



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Second Session

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020

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House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020**

**Sixty-third General Assembly**

**Second Session**

**11:00 A.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Kevin Murphy

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Brendan Maguire

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we get into the daily routine, there are a couple of housekeeping things.

There will be no late debate this evening; nothing was submitted before the deadline.

**SPEAKER'S RULING:**

**Tabling Anonymized Documents**

**(Leader of Off. Opp. tabled documents later discovered to have been anonymized [Hansard p.5299, 25 Feb. 2020])**

**Documents are withdrawn until a version is tabled that identifies the email's sender and memo's author.**

I'd also like to bring to the members' attention that yesterday the Leader of the Official Opposition tabled a document during Question Period which consisted of an email attaching a memo. The Clerks have since brought to my attention that there are several redactions in the tabled document, including the identity of the author of the email.

When first becoming members, the members would have received a document entitled "Procedure Note 5" where guidelines pertaining to the tabling of documents are outlined. This document highlights several previous Speakers' Rulings stating that anonymous letters cannot be tabled in the House.

Faced with a similar situation, former Speaker Murray Scott ruled that the member who tabled the anonymous document had to table the letter in its full content, clearly indicating who the author was, or the letter would have to be withdrawn. Therefore, I would ask the honourable member to table a version of the documents identifying the sender of the email, as well as the author of the memo attached to the email. Until that is done, the document tabled yesterday will be withdrawn.

To be clear, the line of questioning of the Leader of the Official Opposition was not out of order. It was the tabling of the anonymous documents that was out of order and the direct quoting from the documents in the questions subsequent to the tabling of the anonymous documents.

The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if there is confusion but, in fact, we were intending to do a late debate this evening. Did you not receive notice?

THE SPEAKER: The Clerks have notified me there was no late debate topic submitted before the deadline.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: That might have been a clerical oversight. Can I ask for the consent of the House to submit at the earliest possible convenience?

THE SPEAKER: I have just been advised by the Clerk that they were on notice and did not receive any notification from the New Democratic Party. Procedure Rule 5 is very clear, so it is within the purview of the House, with unanimous consent on a motion by the Government House Leader, to accept it after the deadline.

If it is the wish of the New Democratic Party House Leader to defer to the Government House Leader to make a motion - the honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I think our understanding was that the deadline was 12:00 noon. We clearly made a mistake, so I will defer to the Government House Leader.

THE SPEAKER: Just for clarification, it's one hour before the sitting time.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I may regret this, but we're happy to allow for the late debate topic to be submitted and stand. With that, I'd ask for the unanimous consent of the House to include the NDP's late debate topic for today.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The topic for late debate - perhaps I'll defer to the New Democratic Party House Leader as I don't have it.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the resolution for the debate will be:

Therefore be it resolved that the government could have done a much-improved job in its handling of the question of the Owls Head Provincial Park.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, perhaps I'll ask you, when you get a copy of that in writing, to circulate it at minimum to the House Leaders and to myself. Thank you.

We will now move on to the daily routine.

#### **PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

#### **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

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

THE SPEAKER: 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 2019. The report was prepared pursuant to Section 11(1)(f) of the House of Assembly Management Commission Act.

The report is tabled.

#### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

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

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



**RESOLUTION NO. 1681**

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

Whereas February 17, 2020, was Heritage Day in Nova Scotia, a time to honour the remarkable individuals and places that have contributed to our shared Nova Scotian history; and

Whereas this year we honoured Africville which was a small, self-sustained, and vibrant African Nova Scotian community, home to hundreds of families located on the shores of the Bedford Basin; and

Whereas the City of Halifax forcibly demolished the entire community for the purpose of urban renewal, which forced residents to relocate with little compensation for their homes and land;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly please join me in recognizing the heartfelt history of Africville and our commitment to our shared story, which has made this significant impact on our province and country.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

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

The motion is carried.

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 228 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 213 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Housing Nova Scotia Act. (Hon. Chuck Porter)**

**Bill No. 229 - Entitled an Act to Eliminate Political-Party Whips. (Alana Paon)**

**Bill No. 230 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1998. The Municipal Government Act, and Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008. The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting Ministerial Approvals. (Hon. Chuck Porter)**

**Bill No. 231 – Entitled an Act Respecting Parks and Protected Areas. (Gary Burrill)**

[11:15 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Energy and Mines.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Before I introduce the bill, I just want to recognize, in the gallery, a number of staff members from the Department of Energy and Mines. They were a big part of designing this bill and many of the efficiency programs that Nova Scotians utilize every day. I want to recognize the department for all their work. (Applause)

**Bill No. 232 – Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 2004. The Electricity Act. (Hon. Derek Mombourquette)**

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

**NOTICES OF MOTION**

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, may I make an introduction, please?

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Thank you so much. In the West Gallery I would ask that Tara Miller stand. Tara is a beautiful individual, so intelligent, kind, and wise. She is our past president of the PC Party. I just want to welcome her to the Legislature today. We're grateful for your presence here. Thank you so much. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare-Digby.

HON. GORDON WILSON: I beg leave to do an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

GORDON WILSON: I'd like to note, seated in the East Gallery, we have two fine people. One representing the United Nations as an envoy, Wenche Gronbrekk - I know I'm not good with names - and with Cermaq, Victoria Savoie. They bring a lot of information to the fisheries conference that's going on right now. I welcome them to the Legislature. (Applause)

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

**WOWSA: PROMOTING WOMEN'S WELL-BEING - THANKS**

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an amazing group of women in the Eastern Passage area known as the Women of Worth Social Association, which is WOWSA.

This is a group that started with just a couple of women who were looking to get together with other members of our community. It has now grown to over 150 women. This group gets together to enhance mental, physical, and social well-being. They meet every month to partake in different activities which not only benefit the women but also encourage community involvement in other activities. They attend plays, have book clubs, go to movies, and do a lot of dancing and dining together.

Recently this group was awarded a Southeastern Community Health Board award grant, and I was pleased to attend the ceremony last night in which they received it. I'd like to thank all of these women for coming together to support each other in our community. I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Suzanne Switzer, the organizer of WOWSA and all their community members.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.

**LELACHEUR, MARLENE: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Marlene LeLacheur has been a devoted member of All Saints Church since 1978. In more than 40 years, she has volunteered in many capacities. She is always someone the church can rely on. You name it, Marlene has done it.

She has been a member of the Altar Guild for 20 years, holding a leadership position for most of that time. She served on parish council as the church's synod representative. She served as All Saints representative on the Bedford-Sackville Interfaith Society; and you can still find her most Wednesday mornings sorting and pricing items at Beacon House.

Marlene volunteers at church dinners, setting up, prepping and serving food, and cleaning up afterwards. Vacation Bible School, Messy Church, Sunday School, greeting parishioners, St. George's Soup Kitchen - she's done it all. Marlene has also volunteered with Beavers and Scouts, her school library, school trips, and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Bedford Fire Department.

Today I would like to thank Marlene LeLacheur for over four decades of dedicated service to her community - well done.

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

**SAMSON FAMILY: FAMILY FEUD CAMP - CONGRATS.**

KEITH BAIN: It's not every day a family gets a chance to become a reality TV celebrity, but the Sampson family of Little Bras d'Or, Cape Breton, did just that.

In the Summer of 2019, family captain Holly (Samson) Kitamura, her husband Yoshi Kitamura, Holly's parents Liz and Harold Samson, and Holly's older sister Megan Samson sent an audition tape to Family Feud Canada.

Shortly after, they received an invitation from CBC to audition in Halifax with 31 other families. In October, Holly received the call at work confirming they would be on the show. The Samson family's episode is expected to air either March 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>. They plan on having a public viewing party in North Sydney.

I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating the Samson family on being selected for Family Feud Canada and wish them luck.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare-Digby.

**FRESH FOOD BOX PROG.: PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING - RECOG.**

HON. GORDON WILSON: As we're aware, eating a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables daily is an important part of a healthy diet. Unfortunately, there are many people who find it difficult to eat healthy because of the cost or the lack of access nearby. For many families, budgets are tight and less healthy foods tend to be cheaper. Seniors living alone don't need to buy a large quantity of food, so their purchases often lack a variety needed in our diets. Also, distance - the almost two hours to go from Brier Island to the grocery stores in Digby - is a factor.

This past Summer, representatives of the Nova Scotia Health Authority and from local groups and businesses worked together to make it possible for people to buy a variety of produce through the Fresh Food Box Program. For the past 21 weeks, this pilot program delivered affordable boxes of produce from local farms and the Digby Superstore to sites in Digby and the municipality of Digby.

This program was a great way to encourage people to eat healthy, and hopefully its success this summer will ensure its return next Summer.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**ROY, JAY AARON: BUS. YOUTH SAFE SPACE - CONGRATS.**

STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to make special mention of Jay Aaron Roy. Jay Roy is the owner of Cape and Cowl Comics and Collectibles in Lower Sackville. This is not your typical comic shop as it is also home to the Leighann Wichman Safe Space, an open and inclusive space within the store where youth can be their most authentic self.

Although Jay Roy is not a counsellor himself, he saw the need to provide a safe space for youth to receive free counselling. In collaboration with the Nova Scotia Health Authority, this became a reality.

I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating and thanking Jay Aaron Roy, who continues to make tremendous efforts to provide a safe environment for the youth of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

**BAXTER, GEO. - SCH. BUS DRIVER: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES**

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Antigonish Country resident George Baxter has officially hung up his keys, ending a career lasting five decades.

Since September 1969, George Baxter has been a school bus driver in Antigonish County. He retired earlier this month. He started driving the school bus when he was 24 years old and ended his remarkable career with a perfect driving record - no accidents.

Over the course of 50 years, George has left a lasting impression on many children. He has watched generations grow up and move through the school system. On his last day of work George was the guest of honour during George Baxter Day held at the Antigonish Education Centre. Every student in the school signed cards, he was treated to a special song, and staff members even dressed up like George - in plaid shirts and work pants.

After 50 years, it was fitting that George's last passengers were his grandchildren, Grace, Makayla, Casey, and Percy King.

I'd like to take the opportunity to recognize George Baxter for his long and memorable career. I ask my colleagues in the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating George on his retirement and to say thank you for all he has done for our children.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**GERO, NATALIE: N. NOVA EDUC. CTR. - COMMEND**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, research has indicated that one's personality sets great employees apart. North Nova Education Centre in New Glasgow opened its doors in September 2003. Natalie Gero began her tenure at the new high school and is still working in the administrative office. She continues to derive happiness from the time she spends with numerous high school students.

She is definitely a proactive employee, always watching and listening to what's happening within the student population. That's why she stands out among her peers: always quick to take action and solve problems. She has always been forthright and honest. That's why she is greatly appreciated by everyone at NNEC.

Nat is a confident, humble, and very reliable employee. Her positive and happy behaviour is contagious. She arrives to work each day feeling energetic and enthusiastic. She possesses the leadership qualities that are essential to working with students. Natalie Gero is definitely a class act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**POTTERY BOWL FUNDRAISER: COM. VENTURE - THANKS**

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to commend Save 'r' Neighbors in the Evangeline Club in Berwick on hosting the second Pottery Bowl fundraiser this past December with SOUP - Sharing Our Unappreciated Produce - and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Two students who were inspired to support their communities were Sam Doucette of West Kings and Josh Van Nostrand of Central Kings. They made incredible soups in the most beautiful handcrafted bowls, which were donated by local potters. This is the true epitome of community: everyone coming together for a common cause to support their neighbours. I also believe this is a testament to the leadership of our youth.

I wish to thank the Evangeline Club, SOUP, CMHA, and all who volunteered their time and donated to ensure that mattresses and bedding could be purchased for the Inn from the Cold program.

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

**ANTI-BULLYING DAY: THINK PINK - RECOG.**

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, today is Anti-bullying Day. Back in 2007, Grade 12 students Travis Price and David Shepherd observed that a younger student was being bullied simply for wearing pink. The two Central Kings Rural High School students then

bought and distributed 50 pink shirts to fellow students. This anti-bullying initiative struck a chord with many, and students and staff in schools throughout the country now wear pink on this day.

Mr. Speaker, there are few things less acceptable in our society today than bullying, whether it be between children or adults, at school or in the workplace.

I look forward to the day when we all can follow the words of Dr. King and judge one another on the content of our character and respect each other regardless of how we look or what we wear.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we all think pink.

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

### **MENTAL HEALTH 101 PROJ.: INTERGENERATIONAL WELLNESS - THANKS**

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the Mulgrave and Area Medical Centre and the amazing work they've been doing on their Mental Health 101 project. The project will host free information sessions to learn about the basics of mental health and provide light refreshments. They'll talk about some of the common mental health issues, the struggles that come with them, and how to maintain and improve wellness throughout.

Additionally, they will provide an intergenerational education session where generations share life stories and lived experiences with each other.

This is an ambitious undertaking, with mental health sessions planned for once a month during the week for three hours. The number of participants will hopefully be 20 to 30 each session. The intergenerational sessions will be held once per month on an evening or weekend for three hours, with the number of participants being 20 to 30 for each session.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that mental health is vitally important to our overall health and well-being. That's why the Mulgrave and Area Medical Centre should be commended for their exceptional Mental Health 101 project.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

### **BOWERS, BEV: SECRET SANTA INITIATIVE - THANKS**

TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize that the holidays can be a difficult time of year for some of our constituents. Today I recognize Bev Bowers, a

wonderful Dartmouth East volunteer who made Christmas a little more merry and bright for four different families. Through online social groups, Bev asked for donations to provide these four families with a magical holiday season through a Secret Santa exchange. Donations included non-perishable food, toiletries, and household items like bedding.

Bev went above and beyond for these families and their children. She provided information such as ages and interests of the children so that they could also receive something special for Christmas.

I ask that all members join me in thanking Bev for being a community leader and for continuing the spirit of the holidays for these families.

[11:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**14 BELLS GALLERY: CELEBRATING LOCAL ARTISTS - RECOG.**

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize two creative passion projects and the women behind them.

Located in the Hydrostone Market, 14 Bells Fine Art Gallery is named as a tribute to the north-end Halifax community and specifically to the sound of the bells that local residents hear daily from the hill in nearby Fort Needham Park. Those are bells from churches that were destroyed in the Halifax Explosion. Owned by north-end resident Cheryl Bell, the gallery has provided a space for Nova Scotia contemporary artists to showcase their work, and Bell quickly tells the stories of each of the artists she features and champions.

Local artist Donna MacDonald opened a showing of her work at the gallery just last week. Her work captures the natural beauty of the sea and the rugged Maritime coastline. MacDonald has worked with Northwood, where she is currently a nurse manager for 20 years. She first took up painting as a hobby, then a form of relaxation, and now I think we can all tell how highly she has developed her skill and her art.

That show runs until March 6<sup>th</sup> at the 14 Bells Fine Art Gallery, and I encourage everyone to take a look.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.



**ÉCOLE CHEBUCTO HEIGHTS:  
BOOK, *L'ALPHABET DE VIOLA DESMOND* - CONGRATS.**

HON. LENA METLEGE DIAB: In recognition of African Heritage Month, I want to celebrate the Grades 3 and 4 French immersion students at École Chebucto Heights Elementary. Earlier this year, they added published author to their resumé with the publication of *L'alphabet de Viola Desmond*.

This wonderful, colourful book tells Viola Desmond's important story in French, adding a francophone option to school curricula that is for and by elementary students. Students were each assigned a letter of the alphabet and used that as a jumping off point for their individual pages. Telling different parts of Viola's story allowed all students to better understand and remember important people in the history of the African Nova Scotian community. Mr. Speaker, take a look at the HRCE's video clip on the book's creation, and you will see first-hand how proud the students feel after completing this project.

Congratulations to all contributing students, and thank you to teachers Molly MacKenzie and Lisa Radzikowski for helping students appreciate and share our collective history.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**CLARKE, RON: CARING FOR THE HECTOR ARENA - THANKS**

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, the residents of Pictou West are fortunate to have the Hector Arena. The arena is a high-calibre facility, thanks in large part to the efforts of Ron Clarke and his team.

Ron has worked tirelessly to keep the facility updated and relevant to the needs of the area's residents. There are many opportunities to use the walking track, have a leisurely skate, or play a friendly game of hockey. It is also home to many yearly tournaments. The attention to detail shown by Ron and his staff is readily noticeable in the cleanliness of the dressing rooms and washroom facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make special mention of Ron for approaching area businesses to secure a sponsorship, which allows residents a free skate on Friday afternoons. I thank Ron and his team for their dedication.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**DUPUIS, SOPHIE: HAIR DONATION - COMMEND**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sophie Dupuis, a young girl from Timberlea who is making a real difference in the lives of people who are living with cancer.

Over the last eight years, Sophie has donated almost 130 centimetres of her hair to help make wigs for people living with cancer. This Spring, she has taken an even bigger leap by going bald to raise money for a family trying to meet the challenges of covering the cost associated with the disease.

Sophie has met an ambitious goal of raising \$2,000 this Spring through a GoFundMe page, which she tells me she has already reached. She will be shaving all of her hair not only to support a family in need but also as a show of solidarity: to stand side by side with her grandfather, Jaye Penney, who was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2017. Sophie shares a special bond in the love of camping and exploring the outdoors with her grandfather and has dedicated herself to this cause to honour him.

I ask the members of the House to join me in thanking Sophie for her bravery and dedication to supporting her family and community at such a young age.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

**FIVE GIRLS BAKING - NOMINEE:  
BUS. EXCELLENCE AWARDS - CONGRATS.**

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, when Vancouver area residents Leanne Arnott and Richard Stayner purchased property in Queens County in 2016, it was their intention to merely spend vacations in Nova Scotia with their five daughters. Plans changed, and the family decided that visiting wasn't enough. They made the giant leap of leaving everything behind, including professions in which Leanne and Richard were well known and respected.

In September 2018, they opened Five Girls Baking on Main Street in Liverpool. This shop has quickly become a regular stop for residents and visitors and has also become known for its commitment to community. Impressively, they have just been nominated in the hospitality category of the Lunenburg-Queens Business Excellence Awards.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Leanne, Richard, and their family on the success of their business and thank them for choosing Queens County as their new home.

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

**DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY: FREE BKS. - COMMEND**

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring awareness to a wonderful program offered by the Richmond County Literacy Network called the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. There are currently 166 children registered locally in the program and 3,373 provincially.

This program provides high-quality new books for free to registered children from birth until the age of five. Each month, children receive a new book in the mail selected by an advisory panel of experts.

On January 27<sup>th</sup>, the province celebrated Family Literacy Day, highlighting the importance of this essential life skill. For children, literacy begins at home. The benefits of reading to an infant and child are well-documented in promoting the development of a healthy mind and creating the foundation of language and lifelong learning.

I ask the members of the Legislature to join me in praising the efforts of the Richmond County Literacy Network; by promoting these values, it provides a valuable service to our communities.

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

**MEMBERTOU AWARDS:  
CELEBRATING DIVERSE TALENT - CONGRATS.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, this past week, the community of Membertou held its annual awards that recognize residents in the community for the numerous leadership roles that they take each and every day to support the Membertou community.

A number of awards were given out during the evening: the Special Recognition Awards went to Madison Joe and Armand Paul; the Membertou Men's Society Coach Recognition Award went to Alex Christmas; the Roy Gould Memorial Rising Star Award went to Breslin Marshall and Anastasia Kabatay; the Edward Kabatay Memorial Award for Language and Culture went to Katy and Natalie McEwan; the Grand Chief Membertou Lifetime Achievement Award went to Nora Plourde; the Paul Gould Memorial Award for Sportsperson of the Year went to Gideon Paul and Karis Christmas; and the Bradley Christmas Memorial Trophy for Citizen of the Year went to Emily Paul.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Legislature to congratulate all of the award recipients from the community of Membertou for their leadership each and every day to support the residents in their community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

**RUSHTON, SEVEN: DEDICATION TO SPORT - CONGRATS.**

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the courage of Seven Rushton and also the respect and team spirit of all the players on both the Oxford Golden Bears and the Springhill Golden Eagles basketball teams.

Seven Rushton is a Grade 7 student who has developed a love for basketball, and the fact that he has Down's syndrome doesn't slow him down. Near the end of a tournament game against Springhill, at the encouragement of his team, Seven took to the court to show his talents. He was passed the ball and sunk his first shot. Seven has attended every game and every practice with the Golden Bears but had never been coaxed into playing in a real game until now.

Please join me in congratulating Seven on this huge, outstanding achievement and thank the teams of Springhill and Oxford for their inclusive encouragement of this fine young man.

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

**LEMON TREE RESTAURANT: NEW LOCATION - CONGRATS.**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, it's an exciting time for foodies to live in or visit my riding.

As I mentioned last session, there are many great restaurants and pizzerias opening up in the Fairview-Clayton Park area. Now I'm excited to tell you that a Halifax and Bedford favourite has made its way to my community. Lemon Tree, a restaurant specializing in Turkish and Mediterranean cuisine, opened their new location at the corner of Dutch Village Road and Central Avenue on January 17<sup>th</sup>.

Among the many dishes, you can find moussaka, lamb kebab, or lamb tandir. For the more veggie-minded, there are tons of starters, or meze, to choose from; hummus, baba ganoush, dolma, and roasted red peppers are some of my favourites. If you have a sweet tooth, try baklava, sutlac, tahini cookies, or lemon cake. It really seems like there's something for everyone.

I ask the members of the House of Assembly to join me in welcoming Lemon Tree to their new home in Fairview-Clayton Park. I know this will be a popular spot.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**FORT EQUIPMENT: 40 YRS. IN BUS. - CONGRATS.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate Fort Equipment President Jeff Brennan and his family for being in business for 40 years in Fort Lawrence, Nova Scotia. Jeff is married to Angela Brennan, and they have five beautiful children.

The business first opened in 1970, and Jeff's father Bernie Brennan and mother Jennifer Brennan took over the company in 1980. Jeff has had committed and dedicated staff whom he credits for aiding in the success of this business. Fort Equipment sells and services farming machinery in Cumberland North and far and wide.

I wish the Brennan family the best on this milestone and hope their family continues to have success with their business in Cumberland North. They are certainly a well-respected family in our community and have supported the community significantly over the last number of years.

