



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

Published by Order of the Legislature by Hansard Reporting Services and printed by the Queen's Printer.

Available on INTERNET at <http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/proceedings/hansard/>

### Second Session

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2020

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2020**

**Sixty-third General Assembly**

**Second Session**

**1:00 P.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Kevin Murphy

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Brendan Maguire

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

Before we move on with the daily routine, I would like to clarify that I had made an error last night in the Adjournment motion with the end of time today. I incorrectly indicated it was 11:59 p.m. The session will go no later than 11:00 p.m. today, as stated by the Government House Leader. I do apologize for that.

We'll now begin the daily routine.

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. STEPHEN MCNEIL (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, may I do an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

THE PREMIER: Last week in the House, on Friday, we passed a resolution that dedicated this week as Social Enterprise Week in Nova Scotia. Today, we are joined by some very special guests, an extraordinary group of Nova Scotians who are making a lasting difference in communities across Nova Scotia.

As I reference the organization you are with, I would ask you to stand: the Social Enterprise Network of Nova Scotia; Colchester Community Workshops; Corridor Community Options; the Flower Cart Group; Summer Street; and Carleton Road Industries Association, which happens to be in my riding. MacKenzie Akin is here, who is the leader of that organization. If any of you have been through Lawrencetown in the Annapolis County, without MacKenzie and Carleton Road Industries, it would be a very different place. I encourage you to stop into the restaurant that they have, and they can get some gas while they're there too. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, before I read my resolution, I just want to put on the record how proud I am to be associated with these organizations that are truly making a difference in the lives of so many of our citizens and in communities. The work they are providing many of their employees impact all of us.

Some of them are here but some are not here; they're still back in their buildings, working, and providing services. I know many members of this House are represented by either the organizations that are here or some that couldn't be with us today.

I would encourage all of us, this being Social Enterprise Week, to make a special effort to stop by the ones that we represent in our communities, especially this week. I know you would do it all the time, but I would encourage you to stop by the ones this week and express your appreciation and the appreciation of all members of this House to them for the work they are doing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 1682**

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

Whereas many social enterprises across Nova Scotia help adults with diverse abilities to gain vocational skills and meaningful employment while participating in their communities; and

Whereas this year the Province will invest over \$6.1 million to help disability service providers maintain or expand day programming, which includes supporting several social enterprises; and

Whereas recent investments in Carleton Road Industries Association in the Annapolis County, Colchester Community Workshops in Truro, Corridor Community Options in Enfield, the Flower Cart Group in New Minas, Haley Street Adult Services Centre in North Sydney, the Horizon Achievement Centre in Sydney, and Summer Street in New Glasgow show our commitment to supporting strong, empowering, and inclusive communities;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize the remarkable difference that staff, participants, and volunteers from the social enterprises across Nova Scotia make to our communities and to our province.

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. (Standing Ovation)

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 1683**

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

Whereas we all want to build a province with no limitations, a place where Nova Scotians can live their best lives; and

Whereas social enterprises not only earn revenue but give back to their communities by providing social, cultural, community, or environmental benefits; and



Whereas this week is Social Enterprise Week with a specific focus this year on those social enterprises that involve people with diverse abilities;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize the important social and economic impact that social enterprises have on our communities across Nova Scotia.

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.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 1684**

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

Whereas the fishers, processors, sea farmers, and many others involved in the seafood sector are in Halifax this week for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister's Conference; and

Whereas, for the first time, this world-class trade show conference is held in partnership with the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia Seafarmers' Conference; and

Whereas this year's conference on the trends, benefits, and growth of the fishing and aquaculture industries is the largest conference in Canada with more than 800 delegates, including international speakers and local industry members;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House recognize the importance of the sector on our economy, which now exports \$2.3 billion as the leading employer in our coastal and rural communities.

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.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, may I make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

TONY INCE: Joining us in the East Gallery today is Russell Grosse, the Director of the Black Cultural Centre. He is also a member of the African Heritage Month Information Network. I would like the House to give him a warm welcome. (Applause)

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

### **RESOLUTION NO. 1685**

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 is African Heritage Month which is a time to celebrate the culture, history, and achievements of people of African descent; and

Whereas for the past several years the African Heritage Month Information Network selects the annual theme, creates the educational poster, and promotes municipal proclamations and events across the province; and

Whereas the African Heritage Month Information Network is in partnership with several organizations such as African Nova Scotian Affairs, Black Cultural Society, African Nova Scotian Music Association, African Nova Scotian North-Central Network, African Heritage Month Southwest Network, Africville Heritage Trust, Black Educators Association, Black History Month Association, Cumberland African Nova Scotian Association, Valley African Nova Scotian Development Association, Halifax Regional Municipality's African Nova Scotian Integration Office, and Guysborough-Antigonish-Strait African Regional Network;

Therefore be it resolved that the members of this House of Assembly please join me in thanking the African Heritage Month Information Network for the work they do in preserving, sharing, and celebrating African Nova Scotian culture each year.

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.

[1:15 p.m.]

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 233 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 12 of the Acts of 2002. The Smoke-free Places Act, and Chapter 14 of the Acts of 1993. The Tobacco Access Act. (Hon. Randy Delorey)**

**Bill No. 234 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 1 (1992 Supplement) of the Revised Statutes, 1989. The House of Assembly Act. (Hon. Mark Furey)**

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

### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

#### **[INTRODUCTION OF BILLS]**

**Bill No. 235 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes, 1989. The Residential Tenancies Act. (Lisa Roberts)**

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be read a second time on a future day.

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

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

#### **MACNEIL, MACHARA - DANCER: BREAMER HIGHLAND GAMES - CONGRATS.**

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Machara MacNeil for her impressive accomplishments in Highland dance.

Machara recently travelled to Scotland to compete in the Highland Games, including the Cowal Highland Gathering. She performed at Sterling Castle and the famous Pitlochry Highland Nights.

Machara attended the Breamer Highland Games where Queen Elizabeth II is the official patron. Machara is a 15-year-old who attends Island View High School in Eastern Passage. She attends the Worthen School of Dance with Highland dance instruction from Jennifer Worthen.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in congratulating Machara MacNeil for having the honour of attending and competing in the Highland Games.

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

**ASH LEE JEFFERSON SCH.: LEARN TO CURL WORKSHOP - RECOG.**

BILL HORNE: Mr. Speaker, students at Ash Lee Jefferson Elementary School were winners of the curling workshop at the school after student Hailey MacDonald's grandmother entered them into the Rock and Rings contest.

The Learn to Curl Workshop put on by avid curler Jill Thomas taught the kids the basics of the sport, including how to score, sweep the ice, and throw the rocks. Along with the workshop, the school was also gifted with their own floor curling equipment set, cupcakes, and prizes. The project was made possible through the Egg Farmers Give Back program.

Mr. Speaker, as a long-time curler myself, I'm also excited that the students at Ash Lee Jefferson will be introduced to the sport of curling for many years to come.

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

**ST. ANN'S BAY HEALTH CTR.: WATCH MY BACK PROG. - COMMEND**

KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, St. Anns Bay is a rural community with a population of 350, most of whom are over the age of 55. For 20 years, the health centre and local development association have been supporting residents by providing programs to increase well-being and health and allow them to continue living in their community.

Recently, St. Ann's Bay Health Centre started a new program called Stay In Touch/Watch My Back to reinforce social connections. Watch My Back encourages someone who is alone and planning to do something risky, like using a chainsaw, climbing a ladder - or even walking alone in the woods, to contact a friend or neighbour to let them

know. If the friend doesn't get a return call, they know to check and ensure everything is okay.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating and thanking the St. Ann's Bay Health Centre and the community volunteers for initiating this program and providing an opportunity for people to stay safe and live an independent life.

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

**MACLEOD, HAILEY:  
CAPE BRETON CAPERS BASKETBALL - CONGRATS.**

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Hailey MacLeod, of Marion Bridge, on her stellar rookie season with the Cape Breton Capers women's basketball team.

This year Hailey made the transition from high school basketball, where she was a top player, to university level. Without a doubt, she has found her way. She has indicated that she feels she is getting better every game and is hoping to continue this route for the remainder of the season. Cape Breton has already clinched a playoff spot at the AUS championship tournament in Halifax next month.

I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate Hailey and her teammates on their continued success and wish them all the best.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**CHEBUCTO FAM. CTR.: SUPPORTING FAMILIES - COMMEND**

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak of another organization in Spryfield that does amazing work - the Chebucto Family Centre. The centre offers a wide assortment of programs to the community, such as the doula program, prenatal and parenting programs, community and wellness programs, and the Spry Café.

The mission of the Chebucto Family Centre is "to nurture and enhance the quality of life of families through the delivery of community-based programs and services." Through their huge array of programs, they are extremely successful at improving the lives of families in the area.

I've had the privilege of being involved with the Spryfield café on a few occasions. The café has a monthly free dinner held at the Family Centre and is open to anyone in the community. I've had the pleasure of cooking and serving at the café. I'm always amazed at the true sense of community that presides over this dinner, with residents joined together to enjoy great food and great conversation.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the Chebucto Family Centre on their outstanding support of the Spryfield community and thank them for everything they do to improve the lives of our families.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**BOWLIN, ALICE/MOORE, NIKKI:  
COMFORT PILLOW DONATIONS - THANKS**

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to make special mention of Alice Bowlin and Nikki Moore.

Alice Bowlin, a retired nurse from Lower Sackville, along with Nikki Moore, sews and stuffs heart-shaped pillows to give to mastectomy patients at no cost, in the hopes of easing their emotional and physical pain following their surgery. A breast cancer survivor herself, Alice started this endeavour in 2012. Realizing that she needed help keeping up with the demand, Nikki, a breast cancer survivor as well, stepped in and joined her a few years later. This dynamic duo make and give away over 300 pillows each year.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking Alice Bowlin and Nikki Moore for their efforts to bring comfort to breast cancer patients as they begin their road to recovery.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**FOUGERE, JENNIFER: DEDICATED TO STUDENTS - COMMEND**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Jennifer Fougere, a passionate teacher at Halifax West High School who always goes the extra mile. Since 2004, Jennifer has taught at Halifax West and was recently appointed as the Languages and Social Studies Department Head.

Jennifer's enthusiasm for her students is apparent in everything she does. She is an avid volunteer both in and outside the classroom. There are too many initiatives to list, but here are a few that she leads: litter cleanups twice a year; leaders of the Big Bunch program; politics club; model Parliament; and public relations and food chair of the 2015 Canadian Student Leadership Conference.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this House of Assembly to join me in applauding Jennifer. I am so grateful for her work at Halifax West High School and in the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**VON: MEALS ON WHEELS - THANKS**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, in the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life, it can be easy to forget the difference that simple things can make to someone. For many seniors across Pictou County, the delivery of one meal a will always bring a smile and thank you.

The Victorian Order of Nurses has been delivering its Meals on Wheels program for several years as part of the charitable part of the organization. The program operates with the assistance of many volunteers. Kathy Campbell and her brother Donnie Fraser are regular volunteers.

Meals are picked up at Glen Haven Manor where they are prepared. Seniors are always happy to see the volunteers arriving. It also gives them the opportunity to have a brief chat about issues in their community.

Volunteers like Kathy and Donnie are critical to the success of this organization. Your assistance is invaluable and greatly appreciated by everyone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**LEE, OWEN O'SOUND: SYSTEMIC DISCRIM. - LISTEN**

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, as we approach the end of African Heritage Month, I rise today to recognize some recent powerful work by Owen O'Sound Lee, who has released a powerful track and video entitled *Listen*, that discusses the historic and ongoing systemic discrimination faced by African Nova Scotians. It references Africville, Viola Desmond, police street checks, over-representation in prisons, negative portrayal in the media, and employment discrimination.

One line that hit me, given the recent arrest of a 15-year-old by Halifax Regional Police that resulted in the boy being injured and police being investigated, was this: "The cycle keeps repeating and I'm getting nauseous. Got me praying for my sons. We gotta be cautious."

He also highlights the resilience of African Canadians in the face of oppression and their efforts to bring about racial justice and social change. I encourage members of the House to listen.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**MOSHER, ZOE: TRACK ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.**

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, Zoe Mosher, a Grade 7 student at Bridgewater Junior High and a proud member of the Bluenose Athletics Club and the 902 Athletics kids run club, is passionate about running, a sport she started in 2019.

Last June, while still in Grade 6, she placed first in three individual events - 800 metres, 1500 metres and 3000 metres - at her first Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation, Western Region, Track and Field Championships. Last Summer she placed first in the Athletics Nova Scotia Outdoor Track and Field Provincial and Club Championships in the Women's 12-13 800 metres. She also competed in the Youth Running Series, a combination of cross-country and track, and won first place in the Under-15 Female category. Zoe captured first place in the junior girls' Western Region's cross-country and took silver at the 2019-2020 NSSAF provincial cross-country championships in October. This January she won first place in the Girls 12-13, 1200-meter run at the 2020 Athletics Nova Scotia Indoor Open.

Congratulations to Zoe Mosher, this natural track athlete, who had a fantastic first year in a sport she loves.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**POWER, PHIL - CST.: MARTIAL ARTS SCHOLARSHIP - THANKS**

TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Phil Power, a Halifax Regional Police Officer and TaeKwonDo Master at Grasshoppers Martial Arts in Dartmouth East.

Phil has always been a strong advocate, building a positive relationship between police and communities. In Dartmouth East, Phil took the initiative in 2017 to start a scholarship program to give 10 children the opportunity to study martial arts, free of cost, at Grasshoppers. There they learn self-confidence, self-defence and self-control.

Since this program started, it's been a huge success. Many participants enter the program with little respect for the police, and they leave wanting to become a police officer someday.

I want to thank Constable Phil Power for his outstanding approach in building relationships with the East Dartmouth Community Centre, and I want to thank all our officers throughout Nova Scotia who serve and protect.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.



**COONEY, DOUG - MUSICIAN: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to commend a volunteer who makes Bedford an entertaining place to live. After Doug Cooney retired, he started his own band. Silver Wings played many events up until a few years ago. Doug also played his violin at various health facilities throughout our region for many years. He'd visit Magnolia Continuing Care in Enfield to play for the residents. These days he entertains the members of, and volunteers with, the Bedford Leisure Club.

[1:30 p.m.]

When people describe Doug, they talk about his bright smile, that he's fun loving, respectful and considerate, and what a reliable and loyal volunteer he is. Really, isn't that how we'd all like to be spoken of?

I know the members of this House will want to join me in thanking Doug Cooney for bringing music into the lives of so many over the years.

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

**BLACK BATTALION: SERVICE TO COUNTRY - HONOUR**

LARRY HARRISON: Recently, I attended a presentation during this African Heritage Month on the No. 2 Construction Battalion. Many young men were enlisting in Truro to serve in the First World War, including young African Nova Scotian men. They were told that it was a white man's war and they were refused enlistment. These patriotic men persisted and eventually were able to form what is known as the Black Battalion in July of 1916.

They were not permitted to carry arms but were given other tasks such as construction of roads, bridges, and trenches. The No. 2 Construction Battalion earned the respect of some, including Dr. Dan Murray, grandfather of Ann Murray.

This was a sad story in our history, but one that we should learn from. There are no persons less than another, and we should always strive to make that a reality in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare-Digby.

**LE CLUB DES NOUVEAUX-HORIZONS DE CONCESSIONS:  
40<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY - RECOG.**

HON. GORDON WILSON: I wish to congratulate the Club des Nouveaux-Horizons de Concessions on the recent celebration of their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In the 1970s,

the Club des Nouveaux-Horizons was established in the area so seniors would have a place to meet to participate in social activities such as playing cards, and to continue to be involved in their community.

On the day of the grand opening, the community met and watched Disa LeBlanc, the oldest person in Concession, cut the ribbon to officially open the club. Ms. LeBlanc was helped at the ceremony by MP at the time, Coline Campbell. Ms. Campbell expressed her hope that the club will be meeting place for the community for seniors for years to come, a sentiment she repeated at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

I want to echo Ms. Campbell's hope for the future of the club, as clubs like this are important for the well-being of seniors. These types of clubs encourage seniors to remain active and not become isolated and cut off from their community.

In Concession, seniors continue to meet in the basement of their church where they catch up on the news and play cards.

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

#### **KNOX UNITED CHURCH: WELCOMING YOUTH - THANKS**

BRAD JOHNS: I'd like to acknowledge the Knox United Church in Sackville today. Members of Knox United organized weekly food trucks to help feed hungry youth and teens in the Sackville area.

Caroline Gallop and Rainie Murphy of Knox United Church reached out to Becca Bishop, who's the coordinator of a youth meeting place in the recreation centre near the church, when they heard that she didn't have enough budget to feed the youth and teens healthy meals.

