



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Third Session

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

Sixty-third General Assembly

Third Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

[The Third Session of the 63rd General Assembly was opened with a hybrid ceremony on a cold, snowy day.]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor.

[The Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Arthur J. LeBlanc, preceded by his escorts, and by Mr. David Fraser, Sergeant-at-Arms, bearing the Mace, entered the House of Assembly Chamber. The Lieutenant Governor then took his seat on the Throne.

The Sergeant-at-Arms then departed and re-entered the Chamber, followed by the Speaker, the Honourable Kevin Murphy and the Chief Clerk of the House, James Charlton.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: It is the wish of His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, that the ladies and gentlemen be seated.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**Recovery, Renewal, Respect - Nova Scotia's Next Chapter**

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, ladies and gentlemen, Nova Scotians. Welcome to the 3rd Session of the 63rd General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature. Today, we would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathering in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaw people. As such, we have a reverence for our natural world and a belief in protecting it and sharing its bounty.

Our gathering may look different than in previous years, but the importance and value of what we are participating in today does not. Nova Scotia is considered the cradle of Canadian democracy, and just as we led the way in creating a fair and equitable system that gives voice to the people, so do we lead today across Canada in the way in which we responded to the virulent coronavirus.

La Nouvelle-Écosse est considérée comme le berceau de la démocratie canadienne. Tout comme nous avons ouvert la voie à la création d'un système équitable qui offre une voix au peuple, nous sommes aussi des chefs de file au Canada dans la façon dont nous avons réagi à la virulence du coronavirus.

As citizens, we have adjusted, we have adapted, we have sacrificed, and we have emerged as the envy of the rest of Canada. Across the country, Canadians are facing the same issues. Yet, throughout this last year of the pandemic, we have managed our public and financial health well. We kept our house in order, and if we continue to make the right choices, we could emerge from the pandemic faster and stronger than our peers.

As COVID-19 cases were multiplying in other provinces, profoundly testing health care systems, our streamlined health authority stood up. Our foundations remained strong. Nova Scotians are being vaccinated against COVID-19, creating that coveted immunity and bringing with it the promise of a life that is less uncertain.

As population growth stalled in many corners of the country, we continue to see positive signs that people want to live in Nova Scotia. Every one of our 18 counties welcomed more new residents from across the country than the previous year. Consequently, we are able to invest prudently in areas that need our attention: our climate; our economy; and addressing issues of fairness such as systemic racism, mental health and addictions, and those inequalities revealed by the pandemic in our long-term care facilities.

This nexus between the environment, economy, and equity is the focus of my government's agenda. This, and a commitment to the people of this province that my government will constantly strive to improve the lives and livelihoods of all of us. Recovery, renewal, and respect are the themes of our next chapter, and frame my government's vision for this decade of Nova Scotia.

IN MEMORIAM

Before we look to the future, we can't forget our past. This last year, Nova Scotians were tested and shaken to their core by tragic events. And so, we pause to remember the 65 Nova Scotians who died from the coronavirus. We pause to reflect on that horrific and tragic day in April when we woke up to reports of a gunman, posing as a police officer, on a shooting rampage that started in a peaceful corner of our beautiful province and ended with the deaths of 22 Nova Scotians.

We remember them and we think of their families, friends, and loved ones whom they left behind.

There were others, too - daughters and sons of Nova Scotia - who died serving our country and province.

Nous ne les oublions pas, et nous gardons dans nos pensées leurs familles, leurs amis et leurs proches. Il y a aussi d'autres fils et filles de la Nouvelle-Écosse qui ont donné leur vie au service de leur pays et de leur province.

Captain Jennifer Casey, a public affairs officer with Canada's Snowbirds, who died while on Operation Inspiration, aimed at honouring those who sacrificed during the early days of the pandemic. She made the ultimate sacrifice.

Three other Nova Scotians, Sub-Lieutenant Abbigail Cowbrough, Captain Brenden Ian MacDonald, and Sub-Lieutenant Matthew Pyke, were killed in the crash of a Canadian military helicopter, thousands of kilometres from home off the coast of Greece.

Here at home, six fishermen perished in the Bay of Fundy, in the waters that sustained their livelihoods, with the sinking of the *Chief William Saulis*.

Since the last Throne Speech, we lost many members of this House, as well, including former speaker Ron Russell and two of Nova Scotia's political giants, former Premiers John Buchanan and Gerald Regan.