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

**WAVERLEY LEGION DIEPPE BR. 90:  
MORTGAGE BURNING - CONGRATS.**

BILL HORNE: Mr. Speaker, it was a joyous day at the Waverley Dieppe Branch 90 Legion when President Ken Mallett burned the mortgage for the Waverley Legion. Just before the ceremonial burning of the mortgage, the Legion announced that they had officially paid off their mortgage of \$330,000, dating back 20-plus years.

The Legion and community members were in there to celebrate. They also held an open house so the community could see what the Legion is all about and how they can join to keep it thriving for the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the many hard-working volunteers who keep the Legion active and serving the Armed Forces. I ask that all members of the Legislature join me in congratulating the Waverley Dieppe Branch 90 Legion on this milestone.

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

**DUMAY, KAREN: CAVS CAFÉ - THANKS**

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Karen Dumay and her students at Cole Harbour High School for all of their hard work, giving back to the community through the CAVS Café. The CAVS Café is a lunch put on numerous times throughout the year where the learning centre students serve a hearty meal to the public and staff.

With Karen's help and supervision, these students carry out tasks that all connect to life skills. These tasks range from folding napkins, executing visual recipes, serving, and cleaning up. Some of Karen's students are non-verbal and use tablets to communicate.

Karen sees so much growth within the students through the CAVS Café, and it is very rewarding for her and for the students. I can personally attest to how wonderful their meals are. I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking Karen Dumay for her compassion and insight to see the potential in all her students.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**SUSHI COVE RESTAURANT: NEW LOCATION - CONGRATS.**

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome Sushi Cove restaurant to Spryfield. The restaurant opened a couple of months ago at 355 Herring Cove Road and has become a very welcome addition on Herring Cove Road.

The reviews of the restaurant have been extremely positive and I should know, having eaten there probably over a dozen times. I really enjoyed the food, and I look forward to going back.

Over the last few years we have seen some great changes in the business landscape of Spryfield with the addition of several businesses and new restaurants to the area. The addition of new food experiences is a welcome change to the community. Recently, we welcomed Mezza to Spryfield, and now we are pleased to welcome Sushi Cove.

Mr. Speaker, it is small businesses such as Sushi Cove that are the backbone of our economy. The restaurant business is very challenging. I believe this restaurant, Sushi Cove, has found a gap in the Spryfield market, and I wish them every success with their new venture.

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

**ORGAN, GREG/SMITH, MARGARET:  
VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTING - CONGRATS.**

KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the dedication of Greg Organ who recently stepped down after many years as chief of the Neils Harbour/New Haven Volunteer Fire Department. While retiring as chief, Organ says he will still help as a volunteer firefighter.

The department will continue to be in good hands, though. Margaret Smith has assumed the role of chief. I have no doubt that she will succeed in this new role. She is a

registered nurse and comes from a firefighting family. Her father was chief for many years and still remains a captain in the department today.

Mr. Speaker, it is a true honour to thank Greg for his many years of service and to congratulate Margaret for taking on this new challenge.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**COGSWELL, ANDREW: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a wonderful community volunteer in Clayton Park West, Andrew Cogswell. I had the pleasure of meeting Andrew through his lovely 11-year-old daughter Riley at Park West School, who is also an avid volunteer. The two of them are avid volunteers for my litter cleanup initiative.

[11:45 a.m.]

Upon meeting him, Andrew and his family graciously agreed to help at the annual barbeque, where he was one of the cooks. Aside from frequently volunteering at Park West where his daughter attends school, Andrew assists in the organization of Parker Street Food and Furniture Bank. With the help of many volunteers from the Bedford Institute of Oceanography where he works, they are able to provide food for roughly 1,000 families in HRM.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Andrew and his family for their generous contributions to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**SACKVILLE BUS. ASSOC.: XMAS TREE LIGHTING - THANKS**

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the members of the Sackville Business Association in Lower Sackville.

For the past 12 years, the Sackville Business Association has been hosting the Annual Sackville Christmas Tree Lighting at Acadia Park in Lower Sackville. Each year, local organizations come together to provide live music and treats to the community for free. This year's event took place on November 29<sup>th</sup> and was very well-attended, despite the frigid temperatures.

I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking the members of the Sackville Business Association for their continued efforts to host events throughout the year that bring the community together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**ANNAPOLIS VALLEY HONOUR CHOIR:  
30 YRS. OF CULTIVATING TALENT - CONGRATS.**

KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, vibrant communities are a sum of the many community groups and volunteers who create recreational opportunities and services for our citizens.

In the Annapolis Valley, one of those remarkable groups is the Annapolis Valley Honour Choir, which recently celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Lead by director Heather Fraser, the Honour Choir brings together 150 young people from Grades 3 to 12 and young adults by offering vocal training, development, and mentorship.

In addition to these core programs, the Honour Choir has also launched a music literacy program with the Acadia music students, a bursary program with Mud Creek Rotary, a Chorister Apprenticeship Program, and a Treble Choir for Grades 3 to 6.

I invite all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to congratulate and thank Heather and the many parent volunteers and supporters who, over three decades, have given the Annapolis Valley the gift of an Honour Choir.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Sackville-Beaver Bank.

**YORKE, BARBARA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share sad news with members of the House on the recent passing of a great community volunteer, Barbara Elizabeth Yorke of Fall River, who recently passed away on February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Barbara is a graduate of Saint Mary's University and Mount Saint Vincent. She worked as a teacher and a childhood educator for many years. She was also the executive director of the Atlantic Golf Superintendents Association for 15 years. It is through her active involvement in volunteering with the Sackville Kinette Clubs, where she held positions at both club, zone, and district levels, that I met Barb. Barb embodied the true meaning of Kin, bringing a bright smile and infectious laugh to all who met her. Barb will be deeply missed by those who knew her - and there are many throughout this province who would know who she is.

Mr. Speaker, I extend sincere condolences to her husband Hugh, as well as to her children Brianna and Stephen, and her grandson Hugo. With the passing of Barb, I can sincerely say that the communities of Sackville and Fall River have lost a great volunteer.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.



**YOU DEN, JIM: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker in 1881, Maryann Brockwell, a Bedford woman of means, gifted some land to the community to use as a cemetery for residents of all Christian denominations.

As a result, Brookside Cemetery has been the final resting place for many Bedford residents. It's managed by a volunteer board of which Jim Youden has been a member for about a dozen years. Jim has held a variety of roles over the years, including president. He's helped families honour their loved ones who pass away. Jim is sensitive to the needs of grieving families and he provides comfort at a difficult time.

I'd also note that Jim has been involved with a number of other organizations over the years. He's deeply involved in activities at Bedford United Church and served as a key volunteer with soccer and hockey as well. In fact, folks say Jim Youden is a lawyer by profession but a volunteer by choice. I'd like to thank him for serving the people of Bedford.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**RIVER JOHN AND DIST. LIONS CLUB: 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to recognize the 50<sup>th</sup> charter anniversary of the River John and District Lions Club. The club was formed in January 1970 and celebrated this milestone on February 15, 2020. I extend special recognition to Mr. Donald Redmond and Mr. Allister MacKenzie, two founding members, who remain with the club today.

For 50 years and counting, the River John and District Lions Club has served the local community in a variety of ways including - but not limited to - aid for children with special needs, assistance with medical equipment for ill residents, and general help for families in need. The club also proudly supports students with annual bursaries awarded at graduation. The local community has use of the clubhouse for suppers, breakfasts and meetings.

I congratulate the River John and District Lions Club on their 50<sup>th</sup> charter anniversary and thank the members for their dedicated service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare-Digby.

**LE COURRIER:  
PRIX D'EXCELLENCE DE LA PRESSE FRANCOPHONE - CONGRATS.**

HON. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Speaker, in communities across the country people have sought ways to communicate with each other. Before the internet and television, people learned the news through newspapers such as the weekly *Petit Courrier du Sud-Ouest*. This paper was first published by Desiré d'Eon and distributed in the southwestern end of the province in 1937.

In 1972, to reflect the new political provincial mandate of the *Courrier* to develop links between all the francophone and Acadian communities of Nova Scotia, the name of the paper was changed to *le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse*. Since then, in a time when the way people communicate and inform themselves has changed dramatically, *le Courrier* has evolved and strived to remain relevant to the French speaking minority part of the province.

In 2019 the Association de la presse francophone, a Canadian network of French language newspapers published outside Quebec, recognized *le Courrier* with the APF's Prix d'excellence de la presse francophone in 2019 in the category Special Project of the Year. Congratulations to Francis Robichaud and his team at *le Courrier*. They are continuing to inform their readers as Desiré d'Eon did so many years ago.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

**HONEY BEES: PROVIDING HOMECOOKED MEALS - THANKS**

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today to acknowledge Michele Whynot, Colleen McCabe, Lisa Harris, and Liz Ringer along with other volunteers known as the Honey Bees, for making a positive impact for community members.

Organized through Shelburne Christ Church, the Honey Bees have been hard at work preparing home cooked meals for residents of Shelburne and neighbouring communities at no cost. On top of cooking for a variety of different events in Shelburne, the Honey Bees have their own monthly event where they provide a safe space where residents can come and enjoy a hot meal free of charge. Their motto is "Supporting our community as we support one another."

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in thanking the Honey Bees for all they do.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie.

**MELONG, DEE: INCOME TAX FILING SUPPORT - THANKS**

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the hard work and dedication of Dee Melong, a wonderful lady from Havre Boucher who has been volunteering over the past two years to provide income tax filing support to constituents in need. Dee is an accountant by trade with a long and commendable career where she learned the skills she uses today, at least at tax time, to serve her community.

Dee's current community volunteerism is working in providing seniors and low-income constituents assistance in preparing and filing their annual income tax returns. It can be difficult, especially in rural communities like Guysborough County, to access all of the professional services they need. This is especially true of seniors and others who may find it more difficult to travel into larger towns to access these services. This is why the accounting help Dee provides is so necessary and crucial in meeting the people's needs where they are at.

Tax season can be challenging for many of us, but thanks to Dee those in Guysborough County can file their taxes with confidence, knowing her expertise is taking care of them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**30 CHURCH WOMEN'S CLOTHING:  
CREATING BEAUTY EVERY DAY - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize Deanne Fitzpatrick and her staff at 30 Church Women's Clothing in Amherst, Nova Scotia. Deanne is a creative entrepreneur and opened this business five years ago. She wanted to bring this boutique business with her excellence in personal service to her customers. This is Deanne's second business in downtown Amherst; she also operates a rug hooking studio which exports her personally designed, unique hooked rugs the world over.

Deanne is a significant part of the downtown Amherst and local economy and is always excited to see it grow and thrive. She is a woman who proudly seeks opportunities to mentor and empower other businesswomen. Through 30 Church Women's Clothing, she shares her message of empowerment and positivity daily by emphasizing healthy mind and body images. She truly lives up to her own logo mission of "create beauty every day".

I would like to congratulate Deanne Fitzpatrick on this milestone and wish her continued success as she grows her businesses.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**ARMDALE YACHT CLUB: HISTORIC COM. HUB - RECOG.**

HON. LENA METLEGE DIAB: The Armdale Yacht Club is a big part of my community's history. The club is located on Melville Island, which has been used over the years as a family estate, hospital, quarantine station, prisoner of war camp, recruit training station, and an ammunition depot during World War II.

The Armdale Yacht Club was founded in 1937 and, after the military moved out in 1945, the founders negotiated a long-term lease for the land with the Department of National Defence. Today, five of the original buildings remain, including the iconic clubhouse. Though the club's character and the types of vessels it accommodates has changed over the years, it remains a vital part of my community.

On March 10<sup>th</sup>, the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic will host past commodore and long-time Armdale community member Sarah-Jane Raine for a presentation on the history of the club. This presentation is free and begins at 7:00 p.m. I encourage all residents to come out and learn a bit more about this enduring Armdale institution.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**CANNING AND DIST. LIONS CLUB: 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

JOHN LOHR: I wish to express my congratulations and gratitude to King Lion George Mapplebeck and the Canning and District Lions Club. Chartered in 1970, the Canning and District Lions Club has served the community for 50 years and celebrated this event at a Charter Night on Tuesday, February 25, 2020.

The members' commitment to service over these many years has been demonstrated in the countless volunteer hours and hundreds of thousands of dollars of financial support to improve the lives of individuals and their community. Members of the club started the Canning Food Bank many years ago, and the Lions Club continues to host this food bank.

I'd like to ask you to join me thanking the club for their countless volunteer hours, work, and commitment that have led to a stronger, more engaged community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**TIMBERLEA ANIMAL HOSP.: SPRING 2020 OPENING - CONGRATS.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to recognize Dr. Rhonda MacDonald and Dr. Nolan Osborne, the veterinarians and owners of the new Timberlea Animal Hospital. The Timberlea community is pleased to welcome these veterinarians, owners and operators of

this full-service animal hospital dedicated to caring for pets, which is scheduled to open this Spring.

After obtaining her Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine, Dr. MacDonald worked at both private practices as well as a busy emergency hospital. She possesses an enthusiastic interest in soft tissue surgery, emergency medicine, and senior pet care. In her time off, she's passionate about pottery and kayaking as well as caring for her four cats, dogs, and chickens.

Dr. Osborne holds a Bachelor and Master's degree from Mount Allison University. Over his years of practice, he's developed a keen interest in orthopaedic and dental surgery. When he isn't working, he enjoys surfing and kayaking the coastlines of Nova Scotia and caring for his four rambunctious felines and one crazy canine.

I'd like the members of the House to join me in recognizing the Timberlea Animal Hospital for the contributions they are making to our community to keep our beloved pets healthy.

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

**WHITFIELD, KYLY:  
PROMOTING INFANT AND MATERNAL WELLNESS - THANKS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: If you remember, I've mentioned this individual before for the \$1,000,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation she received for her research in nutritional deficiencies. However, I couldn't help but elaborate on Kyly Whitfield's incredible work in Asia and in Halifax.

When completing her Ph.D., Kyly studied why infantile beriberi was so common in Asia. She learned that it was largely due to the mothers' lack of thiamin in the breast milk. As a result of her research, she learned to add thiamin to fish sauce which was already a staple of a Cambodian mother's diet. The study was a success.

Meanwhile, in Halifax, Kyly is compiling data at her Milk and Micronutrient Assessment Lab at Mount Saint Vincent University to help establish optimum long-term health practices starting in infancy. Kyly's research is lauded as groundbreaking and embraces the polarizing topic of breastfeeding.

I ask the members of this House to join me in thanking Kyly for her continued research in the field of infant and maternal nutrition.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time allotted for Statements by Members has expired.

[12:00 p.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM. - LIB. MLA ISSUES: EMAIL - INVESTIGATE**

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a story from the CBC that says, "Email details effort to 'cover up' N.S. MLA's alleged drunk driving incident" (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order please. I'd like to remind the honourable member that the term "cover up" is a well-documented unparliamentary term. I understand that it is part of a media story, but it is not a term that we'll use in this Chamber.

TIM HOUSTON: Just a little bit of guidance, Mr. Speaker. How should I refer to what the media story says, then - just paraphrase it?

THE SPEAKER: You can just refer to the document that you're going to table, as long as there is an author of the document.

TIM HOUSTON: I'm tabling the document that refers to how the Liberal Party handled an email that detailed a drunk driving incident.

The email in question was sent to the president of the Chester-St. Margaret's Liberal Riding Association, director on that same association, and an individual who has been identified as the regional caucus operations officer for the Nova Scotia Liberal caucus office. The email, dated May 6, 2019, included an account of an alleged drunk driving incident involving the member for Chester-St. Margaret's.

The Premier has now had a day to review the email and consider its ramifications. I'd like to ask the Premier: Since the email was brought to his attention yesterday, has he attempted to contact any of the recipients of the email?

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): No, I have not, Mr. Speaker. He would know though, since he's following the news, that the Party president at that time said that he investigated that and didn't find the issue to be credible and did not inform the Premier.

TIM HOUSTON: I did see media reports referring to what appeared to be a very well-coached response to that. The underlying issue is there are very serious questions

outstanding about how members of the Liberal political staff and members of the Liberal Party have handled the information contained in that email.

The email would imply that the constituency assistant to the member knew of the alleged DUI incident from the moment it happened and that the employee of the Liberal caucus office knew from when she received an email on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

Since the Premier claims that the email and its allegations have not been brought to his attention previously, I would think that the Premier would want to know how it could happen that it wasn't brought to his attention. Has the Premier begun an investigation into how this email was handled?

THE PREMIER: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I said to you, the Party president would have received that in that riding, did the investigation and did not find it credible. The reality of it is, the honourable member has tabled a document with all kinds of allegations but with zero evidence. Nothing. Not a single shred of evidence.

There's an accusation in that, and anyone in this province who believes they've seen a crime should go report that, not put it in a letter. Go report it to law enforcement in this province. The question is, how long has the honourable member had the document? How long has he been sitting on the document to use it as a political document?

That's an important question. How long has he held the document so he could come in the House, grandstand, make all kinds of accusations, impugn the reputations of volunteers across the province? How long has he had it? How long has he been sitting on a document that he says demonstrates that someone broke the law? Where's the evidence in that document?

TIM HOUSTON: I'll do something unique in this Chamber: I'll answer a question. Three hours. That's how long it took me to act when I saw that.

The Premier has said that anyone who receives an account of an alleged crime - especially one particularly as detailed as this email - should call the police, and I agree. If somebody had such knowledge, they should call the police.

Now someone did, but it appears that that person is neither of the two provincial employees of the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia who were aware of this, nor was it any of the Liberal Party members who were associated with the email would have seen that email. Has the Premier been able to determine if anyone who's in his employ who had knowledge of this incident called the police?

I'll remind the Premier of one portion of evidence that he seems to be overlooking that is very critical to this: the police have laid charges. That is the evidence that what was

in the email has merit. I'd like to know from the Premier: Is the Premier aware of anyone under his employ who actually called the police?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I would strongly encourage the honourable member to recognize that there is an issue of the courts that will determine whether or not there's guilt. Charges laid do not mean an individual is guilty. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. This will be the only warning today for unsolicited comments.

The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Anyone in this province who is going to make an allegation about another individual in this province needs to have evidence to be able to take that to the law enforcement agency of this province. The very person who is making the allegation should be the one who goes and contacts the law enforcement agency of this province to make the allegation and charge. That's the reality.

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

**PREM. - OWLS HD. PROV. PARK: PROTECTION - CONSULT**

GARY BURRILL: I would like to ask the Premier about the Crown lands in Owls Head and Little Harbour. In March of last year, the government passed a confidential minute letter by means of which Owls Head Provincial Park was removed from the list of pending protected areas. Then in December, a couple of months ago, thanks only to the investigative work of a diligent journalist this fact came to public light. Last month, in January, the government quietly removed the park from the online map of protected areas.

I want to ask the Premier if he would share his reasoning as to why his government did not consult, did not engage, did not even inform the public at any point along this process?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to remind the honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party that the topic at hand appears on the Order Paper now twice, once in the form of the bill that your Party introduced just a short while ago on this day, as well as it being the topic for late debate. That eliminates it as fodder for Question Period.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

GARY BURRILL: Might I call for a reconsideration of that judgment? Is it in fact the case that the entire subject that is pointed to in such a bill is not a legitimate subject for discussion on such a day in the House? That has not been my previous understanding.



THE SPEAKER: We would have been okay if the short title of the bill, printed right on the second page, wasn't the Owls Head Act. You're speaking specifically about a scenario that is the topic of a bill and is the topic of late debate, both of which are on the Order Paper. If you have a general question about a general process, that's fine. To me, your question is specific about a specific situation.

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

GARY BURRILL: I would like to ask, without mentioning the name of any particular communities on the Eastern Shore, if in general, when the government attends to the disposition and the potential future of Crown lands, if it does not find it overall a wiser course of action to consult and engage and inform than to not do so?

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much for your patience.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: I want to thank the honourable member for his question and for his ability to think quick on his feet. I do want to talk to him seriously about this issue. In his earlier preamble, he actually alluded to the fact that this was not a protected area. It was on a list of potential protected areas. Like all pieces of Crown land, when someone - whether it's being used - is looking to buy that piece of Crown land, there's a process that you would go through. There was an offer made on that piece of property. As part of that process, Mr. Speaker, there would have to be public consultation and public input to go forward. That would have been part of the ongoing process if that property had been sold.

GARY BURRILL: The Premier raises the point, which has been raised much in the government's discourse about this, about the technical or juridical status of this piece of Crown land - pending, not pending, park, not park and so on.

What I want to point to, though, is that there has been a broad understanding, as there might be among the public, when maps, government reports, things like the Colin Stewart Forest Forum, other things, when these things have all indicated a certain understanding, when the public comes to understand that in some unjuridical way, just in general, that the protection of something has been provided, would it not be better when that is the case to proceed by some means that would at least allow an elementary level of information to be shared with the public when a different course of action is to be followed?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was - really, I am not. The reality of it is that I said in the process that was in place, there would be public input and consultation on it.

This was not a piece of protected land, Mr. Speaker, and let's be clear about that. It's not that someone is making this up. It wasn't protected and now it has been delisted. It

was never protected. It was one of a number of pieces of land across the province that the former government had looked at as potential candidates to be added to our protected lands.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, there was interest in that piece of property to be able to develop economic opportunities in the region of the province that requires economic opportunities. The responsible thing for the government to do is to look at those options. I would tell the member that there would be public consultation.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I do want to say something about public consultation. The means by which any piece of land ended up being listed on the NDP's Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan, was a means of extensive consultation. At that time there were community meetings held across the province, around 20 of them - a multitude of interviews, way over 1,000 of them, many written submissions. I think in the order of around 3,000. So, we're talking here about consultation on Crown lands and land preservation, with a capital C.

The difficulty is that it seems to me that level of regard for consultation has not been honoured here. I want to ask the Premier: Does his government hold such low regard for community voices and public participation that when the public has an issue that is of such concern to them that all this level of consultation is simply taken and apparently disregarded?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, if the New Democratic Party, when they were in power, did all of this consultation and it was deemed it was supposed to be protected, why didn't they protect it? Why did they put it as a potential piece of protected area? Why didn't they just simply protect it? I think that's a better question. If they have done all of the public consultation that he is describing, why stop there? If they believe it should have been protected, why didn't they protect it?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM. - 2014 INCIDENT: TIMELINE - JUSTIFY**

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, in 2014 the Premier fired his director of communications after learning of a domestic assault. At the time, the Premier said he terminated the employee because he waited four days to tell the Premier about that incident.