Together, Gallop and Murphy gathered volunteers from their congregation to serve soup and sandwiches weekly from a food truck. The number of volunteers has now reached an amazing 160 people.

I would like to take an opportunity to thank Knox United Church along with Caroline, Rainie, and Becca and all the volunteers for their dedication in helping the youth and teens of Sackville.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**7ARTS: COM. ARTS SPACE - THANKS**

HON. LEO GLAVINE: I rise today to congratulate 7Arts for opening the Makers Space in Greenwood, providing an inclusive and accessible opportunity for people of all ages and skill levels to partake in the arts.

This new arts space held its grand opening on November 30<sup>th</sup>, seeing a large turnout from the community to participate in various activities such as a Christmas card demo, drawing demo, and music jam. This also served as an opportunity to meet the local artists, volunteers, and sponsors.

Since their Open House, 7Arts continues to host a multitude of events for all, including adult beginner drawing, Wellness Wednesday, and Zumba, to name a few.

I ask members of the House to join me in thanking 7Arts and all involved in making this unique arts space a reality for our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**LEBLANC, ERIC: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

KARLA MACFARLANE: It is my pleasure to rise today to recognize Mr. Eric LeBlanc.

Eric is a lifelong educator and proud Pictonian, who returned to Pictou upon his retirement from teaching. Eric is a tireless volunteer for the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, the Pictou County Fuel Fund, and the Pictou Food Bank. He is a faithful member of the Stella Maris Catholic Church, always willing to help where needed, and a member of the Knights of Columbus. Eric is the caretaker of the Stella Maris Cemetery. Many residents of Pictou and the surrounding area have been fed and kept warm as a result of Eric's stewardship.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Eric LeBlanc is a fine example of why I often say that Pictou West's greatest asset is its people. I wish to thank Eric for everything he does for his community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

**MACNEIL, TIMOTHY RYAN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

HON. MARGARET MILLER: It is with a heavy heart, Mr. Speaker, that I take a moment to pay respect to an extraordinary giving and compassionate gentleman who passed away on September 4, 2019.

Timothy Ryan MacNeil was a dedicated firefighter with over 30 years in the East Hants area, first serving with the Lantz fire station and most recently a valued member of the Shubenacadie fire department. He held many different positions in his tenure, ranging from firefighter to chief. Big Timmy, or Timmy, as known by many, was especially passionate and proud of being the chairman of the East Hants training committee dedicating his time to ensure proper development of all firefighters in our area. He was also the director and deputy chief with the medical rescue team and was a fire crew lead hand at the Department of Natural Resources.

His sudden passing left our community in mourning. With mourning comes reflection, and in that reflection those who were fortunate enough to know him should take great comfort in the footprint Tim left behind. His years of dedicated service, humble and kind demeanour, courage, and compassion will not soon be forgotten. He will always be an inspiration to us all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

**RADDALL, ELLEN: DUKE OF ED., SILVER AWARD - CONGRATS.**

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate Liverpool Regional High School student Ellen Raddall, on her most recent achievements in the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh Program.

Currently in Grade 11, Ellen recently completed her Silver Award Level, which required 26 weeks in the four criteria of skill, physical recreation, service, and adventurous journey. Ellen played piano; participated in boxing lessons; served as an intern at my constituency office; and completed a three-day, two-night camping expedition.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in applauding Ellen on this very impressive accomplishment. She is indeed a wonderful role model for Nova Scotian youth, and I wish her the best as she works to achieve her Gold Level. Well done, Ellen!

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

**SHOPS: PLANTING SEEDS OF SUSTAINABILITY - THANKS**

HON. LLOYD HINES: Mr. Speaker, the Sherbrooke Opportunity Society is planting seeds of sustainability with their exciting new program.

The Sherbrooke Opportunities Society, or SHOPS for short, is a day program that started in August 2018 at St. Mary's Education Centre/Academy. SHOPS is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the independence, well-being, and individual potential of persons with an intellectual or physical disability.

This Summer, SHOPS will be teaching participants how to properly plan and plant vegetable and flower gardens and use the resulting crops to prepare a meal for the community. They'll also be selling excess vegetables and flowers to the community for work experience. Their project will involve group sessions with gardening community consultants, and participants will tend garden over the Summer, learning new skills and gardening know-how. The program will touch the community by refreshing infrastructure and providing work and volunteer opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, SHOPS is a dedicated organization doing important work for those in Sherbrooke and area, and I cannot applaud them enough for their efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

### **RYAN, MURRAY: 101<sup>st</sup> BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES**

MURRAY RYAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark a milestone. This past February 1<sup>st</sup>, my wife, son, and I, along with many cousins and friends, gathered to mark my father Murray Sr.'s 101<sup>st</sup> birthday at his home in North Sydney.

Murray was in great cheer and enjoyed all of the attention he so rightfully deserved. He eagerly blew out his candles, and we all enjoyed some cake and his sharing of stories. Mr. Speaker, my family and I consider ourselves truly blessed to have my dad with us each and every day. It's truly a gift to be cherished.

Not many generations can bear witness to the changes in our world that this man has witnessed during his lifetime. God willing, the family is eagerly looking forward to gathering again in 2021 to mark another celebration.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

### **HERITAGE DAY: TIME TO LEARN - RECOG.**

HON. LENA METLEGE DIAB: Mr. Speaker, as African Heritage Month ends, I'm reflecting upon the important place of African Nova Scotians in our province's past, present, and future.

This year our annual Heritage Day honoured the community of Africville. It was a privilege for me to attend the Africville Heritage Trust Museum's dedication service on the 17<sup>th</sup> alongside colleagues and community members. Being there really drove home the significance of how our families, our faith, and our wider communities unite us. The speeches were inspirational, and the tone was one of solemn celebration as it was announced that the original historic church bell would be returned to the church after spending 53 years at the Beechville Baptist Church.

I was also proud to see the announcement of a new stamp honouring the Colored Hockey Championship. Originating in Halifax and Dartmouth in 1895 until the 1930s, the all-Black ice hockey teams thrilled mixed audiences and newspaper reporters alike as they challenged each other to exciting matches and vied for the ultimate prize.

Let's all commit to learning more about our Nova Scotia heritage and our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**BALDWIN, RACHEL - ENTREPRENEUR: STARLITE BAKERY - WELCOME**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize Rachel Baldwin, who owns and operates the Starlite Bakery. We celebrate another female entrepreneur in Cumberland North. She opened her business in the Summer of 2019. Rachel previously brought her baked goods to farmers' markets where her scones became very popular.

Last Summer, she put in the hard work to open her own café in downtown Amherst where now locals can enjoy her goods throughout the entire week. Rachel's passion for her business shows through her Facebook posts each morning, featuring her fresh baking.

Rachel and the Starlite Bakery are a welcome addition to Amherst's downtown community, and I wish her great success as she continues to serve her customers. Another woman in business; another opportunity to celebrate.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**GOODWOOD PLASTIC: UPCYCLING PLASTICS - COMMEND**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Dan Chassie, President of Goodwood Plastic Products.

Dan is at the helm of a company working to keep plastic out of our landfills. One of his pioneering projects is a new asphalt-pavement mixture made from recycled plastics. The pavement is made almost entirely from post-consumer plastics that have been diverted from local landfills.

The Sobeys store that opened in Timberlea this past November is one of the first businesses to benefit from this innovation. The amount of recycled plastics used in the Sobeys parking lot equates to more than 6 million plastic shopping bags. The initiative promotes plastic upcycling and is more flexible resulting in less cracking during the freeze-thaw cycle we experience.

In addition to the new pavement mixture, Dan's company has been able to turn film plastic into plastic lumber used to make outdoor furniture such as benches and picnic tables in partnership with LakeCity Works.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to acknowledge the important work that Goodwood Plastic is undertaking to support this circular economy.

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

**MACKINNON-ALLEN, DANIELLE:  
BATTLING BRAIN CANCER - COMMEND**

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend Danielle MacKinnon-Allen of Sydney, who is fighting a courageous battle against cancer. Danielle was diagnosed in the summer of 2018 with a brain tumor shortly after giving birth to a baby girl while her other daughter was only three years of age.

She has indicated that although the intense radiation and chemotherapy treatments were hard on her body, she was fortunate to be able to remain and have her treatment at home. This is partly due to the generosity of Cape Bretoners, including Danielle, who donated throughout the year, and more so on Radioday, which last Fall raised over \$1 million for cancer care and other needs at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital.

I stand here today and applaud Danielle MacKinnon-Allen on her courageous battle and wish her and her family all the best in the future.

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

**YWCA CTR. FOR IMMIGR. PROGS.: COMPUTER TRAINING - THANKS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs is an important resource for newcomers in my community. The centre has many programs, some of which include providing information about gender-based violence, how to access available resources in the community, and helping immigrant children and youth settle into school.

The centre has newly partnered with Digital Nova Scotia and Infinitus Academy to offer computer training classes twice a week. These new classes are being led by two representatives from each of these organizations along with YMCA staff and volunteers. Digital Nova Scotia is supplying the equipment and curriculum while Infinitus Academy facilitates the training. In addition, Digital Nova Scotia has adapted its Tech Shy to Tech Savvy program to enable learning for all levels of computer experience for the 40 clients.

I ask the members of this House of Assembly to join me in thanking the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs, Digital Nova Scotia, and Infinitus Academy for this new program that will help improve the skills of many newcomers.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**MUNROE, JAMIE: RALLY FOR THE VALLEY - CONGRATS.**

STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to commend Jamie Munroe of Lower Sackville. Jamie submitted a bid with Kraft Hockeyville, hoping that Sackville would receive the coveted title of Kraft Hockeyville 2020, along with the funds to upgrade Sackville Community Arena.

When Jamie found out that Tyne Valley, P.E.I., had lost their community arena to a fire, Jamie withdrew his bid. He then reached out to other Maritime teams, asking them to join Sackville in supporting Tyne Valley.

On January 18, 2020, despite the frigid temperatures, hundreds from across the HRM, along with a full bus from Tyne Valley, gathered for the Rally for the Valley, wearing jerseys of every colour, in support of Tyne Valley.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Jamie for this selfless act of kindness for the community of Tyne Valley, P.E.I.

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

**NEW DAWN: NEW CTR. SYDNEY - THANKS**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate New Dawn and everyone involved with the new centre that is going to be located in the historic north end of Sydney.

As many people in the community know, New Dawn has completely redone the former Holy Angels convent into a new centre that is going to host a number of great community organizations, one of those being Celtic Colours, as well as hosting artists' space so artists can actually use the facility to their advantage, whether they live in the community or are from outside.

This has been a multi-million dollar project that has been supported by the local community and multiple levels of government. I stand in my place today to recognize New



Dawn, especially Erika Shea, for her leadership in the project and to congratulate the community.

It is an amazing building. It is transforming the north end of Sydney. When it is completed it is going to become a cultural hub in the CBRM.

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

**LEAMAN, DOMINICK - WINNER:  
GRAPHIC NOVEL CONTEST - CONGRATS.**

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to rise today to acknowledge 10-year-old Dominick Leaman of Beaver Bank-Monarch Drive Elementary school. Dominick is a Grade 5 student at Monarch Elementary and he was recently named the grand prize winner of the Scholastic Reading Club graphic novel contest. He won the contest with his entry, *The Adventures of Bat-Dom*, a graphic novel he made himself.

Dominick was also featured on Global News where his teacher, Ms. Fossen, presented him with some of the prizes he won from the contest.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take an opportunity to congratulate Dominick on his big win for his graphic novel, *The Adventures of Bat-Dom*, and thank the Scholastic Reading Club for inspiring young children to keep reading and being creative.

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

**PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT:  
CONTRIBS. AND CHALLENGES - RECOG.**

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, as we near the end of Nova Scotia's African Heritage Month I'd like to acknowledge the importance of celebrating the contributions of people of African descent year-round.

Nova Scotia has over 50 historic African communities and a history that dates back over 200 years. It is important to celebrate the culture, legacy, achievements, and contributions of people of African descent, while also drawing attention to the longstanding prejudices and unfair treatment endured for generations.

Nova Scotia has been a leader in the promotion and recognition of its African heritage, but we still need to work on improving areas such as employment income and education for many within the largest racially visible group in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon the members of this House to continue celebrating the important contributions the people of African descent have made to our province and commit to addressing the areas where we have repeatedly failed these communities.

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

**HFX. GROUND SEARCH AND RESCUE:  
REMOTE RESCUE VEHICLE - CONGRATS.**

BILL HORNE: I rise today to recognize the Halifax Search and Rescue, which was able to celebrate the addition of a new, remote rescue truck to its operation. Rescue One was unveiled in the open house in Lakeview.

The new truck is designated to specifically aid in remote rescues. The new addition is embossed with a plaque reading "Carmen." This is a tribute to Carmen Eisan, a former volunteer in both Halifax and East Hants Search and Rescue. Mr. Speaker, Carmen's willed donation, along with two large fundraisers and a donation from 100 Women Who Care, enabled the group to go from a standard pickup to a remote rescue vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, I request members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Halifax Search and Rescue and thank them for all they do for all the people in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**PICTOU OLD PUCKERS HOCKEY: 35<sup>th</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate the Pictou Old Puckers Hockey Team on celebrating the team's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In 1984 an ad was placed in the local paper seeking players interested in forming a hockey team for men "over a certain age." The only requirement was that the player was 35-plus years and could lace up their own pair of skates.

Since 1984 over 108 players have played with the Old Puckers. Many of these players remain close knit, have a wonderful sense of humour, and share a camaraderie of playing together. The Old Puckers continue to call the Hector Arena home. They remain loyal to having an arena in the Pictou West constituency.

I congratulate current and former members of the Old Puckers on their 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wish them a great hockey season.

THE SPEAKER: I shall check my list of unparliamentary terms, just to make sure.  
(Laughter)

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**DART. N. CHILI COOK-OFF:  
FUN, FRIENDLY COMPETITION - THANKS**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, some of my colleagues in this House may have heard me in the past talk about my famous - famous to me at least - chili. On Saturday, February 15<sup>th</sup> I got to put my chili-making skills to the test when I competed in the Dartmouth North Public Library's Annual Chili Cook-off.

The cook-off has quickly become a much anticipated and very competitive event in the community of Dartmouth North. This year there were entries from the Dartmouth North Community Centre, the Public Library, the Take Action Society, the Dartmouth Masjid, the police and fire departments as well as a team effort by City Councillor Tony Mancini and MP Darren Fisher.

Over 100 community members gathered to do a taste test of the entries and then registered their vote for the best chili. While I am sure my chili was considered delicious by the masses, their collective voice chose a chili made by the esteemed members of the Halifax Fire Department who service Station No. 12 in Highfield Park. The chili made by the wonderful cooks of the Dartmouth Masjid came in second place, and third place went to the Dartmouth North Library - Tony Mancini and Darren Fisher did not place. (Laughter)

The chili cook-off is a fun and yummy event that celebrates food and community, and I want to extend my thanks to the organizers. I look forward to competing again next year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**HART, GENEVIEVE:  
NURTURING PRE-PRIMARY STUDENTS - THANKS**

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to recognize a very special individual from my community - William King Elementary pre-Primary teacher, Ms. Hart.

Genevieve Hart has done an outstanding job with our youth. She goes out of her way not only to educate our children but to help expand their minds, create friendships, and help them become better people. We, as parents, spend a lot of time away from our children. My beautiful daughter Rufina, who is creative, fun and smart - and one of my best friends - is one of Genevieve's students. I can't think of a better person to trust with the daily care and education of my daughter.

Please join me in thanking Genevieve and all the pre-Primary teachers for their hard work and dedication.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

**STEVENS, ELLA: DUKE OF ED., SILVER AWARD - CONGRATS.**

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate Liverpool Regional High School student Ella Stevens on her recent achievements in the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh Program. Currently in Grade 11, Ella recently completed her Silver Award level, which required 26 weeks in the four criteria - skill, physical recreation, service, and adventurous journey.

Ella plays piano, volunteers at the Mi'kmaq Art Gallery and completed a three- day, two-night expedition on the traditional Mi'kmaw moose hunt.

I ask members to join me in applauding Ella on this impressive accomplishment. She is indeed a wonderful role model for Nova Scotia youth. I wish her the best as she works to achieve her Gold Award level. Well done, Ella.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, may I make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Permission granted.