HONOURING ALEXA MCDONOUGH

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Alexa McDonough's election to this chamber and her extraordinary political career. Ms. McDonough was the first woman in Canada to lead a major political Party as leader of the federal NDP, but before that she was a Party of one for many years, and the only woman, in this House.

RECOVERY, RENEWAL, AND RESPECT

So much of how we are living our lives is viewed through the lens of the global pandemic. It has thrown challenges at us but also afforded opportunities and revealed areas that need attention, especially around inclusion, economic equality, and respect for our environment.

In framing my government's vision for Nova Scotia, it is nearly impossible to untangle and separate these three elements. These are the threads of steel that support the foundations of our plan. The health of our economy depends on the health of our planet and province; the health of our province depends on the health of our people; the health of our people depends on how we are treated - with fairness and respect.

RECOVERY AND RESPECT: THE ENVIRONMENT

The world went into this global pandemic with problems, conflict, and contradictions that are making it less sustainable, less equal, and more fragile.

Foremost among these problems are the risks and consequences of the climate crisis. Nova Scotians will not be able to socially isolate from the effects of climate change. Climate change is the challenge of our generation, and my government has already begun to take decisive action to address this issue.

My government is committed to accelerating the phase-out of coal for energy use by 2030, 10 years earlier than planned. Nova Scotia will be the first province in Canada to achieve carbon neutrality. We will lead the way by ensuring that all of our government offices use renewable electricity by 2025. Our vision for the future of our beautiful province is not just aspirational.

On day one of our new government we acted - announcing a plan for \$19 million in funding for rebates on new and used electric vehicles, including e-bikes and energy-efficient home upgrades. Upgrading homes to make them more efficient will help lift low income and vulnerable communities out of energy poverty.

In this way, energy efficiency programs deliver for the economy, the environment, and our cost of living, giving more Nova Scotians the opportunity to take control of their energy bills with new products and technologies and home renovation.

In the forestry sector, my government will accelerate the implementation of the recommendations of the report of Professor William Lahey to adopt ecological forestry principles, placing protection of the ecosystem and biodiversity in the forefront of forest management practices. My government is committed to higher value production with lower ecological impacts as we innovate away from industrial forestry to ecological forestry.

RECOVERY: THE ECONOMY

As we tackle climate change and work toward our economic recovery, new job opportunities will be created across the province in renewable energy, trades, digital and high tech, and innovative technology related to our ocean or blue economy. This is about creating the jobs of the future across the province in both rural and urban communities.

The biggest challenge we face is also the biggest opportunity available to us. We are already working on this. For example, the Mi'kmaq Home Energy Efficiency Program is targeting energy efficiency retrofits for 90 per cent of band-owned homes in First Nations over 10 years, from 2019 to 2029. We are seizing the opportunity now to stimulate economic opportunity by tackling climate change.

The jobs of the future and the health of our economy are inextricably linked. Just last month, Canada's biggest bank, RBC, which is committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions in its lending by 2050, added \$500 billion to its sustainable financing funds. This is investment we can attract to Nova Scotia.

As these institutions invest in a low-carbon future, in Nova Scotia, we are building one. A Bedford company, Novonix, is involved in the development of high-performance lithium-ion battery materials. It recently entered into a new five-year deal with Dalhousie University, leveraging the economic power of research happening in our post-secondary institutions.

To ensure we harness these opportunities, my government will create an Economic Growth Council. We will partner with municipalities on clean and climate resilient infrastructure investments.

The pandemic has highlighted difficulties faced by women in the workforce, especially around issues of child care. My government is committed to working with the federal government on a national child care strategy because child care is critical to a thriving economy.

Restaurants and the service sector have been severely impacted by the pandemic. Last week, my government announced a \$7 million one-time relief package for these small businesses. Tourism has also been sorely affected, and my government will be there to mitigate the impact of needed border and other public health restrictions, to support the sector as it adapts and to be a partner in recovering a stronger and better future for tourism in this province.

Food is the single biggest industry in Atlantic Canada, and my government will be there to help it grow. Enhancing food security and supporting innovation in the agriculture sector will help people and lead to a more sustainable food supply.

Also essential to quality of life is adequate housing. My government will provide capacity and financial backing to develop innovative solutions to enable Nova Scotians to access affordable housing. We look forward to receiving the report of the Affordable Housing Commission this Spring and acting on its recommendations.