In the circumstances of the member for Chester-St. Margaret's, news of an order to appear was apparently kept from the Premier from February 12<sup>th</sup> to February 21<sup>st</sup> - that's nine days. Yet the Premier says that he and the member mutually agreed that the member should resign from caucus.

I have to ask the Premier: Why was a four-day wait a fireable offence six years ago, but a nine-day wait wasn't in 2020?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. The member is referring to an Independent member, a private member of this House, and he is not a member of the Liberal caucus. It's a decision he made, and I supported it.

TIM HOUSTON: The director of communications should not have waited. Those were the words of the Premier at the time - the director of communications should not have waited.

He also said that the staff member in question wasn't let go right away because a review was needed to determine whether anyone else inside the government knew what happened. Yet this time the Premier learned of an incident from 15 months ago and didn't stop to wonder who else knew.

[12:15 p.m.]

When the Premier learned that the member's charge was from 2018, did he launch a review similar to the one from 2014?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member would know - and I think all members of this House would know - they get elected by their constituents. I don't have the authority to fire anybody in this Chamber.

I'm always surprised at the amount - the level - I'm trying to find the right word that's parliamentary - that the honourable member will go to. He spends a lot of time talking about "I, I, I" and patting himself on the back for all of the great things that he has done. My God, I'd be worried if I were some of you people. I'd be really worried about what he might do to you.

THE SPEAKER: I'd just like to remind the honourable Premier to keep your comments directed through the Chair.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM.: MLA TRANSGRESSIONS - AWARENESS**

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, what we're talking about is a moral compass. We're wondering if this Premier has one.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition that it's unparliamentary to call into question the integrity of another member in this Chamber. I'd like to ask you to retract that statement.

TIM HOUSTON: I retract that statement, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, there's a famous quote that says that the standard you walk past is the standard that you accept. When you see someone sick and struggling, do you put aside your political ambitions for your Party and help them out, or do you prioritize political expediency and turn away and conveniently be kept in the dark by your team?

That's what we're talking about here, and with this Premier. The actions of the Liberal Party caucus members who knew, the actions of the Liberal Party supporters who knew, suggest that they wanted the Premier to be kept in the dark. Maybe they suspected, or maybe they questioned whether he would do the right thing or whether he would put the Party first.

I have to ask the Premier: How does the Premier feel knowing that members who surround him - his team - look the other way in the face of such obvious transgressions, look the other way in the face of public safety, and look the other way in the face of all Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the honourable member that when members of my staff were given evidence that the member for Chester-St. Margaret's was picked up for impaired driving - that's all public. The member has gone and pled guilty to that charge.

He's making a whole host of allegations with no evidence. The courts will determine whether or not what's before them is a charge. They'll determine the guilt or innocence of the individual. At that time, what happened when it became obvious to us, we reached out to provide support, to make sure that he actually was in treatment. That's where he is today. It's my hope that he, like all Nova Scotians who suffer from this addiction or from others, continues to find the treatment and support to bring them back to good health.

TIM HOUSTON: Such nice words, Mr. Speaker. There's only one problem: the facts are in the way. They had 15 months to do the right thing - 15 months when they chose to look the other way and protect the Liberal brand. It speaks to leadership and the standards set within the team that the members surrounding the Premier didn't want him to know, that the Premier couldn't be made aware of this situation. They probably didn't want to know how he would react.

Well, we all know today how the Premier reacted to this. Can the Premier tell us how he actually feels knowing that members of the Liberal Party, members of the caucus staff, paid employees of the Province of Nova Scotia, were made well aware of this incident and chose to look the other way? Is the Premier proud of that?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I said, and he would follow that in the news today, it was described that this was looked into. The honourable member has tabled zero evidence in this House. The documents he tabled had zero evidence.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we're going to continue to provide good government to the people of Nova Scotia and continue to move our province forward. The honourable member can stand in his place and attempt to impugn the reputation of people across the province if he so chooses, but we will continue to provide the government that Nova Scotians elected us to do.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, you have to kind of see and hear this to believe it, it's actually incredible. I am reminded of a time not too long ago when the Premier - the Premier has been very open about one thing in Nova Scotia, that is he doesn't use email, he doesn't want anything put in email.

I refer the members to September 29, 2016, when the Premier said: I very seldom email anybody, quite frankly, I pick up the phone and call. There is certain information I discuss that I do not believe should be in the public domain because it may not be a piece of public policy.

Mr. Speaker, obviously this is a deliberate workaround to avoid the pesky FOIPOP rules of this province. Based on the Premier's insistence that he knew nothing about the November 2018 incident, is it fair to assume that the Premier's policy of not emailing, in order to avoid FOIPOP and those pesky Nova Scotians who want to know what has actually happened and that their Premier is concerned about their safety, is it fair to assume that the Premier's policy has continued on?

THE SPEAKER: I'll ask the honourable member to table the document he was quoting from, provided that it has an author.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to remind him that in 2013 we were some \$670 million in the hole; young people were leaving the province; we saw no opportunity for economic growth; unemployment was high; young people were saying, not Nova Scotia.

I want to remind him today the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board tabled our fifth balanced budget. Mr. Speaker, young people are moving into our province, living and working here. We see more job opportunities being created. Unemployment is at an all-time low. Those are the positive things that our government has continued to do.

While the honourable member wants to stand in his place and impugn the reputation of people across the province, we're going to continue to work with Nova Scotians to build opportunity and hope in this province.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I will table that, the Page can get it. I thought the Premier might recall that. I will also table the Notice to Appear of the charges against this member that members of his team knew about for 15 months while the pattern continued.

There was then a second charge, and all that time public safety was endangered and all because people didn't speak up.

The Premier wants us to believe that the email was kept from him but his established practice of not keeping a record of his conversation leaves a lot to his memory and places a lot of risk on those who work for him. After all, you can't produce an email with someone who avoids email.

The Premier is a busy man. We know that an entire discussion of the defence strategy in the Alton Gas case got only three minutes of his time - that is according to the affidavit from the Deputy Minister of Business when he referred to his discussion with code name "very tall man."

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier concerned that his lack of record-keeping means that Nova Scotians will never know what happened with this email? Or is he, in fact, counting on that?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, what Nova Scotians know is that we tabled our fifth balanced budget yesterday. What Nova Scotians know is their children see a future for themselves in Nova Scotia, living and working in our province.

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians know the largest single investment in health care infrastructure in the province's history, that's what Nova Scotians know.

Nova Scotians know that by working together we can build the province that we all hope and dream for our children and grandchildren, and they know they have a government that is working with them to provide that opportunity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**PREM. - HOUSING CRISIS: RENT SUP. - INEFFECTIVE**

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. There are now more than 5,000 people on the wait-list for public housing and the Metro Regional Housing Authority has stopped housing people who are not on the priority access list. This government has doubled down on allocating rent supplements as a solution, but they are easily passed over by landlords who have dozens of applicants for units, with cash in hand, ready to move in immediately. The result is an impending homelessness crisis.

Mr. Speaker, when will the Premier admit that rent supplements do not work in this sort of housing market?

HON. CHUCK PORTER: I thank the honourable member for the question. At no time have we ever stood and said in this province - the Premier, myself or anyone else, inside this Chamber or outside this Chamber - that there aren't challenges with the housing issues and concerns in Nova Scotia in looking after those people who need housing. That's why we have made the single largest investment in housing in the recent budget announced yesterday: \$20.5 million. That money will all go into a strategy to see that people in Nova Scotia who are homeless or on the verge of being homeless are going to be looked after.

We are going to hire 27 more housing support workers who have a direct impact. There's a history that will show you that over 1,200 people were housed in the last year or more by the work that those housing support workers do. We will continue to support them and those looking for housing in Nova Scotia.

LISA ROBERTS: One reason why we need more housing support workers is because it is taking two, three, and four times as long to find a unit for somebody who is already connected with a housing support worker to move into. There are no units available.

The government has announced that it will build a mere 39 new housing units this year, none of which will be owned or operated publicly. In the meantime, it will funnel \$10 million over this year and next to private landlords in the form of rent supplements. Meanwhile, Montreal has just announced it will be exercising its right of first refusal to acquire land to build social housing. Municipalities across the country are creating affordable housing reserves, building new purpose-built rental units and more. In all of those cases, strong provincial partnerships are key, yet this government insists on transferring millions of our tax dollars to private landlords instead of actually investing in affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, why does this government insist on private market free-for-alls instead of meaningful solutions to the homelessness crisis?

CHUCK PORTER: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't disagree more with the honourable member and her thought around what rent supplements do or what private conversations do with private contractors and not-for-profits and co-op housing. We are working with many more partners out there right across this province.

The fact that she doesn't see any value in housing support workers is too bad. What we know is that that is progress being made. They know where the vacancies are. They're the ones on the ground who are helping these people - the direct benefit to them, helping us get them placed. Every day in this province, those folks are working hard. We're very

pleased in this budget to announce the funds to go toward an additional 27 to help with that caseload that that member referred to.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM: MLA TRANSGRESSIONS - AWARENESS**

TIM HOUSTON: I don't know if many Nova Scotians are familiar with how things generally work in political offices in this province. Here's the shorthand. When an issue comes forward in a caucus office, particularly if it's with a member, that issue would rise to the attention of any one of three people, and oftentimes all three. Those three people are the caucus chair, the chief of staff, and the Premier. The Premier is obviously the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Liberal caucus. The obligation is on the Premier to have people around him who understand what information he needs to know and what information he doesn't need to know or they don't want him to know.

Since the Premier has suggested that he wasn't aware, logic demands that either the caucus chair or the chief of staff knew about this email, knew about this incident. Can the Premier confirm which of the caucus chair or the chief of staff were aware?

THE PREMIER: Again, I want to tell the honourable member that the riding president received that information. The riding president did the investigation, as he said in the news, didn't see any evidence in that, and did not escalate that to the Premier.

TIM HOUSTON: If only it were that simple. More people than the riding president received the email. An actual paid member of the Liberal caucus staff received it as well; so did another provincial employee.

The Premier said himself yesterday that anything this serious should be taken to the police. I haven't heard the Premier confirm that that happened. There are some real serious problems with how this was handled, which is evidenced by the court charge afterward. The public safety was put at risk the entire time that the Liberal brand was put first.

The Premier continues to suggest that he was unaware and that everyone else was unaware. Presumably upon learning about this situation last night, he would have immediately gone to his chief of staff and the then-caucus chair to ask what they knew and when. It's the logical next step. It's the natural next step.

We know this email was in the hands of political staff, so it must have made its way to one of the three people that I identified.

Is the Premier comfortable with the culture that appears to have been created within the Liberal caucus and within the Party where they protect the Liberal brand above the safety of Nova Scotians?



[12:30 p.m.]

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree with the accusation and the allegation in the question. The reality of it is the honourable member has no evidence. No evidence that a single crime had been committed. Zero. As I said to him, the former riding president looked at that, had no evidence. What do they do with it?

If you have evidence and the author of this letter had evidence, that author of that letter should have gone to the police. If the honourable member has been sitting on this letter for a period of time, why didn't he do something about it? Or was it just because he needed to have a political circus for himself?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM.: LIB. MLA ALLEGATIONS - PARTY CULTURE**

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, there is a political circus happening indeed. He asked me the question and I answered. I would love to have an answer from the Premier on some of these very serious allegations. Allegations that the police have since acted upon, laying charges.

I know the Premier is not always that respectful of our judiciary . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I would like to remind the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition to indicate that another member of this House has questionable integrity is unparliamentary. I'd like to ask you to retract that statement.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I referred to the manner in which the Premier views the judiciary. I did not refer to anything about the Premier and as evidence I would present where the Minister of Justice called our Crown attorneys greedy. I would present evidence where the Minister of Justice disregarded a recommendation from the judges.

THE SPEAKER: Is the honourable member going to retract the statement?

TIM HOUSTON: Which statement am I retracting, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: That the Premier is disrespectful of the judiciary.

TIM HOUSTON: I'll retract that statement.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Environment, the Liberal Caucus Chair, who has been at the forefront of the government efforts on the Public Accounts Committee. He used the Liberal majority at the Public Accounts Committee to slash the number of meetings and narrow the mandate of that once powerful committee. It was done

so that the government could avoid weekly televised accountability sessions. Now it's possible that the Liberal Caucus Chair has found a new way to save face for the government.

My question for the Minister of Environment in his capacity as Liberal Caucus Chair: When did he first become aware of the email that's in discussion here in the House?

HON. GORDON WILSON: Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm the next one that's going to have my reputation tried to be impugned here. I certainly think I can look across the floor and look into the eyes of everybody over there and stand by what I say here.

I believe it was actually here in the House yesterday when I first heard of this.

TIM HOUSTON: This is very interesting. We're talking about the situation that happened in their Party, but it's everyone else is to blame here. There is a demonstrated culture on that side of the House and that culture is Liberal first, Nova Scotians if we can.

The culture over there is the ends justify the means as long as the Liberals are holding onto power. It starts from the top and it runs all the way through the organization, to the volunteers, right through; Liberal first, Nova Scotia if we can.

Is it possible that a paid member of the Liberal caucus would receive an email with these types of allegations and it not be escalated to the Liberal Caucus Chair? I would like the Liberal Caucus Chair to confirm for the members of this House that he did not receive this email and put the Liberal brand before the safety of Nova Scotians?

#### **SPEAKER'S RULING:**

#### **Questions Directed to Caucus Chairs During Question Period**

**(Leader of Off. Opp. Poses question to member as caucus chair  
[Hansard p. 5357, 26 Feb. 2020])**

**During Question Period, questions directed to ministers are limited to  
matters concerning their portfolio or department**

THE SPEAKER: Okay, it's been brought to my attention by the Clerk that questions of caucus chairs are not permitted in Question Period. As set out by Beauchene, questions in Question Period are to be directed to ministers on their portfolio, or something within the responsibility of their department. So, we will move on to the next question.

The honourable member for Cumberland South.

**L&F - N. PULP CLOSURE: TRANSITION TEAM PROGRESS - COMMENT**

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Lands and Forestry. Let's change this up a little bit. (Applause) I wouldn't be very proud of that. I wouldn't be very proud of that.

Recently, the forestry transition team attended the last meeting of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. However, there were still more questions than there were answers. The forestry industry is now in a current nervous state about the future.

I would like to ask the minister: Does the minister have any statistics on how many people have actually received assistance by these announcements by the transition team?

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I believe that committee did provide an opportunity for all members in that community to ask questions. There were lots of answers given by the staff on the transition committee, both the Deputy Minister of Lands and Forestry as well as the Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs - and a myriad of programs have been announced.

That transition team has met eight times already and there is an update from many of those programs. They are going to continue to work on introducing more programs. I want to remind the member that those programs have been endorsed and supported by industry, by those industry reps who sit at the table and help put those programs together.

TORY RUSHTON: I thank the minister for his response. The transition team was represented at that meeting by two members of the former deputy minister's group that was announced last year on this floor. The minister stated estimates last March that - at the time a deputy minister's committee was stricken. My question for the minister: Has the minister been given a full brief of the activities from the past deputy's committee and the current transition team?

IAIN RANKIN: I did say at that time that we would be prepared for any outcome. Deputy ministers meet regularly, and I continue to be briefed on activity prior to the decision that was made by a company to go in hibernation. I continue to get updates from my deputy from the activity that happens at the transition team.

Of course, we did know the impacts that would arise when 95 per cent of the material from sawmills and woodlot owners and the residual materials going to one company. We knew numbers of silviculture investments, so we were prepared with analysis to look at any initiative that would come from that transition team. That is what we continue to do, and I want to thank the members who work with our group and with the transition team from the industry. We will continue to work with them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South, on a new question.

**L&F - DG REPORT: CONTACT POSITION - CONFIRM**

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, the Davidson Greenwood report last year suggested a designated person was to become a primary contact person for the industry and stakeholders. Last year, during the sitting, I asked the minister to please inform the House who was the designated staff person assigned, and his response that he would get me that information right away, as the person was hired.

I would like to ask the minister: Why did it take so long to find out who that person was?

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't remember the exact date the staff member was hired. There was their usual process to hire within the department. I believe they were hired in January. They continue to work, and they were at the meeting with the advisory committee for the Lahey report. That recommendation did come out of the DG Communications' recommendations, and we are following that recommendation.

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I just heard the minister say that the person was hired in January. When we asked back in October - and I will table this for the benefit of the House - when I asked, the minister said, we do have a designated person and I will get that contact person. That was on October 30<sup>th</sup> - and I'll table that. When we asked again in November to the minister's assistant, we will get that name passed on right away. When we finally got a response back from the minister's assistant on January 17<sup>th</sup>, they stated that that person had just been hired a week ago.

So, I am wondering: Why did the minister not find out until January that the position was not filled?

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member is going with this. We made a commitment to implement the recommendations from the DG Communications Report. Once we made that decision, it went through the regular process that government goes through in terms of competition for positions, and since then that position has been filled.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**PREM. - DISABILITIES PROG.: RE-HOUSING EFFORTS - FEEBLE**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The road map for transforming the Nova Scotia Services to Persons with Disabilities program was accepted by this Government in 2013. Advocates for community living options have been

frustrated by the Government's inaction and were deeply disappointed by the feeble commitment in yesterday's budget to begin moving 50 residents with disabilities from larger facilities to community-based living.

These individuals have been inappropriately housed in institutions for many years. I'd like to ask the Premier to explain why, seven years into a ten-year implementation of the roadmap, his government is just beginning to move individuals into appropriate accessible housing.

**THE PREMIER:** The reality is that we have been moving people into independent living across the province - not only my constituents, many of whom I know personally, friends of mine who have moved into a group home and then actually moved out into independent living. We continue to work with our partners across the province, as she would know.

Some of the clients that we have, some of the residents that we have, require more supports. That's why in this budget, the minister has made announcements and commitment to continue to provide those supports so that those who require medical and other supports in the Flex Program will have more options to move to independent living.

**SUSAN LEBLANC:** There are 1,560 people on the Disability Supports Program wait-list. The wait-list for community-based residential supports and services has increased by 50 per cent since the government committed to the roadmap. Investments in the Flex Program are an expensive band-aid that may work for some, but there is nothing in this budget to show us how this Government plans to address the need for supported living options and community for these 1,500 people on the growing wait-list.

Can the Premier explain how he plans to meet the commitment he made in 2013 to the hundreds of people on the wait-list and their families?

**THE PREMIER:** Suggesting that some of the most vulnerable people in our care don't deserve to live independently through the Flex Program, which has actually worked for those families, is not appropriate. The reality of it is, for those families and those individuals, that is an important step for them to move into independence.

As I have said to the honourable member, we have continued over the course of the last seven years to move people to independent living. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that, as quickly as possible, all those Nova Scotians who want to live independently can.

I want to also tell the honourable member there are certain Nova Scotians who want to remain in their current housing situation. I don't believe the honourable member believes I should go in and take people from where they are currently living if they choose to want to live there.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**FIN. & TREASURY BOARD: FED. TRANSFER INCREASE  
- ECONOMY LAGGING**

MURRAY RYAN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board tabled her budget. She and her government have been claiming that they are good stewards of the economy, all the while benefitting from the opposite. According to the budget, the Province will receive almost \$400 million more in transfers from Ottawa to fund their lavish spending. This is because our economy is falling behind the rest of the country.

My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is, will she acknowledge that the increase in federal transfers is in-part due to Nova Scotia's lagging economy?

HON. KAREN CASEY: To the member's question about federal support: equalization is a way the federal government has used, over a number of years - back from the 90s - to help those provinces that may need some assistance based on their ability to either raise taxes or pay for goods and services and pay for programs and services. Equalization is not new. Every province in this country has benefitted, at one time or another, from equalization. We are currently one of those five that do, and we will invest that money wisely in this province.

MURRAY RYAN: Spending is easy when it's other people's money. This government may not run deficits, but they benefit from the deficits of their federal cousins. Revenue from provincial sources are budgeted to go down while revenue from federal sources are budgeted to go up. It is short sighted. It is spending money you haven't made yet, and it is a budget built on decisions that are out of this minister's control.

My question for the minister is: Why are we becoming increasingly more dependent on transfer payments and the charity of the federal government?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all Nova Scotians for the tremendous work they've been doing over the last seven years to move this province to fiscal health. The net to GDP continues to decline in our province, from 38.6 now down to about 34. I want to thank all members of this House.

If the honourable member doesn't believe in the programs in Nova Scotia, which ones does he want us to cut? Does he want us to cancel pre-Primary? They're against it. What building does he want us to build? Does he not want the new health care facility? Does he not want that? Does he not want the investments, \$2 billion invested? Does he not want the twinning of the highways in Nova Scotia? What is it that they don't want us to do?

[12:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM. - LIB. MLA: DUI ALLEGATIONS - KNOWLEDGE**

TIM HOUSTON: We're in favour of safe highways, Mr. Speaker. We like safe highways. (Applause)

Yesterday the Premier was adamant that anyone who receives an email with that type of information should go directly to the police, but now we know that the Liberal Party received this email; they did their own investigation and determined it frivolous.

The riding president investigated by going to the member who was trying to hide the issue. The email literally said that the member was trying to hide it. How is it okay in the Premier's mind that the recipient of that email, who knows somebody's trying to hide something, goes to them and says, are you really trying to hide something or not?

Is the Premier really satisfied? Has he changed his mind that people shouldn't go to the police, that they should just do their own little frivolous discussion with somebody?

THE SPEAKER: Two things there: the terminology "hide" is unparliamentary in this Chamber; and again, you're quoting from an email that's not tabled. I would ask the member to be careful in his future phrasing of questions.

The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the author of said email is the person who had the evidence, according to the honourable member. No one in this House can make an accusation about someone else with no evidence. That's the reality, unless you're the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

TIM HOUSTON: It's interesting the words that the Liberals are no longer comfortable with, directly from the media stories and directly from the facts. The reality is this information was very telling. It was information that should have been taken seriously, ought to have been taken seriously. People who are concerned about the health and safety of their colleagues would have taken it seriously. People who are concerned about the health and safety of Nova Scotians on our roads would have taken it seriously.

We can't deny the fact that paid Liberal staffers knew. We can't deny the fact that colleagues knew. We can't deny the fact that they all turned the other way and looked away in the interest of protecting the Liberal brand, in the interest of political expediency. That, in my view, is wrong.

I'd like to ask the Premier: Is that also wrong in the Premier's view?

THE PREMIER: In his preamble, there was a whole bunch of misinformation. It wasn't accurate. It wasn't true. That's the reality.