GARY BURRILL: I want to say to the members that we're glad to be joined in the House this afternoon by Jason MacLean, president of the NSGEU. The Political Action Committee of the NSGEU is here to observe and take part in democracy in Nova Scotia this afternoon. I want to welcome everybody to the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**HALIFAX NEEDHAM SCHOOLS: HOT-LUNCH PILOT - COMMEND**

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, food insecurity is a major concern for staff and parents at École St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay School, a school of 300 students in the heart of Halifax Needham. This Fall, the school began a free hot lunch program every Tuesday. Between 130 and 150 meals are enjoyed by students who were signed up by their parents or guardians. This program is a labour of love made possible through the continuous support of school staff, parents and community volunteers.

Needham Preschool prepares the lunch, parents send a plate and utensil with their student to reduce single-use plastic, and up to six parents and community volunteers

facilitate the serving. Thus far, the hot lunch pilot draws on several small grants and donations, enough to continue it until April, and school leaders are hopeful that they'll be able to identify funds to continue it through to the end of the school year and into next. No student should be hungry in their classroom, and I commend all those involved for addressing food insecurity and hunger experienced by young Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**LIAO, LINDA: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I would like to recognize a woman from Clayton Park West who works hard to teach the future stars of tomorrow. Linda Liao is the owner of Future Stars Daycare. She moved to Canada from China in 2002 and has operated her daycare since 2009. She has great love for children and enjoys teaching and sharing her culture with over 40 children through song and dance.

Linda supports the Chinese Festival, which is held every September, and has helped to make it a very successful event. She also keeps in touch with families that have adopted children from China and is always there to offer her support. Would this House of Assembly join me in applauding Linda, who is enthusiastic about making her community a better place to live? I am delighted that she has chosen Clayton Park West to be her new home.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I would like to bring the House's attention to the East Gallery, where we are joined today by my former mentor and wonderful teacher, John Stone, who is here with the Grade 9 class from Armbrae Academy. I believe it's the Canadian Government class. I'd like to give them the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**FRANK & GINO'S RESTAURANT: NEW VENTURE - WELCOME**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to welcome Mr. Bill Hay and his family restaurant to Amherst, Frank & Gino's. This restaurant opened in its Amherst location on South Albion Street in Spring of 2019. The Amherst location is their second in the province, bringing several jobs to our community.

Offering casual dining, Frank & Gino's adds to Amherst's uptown economy. Bill and his team worked hard to make their physical location into their own and prepare the restaurant to open for the public.

I wish Bill and his staff great success as he continues to serve his customers and create jobs for locals. Another new business in Amherst, another wonderful place to eat, and another reason to celebrate Cumberland North.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**HEUBACH, LORENA: AUS ATHL. OF THE MEET - CONGRATS.**

KEITH IRVING: To be honoured as an Academic All-Canadian is one of the most prestigious awards a student athlete can receive. Even more impressive is maintaining a GPA above 3.5, while setting new AUS, Dalhousie University and provincial records in your respective sport.

Lorena Heubach of the Dalhousie Tigers women's track and field team is an Academic All-Canadian provincial record holder and AUS Field Athlete of the Year in consecutive seasons. A third-year engineering student from Wolfville, Lorena was named the AUS Champion Athlete of the Meet this month after capturing individual gold medals in the women's high jump, long jump and 60m hurdles, and a team gold as a member of Dalhousie's 4x200m relay team.

I invite all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Lorena Heubach for the incredible success with her academic and athletic pursuits.

[2:00 p.m.]

**ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM. - CRIMINAL MATTER: CAUCUS MEM. - KNOWLEDGE**

TIM HOUSTON: Chief of staff is the most senior advisor to a leader. As a leader, they are the person that you rely upon the most. It's a relationship built entirely upon trust. Often what the chief of staff will tell the leader or not tell the leader says a lot about the leader.

I would like to ask the Premier: Why would the Premier's chief of staff think that the Premier would not want to know about a serious criminal allegation against a member of his caucus?

THE PREMIER: First of all, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. The reality of it is, Mr. Speaker, the chief of staff at the time was provided information about an incident that happened six months before. She looked into it. It seemed the issues in the letter were not credible. That was the end of it.

TIM HOUSTON: Yet the RCMP found them credible enough to lay criminal charges.

The Premier said his chief of staff is the gatekeeper, and it is she who decides what information gets to him and what doesn't. Assuming that the most important and pressing matters are the ones brought to his attention, the fact that the person on the Premier's team - who arguably knows the Premier better than anyone - felt that information that one of the Liberal caucus members was potentially engaging in dangerous behaviours is not something the Premier would want to know says a lot about the Premier, Mr. Speaker. It suggests that the Premier wouldn't want to step in and help the member, that he would rather protect the brand.

I would like to ask the Premier: Did the Premier instruct his chief of staff that he didn't and doesn't want to know about matters that potentially damage the Liberal brand?

THE PREMIER: The allegation the honourable member is making in his question has no foundation. He has no idea what's before the court. He has no idea if it's related to this letter - which, by the way, has no author on it. The honourable member is standing in this place making a whole host of accusations about an incident that happened in November 2018. My chief of staff was notified in May and looked into it. It was not credible, Mr. Speaker.

I want to say thank you not only to my chief of staff but to all those Nova Scotians who come and support our government - and, quite frankly, caucuses on both sides of this House - to make sure they try to improve the lives of Nova Scotians. I am grateful and proud of the men and women who stand with us.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, in reality, I haven't mentioned the allegations at all. What I'm talking about is something that the chief of staff knew. I'm asking why the chief of staff didn't think the Premier would want to know. The allegations and the criminal charges speak for themselves. I have tabled that for the Premier, and I'll table it for his benefit again.

The Premier's most senior staff member had key information. On Tuesday, the Premier said that nobody on his team knew. Wednesday, he said, well, the chief of staff knew. Thursday, he's saying it wasn't important. Given the relationship between a leader and their chief, I think it's fair to say that the chief of staff knows what the leader wants to know and doesn't want to know.

Can the Premier explain for the House why his chief of staff would presume that the potentially criminal behaviours of one of his members - even potentially - is something that the Premier wouldn't want to know? What kind of Premier wouldn't want to know that?

THE PREMIER: The reality of it is that the honourable member stood in his place and showed no evidence. When it came to that letter, there was no evidence associated with the allegations that are in it. That's the reality of this.

The bigger question is - he had held on to this letter for a period of time. He has taken the effort to block out the name of the person who's in it. Why didn't that person who's making all of these allegations call the police that night? Why didn't they go and make those accusations? They didn't. This is now becoming a political document, and the honourable member is trying to gain political points on the backs of people requiring support. The legal system will deal with this issue. (Interruptions)

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

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party.

**PREM. - CBRM: FISCAL IMBALANCE COMMENTS - CONFIRM**

GARY BURRILL: Last week, Mr. Speaker, the Premier spoke at the chamber of commerce in Sydney. At that event, he was asked about how much budget preparation attention is given to a matter that is very important, particularly in Cape Breton. The matter is the fiscal imbalance experienced by the CBRM. Entirely offhandedly and quickly, the Premier said, in answer to the question, zero. Then he said that he was not - this is his word - wasting his time thinking about it.

Does the Premier stand today by his statement that thinking about the fiscal inequity between Nova Scotia's two cities is a waste of his time?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the question was about equalization and he is absolutely right - I said zero. We are spending \$700 million today on capital projects in Sydney and in neighbouring communities. We continue to make investments on the Island and will continue to do so.

When I am speaking with the municipality, they are talking about infrastructure investments. I want to congratulate the ministers on this side of this House who continue to go into communities on Cape Breton Island and other places to make strategic investments, not only to provide the people with the infrastructure by public services but to provide infrastructure to create jobs and economic development.



GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, there are number of things about which in the health care department we will not be offering congratulations to the government. One of them is that life expectancy today for a person living in Cape Breton is approximately three years less than that for living in the NSHA's Central Zone. Another of them is that Cape Breton endures the highest level of diabetes in Nova Scotia. The third is that Cape Breton endures the highest rates of high blood pressure in our province.

I would like to ask the Premier: Does the Premier also think it is waste of his time, a matter of zero consideration, to think about the disparity in health outcomes for the people in Cape Breton?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, that is a big stretch to take the answer to a question about equalization and move it into the health care issue. The reality of it is, as the honourable member would know, we are making investments in Cape Breton Island right now.

We are improving the regional hospital, doubling the cancer care opportunities there - I think a 40 per cent increase - and at the same time building new, collaborative care, long-term care facilities in New Waterford and in Northside. That's improving the infrastructure that has people to bring in to provide primary care. That's exactly what we are working towards and will continue to do so.

The honourable member would know in this budget we've made substantial investments to the children living in poverty. The honourable member would also know that the child poverty rate in Cape Breton is too high, as it is in this province, and that's why this budget is making those investments.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, to move from the subject of equalization to that of health care is no stretch whatsoever. Another area of inequity is child poverty. We know that one in three - more than that - children in Cape Breton are living in families where there's simply not enough money to meet their needs.

Now, last week at this same chamber of commerce meeting in Sydney, the Premier was speaking about government spending in Cape Breton and then made reference to people who were picketing that meeting on both of the subjects of fiscal inequity and child poverty. The Premier said: \$700 million and they still protest me.

Listen to the word being used here - they - that's exactly the word that he used. I would like to ask the Premier if he would like to take advantage of this opportunity to apologize for his flippant and ill-considered statements about Cape Breton last week at Sydney's chamber?

THE PREMIER: I thank the honourable member for the question, and the reality of it is that I've enjoyed a great relationship with Cape Bretoners.

As the honourable member would know, I am very proud of the two members who are currently sitting in our caucus, and he would also know that at that meeting I announced that we were adding 62 more nursing seats to CBU. I want to thank the CBU for the tremendous work they are doing to continue to grow the population. The honourable member would know that the population is increasing on Cape Breton Island for the first time in a long time.

He also raised the issue of child poverty, which is a serious issue. That is why this budget has a substantial investment in those children living in poverty, not only in Cape Breton Island but across our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM.: POSS. CRIM. CONDUCT - LACK OF DISCLOSURE**

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier continues his narrative that we somehow knew and didn't do anything, I've answered that question for the Premier. We knew for three hours and we did do something. But in reality, to use the Premier's words, an unidentified individual felt that this issue was an important enough issue that they called the chief of staff while she was in Europe. The chief of staff made a decision not to do anything; the Premier didn't need to know.

When the same member who is the subject of the allegations was charged for the exact same behaviours as the original complaint, it is hard to think that the Premier and the Premier's chief of staff would still think, well, that couldn't have been possibly true in the face of an actual charge and guilty plea, but still, nobody came forward. I am struggling with the fact that then the Premier learned himself of the second charge. The member left the caucus and still nobody thought, well, maybe there's merit to this initial thing - we better keep it quiet.

Mr. Speaker, they weren't frivolous charges. I'll table yet again, for the Premier's benefit, the notice to appear - the actual criminal charges that were laid in the second case. It wasn't a frivolous email.

It starts at the top. What kind of standard is the Premier setting for those around him? Doesn't the Premier find it hard to believe that on three separate occasions there was ample opportunity to come forward and he's created this toxic culture where nobody does?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, I want to thank the honourable member - through you, Mr. Speaker. This question has been asked many times. I'll continue to answer it as many times as he likes to ask it.

He can't draw a correlation between that letter and that charge. He's making a big jump, unless he has evidence that he should take to the court, not to the floor of the

Legislature. The reality of it is, this will be dealt with in the courts. I think what most Nova Scotians are asking themselves is, the author of that letter - whose name he's crossed out - did not call the police. Why?

TIM HOUSTON: Well, in the face of criminal charges, it's a pretty big leap to think that the author did not call the police, Mr. Premier.

The reality is that, by the Premier's own words, his chief was informed in May about the alleged incident by phone call - not by text, not by email - at least not yet. That may come out, Mr. Speaker. Not by text, not by email, but by phone call. This means that there could be no search done of electronic records, so it all comes down to what's remembered - what wasn't remembered in October when a second charge was laid; what wasn't remembered last week, when this came up; what wasn't remembered until they actually got caught and they were exposed with what happened.

If this is the type of recordkeeping system for serious issues that the Premier's Office is maintaining, is the Premier concerned that maybe there are some other major issues surrounding him right now?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, through you, I can't tell you how proud I am of the men and women who come to work on behalf of the people of this Province. When an issue is brought to a staff member - we're talking about my chief of staff - that was looked into and deemed not to have merit.

The honourable member, every time, stands in this House and never challenges the government on policy. We just tabled a budget, and he hasn't asked a single question on the budget. He never asked us about our investment in child care, never asked us about investment in health care. What he does is attack and impugn the character of people who aren't sitting on this floor. He started with Deputy Minister Miller; then he goes on to Deputy Minister Dean; also one of the senior deputy ministers, in Lands and Forestry; now he's on to my chief of staff. Who's next?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: MLA ALLEGATIONS - WHO KNEW WHEN**

TIM HOUSTON: We're talking about the moral character of a government. Isn't it interesting that we've been in the Legislature for one week and we've had two major scandals. I think that speaks to the moral character of a government, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday I asked the Premier a very simple, direct question in Question Period: Which of the caucus chair or the chief of staff was aware of these allegations? Acceptable, straightforward answers could include: the chair, the chief of staff, neither, both - those are all acceptable answers to a direct question. Instead, the Premier said that the riding

president received the email and that it was the riding president who did the investigation. He implied that it was only the riding president who knew. That story has since changed a little bit.

My question for the Premier is: Why did he answer the question in a way that clearly insinuated that neither the chair nor the chief of staff had seen this email when he was well aware that the chief of staff knew?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sure not to ask the honourable member for some advice on how to answer questions.

I will tell you this. This is what speaks to the character of a government: \$6 million that we've invested in social enterprise - the largest single investment in social enterprise across the province. This is what speaks to the character of a government: when we double the child tax credit in this province for children living in poverty and increased the threshold so that more than 50,000 children have access.

This is what speaks to the character of a government: the only provincial government - and, I want to remind you, one of the few Liberal ones left in the country - that invested in women and girls across this province when it came to ovarian cancer. That's what speaks to the character of our government. (Applause)

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, it won't be long before I have time to answer lots of questions for the Premier in this very Chamber.

After Question Period, when asked by reporters if the Premier's chief of staff was aware of the allegations, the Premier admitted that his top advisor had known about them since May. That's a different answer than he gave on the floor of this Legislature. It's curious timing, but I guess that's the theme of this entire scandal: curious timing.

[2:15 p.m.]

My question for the Premier is: Did somebody - and this is a very direct question - tell the Premier that the chief of staff had knowledge of the incident between the time he left this Chamber and went into the media scrums, or did he simply choose not to disclose it on the floor of this Legislature?

THE PREMIER: I continue to stand by the answers I have made. I continue to be consistent on the entire matter which is before the court.

Again, the honourable member has not asked a single question on public policy, Mr. Speaker. He has not asked one thing. He has not asked us about health care, which they say is the No. 1 issue for Nova Scotians. He has not asked us about the investments in pre-Primary. He has not asked us about the supports we provide to vulnerable Nova Scotians -

not a single question because he can't defeat our government on policy. He has tried to impugn the reputations of people who do not sit on the floor of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM.: MLA ACCUSATIONS - CURRENT POSITION**

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is disclosing some facts for all Nova Scotians to see. Nova Scotians are interested in how they are governed, and they are interested in the moral character of the people who make decisions on their behalf.

On Tuesday, when presented with the email at issue, the Premier said, "Mr. Speaker, I'm going by what the member's reading from . . . If anyone has received that . . . and they know information in it, they should have sent it to the police." I agree with the Premier. That information should've been sent to the police last May.

Yesterday when the Premier announced that his team had the information since May and didn't take it to the police, he started singing from a different song sheet. Personally, I agree with his Tuesday gut reaction. On Tuesday, his position was go to the police. On Wednesday, his position was, oh maybe we'll look at it internally . . .

THE SPEAKER: Does the member have a question?

TIM HOUSTON: I'll ask the Premier for his Thursday position now.

THE PREMIER: Again, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I think he's confusing matters. It's the honourable member who stands in one part of the province and gives a public policy position and then stands in another and changes his mind. When he's in Yarmouth, he's for the ferry; when he's elsewhere, he's against it. He continues to stand in this House and say he's against pre-Primary, and then when he stands in front of children he says he's in favour of pre-Primary.

One thing, we are a consistent government that continues to move this province forward. More young people are seeing an opportunity or a future for themselves in this province. Our population is at an all-time high. Young people are choosing to live and work here, raise their families. We're a more diverse population. We continue to make investments in the economy of this province to drive job opportunities. Unemployment is at an all-time low.

The reality of it is the honourable member can't take on our government on policy - he's attacking and impugning the reputations of people who don't sit here.

TIM HOUSTON: It's a bit rich to hear the Premier talk about impugning reputations. I'm talking about the reputations of the people who do sit here, to be perfectly clear.