Nova Scotia entered the pandemic with a very strong fiscal, demographic, and economic position. My government intends to continue on a path of fiscal discipline, respecting the hard work of every Nova Scotian and every dollar we spend.

RESPECT AND RENEWAL: A HEALTHY POPULATION AND SYSTEM

Good public health is good for consumer confidence, good for business, good for people, and good for our economy. Nova Scotians have shown the world what a community can do when it works together for a common goal.

Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 reduced job fairs and on-site visits to Nova Scotia communities by prospective international medical professionals. As restrictions ease and vaccinations increase, my government will remain focused on the recruitment of health care providers from family doctors to specialists.

My government recognizes the impact of the pandemic on our health - not just protecting ourselves from the virus, but how the uncertainty and mitigation measures, such as lockdowns and physical distancing, have affected the mental health of our population.

Recognizing that mental health issues were on the rise even before COVID-19 and have been exacerbated since - in fact, some are characterizing mental health as the “echo pandemic” - we created an Office of Mental Health and Addictions. This stand-alone office, which reports to the Minister of Health and Wellness, is focused on a proactive approach to dealing with mental health and addiction issues.

A tragic outcome of the pandemic, one that we are seeing repeated throughout the country, was the way in which our seniors were living in long-term care facilities. My government is committed to working to improve the standard of care for seniors in long-term care by making investments in retrofits and building more modern facilities.

As much as the pandemic has revealed the prevalence of these issues, it has also helped to reimagine health care delivery in our province. Virtual health and telehealth visits with the province’s primary care physicians have exploded.

This is a positive outcome, a legacy, of this pandemic. My government is committed to ramping up our digital health technology to improve health care delivery and to shifting health spending to place more emphasis on public health with an emphasis on early interventions.

In addition to mental health and digital health, my government's plan for health care is one that considers an active and accessible province. Here, again, our three pillars - the economy, environment, and equity - intersect.

We renamed our Transportation Department to include "active transit." Not only are bike lanes, walking trails, and public transit good for the environment, but they are good for our health - and by extension good for the economy, as healthier people are less likely to access our health care system.

RESPECT: A CONNECTED, AFFORDABLE, AND INCLUSIVE NOVA SCOTIA

Canadians are realizing that Canada needs more Nova Scotia, and the pandemic may have shown just how much.

After decades of outmigration and population decline, beginning in 2015 the tide turned, and Nova Scotia is now experiencing strong population growth because young Nova Scotians are staying here, international students are studying and staying here, and immigrants are being attracted here.

Après des décennies d'exode et de diminution de la population, en 2015 un revirement s'est produit, et la Nouvelle-Écosse connaît maintenant une croissance démographique robuste parce que les jeunes néo-écossais restent ici, les étudiants étrangers viennent étudier et restent ici après leurs études, et les immigrants sont attirés par notre province.

The common denominator is that people are choosing Nova Scotia as a place to live because they believe they will enhance their well-being by making that choice.

More than that, Nova Scotia has embarked on a major plan to get connected with high-speed internet, enabling people to move here and work remotely. Eighty per cent of Nova Scotia homes and businesses already have access to connections - and we are continuing to build on that.

Connected by a ribbon of fibre but also by community, Nova Scotians are known for their friendly and generous spirit. My government will build on that and is committed to creating a more fair and inclusive society. For too many Nova Scotians, systemic racism is a lived reality. For many years, people have raised their voices to demand change.

My government is listening. We created a new office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives, which will be built alongside community to augment important work, such as the Land Titles Initiative. We also appointed women of African descent to the most senior posts in the bureaucracy, including to head the Public Service Commission, where decisions are made about hiring and promoting our public servants.

RECOVERY: MEASURING SUCCESS AS WE CONSTANTLY STRIVE FOR IMPROVEMENT

When asked how Nova Scotia should measure success, 82 per cent of Nova Scotians preferred to measure it by improvement in our quality of life.

During the pandemic, success was measured by keeping people safe and healthy, not only by fiscal GDP measures. Can we bring the same approach to other aspects of public policy? My government will undertake a recovery review in 2021 to ensure that existing programs of government meet the objective of improving the quality of life for Nova Scotians, including:

- Do programs measurably enhance the social well-being of Nova Scotians, including health, education, and protecting the most vulnerable?
- Do programs cause environmental harm, or do they regenerate the environment?