As I said to you, this went to the riding president. The riding president dealt with that. There was no evidence, and there's still no evidence presented on the floor of this House by the honourable member that could prove any of the allegations in the letter. The reality of it is, the private member, now, is before the court. They'll determine what the next steps are.

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

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians are going to the polls more often than necessary, creating additional financial burdens on taxpayers. Eight of Nova Scotia's last eleven governments have been majority governments and called an election before their fourth year in power, even though the House of Assembly can sit for just over five years.

The last two general elections cost this province over \$9 million. The next one . . .

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

I would just like to remind the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition to table the document that he committed to table earlier, the email that you had read. (Interruption) No, the email that you read quoting something from the Premier.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I believe you are referring to the Notice to Appear. This is the actual legal document issued by the police confirming criminal charges against the member of the Liberal Party . . .

THE SPEAKER: You said you would table the document.

TIM HOUSTON: Could you confirm that you are looking for the actual legal document that confirmed the legal criminal charges against the member?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Yes, you are correct. You had committed to table the Notice to Appear.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.



TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, just in the interests of clarity, I committed to table two things. One was a newspaper article that quoted the Premier saying he does not use email because he didn't want people to know what he was saying. I have tabled that. The second document is an actual legal document of criminal charges, evidence of the situation that occurred with the member. You are looking for criminal charges?

THE SPEAKER: The Notice to Appear.

The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

### **POINT OF PRIVILEGE:**

ALANA PAON: I am not entirely sure if I am doing this correctly, but I rise on a point of privilege. We all have the privilege in this House to represent our members. I know we have an allotted amount of time to be able to do so. I would ask, please, if we could all be cognizant - and you, Mr. Speaker, obviously, being the Chair, could be cognizant - of the amount of time that is being permitted to some members as opposed to others.

I didn't get a chance to ask my question today, and my constituents are just as important as everybody else's in this House. I would appreciate if we could adhere to timelines with a little bit more diligence.

THE SPEAKER: I will take that under advisement.

### **OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Motions Other Than Government Motions.

### **MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 1661.

Res. No. 1661, re Boat Hbr. Act: Mill Closure Comm. - Establish - Notice given Feb. 20/20 - (Tim Houston)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to speak to Resolution No. 1661 put forth by the PC caucus, a resolution to establish a select committee on forestry.

Mr. Speaker, as legislators it is imperative that we form this committee to travel the province and listen to the forestry workers. On December 20<sup>th</sup> the forestry sector in this province was thrown into turmoil by the decision of the Premier of our province when he read from a prepared statement that he would not extend the Boat Harbour Act to allow Northern Pulp time to complete their environmental assessments, despite the company and forestry advocates calling for an extension. Sadly, this would put a very important player in the forestry industry at a standstill and result in closure.

After a year of questions put forth by a terrified industry, meeting after meeting and being reassured to not worry, that it was going to all be okay, hard-working men and women were forced four days before Christmas to share emotional and financial anxiety with their families. Think about that. While most were planning holiday gatherings and enjoying celebrations with their families, thousands of Nova Scotians who work in our forestry industry were consumed with complete anxiety and uncertainty for their future.

Northern Pulp received more than 90 per cent of the sawmill chips and bark, as well as more than 50 per cent of the pulpwood harvested in this province. Northern Pulp also financed, coordinated, harvested, and delivered over one-third of the province's annual timber supply. With that announcement on December 20<sup>th</sup>, it changed everything. It changed the lives of 11,000 forestry workers and their families and 30,000 woodlot owners across our province.

The result of this decision is devastating for rural Nova Scotia. As a matter of fact, I believe the result of this decision is going to be catastrophic for our province. I have said it before in this House, and I will say it again: it is the government's responsibility to consider the ramifications of its decisions. Yet, we sadly heard in a standing committee recently that members of the government's Forestry Transition Team have admitted publicly that they are still coming to grips with the impact that the closure of Northern Pulp will have on families and concede that they do not know the number of people that may lose their jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I find this deeply disturbing and concerning. I stood in this House back in April 2019 and stated that it was bigger than the 300 jobs that were at Northern Pulp. I asked this government to take the future of forestry seriously and plan for all potential outcomes. Our caucus introduced a bill entitled the Forest Industry Sustainability Act, and we asked the government if they understood the impacts and if they had consulted with industry. The Premier and the Minister of Business led us to believe that work was already under way to understand and protect our forest industry, but we never heard from that committee, a group of powerful deputy ministers. Here we are today with members of a transition team not even knowing what the impact will be on families or our province.

Let me say it again, Mr. Speaker: it is imperative for government to understand the ramifications of its decisions and to take responsibility. Actually, I believe that all of us as

MLAs, when we make decisions, have a very large impact on the lives of the people we represent, and we have a responsibility to be accountable for those decisions.

It is not acceptable to cause chaos and leave it to non-elected people to fix. It is our responsibility to provide stability and support. Nova Scotia forestry is one of the biggest businesses and, in rural Nova Scotia and in my constituency, one of the largest employers. We have small and large sawmills, forestry contractors, truckers, roadbuilders, equipment salesmen, truck-repair shops, local firewood producers, woodlot owners, and small stores in rural communities that rely on the forestry industry. These men and women who are facing such an uncertain time and uncertain future deserve to be heard by the members of this House of Assembly, who passed the law that closed Boat Harbour, cancelling a contract 10 years earlier. It should be them listening to these affected families.

It is those hard-working men and women who know the answers to the path forward, and MLAs should feel an obligation to look people who make their livelihoods in the forest in the eye, listen to their stories, consider their suggestions, value their expertise, and work with them to make sure that they can continue to make a life in Nova Scotia. It is these innocent, honourable, hard-working men and women who have chosen to live in our province and to make a modest living for their families, who create real wealth for our province, and who are now facing tremendous hardship because of a decision by government and a satisfactory alternate plan.

Yesterday in the budget we heard that the closure of Northern Pulp is going to have a negative effect on the Province's budget. Imagine what the closure will do to the budget of a family that relied on it to put food on the table. Imagine what this closure is going to do for landowners who lost 50 per cent of the value of timber overnight, the landowner who was banking on that money to pay for their kids' education or pay for medication or for medical bills for a gravely sick member of their family. It may be okay for those who want to back away from harvesting and wait and see how this all looks out in the future, but mills also need wood to supply or they shut down, which causes more layoffs. Imagine what this closure means to contractors who are trying to make their payments on equipment and meet payroll.

Based on the Gardner Pinfold study of 2016, the social and economic impact of eliminating 50 per cent of the total harvest in Nova Scotia is huge. It would be in the order of \$500 million per year in lost GDP and direct job losses in the order of 600 in harvesting, trucking, and roads alone. Mill closures would be in addition to these numbers. These, of course, will change as the supply chain continues to adjust and following the road closures.

The reality of all of this will sink in over the remainder of the year and longer. When Nova Scotia Power stops taking biomass at the winter levels in Port Hawkesbury and in my constituency in Liverpool, at Brooklyn Energy, the impact on the sawmills will be hard.

[1:00 p.m.]

In western Nova Scotia a review by Freeman Lumber in WestFor on the harvest level in western Nova Scotia shows that 65 per cent of the total volume will be shut down by road closure due to no outlet for pulpwood, sawmill chips, or hog fuel. The impact on people in economic terms is huge - 90 harvest and trucking contractors and over 400 operators and drivers impacted and 400 pieces of equipment will be idle.

Let's talk about what we know today. We know the result so far has been a loss of over \$3 billion of standing timber value in Nova Scotia. We know that thousands of direct jobs and shutdown of a significant portion of the forestry supply chain. We know for over 1.1 million tons of wood - one-third of the province's harvesting representing \$1.1 billion of economic activity - we know all certainty in the sector has gone out the window with investment and people exiting the sector at an alarming rate.

We know there is a loss of over \$500 million of silviculture investment that has been made in the past by 30 years of woodlot owners. These are numbers being released by folks in the industry, on the ground, desperately trying to get government to listen to them. But what do we have? We have a transition team committee named by the Premier that reports to the Premier - not to the forestry sector.

While throwing cash at a problem may seem great and big numbers excite some, throwing cash at a problem that doesn't fix two major issues is serious. Creating markets and maintaining low owner value through a robust supply chain with high value products gets us nowhere. We have not seen one ton of cord or market of our forestry products and actually experienced a reduced supply to key markets like hardwood sawlogs and hardwood pulpwood by reducing supplies that threaten businesses.

We continue to see the plowing ahead of reports, Biodiversity Act, all things that threaten the economic prosperity of rural Nova Scotia while they've been put on life support. We continue to see the supporting of burning and importing coal and oil - over 70 per cent year to date - rather than support the forestry sector and woodlot owners right here in our own province.

I have always believed that MLAs work for Nova Scotians - not the other way around. Because of this decision, rural Nova Scotia will suffer. It will suffer the most, but every Nova Scotian will suffer to some degree. If you think this decision does not affect you as an MLA or a Nova Scotian, I respectfully ask you to think again. This decision has devastated rural Nova Scotia and the people didn't make this decision.

A select committee of elected, accountable members that consults, listens and provides meaningful and informed support is simply the right thing to address the mess that we are in now. There needs to be guidance and strong commitment to the industry or

we will be losing much more than Northern Pulp. We have heard the Premier say time and time again, Northern Pulp had five years - so did this government.

We need a path forward, one that protects our forests, our rural communities, and the men and women who choose to live and work within them. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour, as always, to rise in this House and to address Resolution No. 1661. This is a very important topic that affects a great number of Nova Scotians in virtually every corner of the province. Many of them are still very much in the midst of grappling with the transition, the change, the uncertainty in their personal and their financial lives. I want to begin by just acknowledging that and acknowledging that change, when it is not change that one has chosen, is a very stressful thing.

The closure of Northern Pulp will have extensive ramifications across the province if it is not stewarded and managed thoughtfully and carefully. Contractors, sawmill owners and employees, mill employees, woodlot owners, forestry workers, truckers, and their families are all under stress as the full picture of what this moment means continues to unfold.

Given the significance of this moment, it is worthwhile revisiting an example from our recent history of when a government managed a significant transition in the forestry industry. The NDP Government took a community-based approach to the transition following the closure of the Bowater mill in June 2012. That transition team included local voices and experts, municipal representatives, and community perspectives.

The goal of the Bowater transition team was to identify potential opportunities to diversify the economy and to bring lasting jobs and economic growth to the region. The team advocated for the community, conveying community questions to the province on issues such as worker pensions, training, fire and safety issues at the mill site, and wood supply. That team made recommendations focused on making the most of the region's people and its resources, including seizing on opportunities in research and development into new value-added forestry products such as biofuels and advanced wood products; promoting innovation; supporting new and small businesses; expanding tourism through more focused marketing; and capitalizing on the region's current advantages in seafood and agricultural production.

The Bowater transition team released a final report in December 2012. Its recommendations included that two or three project managers be hired to work on community priorities; that small business hubs support new and home-based businesses and provide them better access to capital for small businesses; that there be more flexibility and simpler access to government support programs; that a research development

demonstration site at the former Bowater mill property be developed to commercialize new value-added wood products such as biofuels and engineered wood products; that a community forest model be promoted; that work ensue with the construction industry on the merits of wood and wood products in commercial construction; and, finally, that work be done with farmers to identify new agricultural products and value-added businesses for their produce.

An interdepartmental provincial response team from Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, Labour and Advanced Education, Natural Resources, career counselling centres, and community business development corporations continued to support the community's needs after the transition team finished its work.

The Bowater transition team was able to develop innovative and lasting solutions that were tied to what the community needed, because it was connected and listening to the people who were impacted.

I can't help but contrast that approach with the one currently favoured by this government, which has stacked the current transition team with deputy ministers. Deputy ministers who are absolutely skilled and talented and dedicated individuals, but who nonetheless are government employees who answer ultimately to the Premier.

I can't help but think back to some of the Premier's answers in our Question Period today when the protected areas plan that was arrived at, thanks to thousands of Nova Scotians contributing through a really robust consultation process, that plan was discounted as being of the NDP Government. I don't think that there is adequate appreciation in the current government for what robust consultation and community participation actually mean.

That protected area's plan was not the plan of the NDP Government because it was shaped by thousands of Nova Scotians. The government at the time created the framework and provided the administrative supports for that consultation to happen. Here, and repeatedly with this government, what we're seeing is a very closed approach to consultation, and that denies all of us as Nova Scotians the opportunity for the best ideas and for the greatest energy to be put to the problems that we're facing, that are complex.

Certainly, as the NDP spokesperson on lands and forestry, I have come to appreciate that that field, that file, that industry, is incredibly complex. There are very many different players operating at different scales, but all of them are impacted when their neighbours are struggling and under stress, and when the market conditions and the demand for their products is so dramatically impacted, as it has been since the Northern Pulp closure.

It seems to me that the current formation of the transition team is at risk of being ineffective because it is neither wide enough to encompass strategic planning for the future

of the forestry industry, nor connected enough to communities to steward an effective community-based transition. Our caucus has called on the government to appoint a community chair, fully independent of government and with credentials that ensure the respect of all sectors. I will say that differs from what is being proposed through this resolution, which is an all-Party committee.

While I endeavour to show up when invited to all-Party committees of any sort with my best wishes and best intentions to be constructive, frankly I don't think the nature of this House and of partisan politics necessarily lends those formations to be the best ones for getting work done. I don't agree with the core of this resolution, which is that there should be an all-Party committee travelling the province to look for solutions for the forestry industry. It's hard enough, frankly, to be with you for as long as I'm going to be with you just today. I do think that the transition team, a more robust transition team with more community voices, would be very helpful.

Given the current formation of the transition team with its preponderance of deputy ministers, we urge it to meet regularly with municipalities and major social agencies in Pictou, Cumberland, and other impacted counties, in order to keep them informed of their activities and better monitor the situation on the ground, in order to find out what interventions might be needed and might be helpful, and to make sure that those communication channels are open.

I happen to have gotten to know a couple of the non-deputy minister members of the transition team, and I know that there are people there who are really there with the wide interests of the community at heart. Yet, this is a diverse province, and the forestry industry is, again, very complex. The realities in central northern Nova Scotia are not the same as the realities in the southwest, and yet Northern Pulp's supply chain reached all corners.

The only way we will come out on the other side of this significant moment in our province's history is if we are really willing to listen to what people are telling us that they need and what they can offer. That's not just through feedback after decisions are made, but through genuinely including community voices throughout the decision-making process.

I also feel like this is an opportunity to talk about what this transition means to the state of our forests. Of course, this major change in the pulp and paper industry comes on the heels of the findings of the Lahey report on the state of our forests, and the current formation and trajectory of the transition presents a risk and also an opportunity when we look at the need to shift to a greater balance across the landscape of Nova Scotia, and in particular, as described in the Lahey report, a shift to ecological forestry on a great deal of our Crown land.

[1:15 p.m.]

As we confront the climate crisis - which I'll note has not yet been mentioned, I don't think, in this House in this sitting - this moment has to be seized as an opportunity to do things differently. Many people are questioning whether Northern Pulp's licences should be transferred to some of the forestry co-ops in the province which are either more interested or more versed in ecological forestry. I'm concerned that the transition will not be used to its full potential as an opportunity to create a real, profound shift towards sustainability and a new green economy, which includes use of wood for local heat generation, as well as in other value-added products, including mass timber and so forth.

We need this transition to contemplate the long view. We certainly need government support to stabilize the industry so that it is able to adjust to that long view. We also need to be taking this moment to figure out together and to gather different actors to the purpose of moving towards a long-term vision for our forests.

My great question is whether the transition team will facilitate more than a trickle of information from government higher-ups. We have heard from some members of impacted communities that communication from the transition team is poor and that lack of details around the path forward increases the anxiety created by the situation. Pictou has asked for representation on the transition team, but to my knowledge, that request has not been granted. Unifor has asked for representation on the team. Again, to my knowledge, that request has not been granted. We also haven't been informed in detail about how the transition team will measure and track its outcomes.

Additionally, I continue to question and seek clarity on whether actions taken by the government are going to undercut private woodlot owners.

I am grateful to the Official Opposition for putting forward this resolution, which has led to this opportunity to lay out some of my concerns with the current formulation of the Northern Pulp transition. We'll continue to urge the government to include community voices in the transition. Again, this moment will require courage, listening, and transparent communication.

It is my hope that this government will find it in itself to rise to the moment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Lands and Forestry.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: It's a pleasure to rise to speak a little bit on the resolution before the House. I would agree with sentiments expressed by both previous speakers - some of them. I don't agree that this is the time to bring more political actors into a very serious issue that we are facing in the province in one of our most important sectors, especially to rural Nova Scotia, with such a core piece of our economy at stake. That's why



we took action fairly quickly to put together a team that does include deputy ministers. I think that's an important piece of the transition team.

Of course, we have the Deputy Minister of Lands and Forestry at that table, along with Energy and IGA, so we can take quick action. These are the administrative heads of departments that send out analyses throughout the many departments and public servants that can take quick action on initiatives, alongside our partners that come from industry. We do have representation from private woodlot owners and large industrial landowners. We have a sawmill operator at that table so that we can get critical information to the table quickly from industry, from the ground, from communities, and then act on it quickly through our deputies.

Of course, I, as the Minister of Lands and Forestry, had the opportunity to go to one of the committee meetings that they had previously so that I could hear directly from them, aside from my normal practice of reaching out to different players in the industry.

I think having that, and if you look at the comparison of the practice of our standing committees, I would submit that they are not always constructive in their organization. That's where I would agree with the member for Halifax Needham, who just spoke about politics being brought into it, that our so-called road show across the province may not be the best framework in terms of trying to find solutions and acting on those solutions at the table.

An example that I've seen recently - and as soon as I saw this resolution I thought of the ongoing effort by municipalities with the CAP system. I saw in an article that I will table entitled "Partisanship bogs down CAP panel." That was the title of a *Chronicle Herald* article. Members can go through the challenges that you can have when you have political members speaking - what they want to see happen. Sometimes when they get in front of a camera, they like to state political positions and not necessarily get into details and constructive analysis around programs that matter to people.

I think that the current status of how our committee has been operating has seen demonstrated success. The initiatives have been rolling out week after week, starting with looking at funding for silviculture and road work, supplementing some of the funding that we knew Northern Pulp was spending on both private and Crown lands, so some of that money goes directly into the pockets of those who are working - truckers, loggers, people who are working throughout the supply chain - being able to do enhanced silviculture work beyond the increase that we actually were able to get into the budget for the Lahey report recommendations, that were increased last year and this year.

So, those types of initiatives matter, and they are able to be administered quickly through our partners through the Association for Sustainable Forestry and Forest Nova Scotia, when it comes to the road work. Just because people aren't on the transition team themselves as a person does not mean that they don't have a voice at that table.

There are many opportunities in the transition team itself that meets weekly. They actually introduce people who come to the table and bring presentations; they've been out on the road. Community colleges are a part of that for retraining, meeting at actual sawmills, going through presentations from sawmills or interested companies that are looking for opportunities to look at future markets.

I believe there are close to 20 different companies that brought proposals forward, looking at taking advantage of some of the products that we now have in excess, opportunities to look at the bioeconomy and different types of business models that are possible.

So, we have the \$7 million for silviculture and roadwork, as I spoke to. We have the \$5 million to provide the guarantee through the new financing program through our credit unions across the province. We know there is uptake on that program that allows, again, to keep capacity in the supply chain. These are short-term initiatives that can happen right away. If there are contractors that have equipment and are worried about making payments on those, on the credit lines, we provide that guarantee so that we can get through this period of uncertainty for industry. We know that there is uptake on that.

There is \$1.5 million put into retraining options for forestry workers if they choose to consider other skill trades. We also have the recent \$10 million over the next two years to provide an innovation rebate for companies that want to look at capital investments at their sawmill, if they want to look at something that could help with low-value products that we have the concern to find markets for today or potentially look at improving value-added type products and making investment here, and government being there.

So, we are exhausting all opportunities, keeping in mind that we have to ensure that we are keeping the exemption on our softwood lumber agreement, and that's where we get advice from legal teams, trade staff, and others at the table.

Above and beyond all of those investments, we have also put aside \$50 million that hasn't been touched yet into a separate trust fund, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of that is to protect it for future years so that it's not being pulled away from the transition from year to year - fiscal years. We will be able to put initiatives together at the transition table that can draw from that.

Of course, we knew that this would have an impact. I heard the member for Queens-Shelburne, I believe it is, continuing to use the words "this decision" throughout her speech. I would submit that if it was a decision of government, it was very much voted on by every member of this House. All Parties supported the Boat Harbour Act.

The government did not make a decision to cease operation of a company. They had the decision to either comply with what was required of them or not. They did put forward an application that was not successful. By the time we came to December, the

month prior to the closure of Boat Harbour, as is stated in the Act, we were no further ahead than we were five years prior.

Again, that was not an easy time for industry leading up to that. I was minister throughout, meeting with stakeholders, travelling across the province, visiting mills in virtually every county in the province, throughout the South Shore, in around Pictou, up in Cape Breton, and all over. There was anxiety and concern felt about what the government might do as we got closer. Those anxieties and challenges became ever more present as we came closer and closer to that deadline that was in the legislation.

There were always questions of what government would do. Again, we had to take a principled stance. I don't think anyone apologizes for sticking by our word that we made together collectively - all Parties. Maybe some members were not in agreement, but they did vote for the Boat Harbour Act.

We had a situation in the province that has been going on for far too long. There has been a lot of talk for about five years. That was just the last promise that the Province, the government of Nova Scotia, made to the people of Pictou Landing First Nation that that facility had to close. It was just the first time that was put in legislation.

Prior to 2014, when that Act was passed - we know that that was promised in 2008 by the Progressive Conservative government, that that facility had to close. Prior to that, multiple times throughout the 1990s, leading back to 1991, the first promise was made by the government that Boat Harbour would close. I would submit that Northern Pulp had more than five years to transition to a more acceptable environmental outfall with the effluent that they had to deal with. At the end of the day, they weren't able to meet the regulations and have their environmental assessment approved in the province.

It is what it is. We had to come to grips with how we would deal with the impacts. We did know what the impacts were. Right from day one when we came into government in 2013, we had smart public servants who would tell us about how much tonnage goes to a certain company; how much capacity there is of forestry workers in the forest, working on the various types of logging across the whole province; the impacts to sawmills and if they would all continue to operate or not.