In the last few days - as we've just seen right now - the Premier has gone to his old standby of deflect and accuse and point fingers. He essentially accused me of playing politics with this the other day and again today. He said this: It's surprising to me that he has become judge, jury, and executioner here on the floor of the Legislature.

I will remind the Premier that my team did everything we were supposed to do with the information. In fact, appreciating the seriousness of it, my team actually told me about it. Now that the fuller picture (Interruption) I don't know, Mr. Speaker, is it okay to speak now or is he going to wait for his turn or . . .

Now that a fuller picture has come to light of who knew what and when, would the Premier agree that it was actually his own staff who in fact played judge, jury, and executioner when they made the dangerous decision to ignore the credible information?

THE PREMIER: No, I would not agree with that at all. The reality of it is he has tabled a document that he crossed out the name of the very person who should've gone to police in November if the accusations in there are true. He has zero evidence - zero evidence - that anything in that email is actually true. Zero. He has zero evidence whether that email is connected to what's happening in our courts today.

Again, I want to tell you, the honourable member cannot take on our government on policy. He cannot challenge what's happening in our budget. He hasn't asked a single question or, quite frankly, hasn't let very many others stand up and ask questions on our budget. It's my hope he has come to the realization it is a good budget for Nova Scotians and he votes for it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **PREM. - MID.-INCOME EARNERS: RENT HIKES - PROTECT**

LISA ROBERTS: My question is for the Premier. In the wake of this week's budget, I am compelled to explain some of the dynamics faced by many people in this province, people who, despite Nova Scotia having the lowest median income in the country, are lucky enough to make a decent living. But even if they make well above minimum wage - say, \$20 an hour - they are still challenged to absorb rent hikes of \$100 or \$200 or \$300 a month or more.

Mr. Speaker, what is the Premier doing to provide protections for people in this sort of situation?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the honourable member for the question. As I said earlier, we continue to provide rent supplements. This new budget has an additional 600 rent supplements that are in it.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with both not-for-profits, our own housing that we're making investment in. Along with the private sector, we continue to ensure that we have a myriad of housing options for the people of this province.

The honourable member has the position, and her Party believes, that we should have rent controls. We don't support that position. It hasn't worked in other places, but she has highlighted something that is important but for the fact that our economy in HRM is growing at the rate it is, it has put pressure on finding affordable housing. That's why we're going to continue to work with our partners out in communities to provide the myriad of housing options that will be required to ensure that we have safe housing for our citizens.

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I need to clarify the details in my question. I am not speaking about low-income Nova Scotians who would be eligible for rent supplements. I am not speaking for Nova Scotians who would require or be eligible for the support of non-profit organizations, who are doing the best they can in this very difficult housing market.

There are one-bedroom apartments listed on the Halifax peninsula for \$1,445 a month. In fact, I know someone who rented a one-bedroom this week for \$1,550 a month. There is no limit set on the annual increase. There are people moving out this year who moved in last year because the rent has gone up so much. If someone makes \$20 an hour, this rent would constitute more than 50 per cent of their income, an unsustainable amount.

Mr. Speaker, what is the Premier doing to protect middle-income people from massive rent hikes?

THE PREMIER: As I said in my first answer, Mr. Speaker, housing is a myriad of options that will be required. As she would know, we just invested in this, in a first-time homebuyers program, that we've doubled the investment. She should know that we continue to work with both our own housing stock to improve it, to ensure that in working with co-op housing to provide other options when it comes to affordability. At the same time we are working with our partners here at HRM to continue to work on how we can provide an environment where affordable rent is not something that puts families in a difficult financial position.

We're going to continue to try to work with everyone so that we can continue to increase the housing stock, not just here on the peninsula but in surrounding communities, to keep and provide Nova Scotia families with affordable, safe housing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

**PREM.: HISTORY REPEATING - COMMENT**

TIM HOUSTON: Why does history keep repeating itself with this government? Kyley Harris, the Premier said he didn't know. The former Liberal member for Dartmouth East, the Premier said he didn't know. Conquered people, the Premier claims he didn't know. The court affidavit suggests that maybe he did, and you may remember the conversation with the "very tall man" that was referred to. Now once again he is claiming he didn't know.

I am reminded of a quote from former Liberal Interim Leader Michel Samson who, when in Opposition, criticized the Premier of the day. He said that the Premier of the day didn't want to get to the bottom of how his office handled a situation. At that time, he mocked the premier and he said, "Today, the Premier stands in this place and says: I was left in the dark, I'm still in the dark and boy, I'm in a happy place staying in the dark." I am reminded of that discussion today. I'll table that for the benefit of the Premier.

Can the Premier confirm that he is, indeed, in his happy place and happy to stay there?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the honourable member for that question. I am very proud to be the Premier of this province. I'm very proud to lead this government, which has delivered our fifth balanced budget. I am proud of a government that has increased the child benefit program, doubled it for low-income Nova Scotians. I am proud of the fact that we are the first government to take on human trafficking, with the five-year strategy.

I am proud of the fact that we have a five-year strategy on the issue of housing that is being raised by the New Democratic Party. I am very proud of the fact that more people in the global community are choosing to live and work in Nova Scotia, the most diverse population we've ever had, the largest number of people living in our province, on our march to one million.

Even our sons and daughters, who for decades had to leave our province to find new opportunities somewhere else in Canada to build their economy, are living here. They're inviting other young Canadians to come here and live, and that's what I'm proud of.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I can quite imagine the Premier is also proud of the fact that the wait-list for mental health services in this province is 365 days. I can also imagine that the Premier is very proud of the fact that his colleague so clearly needed help, and for almost an entire year his senior political adviser said, don't worry about them, leave them out there on their own.



I wonder, is the Premier proud of the fact that three times he has tried to destroy one single person, a lawyer for this province, through the court process with untold, probably millions of, dollars in taxpayer money, and three times the courts have told the Premier, you should not be proud of it? Yet, is the Premier still proud today?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member raised a very important issue in the preamble, the issue of mental health. That's why we continued in every one of our budgets to make investments in mental health. It's why we put wraparound services in our school programs to ensure that if we can identify the issue early on, we can provide support. We've listened to health care professionals on how to deal with the issue of adolescent mental health and mental health situations across our province.

We're continuing to make those investments; the honourable member has voted against every one of those investments. He has voted against every opportunity to improve the lives of young people. He has voted against every opportunity to improve the health of Nova Scotians when he stands in his place, asks the questions, and when we deliver on what he asks for, he still votes against it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

#### **PREM. - LIBERAL MLA ISSUES: NON-ACTION - CONSEQUENCES**

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, this matter has been uncomfortable. The member for Chester-St. Margaret's does not need what has happened to have been broadcast. He needs support, but he didn't seem to get it from the Premier's Office. These questions have been uncomfortable, but had they not been asked all of this would have been swept under the carpet. The chief of staff knew, but the Premier says the chief of staff never told him.

Does the Premier see how sweeping this under the carpet came at the expense of the member who was failed as someone who needed help and Nova Scotians who could have been hurt on our highways?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the honourable member raises the question, but at no time was there ever any indication to me or anyone else on this side of the House that the honourable member he's referring to had an alcohol problem. There was an allegation made by an individual who didn't call the police, didn't provide any evidence.

As soon as the honourable member was picked up for impaired driving, we brought the member into treatment and provided him the support around ensuring that he got well. That's what he's continuing to do, to be in treatment to make himself better, to deal with this very serious issue that impacts all of our families. All of our families are impacted by this disease. Of course, as soon as we knew there was something, we provided him with treatment and provided him support through our program.

The reality is, the question the honourable member is asking should be to the name that has been redacted from the email. If all of those allegations are true, why didn't that person call the police that night?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, maybe if they did, the member wouldn't have gotten caught the second time, but that didn't happen. However, people in the Premier's Office knew about this, and months went by. How many other times was the member out on the roads risking his own life and other's lives?

I don't have another question for the Premier here because, if he cannot see this and if this government cannot see the seriousness of sweeping something like that under the carpet, I don't expect to ever get a proper answer on it. But I will use this time to take a moment to offer words of support to the member for Chester-St. Margaret's and his family. People make mistakes, we all make mistakes, and we all need forgiveness.

[2:30 p.m.]

THE PREMIER: The honourable member has no evidence that anything in that email is accurate. If he does, I encourage him to go to the courts. That's the reality.

Whoever passed that email on to them, they should be asking them the questions: Why didn't you do something about this when you knew? Why didn't you provide proof? Why didn't you go to the police in November 2018? Those are all the questions, and instead they bring it to the floor of the Legislature after it's already in the court system.

I agree with the honourable member. I hope, as I said in my statement on Thursday, that the honourable member continues in the treatment to provide himself good health. My hope is that those Nova Scotians out there who are struggling with alcohol today and whose families are having to live with this disease see an opportunity to seek out help to ensure that not only they return to good health but that their families can actually return to good health.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

### **H&W - COVID-19: THREAT ASSESS. - UPDATE**

KARLA MACFARLANE: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. We're all watching with great interest and concern as the world responds to the spread of the coronavirus. Canadians who have been travelling and living in Asia are returning to Canada, and there are growing reports of cases across Canada. Now reports are sounding the alarm of what might happen when the virus actually arrives in Nova Scotia. I can table those documents.

In the interest of public confidence, can the minister update the House on the current threat assessment and level of preparedness for any cases of COVID-19 in Nova Scotia?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: I thank the member for the question. The work that's ongoing and being led by public health officials here in Nova Scotia, across the country, and indeed across the world, is being informed by the policies and procedures that they had established - the response plans - for just such a scenario.

These plans in Nova Scotia, as with other jurisdictions, were informed by earlier instances like this, like SARS and H1N1, and they continue to be refined. The work within the province includes continued engagement with counterparts across the country as well as within the province; namely our partners within our Health Authorities and other stakeholders that are important to be kept informed of the work that they're doing and to be prepared should the virus arrive in the province.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Health care is in crisis. We struggle to keep emergency rooms open at the best of times. We know that close to 100,000 Nova Scotians are without a primary care physician. There are regular reports of limited or no paramedic and ambulance coverage at the EH system, and there are struggles. We just don't want to see a sudden influx of scared people overburdening a taxed system right now at our ERs; we're struggling right now.

It seems likely that the COVID-19 will arrive eventually in Nova Scotia, so what does the Minister of Health and Wellness advise people to do if they are concerned that they may have been in contact or even contracted the coronavirus?

RANDY DELOREY: I sincerely appreciate the member bringing this conversation to the floor of the Legislature. First and foremost, I think it's important for individuals to be informed. I think it's important that when becoming informed that individuals should rely on reliable sources of information.

I would encourage them to go to our Public Health website, which provides updated information, as well as the Government of Canada's. I would encourage people not to rely necessarily on social media accounts and other sources of information that may not be as accurate.

Public health officials across the country continue to reflect that what individuals can do, the same as they should do for any virus like the flu, is practise good hygiene: wash your hands frequently, stay home if you're sick, and proper coughing protocols - cough into your elbow, and so on. Taking good steps like that is good for your public health, and not just for COVID-19 but for many other conditions as well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**EECD - COVID-19: SCH. TRIP CANCELLATIONS - PROCESS**

TIM HALMAN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, Global News reported that some parents at Dartmouth High School were concerned about their children travelling to Europe with the COVID-19 outbreak. I'll table that document. We've also heard concerns from parents at Island View in Eastern Passage.

Mr. Speaker, I think everyone can understand parental concerns for their children as they travel overseas with this outbreak. We can also appreciate the hard work that goes into preparing for these trips and the disappointment of students if these trips are cancelled. A constituent in Dartmouth East reached out to me yesterday with questions regarding his child's overseas trip during March Break, and he wants to know who will make the final decision if overseas trips need to be cancelled.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister please clarify the chain of command? Who makes the decision to cancel an overseas school trip? What is the process to communicate to parents and students?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This is an important issue as global concern over COVID-19 rises. Right now, that decision rests with our school communities, particularly parents, but we are in the process of evaluating the situation and identifying whether we need a more consistent and robust policy or protocol in place. In fact, department heads are meeting with regional centres of education executive directors this afternoon to discuss this very issue.

Right now, we would refer people to the Health Canada guidelines and also any travel restrictions that are in place. Some school communities have actually acted on those travel restrictions. I'm aware of one that isn't travelling to Italy because of the current health and safety concern there. They are going to California instead. These decisions are currently in the hands of those organizing these trips, and they do have advice from the federal government in terms of how they make the best decision in that regard.

TIM HALMAN: I appreciate the minister's response with respect to the notion of school communities. That interpretation of school communities can be wide open. As we all know, Nova Scotians want leadership on this issue, and we all know that nothing frustrates parents or any individuals more than when they can't get a clear answer.

Along with clarity, Nova Scotian parents expect the government to have plans in place for our schools. We all know that schools have potential to be a transmission zone for various colds, flus, and viruses. Certainly in the time I spent in the classroom, there were some days I felt like I needed to wear a hazmat suit. Nova Scotians want to know if the department is considering enacting any extra or different practices.

My question to the minister is: What preparations are being made by department staff, RCEs, and school administrators to ensure the safety of students and staff to minimize risks of transmission?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, we're in constant contact with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Department of Health and Wellness to get guidance on this issue. We currently have regional protocols in place that were developed during the H1N1 scare. We're in the process of reviewing them to see if they are applicable for this situation.

Our goal is to have a consistent approach. Having the integrated governance structure of education makes it easier now to have a consistent approach from one end of the province to the other.

The member is right. We want there to be clarity. We do not want the lack of clarity on this issue to contribute to people's anxiety, so we will be developing very clear communications to every school community across this province in this regard if there are any developments from a policy perspective.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

#### **PREM. - DISASTER RESPONSE: LIABILITY COVERAGE - CHANGES**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. I don't need to remind the members of this House about last year's collapsed-crane debacle on South Park Street in the wake of Hurricane Dorian and the chaos and resulting hardship that this caused, particularly for small businesses and residents in the corridor.

Recently, the same developer whose costs were covered by this government erected a second crane at the site in order to finish the interrupted work. It's unclear that anything much has changed in the meantime, including whether the developer and the crane operator will be required to carry more appropriate levels of insurance.

Mr. Speaker, has the government changed anything around disaster response, liability, or transparency as a result of this disaster?

THE PREMIER: The honourable member raises a very important question. As she would remember, when that happened, there were a number of issues about who owned the crane and the crane responsibility. They were on there as a subcontractor. We then moved in to ensure that we provide public safety. That's what this is about. It took much longer, I think, than any of us would have liked, but it was about ensuring the safety of the people in that surrounding community and also those who were going to have to be on that site to remove that crane, the first-of-a-kind collapse that we had in this kind of a centre.

They moved in and did that. Now the department will move through to ensure that we recoup the cost for the people of Nova Scotia.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Maybe the Minister of Business will be able to respond to whether anything has changed. My follow-up is for the Minister of Business.

Many small businesses that were impacted by this issue were cautiously optimistic at the announcement of federal disaster relief flowing through the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing last year. However, upon closer inspection, most of the businesses didn't even bother to apply. The money covers only damage to property, which in many cases is already covered by their insurance and which is not the true loss suffered by them here.

They made it very clear when they met with the Minister of Business last year that lost revenues were their main concern. One of the businesses posted over \$100,000 in lost revenue. This is on South Park Street and Spring Garden Road, in the commercial corridor that tourists frequent every single day in the summertime.

Mr. Speaker, for these businesses this was an empty gesture. Will the minister please explain how government intends to assist these small businesses?

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, she actually brokered a conversation with a number of those small businesses on Spring Garden Road and the area impacted by the crane. It was a very passionate conversation.

Certainly, they were frustrated and it's a significant loss. If you looked across that table at the businesses, the men and women who were there representing their entities, it is certainly varied in terms of what the services and products were. At the end of the day, they were all doing very well, experiencing a good season, a good performance that year, and then they were certainly impacted financially and otherwise by this unfortunate event.

The reality is that there is a financial assistance fund through the federal government that I know the member has spoken about before and the fact that there are insurability questions there - if it is uninsured, can they apply? I think that could still be an option, in consultation with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

I also think that communication was a big piece. In any event, in a disaster such as this, it is incumbent on levels of government to get together and have true discussions with these folks about what could be done.

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

**FISH. & AQUACULTURE - CORONAVIRUS: LOBSTER EXPORTS - IMPACT**

KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Lobster sales are down; lobster prices are down. The coronavirus has taken a deep cut into the global market, and it shows no signs of letting up. Economists are warning of the long-term, worldwide impacts of the virus, but the men and women on the boats are worried about their own backyard.

The minister expects it will take three to four months before exports resume, but that's going from zero to something.

My question to the minister is: Can he say when, if ever, he expects that shipments of lobsters to China will return to their previous levels?