My government's recovery review will enable a new and improved approach that is inclusive and will challenge old ways of thinking, resulting in more sustainable and inclusive growth and higher life satisfaction.

COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus many of the conflicts and contradictions of the paths we were on globally, the fissures that were making the world less sustainable, less equal, and more fragile.

La COVID-19 a mis en évidence un grand nombre de conflits et de contradictions dans notre parcours à l'échelle mondiale, les fissures qui rendent le monde moins viable, moins équitable et plus fragile.

The parallel challenges for the age - the environment, the economy, and equity - are the foundations of my government's vision for the future. To meet these challenges, it will be essential to enlist all the capacity Nova Scotians can muster. The future will not take care of itself. So all of us have an opportunity now to guide and create the future we want for Nova Scotia - one that is more sustainable, more equitable, and economically strong.

CLOSING

I now leave you to the business of the session, knowing that you will faithfully discharge your duties and responsibilities in these unprecedented times that call for unity and collaboration. Nova Scotians expect you to work together, as they have done, to keep our province safe and to work on their behalf to meet this crucial moment.

God Bless Nova Scotia, God Bless Canada, and God Save the Queen.

[1:30 p.m.]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS Please rise.

[The Speaker and the Chief Clerk left the Chamber.

The Lieutenant Governor left the Chamber preceded by his escorts and the Sergeant-at-Arms.]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: His Honour the Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, who will present to the House the newly elected member for Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, I present to you Mr. Dave Ritcey, the member for the electoral district of Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River. He has taken the oath, signed the roll and claims the right to take his seat as a member of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Let the honourable member take his seat. (Applause)

The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party, who will present to the House the newly elected member for Cape Breton Centre.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present to you Ms. Kendra Coombes, the member for the electoral district of Cape Breton Centre, who has taken the oath, signed the roll, and now claims the right to take her seat.

THE SPEAKER: Please let the honourable member take her seat. (Applause)

The honourable member for Cape Breton-Richmond.

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, I don't take lightly rising in this House on a point of privilege. We're about to see a government motion come forward to change the rules of the House so that we may actually sit in a hybrid manner, which is . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Is the honourable member raising a point of privilege?

ALANA PAON: I am raising a point of privilege.

THE SPEAKER: Did the honourable member serve due notice to the Speaker one hour in advance of the sitting?

ALANA PAON: I don't have to give you notice. It's when it's practical. We haven't sat for 12 months, and this is my first opportunity to be able to say this and to bring up a point of privilege.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Our rules of this Chamber state that, to facilitate a member to raise a point of privilege, due notice must be served to the Speaker in advance of the sitting. At this time, I'm not going to entertain any points of privilege.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave for unanimous consent to introduce a government notice of motion.

THE SPEAKER: There is a motion for unanimous consent. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. RANDY DELOREY: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a bill entitled An Act Respecting Oaths of Office.

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

His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to make a Speech to the members met in General Assembly, of which Speech, for greater accuracy I have obtained a copy, which I will ask the Chief Clerk to now read.

THE CLERK: Mr. Speaker, members of the Legislature, ladies and gentlemen, Nova Scotians. Welcome to the Third Session of the 63rd General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I think we've heard enough from the new Chief Clerk. I'll throw it over to the honourable Premier.

HON. IAIN RANKIN (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speech from the Throne be taken as read.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the Speech be taken as read. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to move the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne as read by the Honourable Arthur J. LeBlanc.

I'm happy to be sitting here with all of you in our hybrid virtual world. Although it feels a lot different than the past years, what matters to me is that we were able to put it together and be together. That has been my mandate from the day I was fortunate enough to be named Caucus Chair, and now the newly appointed Whip.

I know how important it is to maintain unity and cohesion with our amazing team. We have done such an incredible job so far, and I know we will continue to do so for the future in support of our new progressive Premier.

[1:45 p.m.]

The core values of my team members are loyalty and heart, and I am committed to keeping us together. Furthermore, as all of you know, yesterday we celebrated International Women's Day. Since I left Iraq at age 16 to further my education in England, then emigrated to Canada in 1984, I have felt endless gratitude for the opportunities I have been afforded in a country I consider my home - Canada - and more specifically, Nova Scotia. Back home it is unheard of that a woman like me would take on political aspirations or positions. It is not only unheard of, but it can be considered dangerous. That speaks volumes to the progressive mentality of our beautiful nation. I never take these privileges for granted.