We have challenges, for sure. We're prepared to meet with all parties to go over solutions, as we have been doing. We have the 1-800 line, where we have monitored staff to look at all the different initiatives that people can bring. That way, through the website, through me, members of the House bring different initiatives to me which go through a central area to the transition team to look at how we could help both in the short term and in the long term.

Right now, the focus of that transition team is on the short term, ensuring that we have markets for some of the low-value pulpwood that comes off of private land and on

how we're dealing with our Crown land operations and ensuring that contractors are working on both of those areas. That's why we have industry reps at our table who have been with us and supporting all of the initiatives that we have been rolling out week after week and monitoring to see how that works. We also have our own government initiatives that we have been working on through the Lahey report that will help with that as well.

[1:30 p.m.]

I think of the public heating initiative that we've undergone, with a tender about to close with six public buildings that will be able to take some of that product. We know that it's a start, and it's a signal that that's the direction we can go in the future that could actually lead to more buildings, or even district energy projects that municipalities may want to engage in. We know there is interest with some municipal groups.

It could involve some of our institutions. We know some universities, like Université Sainte-Anne, already uses the system with biomass products, locally used wood chips from woodlots. There are opportunities, but the key is that we need to make sure that we're diversifying where all these products are going and not putting all our eggs in one basket.

For far too long, the industry was reliant on very limited markets. I'm not blaming them. When you have such a high price being paid to your operation from that entity, why would you change and shift to selling your product to something that you get lower revenue from?

We had to make sure that we did what we thought was right for the environment and what was right for a community that had to live next to what I've said - and I'll say it again - I think it was one of the highest, one of the most extreme examples that we have in the province, in the country, of environmental racism. I think that's why all members at that time decided to support that bill. Maybe some of them regret that or regret the position of their Party but in reality, today, that is just not acceptable anymore.

I'm actually very proud of the principled stance that the Premier had to make. I know it wasn't easy for him, and I know the Premier very much cares about the forestry sector. That's why we put together the transition team, and that's why he said: Do not despair, we will be with you throughout this time.

As you can see through the actions we've taken through a number of initiatives, through the tens of millions of dollars that we are putting out to help people through this period of uncertainty, we mean what we say. We're going to continue to work with those individuals that have been impacted by some of what has taken place over the last number of months, number of years, and, as I have said earlier, number of decades.

I think that we're all for the better if we do keep politics out to the extent that we can. I know the environment that we're all in, but if we can keep politics out of this, we can make sure we're focused on solutions and not adding more committees on top of more committees, we can look at how we work with our industry players and how we're transitioning the forestry sector to one that's more sustainable in the long run; work together to implement a report that lays out a road map for us over the next number of decades, as the report refers to changing our forestry practices; and engage with the communities to ensure that we're looking at different values in the forest, whether it's recreation, whether it's conservation, and how that forestry can coincide with all those values. That's the key, how we work together.

THE SPEAKER: The member for Cumberland South.

TORY RUSHTON: I want to recognize the Minister of Lands and Forestry and my colleague in the NDP caucus for their remarks, and a few things we can certainly share as a whole House of Assembly on some of their ideas.

I'm pleased to stand in my place today and speak on this resolution, a resolution that would establish a select committee on forestry. It seems very familiar that I'm standing here, almost a year after, almost a year to the day, where our caucus presented an idea of Bill No. 85, Forestry Industry Sustainability Act.

That was a bill that would have called on the government to create a task force within the forestry sector to work on issues such as new markets, stepping blocks of transition, what that transition would have looked like, and what finances would have needed to be established for the stepping hurdles in that sector. It sounds very familiar. That was almost a year ago.

A year ago, in this House, this province and this forestry sector were led to believe that we had the best decision makers we have - the Premier, certain ministers, certain deputy ministers - working on it the best way we can. To start a new look at a different task force now wouldn't be going in the right way. It's not something that is going to change the game. Yet, on December 20<sup>th</sup>, we heard the announcement. That's exactly what this government did: created a new task force with a different name such as the transition team.

Starting a new look is exactly what this government did. I am not criticizing the fact that they did this; it needed to be done. My question has been ever since last year and they presented that bill was the timing of that. The eleventh hour was going to come, no matter what, and for planning on the day of the announcement of the eleventh hour bears to be given credit to.

Did this team of deputies meet on a regular basis? What was in their structure? Were they meeting in a proactive approach? Did they meet at all on a regular basis?

We found out when the transition team spoke a few weeks ago in the Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee - they made the statement that they ended up starting from scratch, with no reports back from that team of deputy ministers. They were allocated \$50 million. One of the questions we've heard loud and clear from the sector: Where did that \$50 million number come from?

One of the terms of reference for that committee was to work on short-term pressure relief for the sector, alleviate the transitional change that was going to happen within the forestry sector. It is known throughout this whole House that that was going to happen within the province of Nova Scotia.

I do want to give credit to this government, for the Lahey report is something I think we can all agree on, on this floor. It was a step in the right direction for a forestry sector. One thing we have debated across the floor is how to implement that Lahey report and the speed and process, which we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, why a new team on December 20<sup>th</sup>? Why \$50 million? Why announce that team only at the eleventh hour? At the end of the day, why a big press conference to announce something that this government said was already legislated?

As an Opposition member in any government, whether it's here in this province or in any other province across Canada, one of our jobs is to hold government to account. That's our sole job - to ask the questions of our constituents and residents in the province who are feeling left out. Also, a part of our job is to share ideas - and we did that in the form of a resolution.

Did we have hopes that day of holding a press conference, that this government was going to accept the resolution? Probably not. I've stood in this House for almost two years, and I've heard how collaborative this government is and how open - but not once have I seen this government take either of the Opposition Parties' ideas and collaborate with them. When suggested last year that the MLAs of Pictou come up with ideas on their own and make recommendations to this House, those three MLAs asked for the information - the file information, if you will. That never happened. There's that word again, "collaboration."

We've heard from foresters from Yarmouth to Cape Breton, mill operators, woodlot owners and associations. More important, in my constituency of Cumberland South, as many in all of rural Nova Scotia, it's not just the contractors, it's not just the mill owners. It's those people who are planting trees, it's those people who are running harvesters. They are feeling an awful pinch and an awful feeling of anxiety right now.

We're hearing loud and clear since December 20<sup>th</sup> that they're feeling their voice isn't at the transition team. We've already heard the member in the NDP caucus state that

they are hearing the same as we are, that the response coming back from the transition team is not in a timely manner.

Something did need to be done and foresters needed a voice. I felt it important that somebody here had to step up to give a voice. They also needed a voice last Spring when they felt not consulted about a biodiversity Act. The forestry asked for a voice and, as elected officials, I believe we have a duty to step up.

As it was stated in the House a year ago, in this debate all elected officials need to take responsibility as elected officials. That is why we suggested this resolution. As legislators and being elected to this House, it's time for us to face the facts of decisions we have made, to face the people out in the sector and explain to them what we can and cannot do.

We as the PC caucus made a promise on January 23<sup>rd</sup> to the province of Nova Scotia and the forestry sector that we would have boots on the ground and go out and speak with those sector people. That we have done, as I'm sure other MLAs in this House have done, but they still feel their voices are not being heard. They're scared with anxiety, not knowing where the next paycheque may come from.

An all-Party committee travelling the province could work with groups - such as the one my colleague for Cumberland North and I sit on with support staff in Cumberland County. That meets almost weekly and has an advisory team that has a link right to the transition team. I would encourage all MLAs of this House to go back to your communities this weekend and talk to your forestry sectors and come up with a committee such as that.

When we heard from some decision makers that they don't feel there's anything that has been affected in the forestry sector yet - that sets off an alarm. Let's be very clear: there have already been losses and there are going to be more losses. This resolution will give us an opportunity to seek out the rural areas, get into the roots of Nova Scotia where the forestry sector is, and get a better understanding of what's going on in our own backyards.

Last year when the idea of a Plan B was floated around with the deputies' committee, I still argued with the fact that this was a little bit too late. A year before the closure was a little bit too late. The five-year mark is not even here yet. That legislation was passed on May 5<sup>th</sup>; that will be the five-year mark. I would argue that this government even knew a year prior to that, when the agreement was signed at Pictou Landing with the Boat Harbour issue. I'm not debating the fact that we shouldn't have cleaned up Boat Harbour, I'm not debating that at all today. What I am arguing is how this file was handled.

I spoke in the House in my very first session about an impact my community was going to see: a loss of 10 to 20 jobs. That was a big impact to that community. Here we have a situation that's going to affect thousands of families throughout Nova Scotia, and

this government waited until the eleventh hour to come up with a team and a plan combined to get in together. That's what I'm debating here today.

Impacts are seen, such as people with lower incomes on their paycheque. An impact has already seen people lose their equipment and be fearful that at the end of March they're going to lose their house, as well. Yes, there's some relief funds through the bridge program, but \$618, or \$87 - I apologize, I don't have the proper quoted number - that doesn't make a payment. That doesn't carry on for two or three months while you're waiting to see what the future may bring.

Let's talk a bit about the transition team. Mr. Speaker, I may ask questions of the transition team and these questions are coming from the real people that are being affected. I'm not a forester. I'm not a biologist. I don't know how else to grab these questions, but being made to feel that we're against the transition team - that's not the fact. We're getting the questions from the real people that have the impact with their feet on the ground.

These members of the transition team were put in a very difficult situation on January 3<sup>rd</sup> when their names were put out. I think whether we agree with the process of what the transition team has done, the transition team does need a little bit of a pat on the back for the situation they have been put in and being able to fit into their schedules on a weekly basis. I have heard that the transition team, though, is not getting back to the people that are putting in requests. It's not a timely response. Let's be honest: one of the terms of reference was an immediate response to the situation at hand. We're not seeing that.

[1:45 p.m.]

Another issue that I have heard several times is from presenters that have gone to the transition team, where if they don't share the same ideas as some of those on that transition team, it's almost like they're not paying attention to the presentation. Right from the get-go, before the first meeting ever happened with the transition team, we see that somebody the Premier sent out a personal invite to sit on this team was removed before the first meeting ever happened because he didn't share the same ideas of what was going on within some of those on the transition team. That's not collaboration. I get the sense of why these foresters are disappointed and upset with how the whole process is going on.

Mr. Speaker, our PC caucus put together a resolution idea to put us all together. What a noble idea: elected officials actually getting along on a committee to represent one of the biggest issues going on in the province - one of the biggest issues that any of these elected officials will ever see in their political careers - and work together to see an end to it. What a noble idea that would be in an elected process.

Like I said, I'm not a forester. I'm not a biologist. I'm the Lands and Forestry Critic. I have worked a little bit in the woods in my past. When I was given the job of being Lands and Forestry Critic, I took something very serious and that was to get in the woods to get



educated on what is going on - both sides of the story, not just the harvesting aspect and not just the economic aspect. We have a target to protect our land here in Nova Scotia. I don't think there's one MLA who sits in this House who would argue the fact that we need to protect some of our lands. I don't think anyone would argue that fact.

Since the December 20<sup>th</sup> announcement, even I, who thought I had a grasp of what could happen at that eleventh hour, was set back at the amount of people who are actually affected by this. The forestry sector is a spider's web. Right now, that spider's web has lost one of its lines. If you ever look at a spider's web when it loses one of its lines, the whole structure is at a risk of catastrophe. That spider does not catch its enemy.

The forestry sector believes that's where they are right now. They believe that they're at the risk of total failure. They've set a goal of: Can we reach it when the roads close this Spring? We're days away from that right now. Are we going to be able to move that goalpost now? Are we going to be able to move that goalpost so that we have a prosperous forestry sector and protected areas after the roads reopen? Are we going to be able to meet that?

There's one thing that the Premier and I can agree on, and it is that we will have some sort of forestry sector in the province of Nova Scotia in years to come. One thing the Premier may debate on is: What's that going to look like and how do we get there? Right now we're hearing loud and clear on a daily, nightly, mid-morning basis that they don't feel they have a path forward. This sector does not feel they have a path forward.

If we're going to be condemned as a PC caucus for trying to stand up and give a voice to the forestry sector, well so be it. We'll be condemned. I'm not going to be silenced for the forestry sector, and I'll stand here every day and speak for that forestry sector.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

JOHN LOHR: I'd like to draw the attention of the House to the West Gallery where we have Leslie Tilley, Joan Hawkin, and Janie Andrews here today who are all part of the Nova Scotia Healthcare Crisis Facebook group. Their group continues to grow and now has 9,343 members.

Leslie Tilley, thank you for rising, and we'll give them the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 194.

**Bill No. 194 - Health Authority Transparency Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise in my place this afternoon and begin debate on the Health Authority Transparency Act, an Act to Provide Transparency to Health Authority Expenditures.

The purpose of this bill is in its title: to require transparency from the Nova Scotia Health Authority on its expenditures. Specifically, it would require the NSHA to report any expenditures greater than \$25,000, except for payments of doctors, to be made public at the same time as the Public Accounts are published for the fiscal year, as is required by any other government department.

Health care is a major concern for Nova Scotians. I've said it before, and although some deny it to this day, we are in a health care crisis. In yesterday's budget, we learned that \$4.82 billion will be spent on health care in the upcoming year in Nova Scotia. That's a whopping 42 per cent of the provincial budget. Nova Scotians are not feeling as though they are getting the value, care, or services of a \$4.82 billion health care system.

Yesterday, we learned that the budget for the NSHA is increasing about 7 per cent - to almost \$1.9 billion - from the pockets of Nova Scotian taxpayers. The government passes the money to the NSHA for them to deliver health care, and at the end of the day Nova Scotians have no idea how their money is spent. From this government, there is little accountability or transparency from the NSHA. This is the reason, or one of the reasons, for this bill and others such as Bill No. 155, the Healthcare Ombudsman Act, being introduced.

Our caucus has stood firm on our beliefs of transparency and accountability with Nova Scotians. This is something that the government of the day is failing to do. As I have previously mentioned, Nova Scotians are not feeling as though they are getting the care, value, or services of a \$4.82 billion health care system.

We have a four-year-old provincial Need a Family Practice registry that the government touts a success. What the government is failing to realize is that it's based on

the will of Nova Scotians to self-identify on that registry. Moreover, it's likely that numbers may be a little bit skewed based on how Nova Scotians may register once; find a family practitioner; lose their family practitioner, unfortunately; register again; and find another practitioner. Those numbers there can be compounded in the total number that's being presented. I have to ask myself how many Nova Scotians unfortunately fall into that whirlwind.

In my part of the province, in the western region of the province, there are 21,511 self-identified Nova Scotians without a family practitioner as of February 2020. That's 11.2 per cent of the western part of the province's population. Closer to home, in Yarmouth County, there are 2,742 Nova Scotians - again, 11.2 per cent of the population in the county - without a family practitioner. In Shelburne County, 1,264 Nova Scotians self-identified as without a family practitioner. That's 9.1 per cent. Both nearly double the provincial average of 5.2 per cent of Nova Scotians without a family doctor. All of these numbers are based on self-identification.

For front-line health care workers who work hard day in and day out across our province to deliver the best care they can with the resources they have, the provincial numbers do not meet reality.

Beyond the troubles that I've explained of accessing primary health care in my part of the province, long waits to access mental health services continue and prolonged ER waits. On a daily basis, closed emergency rooms are becoming such a part of the reality for parts of the province that they're announced on the radio just as frequently as the weather is announced. Angered and frustrated physicians are leaving regions such as the Valley because of the NSHA bureaucracy.

There are prolonged ambulance response times and a lack of services in various parts of the province, such as dialysis service - and I have stood on my feet here in this Chamber before to speak about that - or cancer care services. People in Yarmouth have been waiting for nearly two years to see the recommendations and when these recommendations will be implemented. There are closures of clinics such as the cardiac care clinic in Bridgewater.

All of these are reasons why Nova Scotians are not feeling as though they are receiving the care, value, and services of a \$4.82 billion health care system.

Almost half of our provincial budget goes to the delivery of health care. A large portion of that budget goes to the NSHA, a big bureaucracy in Halifax that perplexes Nova Scotians. It is shrouded in a veil of secrecy, has closed-door meetings, has taken away any local decision making, fails to implement any local decision making, doesn't answer to the taxpayers of Nova Scotia, and doesn't listen to the needs of Nova Scotians.

Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians deserve better. They also deserve to know how their money is being spent, just like any other department, whether it be the Department of Environment, the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, or the Department of Justice. This bill here will have two benefits: it will cause the NSHA to consider what their spending would look like if it made its way into the hands of Nova Scotians; and it will give Nova Scotians confidence that either their tax dollars are being spent responsibly, or it will show them when there is waste and duplication.

Nova Scotians are hard-working people who pay among the highest taxes in our country. They deserve to know that their money is being well spent and that an organization isn't given carte blanche for nearly \$2 billion. Every dollar spent in our health care system should be spent to ensure better care for Nova Scotians. This bill puts transparency measures in place to help make sure that that happens.

It's going to take more than recent changes announced to the NSHA's structure before Nova Scotians begin to trust the NSHA. Trust starts with local engagement and decision making. Trust starts with being open with Nova Scotians. Trust starts with accountability and transparency regarding our provincial health care crisis. I think Bill No. 194, the Health Authority Transparency Act, will ensure that that accountability and transparency are a priority for the NSHA.

With those few words, I look forward to hearing the comments of my honourable colleagues, and I take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I am very pleased to rise today and speak to Bill No. 194, which provides some transparency for NSHA costs.

Mr. Speaker, transparency is very important, as we all know, in the work that we are doing. We have called on the government many times to be transparent about many decisions it has made. This transparency Act notes that quality health care is a concern to all Nova Scotians. I think we can all agree.

Certainly, in my community of Dartmouth North, when I knock on doors, I still hear that health care is one of the number one concerns of the folks that I represent. Some still can't find family doctors. There's a great population of lower-income Nova Scotians who live in Dartmouth North, who need better access to primary care in our community so that they don't have to travel outside of the community to get it. Many people contact me because they are waiting too long for procedures and surgeries at hospitals.

This Act suggests that it would require the NSHA publicly to disclose every payment and expenditure in excess of \$25,000. It seems to me that this is really the only transparency offered in this transparency Act. While I think that we can agree that health

care is extremely important, there are, without question, many more important health care issues facing the province than the receipts based on an arbitrary amount of money.

[2:00 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, we know a number of things about health care right now in Nova Scotia and some of the things that I am about to say are not very good. We know that in 2015 the Nova Scotia Health Authority was founded. At the time, the creating of that new authority created chaos in Nova Scotia by focusing on centralizing decision making instead of improving actual health care services.

We know that some of that reorganization has again been reorganized and we stand with hope that this new reorganization will allow the province to get back to the important matter of caring for the health and wellness of Nova Scotians, rather than continually reorganizing an administrative structure.

Last year when the NSHA sought further restructuring, the interim CEO at the time described the Health Authority as “overly complex and bureaucratic, confusing and does not allow us to easily address challenges . . .”

Mr. Speaker, we know that in Nova Scotia we have a worsening of our health indicators. The impact of low health care spending and profound inefficiency is represented clearly in health indicators. Our health indicators in Nova Scotia have continued to worsen. The number of Nova Scotians who feel they are in good health has decreased. The number of Nova Scotians with perceived poor mental health has increased. The number of Nova Scotians with diabetes has increased. The number of Nova Scotians with high blood pressure has increased. The number of Nova Scotians with a regular health care provider has decreased.

We also know there are many disparities in health and wellness across NSHA zones; it is very evident in the data. We see the data trends conclusively illustrate that there are significant disparities. Infant mortality is twice as high in the Northern Zone than in the Central Zone. A baby is twice as likely to die based on where it is born in this province.

Life expectancy in Cape Breton is approximately three years less than life expectancy of people in the Central Zone. The more affluent areas enjoy longer, healthier lives than the less affluent zones. This is particularly true for the Central Zone, which has significant better health indicators than the other zones. So, it is fair to say that in Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker, that one’s postal code dictates their quality of life and health expectancy.

Getting back to the bill at hand, I am all for transparency. I think this government needs to be transparent on a number of issues. Again, I will reiterate that making an arbitrary decision that the NSHA should publicize spending over \$25,000, why isn’t it

\$15,000, why don't we see every budget line for the NSHA? It is important for Nova Scotians to know how our money is being spent.

Surely this Health Authority Transparency Act should be transparent about much more. It can certainly be argued that an Act focusing on costs above \$25,000 is not as important as focusing on the social determinants of health, for instance, or health inequities that continue to significantly and measurably impact public health.

Mr. Speaker, at Public Accounts Committee, at Health Committee, I often bring up the importance of paying attention to the social determinants of health, especially when it comes to housing or income level. Every time I bring up these topics the people across the aisle from me nod their heads.

Normally they are upper level civil servants, public servants, working in the Health and Wellness Department or in different areas of Health and Wellness. They nod their heads; they understand the importance of the social determinants of health and yet we don't see real investments happening. We don't see collaboration around the social determinants of health that we could be seeing. So, let's get transparent about that. Let's get transparent about why we're not seeing that very important and very sound investment with our public dollars.

Perhaps we should be transparent about why Nova Scotia, with its worsening health indicators and health disparities, spends less on public health care than any other province in the country. Maybe we should get transparent about why we don't spend more on upstream health services. Maybe we should get transparent about why funding for walk-in mental health clinics are being funded by the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage and not the Department of Health and Wellness.

Maybe we should get transparent about why the QEII redevelopment of the Halifax Infirmary and the VG sites are being created through P3 models. This is something that I've been asking for transparency on for - it feels like since I was elected but I know it has not been that long - a long time, Mr. Speaker. We're spending billions of dollars on our new hospital redevelopment and we don't know exactly why many of the decisions are being made because the reports have not been released to us.

While I applaud my colleagues from the Progressive Conservative Party on presenting this idea of transparency in health, I feel as though this bill does not go nearly far enough. We have a transparency issue in Nova Scotia, and we could do much better. Thank you. With those short words, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to stand here today. I'll try to take the whole 15 minutes, see if I can do it.

I do want to say a few things. There were some statistics and data that was quoted by the member for Dartmouth North - I would ask that those numbers be tabled for the benefit of the House - about the worsening health indicators for Nova Scotians. I ask that so we could all see it and we could see where that data is coming from. That would be greatly appreciated.

Another thing, one of the things I've heard was that Nova Scotia spends the least amount on health care. That's simply not true. A quick Google search will show that the budget for P.E.I. was \$1.7 billion, or 36 per cent of their budget, Newfoundland and Labrador lower, I think New Brunswick was lower, so we are the highest in Atlantic Canada and one of the highest percentage-wise right across Canada.