HON. KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question; it's a very important question and one we are concerned about. The answer is: as soon as China will allow freight into China again, we will resume shipments.

The important thing is that we have not lost the market. The closure of the borders with the virus has caused the problem. In the meantime, we are looking at value-added products, which we always do, in other markets where we can sell our lobsters. A lot of the lobsters are now being shipped for secondary processing, which is very positive.

KEITH BAIN: China is the number-one customer of our lobster, and now they are not buying any. The drop in demand is dragging down the price and sending ripples throughout the industry. Fishers and dealers are looking everywhere to find new customers to help offload some products.

My question to the minister is: After putting so many eggs in the China basket, what is the minister doing to find new markets and customers for Nova Scotia's surplus lobsters?

KEITH COLWELL: Mr. Speaker, we are indeed exploring markets all over the world and we have been, very aggressively, for the last seven years. As a result of those marketing activities, including areas like China - China is number two in the purchase of lobsters; the U.S. is number one - we continue to develop new markets.

The Premier came up with a fantastic program for Europe. We are working on that very closely, and we have started to increase our sales there as well. We will continue marketing efforts.

I want to commend my team, the marketing team, for the great job they've done to get us the \$2.3 billion in seafood exports this year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

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

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, an April 2017 press release from the now Minister of Business said the government would remove the tolls on the Cobequid Pass when the bonds are paid off. I'll table this document. This press release said that date was expected to be in 2019.

Last January the Deputy Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal walked back on that promise when he told media that Cabinet would make a decision about when the tolls would be removed from the Cobequid Pass, in about a year, and I'll table that document as well. My question to the minister is: What has changed between April and January that has saddled Nova Scotians with more tolls?

[2:45 p.m.]

HON. LLOYD HINES: This government has committed to taking the tolls off the Cobequid Pass for Nova Scotia motorists once the bonds are paid off. The bonds have not been paid off as of yet.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I would encourage the minister to take a look at the finances, where he will discover there is more than adequate money to pay off the tolls and still have excess money left there to pay current maintenance costs.

This January, the minister extended the tolls on the Cobequid Pass for yet another year. He told reporters that he wants to use the toll money for highway improvements, for things like pull-off areas for motorists or satellite maintenance areas for Highway No. 104. I'll table that document. In other areas of the province, improvements like maintenance areas are paid for with taxpayer money, without tolls. So my question to the minister is: Why did the people in Cumberland County have to pay taxes and tolls for the same services other Nova Scotians get in due course?

LLOYD HINES: The issue of the improvements to the facility is very important to the future operation of the Cobequid Pass, which I think ranks up there as a tremendous example of P3 development working extremely well. The eventual removal of the tolls will mean that that burden directly goes to all the taxpayers of Nova Scotia under general revenues, so our objective is to take the great opportunity that we have to use some extra funds to prepare that road so that down the road we'll have sustainability and won't have to spend general revenues on it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.



**H&W: MENTAL HEALTH SERV. - PRIORITIZE**

JOHN LOHR: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. I think we're all surprised to see that the funding for mental health services is only set to rise by \$550,000 in this year's budget. After the near \$30 million increase last year, I was hoping this government was committed to making real change in the way it addressed mental health in this province. Now, with wait-lists little changed, we see an increase that amounts to less than a drop in a bucket. My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness: What has changed from last year to this year that has resulted in this government, again, not prioritizing the need for mental health services?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: I thank the member for bringing the topic of mental health to the floor of the Legislature. It's an important area and one that I think all members of this Legislature are passionate about. The fact of the matter is it continues to be one of our key priorities within the health sphere. These increased investments are building upon the investments we've made over the past number of years. We've talked extensively about them. What has changed over the past year is we've seen a reduction in the wait time for both youth/adolescents and adults. One example is that for urgent care, a year ago it was 85 per cent of Nova Scotian adults were being met within the clinical response time, now it's 98 per cent.

JOHN LOHR: One in five Nova Scotians experiences challenges with mental health. This government is providing an extra 55 cents per Nova Scotian. That equates to about \$2.75 per Nova Scotian who needs support. If I saw a friend who was struggling and I'd bought a cup of coffee, I would be equalling the new investment the government is making this year in mental health services. A cup of coffee is the least you can do for a friend in need and it's the most this government is doing for those in need of support. So my question is: Is the minister satisfied that this small investment in mental health services will make a difference in the lives of those in need?

THE SPEAKER: The time has expired for Questions Put By Members to Ministers.

**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, I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Supply on Budget 2020-21. On Tuesday, as I listened attentively to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board as she was delivering the budget, the title of the budget, Better Together, struck me as interesting or, rather, out of place - out of place given how the government has established their priorities these past seven years and how they have governed. The members of the PC caucus cannot allow this budget and government to go unchallenged. Better Together - this is just ironic and I'm guessing a possible campaign slogan.

This government's policies have not met the needs of Nova Scotians. Has there ever been a government who has been more divisive? Has there ever been a government who has marginalized and vilified one group in this province after another: film workers, teachers, Crown attorneys, doctors, education specialists? Has there ever been a government so intent on pitting Nova Scotian against Nova Scotian, citizen against citizen?

I'd like to take a few moments to examine the policy track record of this government - track record that is not always in-line with the priorities of the community that I have the honour of representing, the community of Dartmouth East. For Dartmouth East our priorities are health care, specifically improvements with accessing mental health services; education, specifically improving the learning conditions in our classroom; the environment is another key priority of Dartmouth East, specifically the impact of climate change on our 25 lakes in Dartmouth; and of course, affordable housing and proposing a long-term plan to deal with the unacceptable rates of child poverty.

If this government truly believed in the title of its budget, Better Together, we would have never witnessed a massive disruption to our film industry in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, an industry that brought in over \$100 million to the gross domestic product of our province. If this government truly believed in the idea of Better Together, they would have honoured the commitment of the member for Annapolis who stated in 2013 that he would renew and extend the Film Industry Tax Credit. Instead, we had a government that broke that commitment to the film industry.

Funny enough we see in this budget the Film and Television Production Incentive Fund back to where it was in 2015. It makes one wonder what that debacle was all about. I believe history will judge the film tax debacle as one of the worst public policy blunders in the history of Nova Scotia.

If this government truly believed in the idea of Better Together, we would have never witnessed, in 2017, the government using the legislative hammer to impose a contract on the teachers of this province. If this government truly believed in the theme of Better

Together, they would have honoured the commitment of the Liberal caucus in 2012 that they were committed to fair collective bargaining. Instead this government has produced a toxic relationship between our teachers and government, which has had detrimental effects on our students, on our families and our communities.

In this budget we see the financial plans for year four in the implementation of pre-Primary. If this government truly believed in the concept of Better Together, they would have taken the time to consult with early learning centres. They would have taken the time to consult with schools and communities in order to get the implementation correct and minimize the impact. Instead, we have witnessed artificial political timelines placed over real timelines based on best educational practice.

The other day in Question Period the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development stated that he was glad he didn't listen to the Opposition and our advice to slow down and consult - so much for Better Together. Because of the rushed implementation of pre-Primary, we now have a two-tiered system of rules for our early childhood educators. We have students being displaced from their building as pre-Primary moves in. All of this could have been avoided if they practised the concept of Better Together, but instead they practised the concept of my way or the highway, or rather, welcome to a portable in the back of the school.

Mr. Speaker, if this government believed in the practice of Better Together, the Opposition Parties in our province would not see the trail of broken relationships between this government and nurses, doctors, teachers, Crown attorneys, filmmakers, education specialists, the forestry sector, and some municipal governments.

If they practised the idea of Better Together, then we would see different outcomes. We would see collaboration, authentic consultation, and healthy relationships. Instead, because of the politics of confrontation, we see the opposite.

Mr. Speaker, if this government practised the idea of Better Together, then we would not see a measly \$550,000 increase to mental health spending. Improving access to mental health services needs to be a priority. That is why this caucus has championed improving mental health services as a priority. How can improvements to access be achieved with only a \$550,000 increase?

If this government truly believed in the notion of Better Together, many of the Opposition bills in the Order Paper would have been adopted and given consideration. Instead, most Opposition concerns and ideas are met with contempt and ridicule - so much for Better Together.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents of Dartmouth East want to see an improvement in education outcomes. They want to know for certain that investments in education are being tracked and monitored. They want to know that our students will be learning about the

dangers of human trafficking so as to prevent the growth of this horrific crime in our province. Where are the investments in education so that our students learn about this in order to prevent human trafficking from occurring?

If the environment and climate change are a priority, where are the investments and updates to environmental regulations to preserve and promote the health and sustainability of lakes in Dartmouth and also lakes throughout Nova Scotia?

If this government truly believed in the idea of Better Together, then we would see the most open and transparent government, as promised by the member for Annapolis in 2013. Instead, we have witnessed a government that has been condemned by the previous Privacy Commissioner and that fails to consult properly with stakeholders in health care and education, and most recently with education specialists. We see a government that damages the Province's Public Accounts Committee by limiting the topics and limiting the time in which it meets. That's not Better Together, Mr. Speaker. That's the height of arrogance and contempt for public input and the democratic process.

If this government truly believed in the concept of Better Together, then the Liberal Party would have done the right thing when it comes to the actions of the Premier's Office in recent days. Instead, they have put the Liberal brand ahead of public safety. If that's the Liberal version of Better Together, then it's my hope that this government is taken out to the dustbin of history.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is misnamed. It shouldn't be Better Together. Its real title is "Too Little, Too Late." Improvements in health care, improvements with mental health, improvements to classroom conditions, modernizing our environmental laws and regulations, dealing with homelessness and child poverty - these have to be the top priorities. Rather, what we're seeing in this budget is more effort sprinkling on the part of this government that has no real clear vision for the province.

[3:00 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, it states in the Book of Proverbs, author unknown, depending on your faith's point of view, and there is also a common statement in the English language: where there is no vision, the people perish. If there was ever a phrase to summarize the seven years this government has been in power, this is the one.

There are a lot of titles that can be attached to this budget, just don't call it Better Together. It is not aligned with your actions, behaviours and policies these past seven years while in government.

Again, Mr. Speaker, has there ever been a government that has been more divisive? Has there ever been a government in this province that has marginalized and vilified one

group in this province after another? Has there been a government so intent on pitting Nova Scotian against Nova Scotian, citizen against citizen?

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

BARBARA ADAMS: I am very happy this afternoon to have an opportunity to talk about an issue that is so important to all Nova Scotians, and that is seniors' home care and long-term care. One of the things I have noticed in this Legislature is that when we say something we are sometimes criticized as being too negative, so I thought I would use the words of others. I'll quote them, and I'll table their documents afterwards.

The ACE Group, which stands for the Advocates for the Care of the Elderly, have written a press release that we all got a copy of and I'll read it word for word. It says:

“The ACE (Advocates for the Care of the Elderly) Team says that the McNeil government is pretending in its 2020-21 Budget that long-term care is a priority, but really only taking very limited steps to address the very real crisis in care that has been continuing for many years. ‘Yes,’ according to ACE Team Chair Gary MacLeod, ‘there is an additional \$5.3 million added to ‘enhance long-term care,’ and an additional \$1 million to help with repairs and maintenance. But realistically how far can this new money go to address years of chronic underfunding and understaffing in nursing homes.’”

Unlike what the Premier said during Question Period, that we haven't been asking questions of this government on budget, that's what 40 hours of Budget Debate are all about, and we have been asking those questions. There were just other important questions that needed to be asked, as well. I'll go back to quoting:

““At this point, there appears to be no clear plan or strategy on how that money is to be used. This truly is ‘much ado about nothing’. We were hoping there would be a clear plan and funding commitment to end five-dollar a day meal allowances in nursing homes, one bath a week, one diaper change per day, persistent bed sores, widespread reports of alleged abuse, and instances of people being denied admission or re-admission to nursing homes if they do not have a family doctor. Instead, we got some very limited funding increases with no clear plan on how to move ahead.’”

“MacLeod said they were also concerned about the lack of an updated plan on progress for implementing the recommendations of the Expert Advisory Panel whose recommendations came out in January 2019, and about the lack of substantive investments or

leadership necessary to move forward with them. He also noted that there was nothing in the Capital Budget to help build new, long overdue facilities and develop new beds.”

“He further asked where the long-promised Five-Year Continuing Care Strategy or Blueprint has gone. ‘This government has yet to admit there is a serious crisis in long-term care or to work closely with everyone concerned to implement the long-overdue directions and solutions needed.’”

For reference, “The ACE team was started in 2006. It is composed of concerned family members who are appalled by the deteriorating quality of care in nursing homes, and who want to improve the overall standard of living for the elderly.”

Mr. Speaker, I will table that because that is someone other than this government, saying what they think about long-term care.

Let’s go on to someone else besides this side of the House. The Nova Scotia Health Coalition in their analysis of the 2020-21 provincial budget - there’s lots in here but I’m going to reference what they said about long-term care.

“The province” - that has been in power for seven years - I added that part - “continues to neglect facility based long-term care. The 2020-21 budget offers no significant improvements in long-term care, including no funding address the dangerously low staff-to-patient ratios” - I am going to say that again - “the dangerously low staffing to patient ratios, no funding to increase staff salaries or training to improve retention and quality of care.” I’m going to say that again: “no funding to increase staff salaries or training to improve retention of quality of care, and no money for new long-term care beds.” - not the ones that were already announced over and over again.

“The ongoing crisis in recruiting and retaining continuing care assistants in both long-term care facilities and home care support agencies is not being directly addressed with any new program spending.”

“The total budgeted spending for continuing care will increase by an amount just above inflation, 2.36%.” That’s just above.

“The combined neglect of long-term care and home-care is worrisome given the demographic challenges facing Nova Scotia. As our population ages, government cannot be in a position of

reacting too late” - and I’ll add seven years too late – “to changing healthcare needs, instead the province should be building public capacity to care for the elderly now.”

So, that’s someone other than this Opposition weighing in. I also went around the province and visited long-term care facilities and spoke with a number of administrators over the phone. These were their comments.

On the budget: Even if you are putting a little bit of money back into long-term care, you are the same government that cut funding to long-term care - so you take it away with one hand, then want celebration for putting it back. It doesn’t work like that. You cut 1 per cent of the budget off the bottom line of some of the facilities. You got a 1 per cent cost of living increase, so you take away 1 per cent, you give back 1 per cent. I can do the math. That’s no change. Last year, for many of these facilities, these administrators - not me - say they have less money now than they had in previous years.

I also want to know, because it is coming up in two days’ time - leap year, February 29<sup>th</sup> - the Department of Health and Wellness is going to collect long-term care payments from every long-term care resident up to the maximum allowed to bill them. The Treasury Board notified those long-term care facilities that they are going to get money only for 28 days. So, the government is taking money from residents for 29 days and only giving back to the nursing homes 28 days. One nursing home administrator said that’s a drop of \$30,000 out of her budget because the government wants to take more than it’s giving back.

I am going to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness, during Budget Estimates, if he is going to correct that because that doesn’t make sense to me. The budget also didn’t reply to their request for an increase in staffing, so they are not getting any relief. The long-term care report did not provide recommendations for staffing, so where is this government making the decision not to increase staffing? These administrators also reminded me that the NDP, when they were in government, identified 11 long-term care facilities to be replaced. The Liberals have replaced how many? Zero.

I don’t know if anybody from the Liberal side - from the government side of the House - has been to Roseway Manor, but I went to (Interruption) Thank you, the Minister of Seniors has been there. Great. Everybody should go. I went to that facility with two other members from this side of the House a short time ago. That facility has so many leaks in the building that there is actually a plastic sheet coming down from the ceiling into a large garbage bucket that fills with water every time it rains - and I feel sorry for them today.

I have an allergy to mould, and within an hour my eyes and my sinuses, that have not been on fire since 20 years before that, were so bad that I had to leave. I could not complete the tour. When I asked some staff members - the air quality reports have got to be showing that there’s mould here - why isn’t anybody doing anything, she said, well, if we say anything, we’ll be out of a job because they did not replace our manor.

Moving on to service contracts, there are two different funding models for long-term care. There is no consistency from one facility to another: it's unequal and unfair. This is what all of them, even the ones who are getting more than their fair share, will say. They pit one CEO against another when it comes to negotiations, and the person who has got the best negotiating skills gets to win.

They have two envelopes of care - the protected envelope for salary and foods, and the unprotected care for maintenance. Every facility seems to get a different envelope and a different size of money in that envelope. They openly admit to having to negotiate side deals in order to negotiate with this government.

