate route to community Internet infrastructure.



MR. SPEAKER: Thank you to those members for participating in late debate.

The House now stands adjourned.

[The House rose at 6:00 p.m.]

**NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)****RESOLUTION NO. 1050**

By: Mr. Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

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

Whereas Canada has every good reason to be proud of the accomplishments of the many athletes who represented our country at the recent Olympics in South Korea; and

Whereas Nova Scotia was also doubly proud of its Olympians who played on the Women's Hockey Team - Blayne Turnbull of Stellarton and Jillian Saulnier of Halifax - who made Olympic history, as there had never been a N.S. hockey player on the Canadian Women's Olympic hockey team before; and

Whereas Jillian Saulnier made further history by being the first female hockey player from Nova Scotia to score a goal in the Olympics, all part of a team effort to bring home a hard-fought and coveted Olympic silver medal;

Therefore be it resolved that this House extend its congratulations and sincere thanks to Jillian Saulnier and to Blayne Turnbull for their huge efforts in putting Nova Scotia on the map of women's hockey for this year's Olympics and doing so with passion and with true Canadian spirit.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1051**

By: Mr. Gary Burrill (Halifax Chebucto)

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

Whereas many stories of Nova Scotians helping one another and being Good Samaritans are told from time to time; and

Whereas such a need for help can occur as casually as a store parking lot in downtown Halifax when your car is mistakenly booted and immobilized and there is nowhere to turn; and

Whereas three employees at Taz Records beyond their regular working hours could have ignored a bad situation and chosen not to step in and provide critical assistance;

Therefore be it resolved that this House recognize the good deeds that were done in November 2017 by those three Taz Records employees who chose to provide help, well beyond the call of duty, to its customers and to do so in a truly compassionate manner.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1052**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Gin Yee has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas he has dedicated his time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas the Halifax School Board will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Gin Yee for all the hard work he has put in as a member and as chair of the Halifax Regional School Board, helping students, teachers, and the community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1053**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Linda MacKay has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas the Halifax School Board will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Linda MacKay for all the hard work she has put in as a member and as vice-chair of the Halifax Regional School Board, helping students, teachers, and the community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1054**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Jessica Rose has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas the Halifax School Board will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Jessica Rose for all the hard work she has put in as a member and as Mi'kmaq Representative of the Halifax Regional School Board, helping students, teachers, and the community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1055**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Archy Beals has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas he has dedicated his time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas the Halifax School Board will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Archy Beals for all the hard work he has put in as a member and African Nova Scotian Representative of the Halifax Regional School Board, helping students, teachers, and the community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1056**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Bridget Ann Boutilier has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas the Halifax School Board will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Bridget Ann Boutilier for all the hard work she has put in as a member of the Halifax Regional School Board, helping students, teachers, and the community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1057**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Nancy Jakeman has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas Halifax Regional School Boards will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Nancy Jakeman for all the hard work she has put in as a member of the Halifax Regional School Board helping students, teachers and the community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 1058**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Cindy Littlefair has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas Halifax Regional School Boards will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Cindy Littlefair for all the hard work she has put in as a member of the Halifax Regional School Board helping students, teachers and the community at large.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 1059**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Suzy Hansen has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas Halifax Regional School Boards will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Suzy Hansen for all the hard work she has put in as a member of the Halifax Regional School Board helping students, teachers and the community at large.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 1060**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Jennifer Raven has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas she has dedicated her time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas Halifax Regional School Boards will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Jennifer Raven for all the hard work she has put in as a member of the Halifax Regional School Board helping students, teachers and the community at large.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 1061**

By: Ms. Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Dave Wright has served HRM residents on the Halifax Regional School Board; and

Whereas he has dedicated his time and energy to the administration and management of the English public schools; and

Whereas Halifax Regional School Boards will be dissolved;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in offering sincere thanks to Dave Wright for all the hard work he has put in as a member and a former chair of the Halifax Regional School Board helping students, teachers and the community at large.