We tend to throw numbers out there, and everybody has stats but these are facts, these are in provincial budgets. We do spend quite a bit of money. We spend the largest amount of money on health care than anything else we spend on because we recognize the importance of health care - not to say that there's not more to be done. There is also a question around collaboration, especially when it comes to social determinants.

I would argue that's simply not true. Yesterday we saw Tim Crooks from Phoenix House, we saw Adsum House, we've seen collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club, Miia from the YWCA. I see some expressions over there, but the truth is the Boys and Girls Club is in my community, as I think it is with the member for Dartmouth North, but the director was here yesterday and was recognized. Afterwards, I had a conversation with them and he thanked a few of us - not just Liberals but I'm sure he thanked the NDP and PC MLAs for advocating on behalf - and that this budget had provided stable funding for the Boys and Girls Club, which helps deal with some of the social issues in our communities.

For example, my community, as some of the members across from me know because they have done some filming around the Boys and Girls Club in Spryfield, but they would know how important the Boys and Girls Club is for this community. We saw Miia - Miia, you're probably not watching - I'm not going to try and say her last name, but Miia has become a great role model for me and is someone that I go to, especially when it comes to issues around housing for women and social determinants that women face. We saw her here in the Legislature talking about money in the provincial budget when it came to human trafficking.

I've known Miia for a long, long time and I can honestly say I don't think I've ever seen Miia cry. She stood there in front a group of her peers, in front of the provincial media and was physically and emotionally overwhelmed because of the investments that were being made. That is collaboration. That's listening to the stakeholders. There's been huge investments in Metro Turning Point. To talk to the executive director at Metro Turning Point, there's been more money put into Metro Turning Point now than there has been, ever. I'm not standing here patting ourselves on the back.

I would argue that the executive director - with whom most people know I have a personal relationship, she is a darn good executive director and she does a great job of getting money - but she also was able to work with Housing and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Community Services, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, and the Premier. We recognize the importance of the Metro Turning Point and organizations like that and working with them, not dictating to them, but working with them and asking them what they need to help us deal with the very complex issue of health.

So, to say that there's no collaboration going on, I've been doing this for six years and I've seen a lot of it, I've seen a lot of it. It's easy to point at things you do not agree with and say, well, there's no collaboration. It's easy to point fingers and say this government is bad or that government is bad, or this policy is bad, but these investments in this budget, which I am hoping the members of the NDP in particular see . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has reminded me that the subject of the bill we are debating is transparency of health authorities, and I am sure the member can relate something in the budget to that, but in my mind the debate has sort of wavered off from its original purpose.

THE SPEAKER: I will take that under advisement.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Ironically, Mr. Speaker, I was sitting in your position when that member stood up and talked and I gave him a lot of leeway on this topic, so it's good to see that there's mutual respect and collaboration across the aisle. I actually said to him afterwards: hey, you know, I could have called you out for that but, you know, I understand that you're passionate. Let's continue on. Anyway, transparency. The reason why I am bringing this up is because that is transparency.

Collaborating with stakeholders and not doing things behind closed doors is transparency. Like I said, health is a very complex issue, but we want to talk about transparency. We've had questions about the redevelopment of the QEII and the money, over \$25,000 payments which is part of this bill, that's being spent. We've had some opposition from members across about the way that this is being done, but the truth is it is all online. It's all online.

I've heard members say, what is going on, like we need to know about the QEII redevelopment. I said, why didn't you attend the 12 community events that happened or the 12 announcements that happened? I attended most of them. It wasn't in my community - not in the area that I represented - but it was important. Why not go online? Take a moment.



I've had constituents come up to me and ask me very specific questions about the redevelopment of the QEII. I directed them online and they got their answers.

I can honestly say I understand the apprehension from Opposition over projects this size, I really do. We've seen governments in the past have their hands on massive projects like this and mistakes were made. Mistakes were made because the transparency wasn't there, because there weren't enough eyes on these projects. Sometimes, when you are in the middle of these projects, you are in a bubble and it's hard to see outside of that bubble.

So, I understand when we see the Opposition say, well, you know what, we want to see more; we need to hear more because of past mistakes of government. I can't remember, and I honestly mean this, I can't remember a project of this size with plans online; with non-stop negotiations with the municipality; non-stop negotiations with our partners, including Doctors Nova Scotia; having conversations with the doctors and the front-line workers and saying to them, what is it that you need?

What is it that will attract you to come to our communities? It's not just about the QEII; it's about the billions and billions of dollars that are being spent across this province, from Glace Bay all the way to Yarmouth, to improve the infrastructure. It's online, it's in the budget, it's been debated at the Public Accounts Committee, and it will continue to unfold for the public to see.

[2:15 p.m.]

I often think of one of our harshest critics, or one of the individuals who really fought tooth and nail for health care reform and health care investment, and the member for Glace Bay might know this. Dr. Orrell, who is now the Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness, saw the issues first-hand and decided to be part of the solution.

If there wasn't transparency, if people didn't believe that we want to do the right thing, well, the proof is in the pudding. Why would you bring in somebody who has been a critic in the past? Why would you not bring somebody in who just pats you on the back and says you're doing a great job?

You want people who are critical, who are experts, because you want to be able to deliver the right health care. The right health care means a different thing, depending on the community you live in, let's be honest. I represent Spryfield, Sambro, Purcells Cove loop. The issues we face are different than, say, the issues in Yarmouth, the issues in Sydney, or the issues in wherever the member for Kings West is from.

When we talk about transparency and where the money is being spent, I can tell you where the money is being spent right now: the new blood clinic that just opened in Spryfield last year, that is where the money has been spent. When we started, there were maybe a dozen nurse practitioners working in Nova Scotia. How do I know that? A friend

of mine who is a nurse practitioner came to my office shortly after I was elected. She told me that the nurse practitioners were coming out of nursing school, and they weren't even able to get their practicums done here in Nova Scotia, let alone find a job. They were either losing the certification or they were moving out of the province.

I said, well, that certainly can't be true. We understand the importance of nurse practitioners and family practice nurses. I made a call to the Dalhousie School of Nursing, and I talked to one of the executives at the school. They were shocked that a politician had called them to ask them about this because nobody was listening - their words, not mine.

It was hard for them to sell this course to registered nurses because they weren't getting the work here in Nova Scotia. Fast forward, hundreds and hundreds of nurse practitioners have been hired from one end of this province to the other and now are an integral part of our front-line services.

Over 440 doctors have been hired. I read a statistic that said we have more doctors per capita than anywhere else, but we also face some very challenging and difficult situations when it comes to our province. People want to work in urban cores, for the most part, so we have to recognize that. We have recognized that, and we've created initiatives to help these doctors and these nurse practitioners come to rural areas.

Another area where the money is being spent is on not just recruiting but retaining, making sure that when doctors come to Antigonish, they stay in Antigonish; that we support their family; that there's wraparound services for them in their community; that we build vibrant local economies; that we have access to high-speed internet; that we have roads that are paved. These might not seem like things that impact your health care, but they certainly do when you're trying to attract health care professionals.

I have a couple of friends who are real estate agents. Laurie and I had this discussion about how we attract people to rural parts of Nova Scotia. She said one of the first things people ask me when they move to these areas is, is there high-speed internet? If there isn't, they are not coming. These are where we're spending the money. This is why we have set up funding: to keep promises and to fulfill promises that governments have been making for decades.

If you want to know where the money in health care is going, it's going to front-line workers. It's going to attracting and retaining. It's going to building world-class facilities that we have heard - not from you or from us, but from doctors, nurses, and staff - that they are tired of leaky buildings. They are tired of old technology. If you want to keep them, and if you want to retain them, invest in them.

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

BARBARA ADAMS: That was quite interesting.

I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill No. 194, the Health Authority Transparency Act. For the information of some of the members of the House, the word "transparency" means honest and open, a quality of being easily seen. If you have ever looked at the budget books or the Nova Scotia Health Authority reports, it is not very easy to find the information.

Under the duties of the Minister of Health and Wellness - I'm going to refer to the Health Authorities Act. It says in there that the role of the Minister of Health and Wellness is to conduct financial and human resources planning. Given that the Health Authority's budget is \$1.9 billion - the biggest investment in this province - people would think that it would give us the best care and that everything should be taken care of, but that's not what people think.

People are asking for more transparency. In fact, this isn't the first time a transparency Act has been introduced in the Legislature. There was a 2013 Transparency in Power Rates Act, introduced by the Liberals. Before they became government, transparency was something that they introduced as legislation. In 2015, there was a Transparency in Expenses Act introduced by the PC Party. Another one by the PC Party was Transparency in Ministers' Expenses Act. Then again by the NDP in 2018 was the Nursing Home Transparency Act. We have been calling for transparency in this House.

What we're asking for is where are you spending the money? How are you spending it - not just a line on a budget?

Who else wants to know and asks for more transparency? I'm not sure if everybody is on Facebook, but if you're not aware, I'll give you a rundown of just the ones that I am aware of that are asking for transparency: the Nova Scotia Healthcare Crisis Facebook group, which is in the House today; MEGA, Make Emergency Great Again; the Family Rally for Health Care; the Nova Scotia Needs Doctors Facebook page; and the Nova Scotia Health Coalition, which is calling for transparency. We're not the only ones calling for it. Everyone in this province is looking for it.

Why does that matter? Why does how you spend the money and where you're spending it matter? We used to be able to ask that every week in the Legislature when Public Accounts was a strong committee. This government took away transparency, and we can't bring these issues up there.

We have a Nova Scotia Health Committee. During one of those meetings when we were talking about budgets, there was a report on 811 that the Minister of Health and Wellness withheld from the committee until after the committee met. We couldn't ask questions that would aid in the transparency of health care in this province because we didn't have the information until the day after that committee met.

We're asking for someone to say this is where we spent our money. How on earth do you argue against that? I'm assuming the government knows where the money is going, I'm assuming the Health Authority can account for that. According to the accreditation report, the Health Authority was doing a good job keeping track of the money, so I don't understand why it's that difficult to understand why actually asking you to report it in a way that is open and transparent would be difficult.

THE SPEAKER: I would like to remind the honourable member to keep her comments directed through the Chair. I let the first one go, but several times in the last couple of minutes you seem to be speaking directly to the members opposite. Please keep your comments directed through the Chair.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage has the floor.

BARBARA ADAMS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sometimes my emotions get away with me and I look directly at the members opposite.

I want to refer to the budget in terms of transparency and where the numbers are going. People want to know how, if we're spending \$1.9 billion, do we not have enough staff in long-term care, do we not have enough staff providing mental health services in communities and in the hospitals? How is it that our emergency departments are closing more now than at any other point? How is it that so many Nova Scotians still don't have a family doctor? They have a right to know.

One constituent wrote to me and I'll table this after I read it:

Attention Barbara Adams, MLA. Oceanview Continuing Care Centre is in crisis. Staffing issues are beyond. It is not a safe work environment, not enough staff to care for residents' basic needs. For most professions, staff leave at the end of the day. We do not have the luxury. Mandating to stay back was always a last resort; now it's a daily event. Not a safe practice which has a huge impact on all staff and residents. The residents' needs are not being met. Management is aware but no support is offered because, in brackets I'll add (I've indicated from management that they don't have sufficient funds). With no staff, why are we admitting new residents when we can barely care for what we have?

This letter needs to go to the Department of Health and Wellness and followed up. I will be passing that over to the Department of Health and Wellness today. I see you are constantly keeping health care in the news, the time for the residents and staff in your constituency are looked after. Please help us.

This is not the first letter that I have received. What I do know is that at the Health Committee we are looking for transparency in how money is being spent. We are asking about a chief dental officer because that helps with accountability and transparency and how this money is being spent. We found out during that Health Committee meeting that the chief dental officer is not something this government was willing to do; they had appointed somebody temporarily. I'm not even sure today if that has been extended for one day, a week. That's not a good use of money. We don't know how the dental program is being monitored and whose oversight is there. People in this province have a right to know how you're spending their money.

We talk about QEII redevelopment. We've needed that VG Hospital torn down for over a decade. The fact that this government is now trying to make up for lost time and spending more money now when they should have been spending it all those years ago isn't something to be proud of.

We talk about orthopaedic wait times and those amazing new orthopaedic surgery departments in Dartmouth. That is true. They are amazing. They were needed a long time ago. We have wait-lists for orthopaedic surgeries of over 1,100 days in the past. They've improved, but they are still two to three times longer than the national average. People want to know: When you build things and when you spend money, are we achieving the standards across this country? We are not.

I want to reference something that the member for Halifax Atlantic said. He wanted to know where the member for Dartmouth North was getting her information about how badly Nova Scotians are doing in terms of our health status. I would maintain that every single member of the Legislature should already have that information. As a health professional, I certainly know it.

[2:30 p.m.]

We have the worst outcomes in almost every health category going. I would assume that this government would know that and that they would have that information and not need it to be tabled, but I am counting on the member for Dartmouth North to table something that we all know about on this side of the Legislature.

We have an additional \$500,000 in our Budget Books to be spent on mental health. If anybody knows what a mental health worker costs in this province, we know that an additional \$500,000 will employ approximately six to eight health professionals. That is not a significant increase. People want to know, is that money being spent effectively? Why would this government not want the transparency?

Other government departments that don't cost anywhere near what the Health Authority costs have to do the same reporting that this Health Authority Transparency Bill is calling for. Other government departments that cost less money are bound by what we're

talking about here. Why would the single most expensive department that we are responsible for not be bound by that? We're asking for how you spent the money. The government not speaking in favour of this doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't make sense to my constituents, who want to know whether we're getting good value for our money.

I want to talk about a couple of things that are in the budget. When you read the budget about where money is going to - and I've said this before - you don't also provide a supplemental of what's getting cut, what we're losing money for. That would be really important for this government to be transparent about.

I'm going to reference the very first thing in the budget on health care. It talks about the money in the doctors' master agreement. It talks about the money that's been put into that. What it doesn't mention is that there has been a disincentive to physicians who are on the alternative payment plan; that this new budget, which is supposed to help us recruit physicians, is not as helpful to physicians who are on the alternative payment plan, who are disproportionately those in the rural areas. My constituents want to know if this particular investment that shifts money is going to reflect in greater ability to recruit family doctors to rural areas.

I want to go back to the actual lines in the bill. It says: "The Nova Scotia Health Authority shall publicly disclose . . ." and I'm going to stop there. We're asking for public disclosure. Where is the argument where this should not be public? This is public money. This is you and me reaching into the pockets of every Nova Scotian and taking \$1.9 billion to spend on health care, and we would like you to publicly disclose . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The term "reaching into the pockets of every Nova Scotian" is a documented unparliamentary term. Just bringing it to your attention.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

BARBARA ADAMS: I'll rephrase that and say that the government taxes in various ways to get the money to pay for health care. No question.

The public would like public disclosure on the use of public money, and that's what this bill is asking for. That's what this Party stands for: public disclosure - the openness and transparency of how we're spending your money and whether it's effective. Are we, in fact, having better health outcomes? Are we, in fact, gaining in terms of our wait times? If you spend any time going through the wait times for all sorts of procedures across this province, you will see a significant number of them going up, not going down.

Given the enormous amount of money that we are spending on health care in this province, we are asking for the words "public disclosure." The amount of \$25,000 is an amount that we use for other departments. Therefore, it seems reasonable that that amount would have been included in this legislation.

The second requirement in this legislation is that this disclosure must be made annually at the same time as the public accounts are published for the fiscal year. If we want public disclosure of how we're spending money in every other department, save the most expensive one, we, the PC Party of Nova Scotia, would provide that transparency. We would publicly disclose how those funds are being spent because that's the right of every Nova Scotian, to know exactly how we would spend their money and whether that is, in fact, resulting in an improvement in their health status. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I'd just like to remind the honourable member to please table the document, the email you quoted from earlier, and we'll make sure that it has, in fact, an author noted on it.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Opposition Business for today. I would like to hand the reins of power back to the Government House Leader.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as referenced earlier, the NDP has identified their topic for the adjournment debate, so I'd like to ask the House for unanimous consent to move the moment of interruption to now, as opposed to later this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We will now move on to the late debate, the moment of interruption. That topic once again, for those who many have missed it earlier, as submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Chebucto is:

"Therefore be it resolved that the government could have done a better job at managing the issue of Owls Head."

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

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

**GOV'T. (N.S.): HANDLING OF OWLS HEAD PROVINCIAL PARK -  
INADEQUATE**

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to the Government House Leader for permitting the adjournment debate to go forward this afternoon, following my misunderstanding of the submission deadline for late debates.

The resolution that is before us, while it may not be phrased particularly elegantly, is plain in its meaning and its intent. Namely, that the government could have done a much-improved job in the matter of its handling of Owls Head Provincial Park.

Now, key words here: provincial park. These are works that we use advisedly because regardless of the semantic waffling which, in my view, the government has engaged in over this subject, the public has for at least 40 years - and I'm speaking here in particular of the public of the Eastern Shore - has had every reason to believe that the lands we are speaking of here were lands that at least in some respect, under some piece of legislation somewhere, were protected by the Province of Nova Scotia for future use.

This was not an anachronistic or frivolous understanding, but a grounded understanding. Let me outline some of the reasons why this is so. Conservation specialists spoke in January at the public meeting of concern held in East Sheet Harbour on this question about the record of matters, on the basis of which reasonable people in the area had come to the understanding that the government was extending some form of protection to Little Harbour and Owls Head. They mentioned that the park was included in the June 1980 Eastern Shore Park System Master Plan as it was published in the edition that year of the magazine *Conservation*, which many of us will remember was a former quarterly publication of the Department of Natural Resources.

Then in 2009, the determinations of the Colin Stewart Forest Forum Final Report were made public. This was a process that included, over a long period of time, a great deal of extensive public input and community participation. In the concluding reports from the forest forum, Owls Head was included under the heading, Tier One High Value Conservation Land. Then in 2011, Owls Head Provincial Park was listed on government maps under this heading, "12 Percent Lands for Review," a government map series published by the Protected Areas Branch of the Department of Environment. Then, more familiarly in 2012, Owls Head Provincial Park appeared in the Provincial Parks and Park Reserves map series.

All of this was the case until earlier this year when that map was surreptitiously removed following the breaking of this story. Owls Head Provincial Park appeared on the online Department of Lands and Forestry map until that time titled, Parks and Protected Areas - a System for Nova Scotia. Therefore, it was a reasonable thing that the people of



Ship Harbour, Lake Charlotte, Musquodoboit Harbour, and surrounding area assumed that this was a piece of land that enjoyed some form of government protection.

This is why, despite the fact that some members of the government have found it surprising, there was such a sudden expression of outrage and deep public surprise when people became aware of a plan that had not previously been revealed, by means of which the government was making way for a potential sale to a developer when all of that came to light. This, after all of those years of careful mapping, surveying, listing, reviewing, and public consideration of Owls Head as a significant piece of coastline to be protected for future generations and held in the public trust for the indefinite future.

The thing is, all it took for the government to reverse this 40 years of participation and public understanding was the few seconds involved in the enacting of this confidential something called a minute letter. Now, I must admit that until this discussion came forward about Owls Head, I had never heard of a minute letter - granted, I've never been a member of the Cabinet. Nevertheless I've been around this work for a number of years, and it's never a category that I had at least heard about. I find that I'm not alone. Last Thursday there was, on the opening day of the Legislature, a demonstration of 150-200 or so people here expressing their concerns about the government's action in the Owls Head case.

I had the occasion to speak to that demonstration and, asking about this understanding, I said this was true of me: I never heard of a minute letter. Is there anybody here who could put up their hand who has ever heard of a minute letter before? There wasn't one - well, I was saying in the demonstration, I am pleased at the familiarity with parliamentary procedure of a number of the opposite members - but when I asked that question, there weren't any hands that went up.

At the time this happened, I asked Siri about this: Siri, what's the story on a minute letter? Now Siri, generally, has got something to say to me, but Siri had no answer. Siri's first cousin, Mr. Google, didn't have any answer either. That's because a minute letter is a thing that is, of its nature, behind a wall of secrecy and confidentiality in a Cabinet.

After the revelations of December - which I will say again as I said earlier today, we would not have known about in the public at all but for the diligent work of an investigative journalist - after those revelations, there were lots of people including me who asked themselves, can this actually happen? Can you have an area that everybody's understood for a long, long time is under a form of government protection, which has all this documentation about this protection, that the government is able to remove that pending status without anybody even being told? How in the world could that actually take place?

It wasn't very long after those revelations were published in December, about what had taken place the previous March, that more insight came forward into the mechanism. The means of this process by which this had actually happened was revealed to the public,

namely that there had been a series of private lobbying meetings between members of the government and a former Liberal Cabinet Minister, Michel Samson, who states as his lobbying goal in the provincial lobbyist registry: “Acquisition of & access to Crown land” for Lighthouse Links. Lighthouse Links, Mr. Speaker, is a golf course developer.

[2:45 p.m.]

So a picture appears of conversations which take place with the government, with friends of the government, which take place with ease and access and influence and, I would say, privileged consideration. Privileged is the word I use because it is privileged, it is given more importance, it is given greater credence than all those decades of work, all those years of consideration, all those consultations, all those evenings in which people came out to take part in public consultation meetings. All of that is weighed on the scale and is not given the same weight as is accorded to that series of meetings that take place with that government lobbyist, which lead to that decision behind closed doors.

I want to say that an important piece of this puzzle that’s worth speaking about is the 2012 Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan. This is the document from which Owls Head has now been removed. It’s the plan assembled by our NDP Government in 2012 that laid out the path to protecting almost 14 per cent of the province’s landmass. The strategy outlined a path to go forward beyond the current target for landmass protection of 13 per cent. It was a very important document and a very important process. I would like to again underscore that it was the result of extensive public conversation, extensive participation from all across the province.

I just want to check, Mr. Speaker, if I might. Is it in fact the case that I have only three seconds left to speak?

THE SPEAKER: That is in fact the case. You are finished.

GARY BURRILL: In that case, I will conclude by saying that the government has not, in the words of this resolution, done as good a job as it could about Owls Head.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Lands and Forestry.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I won’t be nearly as funny on this file, but I’ll do my best to try to clarify some of the facts around the process of how we look at considering economic opportunities that deal with Crown land in the province. The fact of the matter is that this land is not legally protected, whether it was considered protected, whether it was on maps identified as Owls Head Provincial Park. It was on a list of potential areas to be considered for protection.