Staffing issues, how many of these facilities have staffing for a medical director? The majority of these administrators have no idea how many of these long-term care facilities are funded for a medical director. Why wouldn't they know this? They're very concerned that some have a medical director while others don't; some of them have to take their medical director out of their long-term care budget, others don't. Some of the doctors at some of the facilities get a stipend to be there, others don't. Some facilities have a medical director who wants to retire, but there's no one to replace them.

While I'm at it, my long-term care facility notified this government in June that their two part-time physicians were leaving. They got no reaction from the government for six weeks until the CEO of that facility blocked admissions. They found temporary reprieve. The three part-time casual medical staff at Ocean View Continuing Care Centre are leaving next month; that's in less than a week and there is still nobody coming.

Debert, Truro, lost their family doctor to manage that facility. They put out a press release saying that they were going to block readmission of frail elderly into their facilities where they're living, their home, and they still have no doctor. There were people who have been denied readmission into those facilities. That's what these CEOs are saying.

CUPE has called on this government to increase staffing levels. Currently, it's 3.45 hours of care per resident per day; CUPE's calling for 4.1 hours. I have not yet heard the Minister of Health and Wellness comment on what he believes is a sufficient staffing allocation. I can guarantee you that we would have fewer bedsores, we would have less need to transfer people to the hospital for bladder infections, if we had enough staff to get patients to the bathroom when they press the call button.

Mr. Speaker, I have referenced what others have said about this government. I would like to reference what the government itself has said about long-term care. They came up with an expert advisory panel report. They tabled it, which is nice. They tabled it right away. They came up with an expert advisory panel update as of September 2019, and I'm looking forward to when the newest update comes.



There are things in here that don't make sense. It says, "Examine the methods of CCA education and curriculum, specifically with reference to LTC environments and hands-on experience." Why haven't they already done that? It asks, "Acquire better data and information to drive system action and decision making." You have had seven years to do that. Work with the Nova Scotia Health Authority to better understand the current state of primary care coverage in long-term care facilities and develop a provincial framework. Mr. Speaker, why have these things not already been done?

I'll go back to the one recommendation I have been beating the drum on since I got in here, it is that the long-term care expert panel said bring back the CCA grant program. There were thousands of people given that grant under the NDP Government. As soon as this government got into power, that grant ended.

The reaction of this government was to give a temporary one-time grant to 150 CCAs. I will say it again. We need between 4,000 to 5,000 CCAs. We need to regulate their profession. We need a CCA registry so that we can make better plans.

I look forward to having an opportunity during Budget Debate to ask the minister to answer some of these questions and to thank all of those who have reached out to my office to share what they have had to say. There's lots more coming from the public.

I introduced an email yesterday from someone working in a facility, but because they didn't sign their name I couldn't actually reference them. I did read it out loud.

I want the government to know that everything I said today were the words of another organization, so if you go after this Party on this side of the House for bringing forward the truth, well, I guess that's what our side of the House is committed to.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[3:15 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Brendan Maguire in the Chair.]

[7:26 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: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Before we go to the Government House Leader, I'd like to draw everybody's attention to the Speaker's Gallery where I have a guest here this evening.

Visiting us from Windsor is my old university school friend, Chris Strickey, and his daughter Julia. I'd like the House to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Congratulations on having a friend, Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy for you. (Laughter)

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

### **PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 220.

#### **Bill No. 220 - Labour Standards Code.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 220, an Act to Amend Chapter 246 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Labour Standards Code, Respecting Leave, be read a second time.

I would like to take this time to share with you proposed amendments of the Labour Standards Code that will provide our reservists of the Canadian Armed Forces with better job protection.

Mr. Speaker, reservists make significant sacrifices and put their lives on hold to protect us. The government is committed to supporting them and ensuring that they are also protected and have the support they need to succeed.

There are currently around 1,200 reservists across the province who are ready and willing to serve to protect our country. The changes brought forward will ensure all reservists in Nova Scotia have the ability to take leave to complete training and for deployment.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments to the Labour Standards Code will reduce the eligibility period to access reservist leave from one year to three months and increase the length of leave from 18 months within a three-year period to 24 months within a 60-month period. A longer period of leave will also be possible in situations that involve a national emergency.

The amendments will also reduce the period of notice that reservists must provide employers from 90 days to four weeks, and if a situation occurs and an employee receives less than four weeks' notice, then they will be required to provide as much notice as possible. These amendments will also align us with changes that were made to the federal government's reservist leave last Fall.

Mr. Speaker, this is a positive step forward. Changes like this will provide our reservists with more flexibility and stronger job security. We want to reduce some of the barriers that can sometimes stand in the way of those who want to serve our country.

A targeted consultation was conducted this month to gather feedback around the proposed changes. We have heard from a number of stakeholders including those in both labour and business. There have been many signs of support.

Mr. Speaker, reservists are there for us in our times of need, and they want to help. They do this voluntarily. They deserve the comfort of knowing that they are prepared for whatever situation comes their way and that they will have their full-time job to come home to. This is the right thing to do.

Before I conclude, I would also like to mention that there will be a couple of housekeeping amendments to the pregnancy and parental leave provisions of the Labour Standards Code.

Last year, we made changes to the length of pregnancy and parental leave, and the eligibility period for pregnancy and parental leave was also eliminated. The related provisions are around the start date for pregnancy leave and the length of notice employees need to provide employers before beginning pregnancy or parental leave. The amendments will bring this in line with the changes that were previously passed.

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

**BRIAN COMER:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 220, the Labour Standards Code, regarding reservists. I'd just like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution that Nova Scotia has provided to the Canadian Armed Forces over the last number of years. (Applause)

I thank the minister for introducing this bill. From the research that I've done and discussions with his department, it increases alignments with federal legislation and

reduces the eligibility, which could be beneficial in the state of a national emergency or something of a pressing nature.

[7:30 p.m.]

I'm just curious - and maybe the minister can clarify. I think the consultations were only about two weeks ago. I'm just wondering why such a short time frame, so maybe he can clarify that. This caucus will support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to speak to Bill No. 220 and also acknowledge the terrific contributions the members of the Canadian Armed Forces make to our province and our country. Reservists are a special breed of members of the Canadian Armed Forces. My sister was a reservist in the Navy Reserve for 25 years. Through her I got to know a number of amazing reservists, mostly women, who are her dear friends. I know how hard they work and how much they care for their country.

I am happy that this bill is coming forward. We agree, of course, that their leave should be protected, as should be the interests of their employers. We are also particularly glad to see that the definition of service has been broadened in this bill, particularly related to mental health.

It is important that we provide support for more components of the service process, including all deployment, training, travel time, and treatment. Undoubtedly broader support for the reservists will positively contribute to their overall service, and that will be good for them and for our country.

While I understand that the government has been consulting with the reservists as well as other stakeholders, an interesting question was brought up by my colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party, a great question about why the consultation took place only this month, but happy that it took place at all. We're looking forward to hearing from the public at the Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, the consultations happened just recently. The federal changes actually just happened in the Fall. We flagged them when we saw those changes come through the department. We actually just did some quick consultations around it and made sure that business could voice their concerns. As well, we spoke to the Brigadier General here to see if there was anything other than what the federal changes were that could be advanced in it.

Since the only changes brought forward were alignment with the federal government, it actually was a pretty simple bill being brought forward. There was strong support across the business community with our long history around the Armed Forces, around the Navy in this city. It's no surprise that Nova Scotians were behind this.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 220.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 220. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 221.

**Bill No. 221 - Labour Standards Code.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 221, an Act to amend the Labour Standards Code, be read for a second time.

I'd like to take some time today to share proposed changes to the Labour Standards Code, changes that will help address Nova Scotia's gender wage gap.

Women currently make up 49 per cent of our workforce, and they play a vital role in our economic growth. As we continue this economic growth, we're seeing important progress. For example, more women are in careers where they are typically under-represented, such as skilled trades. Despite this progress there are still areas of significant concern. The gender wage gap is a major issue facing women today. On average, women are still being paid less than their male counterparts for the same work in jobs across the board.

There are a number of ways to measure the gender wage gap, but when we look at the average employment income of all workers in Nova Scotia, women earn 73 cents for \$1 that a man earns. This is unacceptable. That's why we are proposing changes that will strengthen the province's labour legislation and help to narrow the gender wage gap in Nova Scotia.

These changes are rooted in a simple concept of equal pay for equal work, which is already in our Labour Standards Code. The amendments will prohibit employers from

asking job applicants and current employees about their previous salaries. This is because sometimes when your previous salary is lower, it follows you throughout your career. They will also prohibit employers from banning employees from discussing or disclosing their own wages to other employees within the organization or wherever they choose to.

Research has shown us that greater transparency in wage information leads to a smaller gender wage gap. These changes will help bring more transparency to the salary of both women and men in the workplace. They will also help to ensure that employees are paid a wage that reflects their qualifications, experience, and value. Women should be paid what they deserve, not what they feel they need to accept.

Additionally, these changes will expand the equal pay provision currently in the Labour Standards Code to employees that do not identify exclusively or at all as men or women. Through regulations, they will also allow government to expand the equal pay provisions to employees who possess certain characteristics such as those related to race and ethnicity. These are important steps to ensure that our regulations reflect our diverse workforce.

We need to continue advancing gender equality so that all Nova Scotians have the opportunity to grow and thrive in our province. As Nova Scotians, we stand for many of the same values, like fairness and equality. Together, these amendments set the foundation for a stronger and more fair and just workforce in Nova Scotia.

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

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a great first step in addressing this issue. Like the minister said, the 73 cents for every \$1 that a man makes is simply unacceptable. I know in Nova Scotia and across the country this problem has been painfully slow to correct over the last number of years. I think this is a strong idea.

I do have a couple of questions for the minister that he might be able to clarify for me and my colleagues. I'm just wondering, for clarification, what these administrative penalties are, what they look like, how they would be enforced in the workplace, and what supports would be offered to women to come forth and feel comfortable enough to voice their concerns with their employers.

There is also a question about how small businesses throughout the province would be educated on how to significantly and efficiently implement this policy, I guess you would say. A large employer as opposed to a small business with three or four employees may need a significantly different approach.

I think that's a great first step. We would support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise and speak to Bill No. 221. We in the NDP caucus believe that there are many improvements that need to be made to the Labour Standards Code. This bill does address some of those steps in a small way.

Some of the things that I think are positive about this bill are that it addresses the fact that not everyone identifies as a man or a woman and that it has space for non-binary or gender-nonconforming people, which I think is a really important change. We do know that the wage gap is remarkably high in Nova Scotia, 73 cents on the dollar, and we need strong legislation with real teeth in order to address it.

There are real systemic issues that impact the wage gap in Nova Scotia that need a broad approach from this government, including the fact that Nova Scotia still has the highest poverty rates in the country. We also need to consistently be talking about the fact that the wage gap is much worse for racialized women.

The NDP has continually pushed for improvements to the Labour Standards Code such as paid sick days and stronger stolen-wage protections. We would have hoped this opportunity to make changes to this Act would have included some of these measures.

Of course, I also want to take the opportunity to mention the pressing need for a higher minimum wage, a \$15 minimum wage, as well.

While I appreciate some of the changes coming forward, I'm concerned that many of the details in the Act are forthcoming in regulations. Frankly, there is a real risk that this is a toothless piece of legislation without real change in the piece of legislation itself. Nonetheless, of course we welcome any forward movement on the pay equity issue, and we look forward to hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, there were a couple of questions from the Progressive Conservative side. The gender wage gap and equal pay regardless of your sex or your race is already in the code. If a complaint would come in, our officers would go out and investigate. Our hope with this bill is it will put a spotlight on it. It's also giving us another avenue of allowing workers to have more information among their co-workers and within their organization.

Our experience has been that businesses do want to pay their employees fairly and equally, but a lot of times - like the example we gave and there is well-documented proof of it - when an employee starts earning less, that lower salary follows them through their career. That's part of what this bill is addressing as well. We also have a provision in the bill that, as we start getting more and more cases in, we can also look at any punitive

measures through regulations for those few-and-far-between companies that are actually doing this in a manner where it's not unintentional and it's more intentional. In those instances, we would be stepping in and essentially having a fine which could be monetary or enforcing things under the Labour Standards Code.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 221.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 221. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 223.

**Bill No. 223 - University Foundations Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 223, an Act to amend the University Foundations Act, be read for a second time.

I'd like to take some time today to share proposed changes we're making to the University Foundations Act. Universities play an important role in Nova Scotia's economic growth. As they advance education and research across the province, we want to ensure that their operational needs are supported and that we help to reduce any regulatory burdens. That's why we're making amendments to the University Foundations Act. It will allow the universities that no longer wish to operate their foundations to dissolve them.

Mr. Speaker, the Act currently requires all 10 universities to operate a foundation and to report on them. We've heard from our universities, and for many of them there is no longer a need to operate a foundation. At the time the Act was established in 1991, there were tax advantages associated with donations to Crown foundations. However, these tax advantages no longer exist. The proposed amendments will help ensure the legislation reflects the current university landscape, as well as support our universities by allowing them to streamline administration.

In addition to dissolving the foundations for universities that no longer wish to operate them, the additional amendments will add transitional provisions to transfer all assets, properties, liabilities, and obligations associated with the dissolved foundations to the affiliated university. Any outstanding gifts or bequests to a dissolved foundation would



go to the affiliated university. The amendments would remove the requirement for the minister to table the annual report of each foundation before the Legislature, and add that the minister can require that additional information be included in a foundation's annual report. We will update the name of the minister and include an amendment to the University Pension Plan Transfer Act to remove reference to the University Foundations Act.

While some of these changes are housekeeping in nature, they'll also help our universities in making their operations more efficient. Most importantly, these amendments align the government's broader commitment to reduce regulatory burden. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[7:45 p.m.]

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

BRIAN COMER: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 223. I have spoken to the chair of the Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents as well as all the other stakeholders involved in this legislation, who are all highly supportive. Based on my own research, this appears to be administrative housekeeping that makes it easier for universities to receive donations. I would support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm also glad to stand and speak to Bill No. 223. We are glad to see that the government is listening and adopting these changes that were asked for by some of the universities. They seem like logical and important changes to reduce red tape and to streamline administrative processes. We look forward to hearing any other feedback at Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Labour and Advanced Education.

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: I rise to close debate on Bill No. 223.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 223. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill. No. 226.

**Bill No. 226 - Companies Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I move that Bill No. 226, the Companies Act, be read for a second time. I look forward to hearing comments from members opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

LISA ROBERTS: We believe in corporate transparency and think that decreasing illegal activity through improved transparency and penalties is a good thing. We're pleased to see that Nova Scotia is working to meet national standards related to this. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and P.E.I. have instituted similar legislation and we feel it's important for Nova Scotia to do the same.

Penalties associated with non-compliance with the Act's regulations are a good thing. It's important that private companies increase their transparency and face penalties if they do not comply with regulations or regulatory authorities.

While I understand that the government has consulted with legal representatives and private companies as well as other stakeholders on the bill, we nonetheless look forward to hearing from the public at Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, that speech by the minister was so quick that I didn't have a chance to get up. I know we're doing things in a bit of a different order than numerical here.

This legislation looks positive. It's important that there's protection for consumers out there. As I understand it, this bill has to do with collecting beneficial owner information of people who have ownership of companies, of incorporated entities. A lot of good people start companies, but there are some bad people out there who start companies and they steal money from people and steal money from the government. If this bill helps to prevent tax evasion and money laundering and other illegal activity, we're fully supportive of that.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I'd like to thank the members opposite for their support of this bill. As my colleagues did state, the amendments that we're introducing today are put in as safeguards to prevent money laundering and illegal activities surrounding private and public businesses in Nova Scotia. We're following federal guidelines, working with our federal and territorial and provincial counterparts to make sure that, moving forward, information on beneficial ownership is easily accessible for law enforcement and for tax purposes.

I appreciate that we're going to have more consultation moving forward and I look forward to hearing any comments from the Law Amendments Committee. With that, I close second reading of Bill No. 226.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 226. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 228.

**Bill No. 228 - Housing Nova Scotia Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. CHUCK PORTER: It's a pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill No. 228, an Act to amend the Housing Nova Scotia Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, any time we can come up with more tools in our tool chest to help provide affordable, sustainable, safe housing is a good day. This is one of those things where we expand the objects and powers of Housing Nova Scotia to include the provision of financial assistance directly to Housing Nova Scotia clients.

I'm looking forward to seeing the regulations. That's where we'll see, hopefully, a reflection in the budget, in the Estimates we're going through now. If we can get that later when we go through the Estimates to see where it would be applicable to that bill, that would be very helpful.