I have also worked extremely hard to empower the women around me. My constituency assistant, Zeina, tells me every day that seeing me in a political role showed her that someone with her name and background is not only valued but accepted with open arms in any field she desires. This is why I do what I do, and I believe this has become my purpose in life - to open doors for other like-minded women to come after me. I thank you for believing in me to be part of this amazing team.

I am proud to share some of the initiatives that my MLA office has worked on during the past four years. First, we started with our little prevention committee - LPC - that was established in the Spring of 2019. We had three constituents who noticed an issue in our community and wanted to make a difference. I am happy to share that we have reached over 30 volunteers, who are dedicated and show up to clean up every single time.

So far, we have completed 10 community cleanups. This included a cleanup of each of the four schools in my riding - Halifax West High School, Park West School, Grosvenor-Wentworth Park Elementary, and École Rockingham School. We also collaborated with the Sobeys team on Lacewood Drive and the Filipino community group. We have all felt

proud of our community, and we have targeted at becoming the cleanest riding in Nova Scotia. This symbolizes the amazing community sense we have in Clayton Park West.

Last year, due to COVID-19, my office staff and I were inspired to start another community initiative, the Clayton Park West connecting seniors group, where we have assisted the most vulnerable members of our society. This is essential, especially in the Winter months when it can be harder for them to cope with issues such as loneliness.

We have been meeting, via Zoom, for two hours each month. We brought in speakers from the Department of Seniors, from other organizations that offer programs, information, or resources to seniors. I know that many of my senior constituents were not aware of those services.

The second hour of our meetings are social, to socialize - where we get to mingle virtually and ask how everyone is doing. I am proud of this initiative as I can tell, by the increased number of participants each time, that my constituents appreciate it. We look forward to the day when things are safe and we can meet in person.

I am so excited for the current development of the Bayers Lake Community Outpatient Centre. My government has ensured that we will deliver health services to where people live. I'm thrilled to say that the new state-of-the-art facility will improve access to care by providing services in the community - a more convenient location for individuals who must travel to downtown for appointments - and providing much easier parking facilities. This new outpatient facility will provide doctors, nurses, and other health professionals a modern place to work, with advanced equipment and technology. It will help us recruit and retain health professionals.

If you did not know, Clayton Park West also has a treasure in its backyard: the Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area - 1,767 hectares of wilderness at the edge of urban Halifax. It is bordered by Bayers Lake, Kingswood, and Tantallon. It is roughly the size of the Halifax peninsula, and it contains over 20 lakes, not to mention the beautiful scenery. I am grateful for the collaborations of the three levels of government in working together to help create a regional park around this amazing wilderness area, so that people in my riding and beyond will be able to enjoy this hidden gem.

I also want to give a quick shout-out to Maskwa, an aquatic club, for their national, international, and local success and for producing athletes and providing excellent outdoor activities and paddling and swimming in my community.

I also would like to mention the Rockingham Heritage Society. I'm so impressed with the work they have done, such as creating murals that describe our local history. At over 200 years old, the Prince's Lodge Rotunda is a prominent remnant of the country estate and gardens created by Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the Maritime provinces, and the future father of Queen Victoria. Thank

you to the Rockingham Heritage Society for keeping the importance of these murals alive. They have placed one on Dunbrack Street and one on the Bedford Highway.

Last but not least, what I am most proud of is the diversity. The success of our immigration policies, federally and provincially, is so prominent in my riding. New immigrants from all over the world are enriching our lives, enriching our society, opening businesses, creating jobs, helping to look after our seniors, volunteering, and engaging to learn more about their new home. It is my honour to represent a community that reflects the Canadian dream.

Mr. Speaker, it is now my pleasure to thank His Honour for the Throne Speech. With great pride and great confidence, I move that the Speech from the Throne, as read by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, do pass. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

The honourable member for Kings West is on mute. Would he mind unmuting?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: How's that, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: There we go. We can hear you now. If you wouldn't mind starting again?

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to support the Speech from the Throne and a motion brought forward by my colleague for Clayton Park West. I want to acknowledge her speech and her story and her journey to see herself as a proud Nova Scotian making a contribution through elected office.

I also want to thank the Lieutenant Governor, His Honour, for delivering the speech today, but more so for being that Nova Scotian, along with Her Honour, to be present during the time of COVID - as much as humanly possible - to encourage Nova Scotians and to stand by us with their support.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the honour of representing Kings West for almost 18 years in the House of Assembly and only two of that original team now remains - myself and the member for Annapolis, the former Premier - and I will certainly allude in my speech today to the contribution, the remarkable seven and a half years of his leadership, and I know history will be kind.