There were governments after governments that had a chance to protect that, including the NDP Government that was involved in putting together the Parks and

Protected Areas Plan. They chose over the four-and-a-half years that they were in power not to proceed with protecting that piece of property. There is a long list of other land areas across the province in that plan. Government has shown a commitment to looking at that.

It's not only that list. We have protected over 100 different sites from that plan since we came into government in 2013. We have also looked at other areas in the province that warrant consideration for looking at the biodiversity features on the land, wildlife on the land, and consideration from the community. Not only that, we've added to areas that had been protected land from that plan.

We had a potential opportunity brought forward to us by elected members who represent constituents in that area, including the Member of Parliament and the MLA and neighbouring MLAs, who have said there is strong local support for a potential project. The process for us to go forward would have been to look at - okay, it is on the list of potential protected areas, so we should check in with policy and Treasury Board because it is a policy shift in how we treat that area. That's why it went to Treasury Board. It's not a public meeting. Treasury Board and Cabinet never has been a public meeting. The Opposition and others can call it a closed-door meeting to suit their narrative, but that is the process that we decided to go through that would be prudent so that other elected members at the table could weigh in to see if it was worth consideration.

Our mandate under Lands and Forestry, and Environment, is to protect 13 per cent. We're well on our way to get to 13 per cent. We've never had any non-governmental organization come in advocating for the protection of Owls Head as a priority. They always had a list of different priorities, which we paid special attention to. I think of Wentworth Valley. I think of the Mabou Highlands. I think of McGowan Lake. I think of a long list of other ones - Rogue's Roost in an area near mine. Those types of areas that were advocated for and prioritized by the environmental groups have been looked at and we looked at the other areas that would be prioritized for a range of values to look at protection. The internal staff also do that, and I have never seen on one list, since I've been in the Departments of Environment or Lands and Forestry, this potential area being prioritized above others for protection.

Then, once we had authority from a submitted letter - that's how everything goes through Treasury Board - to consider the application, once that application starts to proceed, there are a number of steps that this developer would need to go through, and actually wants to go through, because he has been quite clear from the start that he wanted to have public support for a potential project. He wanted to give back to the community to help with economic opportunities in an area that doesn't have a lot of opportunities.

We decided to put together a requirement in the application that he would have to put together a public engagement plan that we would approve before he would actually start that plan. Unfortunately, we're at a juncture now where there has been a pause and we don't know if that developer wants to continue on with the project potential. If he does,

we'll continue on with the regular process that we have been engaged in from the start. That doesn't preclude the obligation for the Crown to consult with the Mi'kmaq.

It's not only the local voice that has been lost in this. It's still early in the process but there's also the voice of our Mi'kmaq partners, who have a right to start to engage if there was a potential sale in any Crown land, what their view is on the matter, if there is a position that they could either support or not support a potential project. That's not to say that they would or not, it's just a step in the process that we didn't get to yet.

Yes. The information did get broadcasted out to all Nova Scotians and there are varying views of different groups. There are some Nova Scotians that don't want any of the land that's on Crown land used for any economic potential. On the government side, we think that we can do both. We've shown that we've been able to protect the environment in a myriad of ways. When we came into government, the protected lands in the province was less than 10 per cent. It's now very close to 13 per cent. We are nearing our goal. That puts us behind only British Columbia and Alberta for a percentage of land protected.

We know we have work to do. It becomes more of a challenge for us because our Crown land percentage is just over 30 per cent. I know there's discussion from the same group of people who are against this project that we should be protecting 30 per cent. I think it's important to have all of the information before you make that type of statement. If you want to protect all Crown land, that means no forestry, mineral development, and a lot of other things that people rely on for their livelihood, especially in rural Nova Scotia.

Those discussions just need to take place when we're trying to balance the need to support economic opportunities, as well as protect the highest conservation values in the province. This government stands for both. I know that there are people that only are one side of this discussion. I think that we've shown in many of the major decisions that have gone through for considering economic opportunities that we have always looked at the evidence and how it would be in the overall public interest. In this particular case, I think it would be not in the public interest for a politician to say, we won't consider a project just because it is on a list for potential protection.

Again, the facts matter in the case of looking at a development proposal. If there's value that we can look at for a project that may actually help in terms of looking at initiatives for ecotourism, which is a vision of the project - the 100 Wild Islands is a great opportunity for the area to look at bringing people to the area. How does that work and how does that coincide with a potential golf course? Again, I'm not speaking to those who are completely against development or those who are completely against golf courses per se. Most reasonable Nova Scotians, I think, would want any government to explore any opportunity in any area if it would help the community and also help conserve the general environment.

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

BRAD JOHNS: I come back to the wording of the resolution that's here before us as submitted by the Leader of the NDP: "Therefore be it resolved that the government could have done a much-improved job in its handling of the question of the Owls Head Provincial Park." I do support exactly what's written there. I do feel that the government had opportunities where they could have dealt with this file in a way that would have better served the government, better served the people of Nova Scotia, better served the developer that was coming forward with a proposal, and better served the residents that were there.

The reason I say that is because although sometimes we don't necessarily have a legal right to do things, we do have a moral right to do things. The Leader of the NDP went into the history of Owls Head and how it has been perceived by residents in that area - that it was going to be a protected area, that it was on a list. I think that the government had a moral obligation to go out and consult with the residents of that area prior to furthering discussions with the developer, prior to removing that property off of a list via minute letter.

I could talk for ages about how I feel about how that property was removed. I recognize it was not on a protected list but it was on as a potential. The residents of Owls Head and the Eastern Shore held the perception - sometimes perception is reality - for a long time, that that land was going to be protected. Whether it's because of the current government, past governments, or whatever, it didn't get protected. However, it was still on the potential list, and residents felt it was going to be. Government had a responsibility to go back and consult with those residents.

In this case, I listened today when the Premier suggested that, after it was removed, if there was a proposal or an option to buy come forward, then they were going to have consultation. The problem with that is there's a lot of uncertainty that occurs. I did attend a public meeting that was held. Unfortunately, it was held by a community group which obviously had a slant. They were an environmental group. I certainly support the stand they took. However, if the government had held that public consultation and public meeting versus an independent community group, then I think the feedback the government would have received was something very similar to what I had received: that there were people who are in favour of this as well as people that wanted to see it remain as an environmental area.

Where I have a problem with this is, the government could have done this better. The government could have gone out, hosted a public meeting, took residents' questions and answers, and put their minds at ease. Instead what ended up happening at the meeting I attended - for the record, the Leader of the NDP was there as well as two other members of our caucus. What I saw was neighbour against neighbour, volunteer community group pitted against volunteer community group, and nothing that was officially given to give any direction to anybody who was in power to make a decision. Therefore, we are now where we are. A developer that was willing to look at investing in this province has now

walked away from this issue. Residents from the environmental group are now in the process of taking this issue to court, I believe.

We go back to what the topic of late debate is: the government could have dealt with this and done a better job of managing Owl's Head. I think they could have. They could have gone out and done better consultation. We're not even getting into the discussions around that area being identified as an environmentally sensitive area with a unique ecosystem. I'm not even getting into all that. I'm just talking about going out and holding public consultation.

Even from that, the optics in regard to this - and I recognize that there are some things that are not in the control of this government - but the optics to have a previous member of this government, a previous minister who is now advocating and working for the developer here, all that did was add additional fuel to the fire and the concerns residents had. They feel that not only is this land taken off the list and it's done via a minute letter, which nobody knows anything about or what it is, it's really not a transparent and open way to remove the property.

[3:00 p.m.]

That created concerns, concerns from the fact that the gentleman pushing it forward is a former Cabinet Minister of this government fuelled anxiety in the community. If this government, instead of putting the cart before the horse, had actually gone out and held public meetings, I think it would have put everybody's mind at ease. I think the government would have seen the same thing that I saw. Although there are concerns with regard to the ecosystem there, I don't think there was anything there that couldn't have been resolved with some compromise if the government had gone out and consulted.

I will say there were people there - and I was quite surprised at the number of people who actually stood up, whose opinions were counter to what the hosts of the meeting had - who actually stood up and expressed that they would like to see a golf course there, and they were in favour of this development. There are two sides to the coin. Unfortunately, because the government didn't go out and hold these meetings, because of all this anxiety, ultimately, what ended up happening was that the developer, who was looking at investing in this province, who was looking at creating jobs, who I sincerely feel was concerned and environmentally conscious and was taking that into consideration, has now walked away. We've lost the opportunity for that development.

As the Environment Critic, I always put environment at the forefront of my mind, but at the same time I recognize the need for economic opportunities in this province. This could have been one. I know that if the government had taken a better lead on this, a compromise would have been achieved that would have been good for everybody all around this province. I'm very disappointed in that. With that, I conclude.

THE SPEAKER: As there are no other speakers on the topic, that concludes the late debate.

### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

### GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 1659.

[Res. 1659, re Estimates - CW on Supply: Referred - Notice given Feb. 20/20 - (Hon. Karen Casey)]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount with 48 minutes remaining.

MURRAY RYAN: Mr. Speaker, my speech is only about 20 pages. It is double-spaced and it's a larger font, so I don't have to wear my bifocals, so I met him about halfway.

Yesterday this government unveiled its 2020-21 budget, one which projects a surplus to the tune of \$55 million. On the surface, the operating budget and the previously announced capital budget of just over \$1 billion - incidentally being the largest capital budget in our province's history - would present Nova Scotia as a province on sound financial footing, one where everything is coming up roses. Indeed, from December's interim financial update, revenues grew an additional \$156 million, yet expenses increased \$89 million. One could ask: How could expenses grow from December forecasts by \$89 million in just under three months? But I digress.

What is the net result of all this? A forecasted budget surplus \$8 million higher than budget and a \$5 million improvement from December's update. Given the material changes we have seen since the last forecasts of December, I will be curious to see where the final year-end numbers land, what additional costs remain uncaptured or unrealized. The closure of Northern Pulp is a cloud that even Finance and Treasury Board did not begin to fully model until after the final decision was made not to extend the deadline. I'm here to speak to the current budget and the future. We will await the Auditor General's final report on the 2019-20 fiscal year in the coming months.

Mr. Speaker, this government has presented Nova Scotians with an impressive document. Year-over-year revenues will increase \$186 million to \$11.5 billion, and spending will increase \$136 million to \$11.6 billion versus the forecasted March numbers. For 2020-21, the government says we will see a surplus of \$55 million - truly impressive.

When you consider that the province is benefiting from an additional \$395 million from the federal government, one is left to wonder: Gee, this looks great, look what we can do. The question comes to mind: This government has and is continuing to benefit from Ottawa's continued deficit spending; when the tap is turned off, where will this province be? What kind of financial situation will we be in? Will we be forced into running deficits, bad debt, while the government once again is forced to adopt austerity as rule number one?

A review of the budget materials shows that revenue from provincial sources has remained relatively flat for the past number of years, in fact, decreasing \$5 million in the upcoming year. In the face of the great economic unknown of Northern Pulp, is a \$5 million decrease a best-case scenario? Furthermore, the province, nation, and world are impacted by a variety of internal and external events that could have significant impact on our province and its finances in the coming year.

What has been and will there be any lasting impact from the rail disruptions to our province? Getting product to market has been impacted. We have heard of propane shortages. In my own constituency of Northside-Westmount, a rope factory is dangerously low on much-needed raw materials and resin to make its own products.

We have seen lobster export issues with China due to the impact of the coronavirus, a growing health concern, as we are now seeing the virus expand its reach across the globe. Indeed, with health experts beginning to state that we are headed towards a potential pandemic, for Nova Scotians this can no longer be viewed as something occurring on the other side of the world. It's here now in Canada, and unfortunately it is only a matter of time before it is here in Nova Scotia. How prepared is this government and our health system to handle this virus should cases be identified here? How prepared are we all should it become a pandemic? Indeed, the coming year is fraught with many internal and external threats to our province and our residents.

Onwards and upwards, in the upcoming fiscal year, the government has increased spending in 15 of their 19 departments. Given the total increases of \$400 million, one wonders what the Ministers of Agriculture, Business, Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Seniors do to see their budgets decrease. Indeed, while decreasing funding in any department is a concern, one wonders, with the province's continually aging population, how a Department of Seniors and their budget remain essentially static, decreasing by \$10,000.

Mr. Speaker, the government's budget has something for everyone. There are increases to the Nova Scotia child tax benefit, standard household rate, affordable renters'



program, and more money for the affordable housing plan and an action plan to address homelessness. These initiatives and extra spending are all positive in and of themselves. The question that comes to mind is, why now? In total, these programs account for \$59 million in additional spending.

Given that this government has brought down five successive surplus budgets, why were these programs not introduced over the past five years? What took so long for this government to act? Once again, why now? These issues are not something that have just come up in this past year.

This past Fall, my colleague, the member for Pictou West introduced several pieces of key legislation aimed at addressing human trafficking. This government is to be commended. Their decision to move forward with some of these ideas and allocate \$1.4 million towards this important issue bears merit.

It is of little surprise that health care is the largest single budget line on our provincial expenses. The department has struggled mightily in the face of shortages of health care professionals across this entire province, increased ER wait times, and a frustrated public. In spite of these challenges, our health care professionals, from nurses to doctors to paramedics to the support staff, all have provided and continue to provide incredible service and care to our patients. Increased funding for the IWK, addressing doctors' compensation issues, increased funding for nursing seats - once again, these are all not new, but could have been addressed over the past five years. Again, I ask, why now?

Wait times at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital for mental health services are one year. The government's response? An extra 55 cents - or \$550,000 to the department. The government plans to spend an additional \$692,000 to add 70 additional nursing seats. On an annual basis, \$692,000 is what this costs. For the sake of saving \$2.8 million over the past four years, the government has delayed adding 70 much-needed nurses who could have been graduating and on the job in our hospitals now.

When I look at my own community, I see Cape Breton University as a bright light. The impact the university has had with its growing enrolment and the diversity and vibrancy these students bring to our community shows how our schools and universities contribute not only toward bettering ourselves and our community but also contributing to the communities economically.

That said, the additional spending announced in the area of education should never be thought of as a bad thing, but as with any initiative or program, the devil is in the details. The pre-Primary program is one that holds great potential, but this government's lack of proper planning in rolling it out is of great concern. The busing of pre-Primary students, utilization of mobile classrooms for space, relocating Grade 5 students to middle schools to open up space - these all speak to a program that was rushed out the door faster than a student when the bell rings.

As a result of the budget, businesses in the province will see corporate taxes decrease 2 per cent, or \$70 million. Just a few short weeks ago, the Province announced intentions to raise the minimum wage by \$1. Far too many of our workforce rely on minimum-wage jobs. These individuals struggle on a monthly basis with ever-rising costs of living, and this increase on their wages will serve to hopefully make their lives a little better, but what will be the cost of this hourly wage increase? Is it the government's plan that the tax cut that's been announced will offset the added wage costs for small business? What is the estimated cost of this increase?

Small business owners are the engine that drives our economy. Adding additional pressures on their margins will ultimately lead to a trickle-down effect of increasing sale prices or of businesses reducing staffing through efforts to increase efficiencies. One small business owner has told me that, faced with this increase, he will be going forward with the purchase of new machinery - machinery that will replace up to six employees, all in an effort to manage costs. Increasing the minimum wage in a vacuum of other initiatives is only a win-win for the government. On the one hand, they win the support of the minimum-wage earner; on the other hand, they increase their revenue through added taxes.

We have seen in this budget that the Province has added \$5 million to the Film Tax Credit, or to the Nova Scotia Film and Television Production Incentive Fund, increasing it to \$25 million. This is, incidentally, where this fund was at prior to the government's disastrous tinkering with the program in 2014. An additional \$16 million flows into the Digital Animation Tax Credit, bringing the total for film tax funding to essentially \$41 million to support this industry.

However, the industry was devastated in 2014, and I can't help but wonder, where would the industry be now if it had not been short-circuited in 2014? Would it be two times or three times - how much larger might it have been? A long-time acquaintance of mine involved in the film industry literally had his career pulled out from under him. As a result, he had to leave Nova Scotia for work and spends much of his time travelling for weeks on end away from his wife and small children as a result of this government's decision and its impact on the industry.

[3:15 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, last week the capital budget was released for the upcoming year. At \$1 billion, this represented a 51 per cent increase over last year's commitments. This plan is ambitious, to say the least. New schools, investments of \$100 million, \$166 million towards the purchase of P3 schools, \$209 million towards the redevelopment of our health care facilities and hospitals throughout the province.

No one can argue our infrastructure deficiencies have been long overdue this attention. This plan will increase our debt \$500 million this year with additional increases of \$700 million, \$900 million, and \$600 million through 2023-24, at which point our debt

will be \$17.9 billion. This government is betting on the future and, in the case of health care, one where these new facilities will enable the Province to recruit doctors and other health care professionals.

The question that begs to be asked, Mr. Speaker, is what has been the cost of delaying these investments? Infrastructure and capital assets age. The delay in commencing many of these projects will inevitably lead to the costs to rehabilitate them being much higher than had the government acted earlier in its mandate.

The government referred to this plan as a good debt. Only history will bring us to the point where we can or cannot make that assertion. If the projects are completed on time, on budget, and do all the government says they will, then and only then will we know if this was 100 per cent good debt. I will say the intentions are good, but these projects are complex, massive in scope and rife with risk. Further, given that these projects are good debt, then why now? Why now? Why not two, four, six years ago? Why now?

One final point, Mr. Speaker, related to the QEII redevelopment plan. In its current form, it is going to be a P3 model. I wonder what the cost of this project will be in the years to come, when we finally purchase the facility. This isn't like a school. We can't not afford to buy it.

Seven years ago, the Premier promised a doctor for every Nova Scotian. Here we are seven years later and we're no further ahead. Based on continued ER wait times, it would surely seem that things have gotten worse. These facilities will take several years to come online, provided there are no issues or cost overruns. Nova Scotians can't and shouldn't have to wait several years to finally get a family doctor.

Earlier this week, surgeon Phil Smith held an interview reflecting on the causes of his departure from the Cape Breton Regional Hospital. Furthermore, the Cape Breton Medical Staff Association requested the Nova Scotia Health Authority to change the leadership at the hospital. Mr. Speaker, doctors want to heal. Doctors want to be treated fairly and respectfully. Doctors don't want to speak up; they just want to do their jobs and that's what their patients and Nova Scotians want.

When doctors do finally speak out, I'm reminded of the old adage "Where there's smoke, there's fire." I can't help but wonder what impact these types of management issues have on our ability to recruit and, more importantly, keep and retain our physicians.

Mr. Speaker, this budget has laid out additional funds to increase student loan forgiveness to the tune of \$2.2 million. Any funds directed towards graduates that provide for debt relief is a good thing. However, I believe there is a segment of graduates who are not treated fairly. Graduates of Nova Scotia universities who remain in Nova Scotia to work are entitled to have the provincial portion of their student loans forgiven. This

encourages our younger generation to remain in the province, to contribute, and to help grow and raise families here.

But what of those students who studied outside of this province? A student who attends a university in New Brunswick qualifies for Nova Scotia student loans, but when they come back to Nova Scotia, when they start their career here, they are not entitled to that same loan forgiveness. If the purpose of the plan is to encourage graduates to remain in Nova Scotia, it should apply not just to students who study in Nova Scotia but the students who return after completing their studies.

At press time, there were currently 10,078.9 full-time equivalent staff working for the government across all departments. Also, total staff positions are 10,436.1. Mr. Speaker, this means there are 358 positions across this province on hold, through vacancy, staff hiring freezes and the like.

Mr. Speaker, in my area, hospital staff are suffering from these policies. Hospital staff are often having to do the work of two or three missing colleagues. Further, the staff are not allowed to work extra time and, as a result, we end up with overworked, overstressed staff who, rather than being able to do their job 100 per cent, are having to do multiple jobs at around 75 per cent. This impacts Nova Scotians in the services we see and contributes to reduced morale and pride in one's work.

I have reviewed this budget several times now. I see initiatives for low-income housing, for community services, for health care, for small business but I still don't see anything for the middle class. The middle class, along with our small business owners, are the backbone of our economy. Given all that this budget has for almost everyone, what about the middle class? They are forgotten once again.

Mr. Speaker, this budget and capital plan introduced this week and last week are, at the end of the day, late to action.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in my place and respond to the Budget 2020-21 on behalf of the New Democratic Party. Three headings come to mind around this budget: optimism, cynicism, and a burning desire to do things differently.

Mr. Speaker, as Nova Scotians, we are optimistic. We are resilient and we do the work we need to do. The job of government is to ensure that Nova Scotians have what they need to survive and to do everything we can to help them thrive.

The people of Dartmouth South, my own constituency, are optimistic. When I talk to my friends and neighbours, my constituents, what they tell me is that they love this place.

Life is not always easy and they are sometimes concerned about the work we need to do as Nova Scotians, work around ensuring that they can stay in their apartments, that they can find doctors, that they can access health care and afford groceries. They are concerned about the difficult work of dismantling the systemic racism we see in so many of our institutions and the important work of reconciliation. Mr. Speaker, they are ready to roll up their sleeves, but the question is, are we?

Some of the headlines in this budget breed optimism - attention finally to poverty reduction, to the need for adequate housing. These are things our caucus has been advocating for tirelessly since this government took office. We are very happy to see the increase in the Nova Scotia Child Benefit and happier still that our pleas have not fallen on entirely deaf ears.

Although, as you will hear, we have significant issues with this budget, we take our seats today with some pride as we are reminded that the work we do in this Chamber, on behalf of our constituents and all Nova Scotians, matters.

Unfortunately, that optimism is tempered when we see the government giving with one hand the very gifts, in so many cases, that they have already taken away with the other. In many ways this government is telling Nova Scotians they are doing the work that needs to be done when, in fact, they are maintaining the status quo.

Mr. Speaker, when will we escape this hamster wheel of a political cycle? We have been conditioned for this, the constant cycle of spend and disappoint and spend again. There's plenty to like about this budget but, election or no, it comes on the heels of seven years of austerity, and that breeds cynicism.

We are seeing the most significant investment to date in housing from this government, after sounding the alarm for years. After bringing story after heartbreaking story to the minister and to the floor of this House, we will see 39 units this year, Mr. Speaker, 39; 131 over the next three years. This is not even a significant fraction of the wait-lists that the housing organizations have before them now, not to mention counting all the other people out there looking on their own. Rent supplements don't work in a market of under one per cent vacancy. They are complicated and costly for landlords, and not their first choice when they can afford to pick from dozens of applicants for every apartment.