We have no questions over here, and the Progressive Conservative caucus members are supportive of this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

LISA ROBERTS: I, too, am glad to see that we are making a small step towards facilitating greater development of affordable housing. As we have spoken to many times in this Legislature, there are many things that need to be done on this file. Getting out of the way of municipalities taking some action on this is good sense. I would say that it's wholly inadequate given the challenges that we face, but I look forward to hearing more about this at the Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. CHUCK PORTER: I appreciate the comments from members opposite. I move to close second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 228. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 230.

**Bill No. 230 - Municipal Government Act and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. CHUCK PORTER: I'm pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill No. 230, an Act to amend the Municipal Government Act and the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, respecting ministerial approvals.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

STEVE CRAIG: We're removing the signature requirement from the minister when a municipality has an expenditure, whether it's a leasehold, capital expenditure, and payments in the case of non-HRM over \$100,000 and in HRM of \$500,000. That's a good thing.

The concern I had was associated with the auditability of that to ensure that the monies were being correctly spent. However, I do know that municipalities do have their own audit procedures, and they will be looking at this. Also, at a higher level, it could be captured in some particular audits that we do, so we're not too concerned about that.

Of course, Clause 2 removes the approval of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing where another minister has a signature that's required too. On this side of the House, any time we can remove unnecessary work from the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing so they can rely on and do more substantive work, we're in agreement with that. This removes some red tape, and it's in that category. We indeed are supportive.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

LISA ROBERTS: We see this as housekeeping bill and certainly one that we are comfortable supporting, subject to anything that we hear that surprises us at the Law Amendments Committee. We're glad to see that the government is listening to municipalities and has presented this small change.

However, we can't help but think of all the missed opportunities to address the many other changes that have been asked for by municipalities and, in many cases, by our caucus, things such as inclusionary zoning, voting rights for permanent residents, local power over speed limits on local roads, and revisiting the municipal funding formula. May this set a precedent of working collaboratively with municipalities across Nova Scotia.

In the meantime, we will look forward to hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. CHUCK PORTER: Again, I appreciate the comments from the members opposite. As the member for Sackville-Cobequid has pointed out, there is certainly an audit process in place by the municipal units for the practices that we are removing there. Around the ministerial approvals, it is, indeed, a duplication, and it can slow things down. This is making things more progressive as we move along here.

Regardless of what people might think, we are constantly working with our municipal partners on many fronts. Even though some members may not think that, I can assure you it's a busy portfolio. We have a good relationship with the NSF, and we'll continue to have that. We'll continue to consider all options and opportunities that they may bring to the department for review.

With those few comments, I move to close debate on Bill No. 230.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 230. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 225.

**Bill No. 225 - Elections Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. MARK FUREY: I move that Bill No. 225, An Act to Amend Chapter 5 of the Acts of 2011, the Elections Act, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand this evening to speak about amendments to the Elections Act. These changes will make it easier for Nova Scotians to vote in provincial elections and better support those who wish to serve their communities and fellow citizens by running for public office. There are over 40 changes to the Elections Act included in this bill, so I will touch on some of the highlights.

After the 2017 provincial general election, the Chief Electoral Officer released a report with several recommendations to improve the administration of elections. These recommendations, based on analysis and consultation with stakeholders, are about modernizing our systems. We want to bring the Elections Act in line with the needs of today's voters while maintaining our position as a recognized leader in electoral administrative reform in the country.

This includes protecting the rights of voters who do not wish to be identified by their gender. One's gender identity has nothing to do with the right to vote or the validity of the vote they cast. By making gender identification optional, we are respecting the rights of those who don't wish to share this personal information.

Mr. Speaker, we're also proposing changes that will support the participation of more Nova Scotians to seek elected office by reimbursing candidates for additional family- and accessibility-related expenses incurred during the election. This funding will support greater accessibility for candidates with a disability and assist candidates with expenses for child care, spousal care, elder care, or care for a person with a disability regularly supported by the candidate. I know that candidates and their families make sacrifices. Public service is foundational to our democracy, and my hope is that these changes will reduce barriers

to running, especially for women who are primary caregivers in their families and persons with disabilities.

Technological advancements have expanded options for the way we vote, including the ability to vote online or establish electronic tracking of votes. Before adopting any such practices, it is important that we ensure the appropriate IT processes and securities are in place to protect voter privacy. The changes to the Elections Act will allow Elections Nova Scotia to further explore options for the use of technology, including electronic ballots. If, following proper due diligence, a satisfactory process is identified, Elections Nova Scotia will be able to facilitate the introduction of electronic voting technology at early voting opportunities.

This will give Nova Scotians other ways to cast their ballots at advance polling stations. Although technology will not eliminate the use of printed ballots, it would expedite the reporting of results on election day and help reduce the risk of human error in vote counting.

[8:00 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, the amendments will also grant authority for Elections Nova Scotia to work with the Canadian Armed Forces on the potential future use of online voting by members who are stationed out of province. In the last provincial general election, only 10 of the 200 eligible members posted overseas who applied to vote actually cast their ballots. This was due in large part to the time it takes to reach them with vote-by-mail write-in ballots. The introduction of online voting will remove this barrier and better support Nova Scotians who serve in the Armed Forces. Those who serve in uniform make tremendous sacrifices to protect and defend our democracy, and these changes will strengthen their democratic right to vote while serving overseas.

Mr. Speaker, we are also making changes to address the confusion that arises when a candidate withdraws or if a Party rescinds their endorsement after the nominations close. Under the current legislation, the candidate's name and Party still appear on the ballot. This is confusing for voters and results in an unnecessarily large number of rejected ballots.

We are also making changes to better protect electoral information and improve accountability by requiring not only candidates but also registered Parties to destroy their list of electors and to report having done so to the Chief Electoral Officer. In fact, Mr. Speaker, these changes would also allow the Chief Electoral Officer to impose fines if a candidate or registered Party does not destroy their electoral list or if registered Parties do not submit legislated financial reports. The Chief Electoral Officer can withhold funds owed to candidates or registered Parties if fines are not paid.

The amendments will also eliminate the need for witnesses when counting votes, provided at least two elections officials are present at the count. This will improve efficiencies while maintaining the integrity of the counting procedure.

This is all part of our approach to support a more accessible, transparent, strong, and honourable democratic system that better serves Nova Scotians' needs and the wishes of Nova Scotian voters. With those comments, I look forward to the comments of my colleagues opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, many of these recommendations have been hanging around since 2017. Now that they have come to the Legislature, maybe there is an election coming soon. (Interruptions)

That elicited a lot of comments, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what I should take from that. I was just staying silent in case there might be some hints in there.

In any case, I know most of the recommendations that Elections Nova Scotia put forward are in this legislation. I believe there are three that are not, but those are ones that the electoral commission was not unanimous on. I'm not going to go through them all, but I think the changes here are positive. They'll make democracy better. I'm going to point out just a couple of them.

Recount justification - my first election required a recount, but I don't think it should have had a recount because the statistical margin of error was too great to overcome. I think it was a waste of money and a waste of time. It actually kept me from sitting in this Legislature at that time. I missed part of the Fall sitting. I think to have a justification is important, and it makes sense. If people are going to request a recount, it should be based on something that is reasonable.

Voting before close of nominations was one that was not included in this legislation because it did not have unanimous support from the commission. That's an interesting one. The challenge there is that you can have people voting before the close of nominations. They may be voting for a person, or they may be voting for a Party, and you don't know. There could come a point, as we have seen in a recent byelection, where people voting may have been voting for a person, but their vote may have gotten recorded for a Party. I suppose it's possible that it could go vice versa.

I don't know how they're going to get around that. I did hear some comment made by someone, I think Elections Nova Scotia made a comment, that they may have some ways to get around that the next time. I know that was a concern for some. I raise it here because it's an interesting one. It raises the point, if people are going to be able to vote



before nominations close, who are they really voting for? That's a challenge unless of course people weren't voting until after those nominations closed and it was set in stone.

The last point I'll mention - I think we can all remember in the 2017 election how we were all waiting around until well after midnight to see what the final result was. I know that's frustrating no matter what side of politics you're on, and for the public. It's not as good as watching a sudden death, seven-period hockey game - maybe for some it is - but it took a long time to get the final result.

I think with Recommendation 14 - that's from the 2017 Recommendations, it's included in this legislation, that says one-half hour after the polls close, they'll be able to have the advance votes counted. As I recall, that was one of the reasons why some of the returns were so late in being finalized the last time around.

It would be interesting if they could post the vote, wherever it is cast, to the poll that the voter would have been voting in for that advance vote. I think that would be interesting for those of us who like to look to see how the polls actually shake out in the end. Perhaps an acknowledgement that it was an advance vote for statistical purposes. I know that would be something of interest that it kind of presents a more accurate picture of how the votes were recorded for a poll-by-poll results.

We will be supporting this legislation and look forward to hearing other's comments on it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I will rise to say a few words. We are supportive of this as has been mentioned. These changes have been kicking around for a long time.

I've had the opportunity to meet with the Chief Electoral Officer and discuss these. Of course, Elections Nova Scotia is an independent body, reports to all members of this House, not just to the minister. I've been pleased to have an open line with them and pleased to see most of the changes that have been brought forward coming into force in this bill.

I think the modernization in general is great. I think there are lots of little changes that just needed to happen. As the minister spoke of, the ability for electors to note their preferred gender rather than sex is important. This is a positive change that we're seeing across legislation and that I think is going to be a meaningful change for many Nova Scotians.

We're very pleased to see campaign expenses expanded to include elder care, child care and accessibility. We have lots of questions about how that will be enacted, how that

will be calculated, how that will be rebated at the federal level - it's a separate rebate. I don't know what that will look like, but we are certainly eager to see it. Perhaps we'll hear something at the Committee on Law Amendments about how that might come forward and be codified.

I really like my colleague's suggestion that we could tie advance votes to a poll and mark them as advanced. I think statistically that would be a helpful thing in the political process as we move more and more to continuous polling and advance voting. That's likely something that may or may not have been discussed, but I think it's something that makes eminent sense.

As far as the advance votes, I confess I actually fell asleep before my district was called, it was so early in the morning. So, I think that is a welcome change, that people will have more certainty over the outcome of the ballot that they cast earlier in the evening this time.

With those few comments, I'll look forward to hearing comments at the Committee on Law Amendments, and I will take my seat.

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

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today to give a few words here on Bill No. 225, an Act to Amend the Elections Act.

This bill overall, I'm very supportive of the modernization that it's proposing. I think it's really important that in our democratic process we have an election that is as fair and as accessible as possible, and that's presented to the voting public with as much integrity as possible.

I know Elections Nova Scotia does an extraordinary job in doing that. I, too, had the pleasure of being able to speak with the Chief Electoral Officer with regard to these changes and also had a few questions myself about some things that are not reflected in some of the amendments that are in this bill.

Overall the support, as some of my colleagues have mentioned - with reimbursing families and those with accessibility issues - is wonderful, I think. It opens up the possibility for more people to put their names forward to represent their constituencies. Again, that increases fairness and it increases inclusion.

I think when we see electronic voting or internet voting, many people have concerns around hacking issues or issues around making sure that nobody tampers with votes between when they're cast and when they come in to be read or accounted for with the Elections Nova Scotia process. As I understand, it's only going to be open right now to

military members who are deployed. Obviously, we want to be able to give equal access to everyone, especially those who are away defending our country on our behalf.

There's a couple of things here that I wished we could have seen reflected in this amendment. One thing that I'm very passionate about, and for some reason I can't really understand why - we're in the "cradle of Confederation" here, yet we're the last province out of ten not to enact fixed elections. We have fixed election dates federally, and all the rest of the provinces have fixed election dates. The Premier himself, I believe back in 2013, tabled legislation or a bill to try and enact fixed election dates. Obviously, he was supportive of it at the time. We have the NDP on record in support of fixed election dates, and the former Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party also tabled the identical legislation for fixed election dates as did the Premier, in 2016.

I have to ask, and I would ask the minister if he could please perhaps comment in the closing remarks why, if the Premier himself - and we have the Opposition Parties on record and on board for fixed election dates - why this legislation hasn't been enacted. I know that it was a recommendation put forward by Elections Nova Scotia, and yet it seems to still be kind of tucked aside. I'm very proud here in Nova Scotia that we're in the middle, we're in the home place of where Confederation started basically, yet we're still standing off on putting this legislation through.

With the changes in the boundaries happening, we're going from 51 constituencies to 55. We need more returning officers to be put into place in these constituencies. There's a lot of work to be done. There's a lot of work to be done to prepare for a general election. This is a really huge expense to the province. I think the last two general elections cost the province more than \$9 million each, and the next general election is going to be approximately \$12 million to this province. It's a huge price tag.

I believe that in fairness and wanting to be inclusive and wanting things to be as equitable as possible to the people that we serve, but also to all members in this House in order for them to become prepared and also all those who may want to put their name forward to run in elections. I think it's really important to try and level the playing field.

We don't want to see the continuation, or I would not want to see the continuation of the practice that it's just the majority government that's in power that basically gets to call the election. If we knew when an election was going to happen, we could all better prepare and Elections Nova Scotia could better prepare as well. I understand they've pushed their election readiness date back to April 1, 2021.

Again, I guess there's a couple of other things here too. The fixed election dates, obviously, is one. The other thing, as well, is - and the member for Inverness has mentioned, I think - about the close of nominations, the early voting that goes in prior to nominations closing. It seems to be kind of a grey area and a loophole here.

[8:15 p.m.]

If we're looking at wanting to make certain that we do fairness and we have a system that has the highest integrity, I would hope that we would want to make certain that any votes that went towards a particular candidate while they were a member of a particular Party is dealt with in the fairest way possible, if that candidate is removed as a nominated candidate for that Party at the eleventh hour before nominations close.

As I understand, of the 132 votes that had been cast in Northside-Westmount, there's 97 that went to the Party and 10 to the candidate. I'm sure you're all very thankful, as well as the candidates are thankful, for Elections Nova Scotia stepping in and being able to mediate that issue, but I don't think that issue should have to happen in the first place. I believe that there's no reason why we can't wait for early voting to happen after nominations close; that when candidates go and they cast their ballot; they know exactly who it is and where it is that their votes are going to be going.

The other aspect of this is that I'm sure most Nova Scotians are aware, and we're very aware in this House, that we've had a lot of our colleagues who have left, either for illness or have gone on to put their name forward for federal nomination. If somebody obviously leaves their post as an MLA for health reasons, my heart goes out to them. But MLAs that leave mid-term or halfway through a term - we've made a commitment when we put our name on the ballots to be here and represent people.

It has cost this province \$1.2 million - that's \$200,000 approximately - per by-election. It's a huge amount of money to put a by-election on, and when you're looking at it as Elections Nova Scotia, I believe that they budget for at least one by-election a year, but we've had six of them this year alone. This could be kind of a blip in the system with so many people going on to federal politics. Again, we should be looking at that and seeing what can be done to ensure that taxpayers aren't on the hook quite so much when a member decides to move on to either federal politics or another position of some sort.

The last thing I want to say here is that, again, all things considered, we want to make certain that taxpayers are protected as much as possible. We want to make 100 per cent sure that Nova Scotians have equal access, to be able to have their voice represented not only in this House but obviously represented when they go to cast their ballots. I'd really appreciate if the minister would take into consideration some of the things that I have put forward here today, especially the fixed elections.

With that, I will take my seat and I look forward to who comes forward in Law Amendments Committee. Thank you.

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

BARBARA ADAMS: I'm pleased to stand today to talk about the Elections Act, Bill No. 225.

To my mind, there is only one reason why a government would not want fixed election dates - that's because it gives them a political advantage. What the public wants is for us to spend their money wisely. This came to light in the last election I was involved in, when in the Fall prior to the election, the government paid - and I forget exactly how much money but it was a lot of money, possibly over \$1 million - to train the people who were going to work in the polling stations to do their job, just in case the government pulled the trigger and called the election in the Fall. They didn't.

These same people got retrained six months later to do the same job. That's a waste of money. That's not fair. That's a government using its power and its failure to bring in the same legislation that applies to the rest of the country of having fixed election dates, using their advantage and our taxpayer dollars, to keep that advantage.

The other people who were disadvantaged, and I reference this, are the employers who are possibly going to lose an employee for the 30 days during the election. So there are a whole lot of business owners out there and a whole lot of private business owners who are saying to their bosses, I might be gone for 30 straight days but I don't know when.

I know that my employer was very, very lenient. I was running a home care physiotherapy and OT company and I had to say to them, I might be disappearing on you at a moment's notice. There were 20 people whose jobs depended on me doing my job, and now I'm putting their jobs at risk because I am going to take off, and they are not going to have anybody to replace me because, if I lost, I was coming back. That's not fair. We can do better if we have fixed election dates.