We've been advocating for rent control legislation, and ironically the government has taken our advice when it comes to some of their own programs - some home-warming programs and rent supplements, where landlords who participate are limited to rental increases tied to Consumer Price Index. That breeds cynicism, Mr. Speaker. The Premier says rent control doesn't work, but his own government uses it regularly.

There is \$17.3 million in this budget for Department of Community Services transformation - for most people, a 2 per cent increase in the standard household rate. What

the government fails to mention is that this comes on the heels of the longest rate freeze in history. The 2 per cent increase most people received gives them less purchasing power than they had seven years ago. If rates were indexed to CPI, we would need to see 2.6 per cent just to maintain the status quo. So, forgive us for not applauding this investment. This is not to mention that unlike the \$70 million corporate tax cut that fell out of the sky and into this budget, which I will talk more about later, this increase took six years, and we know that most recipients, our most vulnerable Nova Scotians, are still choosing between housing and groceries.

The government is investing in arts and culture. There was a great announcement today about the Bus Stop Theatre and a new art gallery is budgeted for. These are welcome and needed investments in our cultural sector but needed even more because of the actions of this government. I shouldn't have to remind anyone in this Chamber of the government's single biggest insult to the cultural sector: the axing of the Film Tax Credit, a tax credit this Premier promised to protect. That was three years ago. It feels like ancient history, doesn't it, but it's not. It's certainly not to people in the cultural sector, who are still reeling from that boondoggle of a decision.

In education we're hearing about the investments from the inclusion report, but we don't get any details. That \$15 million comes with a road map, but the government is not following it or at least they are not telling us about it. Meanwhile they are refusing the direction of the courts to reverse their illegal decision to remove specialists from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, specialists that help the very children at the centre of this \$15 million investment.

We're hearing about investments in pre-Primary, but in my district pre-Primary will mean kids in portables in a school that isn't even three years old, while nearby regulated child care centres struggle. The ECEs they can retain have to be content with fewer benefits and less income than their counterparts in pre-Primary.

It was this government that triggered Nova Scotia's first and only teachers' strike, that has consistently worked to weaken the union and all unions, and that sent our teachers to the picket line for the first time in history, while locking our students out of their schools. Again, it feels like ancient history, but not to me. I had two children in Primary. They missed their Christmas concert and for them it was a real bummer, Mr. Speaker, but for the thousands of teachers (Interruption)

Bummer unparliamentary? No? Okay (Laughter). But on a serious note, it was a massive disruption to our educational system and one that didn't need to happen, and it's one that this government is banking on, quite literally: people forgetting when they go back to the polls.

In health care it's hard to know where to begin. After a disastrous amalgamation of the district health authorities that in many ways led directly to myriad issues we are seeing

today, this government is now shuffling the chairs in the boardroom again, but still without transparency about how, and without clear and articulated discussion of why. For the last several budgets this government has inexplicably left money on the table for health. Now we are getting hospitals - we are also losing hospitals - with no information about how the money is being spent. What will this massive redevelopment project look like? Who knows? Only the successful \$2-billion bidder.

[3:30 p.m.]

As hospitals are closing and consolidating, and we're seeing massive changes to our health care systems and infrastructure, Nova Scotians deserve to be let in on the secret. The last big project in health care, the amalgamation of the NSHA, was a failure, in part because it was secret, and it still largely is. Fool us once, shame on us, but fool us twice? How are we leveraging the \$2-billion hospital redevelopment to meet the requirements of the lifespan of this project - the next 50 years? We have no idea.

Mr. Speaker, we know one thing, which is that the next 50 years will look very different from the past 50. If we're serious about the future, if those in the Chamber who have children are serious about their future, about the next generation of Nova Scotia, a project like this must engage the most creative and different thinking about everything - heating, transportation, parking, and energy consumption.

What evidence do we have that the Province is leveraging the biggest capital project in recent memory to serve the real needs of Nova Scotians for the next 50 years, beyond just the acute care needs required by a hospital? We have no evidence. We can only hope.

The Premier says I should be thanking the province for the work done to the Dartmouth General Hospital. I have, and I will continue to. That open, conventional, publicly-managed design and build process has been a success. It is a wonder that the government wouldn't take a page from this as it has from so many of the Dartmouth General's other successes as it embarks on this massive redevelopment project. As a point of clarification, I wasn't invited to the opening, but I went anyway.

On the topic of health, we also need to work harder and better to ensure that our upstream efforts in public health and the social determinants of health are also addressed, especially in the face of unknown implications of COVID-19. Our spending on public health is below the percentage of budget stipulated by the World Health Organization, and I would submit that it's long since the time that we corrected that, Mr. Speaker.

The government acknowledges that we are facing a climate crisis, yet the investment in meeting this existential threat of our time doesn't come close to meeting the herculean challenge before us. As we heard last sitting at the Law Amendments Committee, targets are not strong enough. We ought to be measuring ourselves against scientific consensus, not other provinces. We could be leaders here, but nothing points to our desire

to do this. As one example, we see the budget line for EMO adjusted downward in this budget, this after spikes in forecast numbers over the past two years - first for the Sydney floods, then for hurricane Dorian. When it comes to the environment, we can no longer rely on patterns of the past to predict the future. Are we ready for the next Dorian? Given our aging infrastructure, our climate action, and scientific predictions, it seems not.

Are we truly investing in appropriate ways to green our power sources and electrify our grid while sharpening our legislative tools to ensure that we can expect the heat to stay on when the next emergency hits? The \$10 million of mostly federal money that we see in the Energy and Mines budget is a good start, but it's too late for starting.

We have recently seen money for the remediation of two former gold mines, but we know, and the Auditor General has told us, that there are so many more out there. Why aren't we budgeting for that? Or maybe we are. There are many budget items we don't know the contents of, predominantly the \$140-million restructuring fund, the line for unbudgeted projects. The mystery line of \$140 million - what is it for? Only time will tell.

We have, as I mentioned before, \$15 million in education with no details. Off the books, we have a \$2-billion P3 hospital already mired in controversy before the agreements are even signed and the ground is broken. Mr. Speaker, this budget predicts a borderline stagnant economy with virtually no growth outside of some of these large capital projects, but there is a 5-per cent growth rate forecast.

Unlike my Progressive Conservative colleagues, I don't take issue with federal funds to help fuel work on climate change mitigation, health, and general revenue, but I do worry about what the true state of the Province's finances is. Against this uncertain backdrop, these magnificent money managers before us have decided upon a \$70-million handout in the form of a corporate tax break to some of the richest corporations in the world. Yet this government is not able to provide a shred of evidence that this handout will create even a single job.

Corporations are responsible to their shareholders. Although the economy benefits from them, not all Nova Scotians are shareholders of large corporate players. We are, however, all shareholders of an even bigger entity: the Nova Scotia government. We look to that government to pay dividends to the folks working hard to pay their taxes and afford the basics in the form of social programs, health care, and education, not to give away their contribution to the highest bidder.

Earlier this year, the government signed a blank cheque to a developer and declared a provincial state of emergency for a preventable accident that occurred on private land concerning a crane that was insured under a private policy. Again, what did that tell us about who this government is working for? We've worked for months to get relief for the small businesses impacted by the action of this government. We've had conversations, but no movement on an ask in the hundreds of thousands of dollars that would make a tangible



difference to the small businesses that form the backbone of the entertainment district of this province's largest city. No movement - only a triggering of the federal disaster response program, which does not help them in the slightest.

We need this Province to care about ordinary Nova Scotians and small businesses. When it comes to large corporations, we know one thing they are looking for is regulatory certainty. We saw that with Teck's withdrawal from the Frontier project this week. Corporations often lead the way when it comes to scenario planning and futureproofing. So often they know what's needed. Will they take a corporate tax cut that they can give to their shareholders? Of course they will. It's baked into the corporate structure.

What's not baked into the corporate structure, what is antithetical, is the idea that the primary use of a reduction in taxes would be for reinvestment. There is a name for that idea. It's called trickle-down economics, and we found out a long time ago that it doesn't work.

Mr. Speaker, 72 per cent of children in Eskasoni and 44 per cent of children in Whitney Pier live below the poverty line. According to Statistics Canada, an average of 25 per cent of the children in all of our constituencies also live below the poverty line. They are food insecure. The increase of the Nova Scotia Child Benefit will help, but so much more is needed.

This is another reason that a \$70-million corporate tax cut is such a cynical move. By endorsing the largely debunked theory of trickle-down economics - as the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board have done so many times now, telling us that businesses will reinvest - they are telling Nova Scotians that this \$70-million corporate tax cut will help them. It will not. It will help the friends of this government to enrich themselves and their shareholders, at the expense of much-needed revenue to fuel the programs that actually help the Nova Scotians who are most in need.

We are not philosophically opposed to economic growth, as the Premier has suggested. We believe in growth. We want the kind of growth that benefits us all. We want our prosperity to be shared. We saw an investment in social enterprise announced as part of this budget, and that's great. But social enterprise has a more expanded definition than the one the government is using. Here in Nova Scotia we have several small businesses who are what are called B Corps, some of whom the government has recognized in this very Chamber. These are businesses with a triple bottom line: economic, environmental, and social.

Where do we see the support for these businesses? As predominately small businesses, they are receiving a 5 per cent tax cut - a fraction of the \$80-million total tax cut for businesses. Why is this government once again ignoring those who are leading the way towards the kind of future that Nova Scotians want? The question that needs to be

asked of this government is whether they are building a compassionate, sustainable, and thriving province, or a successful campaign?

Nova Scotians have been through this ringer for generations and we can do better. How? Well, for one thing, we could have fixed election dates. If the government truly wants to quell speculation on election spending or no, then make it clear. We could have a parliamentary calendar, and one that required elected members of this Chamber to spend more than the average of 60 days or so a year debating the important budgets and legislation which impact our constituents so directly.

These changes, and others, would allow MLAs - especially those of us in Opposition - to do the work that we are elected to do. Instead, we'll be here for a few weeks, 10, 12, 14 hours a day, tasked with responding to the budget, digesting and commenting on a raft of legislation, asking important questions to the ministers on behalf of our constituents, and then we'll be done.

I take my job seriously. Believe it or not, I would like to spend more time in this Chamber representing my constituents, debating legislation, and doing the work of a legislator. It's what I was elected to do.

This budget reads like a deathbed confession. Because of the government's failed policies over the past seven years, we now have a health care crisis, a housing crisis, and a poverty crisis. We have the lowest median income in Canada. We have the highest poverty rates. We have families that can't find a place to live and are being thrown out of their last-resort hotel rooms secured for them by a government with no better option.

Emergency room closures have tripled under this government, and thousands are still without a family doctor. The hospitals serving Cape Bretoners have the highest mortality rate in Canada. Kids who need mental health care in industrial Cape Breton still have to wait for over a year to be seen. The mental health spending in this budget is nominal.

It's easy to get lost in the numbers, but for so many Nova Scotians who have been waiting seven years to see a substantial change to their circumstances, numbers are not front of mind. Nor do they take kindly, I don't think, to the Finance and Treasury Board Minister's good debt and bad debt conversation.

Of course, deficit spending is never the desired way forward. That being said, when the debt to GDP ratio is trending downwards, when there's economic crisis and stagnation as we had in 2008-09, and as we certainly might see again, a government's job is to ensure the shared prosperity of their citizens.

Many Nova Scotians would take issue with the Finance and Treasury Board Minister's characterization of borrowing to buy groceries as bad debt because many Nova

Scotians don't have the choice. They buy groceries with debt or they don't buy groceries at all. They don't see keeping the lights on as bad debt; they see it as what they need to do to keep the lights on.

Nova Scotia is an incredible place. It's trite now to talk about our people, our natural beauty, our hospitality, our food. I'm sick of the term "world class" but, truth be told, where Nova Scotia excels is in its kindness, in its human scale. That kindness can be uneven, and because of our inability so far to address structural racism and discrimination, it can be elusive for some. But I still submit that the shared prosperity of Nova Scotians and the strength of our communities across this province are the measures by which we will know that we are on the right track.

We are in a time of turmoil, environmental turmoil and a time of reckoning for all of us, a time for caretaking and resilience as we face a future that is largely unknown. Half measures won't work. Business as usual won't work. We are asking the government to act. We want them to have the authenticity, the bravery, as my family would say, the chutzpah, to do things differently and to acknowledge, in Einstein's words, that we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

[3:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply unto Her Majesty.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to stand in my place and have a few moments to speak on the budget.

The first day of this session, Thursday, February 20, 2020, the Premier's Office released at 3:35 p.m. a statement outlining that they would deliver a budget before us that would have added focus on helping Nova Scotians who need it the most. The release indicated the government's legislative agenda would include support for affordable housing, addressing gender wage gap, and regulating nicotine content of tobacco and e-cigarettes.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please - an administrative error on my part. I forgot to say, just before you started - nothing to do with you - that the Estimates are now referred to the Committee of the Whole on Supply unto Her Majesty, the Government House Leader, and now we're going back to the honourable member for Pictou West. Please continue. My apologies.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, the release indicated the government's legislative agenda would include support for affordable housing, addressing gender wage gap, and regulating nicotine content of tobacco and e-cigarettes. Shockingly, there was no mention that day about health care. On the very first day of this current session, the Liberal government neglected to mention health care. Imagine that - the number-one issue on the minds of every Nova Scotian. How is it even possible not to mention health care or to signal that there will be a focus on it during this House session?

The Premier continued to say - and I will table the following: We have come a long way in six years. Our population is at an all-time high. Unemployment is low. We are seeing record high levels of export and immigration. More of our young people are seeing opportunities in Nova Scotia. We also know not all Nova Scotians are feeling the positive impact of our growth. We are keenly aware of challenges in our province, and we will be taking more steps to address areas of child poverty and affordable housing.

Again, no mention of the health care crisis in Nova Scotia - no mention at all - and we know there is a crisis from one end of this province to another. It all makes sense now as to why the Premier didn't mention health care in his press release on the first day of this session: because there is basically nothing in this budget that addresses the ongoing health care crisis we are facing in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there is very little in this budget to address the ongoing shortages of long-term care beds. There is no mention of increasing the staffing levels in long-term care facilities or investing to replace/repair older facilities like Roseway. We are blessed in the Town of Pictou to have two wonderful facilities: Shiretown Nursing Home and Maritime Odd Fellows Nursing Home. Both facilities are amazingly staffed with the most skilled and compassionate people that any of us would ever dream of to care for our loved ones, but we all know that proper investments need to be made in front-line health care workers, particularly in our long-term care facilities, where some of our most vulnerable in society are living.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we all know without proper investment our residents at these facilities will suffer; we have witnessed that. They will suffer just like all Nova Scotians without a family doctor.

It perplexes me as to why the government has never been able to fulfill their promise of 2013 - seven years later. They promised a doctor for every Nova Scotian. There are over 14,000 people, just in northern Nova Scotia, who are without a doctor. That number we can account for, but think of the many more who are not on the registry.

There's a lot of confusion right now around the Need a Family Practice Registry. For example, when I signed up long ago, it was to go on the list so that I could receive a doctor. A few months ago, I received a call from the registry - I believe it was them - asking

if I had found a doctor. I indicated no, I did not find a doctor, but that I had received a call and had been able to get a nurse practitioner.

The voice on the other end of the phone said, so do you want to be kept on the list for a doctor? I said, of course I do. That's why I signed up. I want to have a doctor. The person on the other end of the phone said to me, no problem. We'll keep you on the list to receive a doctor but happy to hear that you were called and now you have a nurse practitioner too. It was no problem at that point in time for me and my children to be kept on the list so that we could receive a doctor.

Just the other day - and this is where there's so much confusion - I received an email from the Need a Family Practice Registry. It says the following, and I will table it. It was emailed to me and I'm not even sure how they got my email, but perhaps I did give it to them when I signed up a year or two ago. I want to read it to you. It says: Hello. We are contacting you today because our records show that you have registered with the Need a Family Practice Registry as a Nova Scotian who is in need of a family doctor or nurse practitioner.

I didn't sign up for a nurse practitioner. I signed up for a doctor: We currently have a provider now in Pictou that is accepting new patients from the Need a Family Practice Registry. This practice is - in capital bold letters - only able to accept patients that do not - and "not" is in big, bold letters - currently have a family doctor or nurse practitioner in Nova Scotia. Please let us know if you are without a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. If not, please indicate if you have successfully found a family doctor or nurse practitioner. As well, please let us know the best phone number to reach you during the time of day. They had just called me a couple of months ago.

This is from the Nova Scotia Health Authority. There's a lot of confusion here. Are we now telling people that when they sign up on this registry that it's not just for a doctor, that you could be given a nurse practitioner and that you will never get a doctor? That's what it's saying. There's so much confusion. I can table that now.

Mr. Speaker, no wonder Nova Scotians are so frustrated with this Liberal Government because the story keeps changing with regard to how one acquires a doctor. Nova Scotians want a doctor, and they deserve to have one for their basic needs. They signed up on the registry for a doctor, not for a nurse practitioner. Now mind you, nurse practitioners are wonderful, and we are grateful to have them. I know that I totally respect mine, but I also identify and understand the differences between a doctor and a nurse practitioner and the roles that they play. I will keep advocating for more doctors. I will continue to address the lack of transparency within this Liberal Government when it comes to health care.

"Better together." When I read this title, my first thought was that Pictou County has definitely been excluded from the "together" part. After talking to many of my

colleagues, they too feel their constituencies have been excluded. “Better together” stands for those who this Liberal Government decided to include, and that’s certainly not everyone. I see nothing in this budget that will help those in Pictou County travelling to Halifax for dialysis, some on a daily basis, some in their 70s, some in their 80s. This is a reality for many Pictou County residents.

In Pictou we have a wonderful dialysis unit staffed by incredible people, but we have only four chairs, and we have dozens of people on the waiting lists. We also know that this number is growing rapidly. Every year since I was elected in 2013, I have been requesting that this Liberal Government see the urgency of increasing chairs at the unit in Pictou. We have the space, and we certainly have the need.

It is so frustrating to me to see family having to take vacation time to help a loved one travel for this life-saving service. Families are disrupted terribly, not only daily routine or missing work or family engagements. The financial burden of having to travel to Halifax to receive this service takes a lot out of families, and it’s causing unnecessary stress and mental anguish. It is not fair, and it has to stop. If this government really meant Better Together, they would include all Nova Scotians, but they have not succeeded in that mission.

I was walking from the Legislature last night, and I ran into a friend who works in government actually. We briefly spoke, and they had an interesting adjective for this budget. They called it superficial. It kind of took me by surprise, to be honest, because there are a lot of good things in the budget. I just found that adjective very interesting. I didn’t think that way until I went home and gave it more thought. While watching the news and listening to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board being interviewed by Steve Murphy, I then understood why this government employee was referring to the budget as superficial.

Then I thought, you know what? I’m going to look up what the actual definition is. Superficial: existing or occurring on the surface, appearing to be true or real only until examined more closely.

It’s always wise and interesting to get a number of perspectives on a delivered budget. Later in the evening I spoke to my son. They had actually briefly spoken about it in school and said they would be speaking more this morning on the budget. He wanted to know a little bit more about it.

Recently, he purchased a vehicle. He turned 18 last week. When he was 16, he wanted to purchase a vehicle. He had no money, and he thought his father or I would get the vehicle for him. We said absolutely not. You will continue to take the school bus to school. You will continue to have us drive you to work and to all your social engagements and extracurricular activities.

Last year we revisited the conversation. He said he was serious about wanting to have a car. We said, you're going to have to save for it. He took a whole year, and he saved to buy that car. Although he was frustrated and mad at us at times, at the end of the day, he was grateful for the lesson that he had to work three jobs this summer to save the money to purchase that car. The car he wanted wasn't just \$2,500. He wanted a \$15,000 car. I said, Jack, if you want a \$15,000 car, you're going to have to save the money.

He came to us in August and said, I don't have all the money, but I see a car that I want, and I'm hoping you guys can help. We talked about financing, and I said, you save X amount, and I will loan you the small portion you need. I said, we're going to have a really good lesson here - I'm going to put an interest rate on it. That's what I am doing. He doesn't know this because he's not watching right now, but he is paying interest on the money that he owes me for that car. What I will do at the end of it is I will give him back the money he paid in interest, just so that he can (Interruption) I'm not getting the Mother of the Year award. That's for sure.

[4:00 p.m.]

I spoke to him last night, and I said, it's interesting with this budget, Jack. We're spending out of our means. We are. We're spending out of our means here. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is not only abandoning the Ivany report goal to get control over Nova Scotia's debt. In reality, she is abandoning the future for our children, our grandchildren, their children.

That's what I was trying to teach Jack last night: you can't be buying things and borrowing constantly for those things. When you expand the province's net debt by \$2.7 billion, that means this government has done nothing to improve economic growth. It means they have no plan to improve economic growth, hence why our federal transfers are increasing constantly. Ask your friends who live in Alberta how they feel about that.

What I would like to say is that at the end of the day, I could go on and on about this budget, but right now, I feel that it's reckless, it's superficial, and it's false hope for the people of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[4:01 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Brendan Maguire in the Chair.]

[8:11 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. The Speaker, Hon. Kevin Murphy, resumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and made progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: Just before we go to the Government House Leader, I have one item of housekeeping. Earlier today during Opposition debate, the honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage read a quote from a constituent email and subsequently tabled that email. As I had mentioned, we're going to have to disallow the tabling of this document as there is no author of the email provided. We had requested that.

Also, I do want to remind all members that, in addition to the necessity to identify the author of written documents, if you are going to quote anybody in your verbal comments, you also have to identify who you're quoting. I did rule as recently as September 12, 2018, when I said: "I'd like to remind the honourable member it's against the Rules of this Chamber to read a constituent's email without identifying . . ." the author of the email, ". . . you have to be able to identify the quote, from whom the quote came."

If everybody could keep that in mind. We will return this document to the honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that concludes the government's business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow, Thursday, February 27, 2020, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.

Following the daily routine and Question Period, business will include the continuation of the Committee of the Whole on Supply and, with time permitting, second reading on Bill Nos. 220, 221, 223, 225, 226, 227, 228, and 230.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to rise to meet again tomorrow, February 27<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:00 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 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 8:13 p.m.]