There are also people who might be in the military who want to run in an election. We have a huge military presence in Nova Scotia, but you can't run in an election while you are still an active member. You have to take a leave of absence. You can imagine how happy the military is to have a member say, I might need a leave of absence. I might be in the middle of a deployment. Now you've messed with somebody's possibility of promotion because they want the right to run in an election.

We want the most diverse candidate pool possible. It will be a whole lot easier if there were fixed election dates in order for that to happen.

The final group that we need to show respect for is the family that supports us while we are here. There are people who are literally holding off on pregnancies because there may be an election call. There are people who are holding off on vacations that they need for their mental health because there might be an election call. I personally get to miss out on a trip with my friends every year because we are sitting in the Legislature. That's my sacrifice.

The sacrifice of our family members needs to be accounted for, too, because some of those family members are going to need to go back to work while we're taking a leave of absence from our jobs so they can still pay the bills. If we want to support people who are less economically strong as some of the candidates who run - single women, people who have only one person at home who can look after the children and who are going to need a babysitter the whole time they are out door-knocking - we must do everything we can to make this election process as attractive as possible.

I will ask, during the minister's comments, that if he is not in favour of fixed election dates, he can explain to Nova Scotians why they spent that extra money to train people when they didn't really need it, just in case they pulled the trigger, and if he can explain to Nova Scotians why he is disadvantaging the business owners and the businesses that have to let go of somebody at the last minute. Or perhaps he would be willing to amend his own legislation and to include fixed election dates. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. MARK FUREY: I thank my colleagues for their comments. We will allow the legislative process to run its course. I know these items will come up in Law Amendments Committee and most likely third reading.

I would say this very quickly. I appreciate the comments from my colleagues, recognizing the work that Elections Nova Scotia has done in bringing these recommendations forward. Mr. Temporale and his team have done a tremendous amount of work since the last election in their review of those election results and activities to advance the recommendations that they did. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for that work, as well as my colleagues in the Department of Justice who worked very closely with Elections Nova Scotia in the preparation of the bill and the resulting discussions that landed us where we are today.

I'm going to make one quick comment on fixed election dates. This discourse can play out and dialogue can play out through the process but, quite frankly, fixed election dates don't work. It's been seen where they're not applied. Nova Scotia doesn't have to be a follower just because every other province does this. We look at them, we give it a good analysis, and there have been situations where fixed election dates are not adhered to.

Around the extra cost to train - I thank my colleague for bringing that matter forward - that has been a topic of discussion. She's quite right that in the past money has been expended to train. That was the argument that we advanced in discussions in this Legislature and outside this Legislature, around prudent fiscal management and the appropriation of funds to Elections Nova Scotia. I want to thank my colleague for reinforcing the point that I have publicly taken in the past.

With those few comments, I again want to thank my colleagues for their comments and look forward to further dialogue through this legislative process.

With that, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 225.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 225. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 227.

**Bill No. 227 - Legal Aid Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. MARK FUREY: I move that Bill No. 227, an Act to Amend Chapter 252 of the Revised Statutes of 1989, the Legal Aid Act, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand this evening to speak to amendments to the Legal Aid Act, amendments that will support access to legal services for vulnerable Nova Scotians like those who are low income, those who are part of historically disadvantaged communities in our province, women and children, and those who struggle most.

The Legal Aid Act has not had an overall update since it was first introduced in 1977. We all know the value of legal aid services and the fact that they are evolving to be so much more than free legal representation to low-income Nova Scotians.

There is a growing realization, not only here but internationally, that legal aid services have enormous value, both socially and economically, that can extend beyond legal representation. When legal aid services are client-centred and focused on preventive approaches, we know that there are huge benefits for Nova Scotians.

The proposed changes will support Nova Scotia Legal Aid to provide services that will help reduce or avoid court proceedings. We know that early resolution of matters can take many forms. In child protection matters, early advice can often keep families together and matters out of court; in criminal matters when clients have early advice and access to duty counsel there are better results for our clients, for victims of crime and for communities. This is one of the ways the Nova Scotia Legal Aid is working to put Nova Scotians first with the right services at the right time.

[8:30 p.m.]

In response to a recommendation from the legal aid board, the changes will also reduce the size of the board from 17 to 11 members; this will help make the board more efficient. We also want to recognize in legislation the importance of board members' familiarity with Indigenous, Black and Mi'kmaq communities when nominations are made for board memberships. These changes will help ensure the board is more reflective of the diversity of Nova Scotia.

The changes will also give Nova Scotia Legal Aid greater autonomy over their operations to support innovation and efficiency with the authority to create their own governance, policies and procedures. We feel that these updates will allow the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission to become better equipped, to continue to provide flexible, cost efficient, preventative services as the needs of Nova Scotians change. These changes are about reflecting and protecting the changes that legal aid and government have put into practice.

Ultimately, these amendments will result in providing better services for Nova Scotians and continued cost savings throughout the system. Our goal is for legal aid to be able to be responsive to the needs of people they serve now and into the future. These changes are about putting Nova Scotians first.

This is all part of our approach to improve access to justice for Nova Scotians, especially for our most vulnerable communities. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues in Opposition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

KIM MASLAND: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill No. 227, the Legal Aid Act.

In Nova Scotia Legal Aid offers invaluable services to Nova Scotians. Being involved in a situation where you need a lawyer can be very intimidating, but Nova Scotia Legal Aid is accessible and provides legal services to people facing a range of issues.

I note the changes contained in Bill No. 227 are endorsed by the Chair of the Nova Scotia Legal Aid society. He has indicated these changes will improve access to justice for marginalized Nova Scotians, and anytime we can increase access to justice it's a good thing.

The PC caucus supports changes like the ones in Bill No. 227. We support innovation and modernization and strengthening the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.



CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, our caucus is also very supportive of the work done by legal aid. We've been happy to see the gradual expansion of responsibility of legal aid in the last few years in particular, particularly where it helps address access to justice issues, which we know are many.

The changes that are in this bill that help legal aid to address issues of income security and housing are very welcome, especially at this moment. We know the work of these front line providers, as with many, is becoming more complex and more difficult. I think the more we can make that work effective and support it, the better. I think this bill, as far as we've been able to see, does just that.

We're pleased to offer our support. We're happy to see the endorsement of legal aid. The only comment I would have is that I would hope that the funding offered to legal aid is commensurate with the additional responsibility that it continues to acquire as its scope expands.

With that I will look forward to hearing the comments of folks at the Committee on Law Amendments, and I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for their comments. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Mr. George Ash who is the Chair of the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission and Executive Director Megan Longley. We have a tremendous work relationship. I must say they certainly put the interests of vulnerable Nova Scotians first and work in a very collaborative manner to find solutions.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I would be further remiss if I didn't acknowledge the commitment and hard work of the Deputy Minister of Justice, Karen Hudson. Karen has spent a career in legal aid, has brought enormous knowledge and awareness of the criminal justice system and is a key contributor in the dialogue and discussions we've had with Legal Aid. I wanted to acknowledge her here in front of my peers for the work she's done, specific to this area but holistically across the Department of Justice.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I rise to close debate on Bill No. 227, the Legal Aid Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 227. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 232.

**Bill No. 232 - Electricity Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Mines and Energy.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 232, amendments to the Electricity Act, now be read a second time.

Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I introduced changes to create what is a Green Choice Program. This program will give large electricity customers the ability to purchase clean electricity through an independent and competitive process, at the same time protecting ratepayers. This will allow our electricity system to be more flexible, while creating green economic growth and new jobs in communities across our province.

In August, as many would know, the federal government approached us to help get 100 per cent renewable electricity for all federally-owned facilities in the province of Nova Scotia by 2022. These amendments are necessary for that goal.

Essentially, this project is going to create tens of millions of dollars in construction in our green economy, creating jobs across the province. It's estimated that it is going to create 100,000 megawatt hours of new renewable electricity, which is the equivalent of powering about 10,000 homes a year, so this is a very substantial project.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning. We have also heard from larger-scale private companies, large scale community organizations, and academia about having this opportunity to look at green choice, looking at greening their operations. This is another step that government is taking to support our green initiatives, and they continue to be a leader across the country and North America. With that, I look forward to the comments from my colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I know this legislation, as the minister said - I think it was mostly driven by the federal government's desire to have renewable energy powering all their buildings. That does come at a premium price, but there are many people out there now who are willing to pay more for their power if it's green power. If you can give them the option to do that, all things being equal, if it's not hurting somebody else, I think that's a good thing. Let people choose.

In this case, the federal government is choosing for taxpayers. I guess one could say that - I don't know if it would be a popular vote, if the majority of Canadian taxpayers would support that, but they certainly won the last election in terms of seats. That is one distinction I would like to make, Mr. Speaker: the federal government is making that decision for people.

On the day of the announcement of this legislation, I believe the government mentioned something about large power users having some ability, as well. I've been kind of exploring that, but I haven't really uncovered a lot in my research on what opportunities might lie ahead there. Maybe they are in the very early stages of development but that's something I'm keeping my eye on.

Mr. Speaker, I guess the one caution and the one question I would ask is, what is the impact of more renewable energy? This is where I think it's important because there's a great popularity now to be supportive of the environment and to focus on renewable energy. But let's make sure that decisions that are being made by governments are ones that result in improvements and protection for the environment. I am going to raise a couple of questions here. Maybe they are things that the minister can address in future remarks. I wouldn't expect him to address them tonight.

I've toured Nova Scotia Power's operations facilities. You can see how they are balancing - when the wind stops blowing, they have to ramp up power plants that are often burning coal in this province. It's a delicate balance because if you don't ramp up the plant quickly enough as the wind drops, you could have blackouts, technically. That exists in some parts of the world where they probably don't have the infrastructure as advanced as we have here - you get blackouts. I know people would not want that. We know what it's like when we lose power for a few days here. With the last hurricane - what was it? (Interruption) Hurricane Dorian and how much angst that caused for people. I'm glad I forgot the name of it because I don't want to remember that one.

The point being with Nova Scotia Power, if the more renewable energy is up there on the grid, the more challenge they have with the balancing as that power drops because the environment is not able to provide it. If you're ramping up these coal plants very quickly - as I understand it - it's not as efficient as having a coal plant operating at a stable, steady rate. You could in fact generate more emissions during the period when you're ramping up that coal plant to make up for the loss of wind power, which may in fact be creating more emissions than necessary.

I raise these questions because, yes, renewable energy can be a good thing. However, Mr. Speaker, let's make sure that as it's being used it's not having negative consequences somewhere else. Let's look at it and let's be smart about it.

The minister talked about there being a substantial amount of power potentially being added here to the grid - 10,000 homes' worth. Well, if there's that much less

generation through our existing power plants in the province, that means there's less power being generated over the same number of assets. If you do the math on that, the cost goes up for the public - unless, of course, you can retire perhaps one of those power plants. Of course, if you do that, you're losing the value of that power plant because I don't think it will be worth a lot of money. It's not something you can package up and sell to somebody else.

Those are things that impact the price of power and affordability. Let's not forget about affordability. I think that in the past we've seen governments reach for improvements to create more green forms of energy. I think of the COMFIT program, Mr. Speaker. If you are an environmentalist and you are in favour of more green power, the COMFIT program resulted in Nova Scotians paying a premium for green energy. If you were a true environmentalist and you understood economics, you could have put more green power in the grid for the same price. I believe that program was a failure in that sense, if you are a believer in green energy.

I raise those points, Mr. Speaker, because we need to be thinking about those things. There are many politicians who will pat themselves on the back for doing things for the environment, when maybe they're not looking at things as closely as they should be.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I feel like I'm in a little bit of an upside-down world because I know that I'm supposed to be opposing the government and now I feel like I have to direct my comments to what we just heard from the member for Inverness. (Interruptions)

I'm all off balance here, Mr. Speaker. Just forgive me while I try to collect my thoughts. I will basically start by saying, and now for something completely different. No, not quite, but I will say that the initial thing I was going to say that this is a good step in the right direction - a small step forward for us environmentalists in the room and in the province.

[8:45 p.m.]

Listen, folks, if we don't make some of these changes today, we are going to be in a bad state of affairs in the next couple of years. I do applaud that the government is moving forward in this way. We need to see, of course, that the program is useful and is going to work and is going to be taken up by large customers before we can actually evaluate the success of this idea.

Here's an idea for you, Mr. Speaker, and for the Minister of Energy and Mines. Given that the federal government has shown leadership in this way of wanting to green all of their buildings by 2022, which is pretty impressive, we would like to ask that the

provincial government take up the same challenge. This is the spirit of the bill that we introduced in 2018 - Bill No. 112 - the carbon neutral government bill - which would require all provincial buildings and provincial fleets to be carbon neutral by 2028. If it's good enough for the federal government, it's good enough for the provincial government.

We also continue to hope - hope springs eternal - for stronger renewable energy targets in this province and a clear picture of how our stronger energy targets are going to fit into this plan. Contrary to what my colleague may believe and suggest, I actually think that one of the faults with this bill is the title, the Green Choice Program.

We need to have a government that is going to be bold and visionary when it comes to a transformation into the green economy and into a future where global warming does not go more than 1.5 degrees. We need a government that's going to give us strong targets from green jobs and renewable energy and not one that leaves it up to the choice of customers. We need to make it so good that the only choice is to go green.

This is an opportunity to create some green jobs, but this government needs to go further in order to transform our economy and create the thousands of green jobs that are possible in this climate moment. For more information on this idea, I draw the House's attention to Bill No. 108, the Green Jobs Act. It outlines an entire idea about this bold visionary movement.

This government continues to fail to provide a comprehensive plan for how we're going to transform our economy. Like I said earlier, I hope we can continue to take bolder and more visionary steps towards truly transforming the economy to a green economy. Too much is at stake environmentally, but also too much is at stake economically. We need good, strong, smart jobs in this province, and this is a way to do it.

We look forward to hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee and debating this further in third reading.

**THE SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN:** I just wanted to add a couple of comments to those of my colleague, and that is this bill certainly sounds good, the green economic growth initiative. I just hope that the department looks at the fact that low-impact renewable energy includes wind, solar, and also biomass.

I hope during the procurement process that everything is looked at and the whole entire life cycle analysis. Right now, we have an opportunity in this province to use our own renewable natural resource of wood. I just hope the department and my colleagues across the floor are taking a real look at the life cycle analysis and making sure the forestry products that we have available here in this province are part of that calculation and part of the consideration.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Energy and Mines.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I really appreciate the comments from all my colleagues. The member for Inverness had a number of questions. I'm happy to have that conversation in third reading. Maritime Link is coming online, so we are seeing a huge transition when that happens.

I do agree with my colleagues from the NDP about a lot of their comments.

It's also a great opportunity for me to say that we have just been ranked in 2019 as the best solar program in Canada because of our insulation costs and the program and the incentives. We were just ranked number one in our efficiency programs through Efficiency Canada. This is the interesting piece: when it comes to the economy, we're now ranked number one in Canada in workforce training in our efficiency industries. This has been in the last year or so.

We are going to continue to push in regard to the idea around doing it for provincially owned buildings. We have really been focusing on the overall grid for Nova Scotians to ensure that everybody could access the programs. That's why we expanded our efficiency programs. That's why we signed the deal with our 13 Mi'kmaw communities for retrofitting 2,400 homes. That's why we're looking at all these incentives: because we wanted to ensure that Nova Scotians could access as many programs as possible with the resources that were there.

This green choice is taking a big leap into large-scale private-sector companies that want to green their infrastructure and that have supply chains that want to do the same. We're giving them that ability. It started with the federal government, but we didn't want to limit it to that. Once we got into the path of designing this, we said, why limit it here? We have universities that may want to do this. We have colleges that may want to do this. We have large-scale industrial companies that may want to do this. We're talking to them on a daily basis. That's really where the green choice piece is.

We will continue to look at every avenue as a province, first and foremost starting with Nova Scotians who need help the most when it comes to their energy bills. We're saving them \$900 a year now on their bills, on average.

It's building new partnerships with communities across Nova Scotia so that if we can partner on larger-scale projects, we're going to do that. We're looking at electrification of our own fleets. We're looking at electrification of fleets with municipalities - solar projects, solar farms, et cetera. We're doing all that work.

This green choice is going to create tens of millions of dollars in construction in communities across the province. The federal government wants to do this. It is going to result in hundreds of jobs, and we need to capitalize on it.

I really appreciate everybody's comments. With that I close second reading of Bill No. 232.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 232. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

KEITH IRVING: That concludes the government's business for today. I move that the House do now rise, to meet again Friday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Following daily routine and Question Period, business will include the continuation of Committee of the Whole on Supply to deal with the Budget Estimates and, with time permitting, second reading of Bill Nos. 233 and 234.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for us to adjourn to meet again tomorrow, Friday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 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, February 28<sup>th</sup>, at 9:00 a.m.

[The House rose at 8:53 p.m.]