Getting back to Kings West, I believe one of the most heartening aspects of life in the Annapolis Valley and in Kings West has been to see a revitalization of agriculture and the apple industry in particular. I do have two great employers as bookends to my riding and they are Michelin Waterville and 14 Wing Greenwood, but they are also tremendous corporate citizens who enrich the lives of our community in a significant way. But during

my time in office, it is the many visits to little communities - whether it be Black Rock, Harbourville, Morton, Morristown, Somerset - these little communities are the very fabric of rural life in our province.

One of the aspects, also, during my time here at the Legislature is to observe how our bench has grown to include new and diverse voices. It has brought a unique strength to our time in government. And while I came in to government with my friend and the former Premier, today I feel very proud and optimistic knowing that this province is in good hands with our new Premier at the helm. I have had the good fortune to see him grow and turn into a consummate professional in the job of political life.

During my time in government and as Minister of Health and Wellness, I guess I would say that a major achievement was turning our disjointed health care system into one health system - the Nova Scotia health system - and it was during the pandemic that I heard many voices from the health community to say that operating as one turned out to be one of our great strengths across Nova Scotia. The work is not finished. We will continue to reform, and we will continue to change the health care system.

In my time as Minister of Seniors, we've seen us bring forth the document shift and work on finding a new way of seeing our seniors in our province - over 200,000 Nova Scotians over the age of 65 - and we've seen that they need strong social and economic opportunities after the age of 65 to help them remain healthy and have an active lifestyle, and the third pillar of that document was to age in place and stay, as much as possible, connected to their communities.

Also, palliative care changed remarkably. When there was no hospice - no provincial plan for palliative care - our government responded by seeing that hospice is a remarkable part of the end-of-life journey. We will soon open the third hospice in Nova Scotia in Sydney, after Halifax and Kentville.

I'm very proud of the work that we have done around accessibility, to be just the third province in Canada to bring forth a piece of legislation, and also road markers, that by 2030, the goal of having the most accessible province in our nation is one that we will continue to work toward.

Sometimes transit - community transportation, or a rural transportation network - is not seen as perhaps the big items of government, but during my time at the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage and the Department of Seniors, I was able to bring those two departments to see what more could be done to keep Nova Scotians connected to their communities.

Today, when people can get on a bus in Meat Cove and go to the Buchanan Memorial Community Health Centre for services, and other services offered by that community, that is a great strength in Nova Scotia. I would say that, as I look across the

province, our rural communities have never been connected like this before. Connectedness saves lives and overcomes isolation.

[2:00 p.m.]

It will be perhaps about a decade before we see all of the infrastructure investment in the QEII New Generation redevelopment, but along with those massive investments in new infrastructure, I've been very concerned about the role of preventive health measures and seeing the Let's Get Moving Nova Scotia action plan start to take on life in our province. I know that our new Premier remains steadfastly committed to this, and I am looking forward to working with my colleagues to advance the role of active transit and the part it will play in the future of our province.

I like the fact that we took fiscal responsibility extremely seriously. It increased our credit rating and gave us a stronger place for small business. We truly moved the marker on immigration as 40,000 new Nova Scotians are now with us since 2013. Above all, we see more young people - in fact, in the last three years on a per capita basis, we have retained our community college and university graduates at a rate better than other provinces in our country. For many years, as an educator, I felt that I was often teaching for western Canada. There's nothing wrong with that, since we are all Canadians, but to keep our best and brightest here in Nova Scotia is certainly what we are seeing now.

Ensuring that we had a handle on the province's finances has proved invaluable during this past year. One could never have predicted, but we were ready because of responsible budgeting and spending.

COVID has brought unimaginable tragedy and challenge over the past year. I got to walk the halls of the Department of Health and Wellness with Dr. Strang and his public health team and to witness and experience and feel the dedication and the leadership that they have given to Nova Scotia. Today, I believe the statistic that truly counts is that we are one of the safest places in the world to reside.

I also want to salute and champion every Nova Scotian who took up the cause of a safer place to live. We have donned a mask. We have sanitized. We have kept a distance, and we have not come together when it was so natural to come and congregate and celebrate. We have kept our groups small, and Dr. Strang and our Premiers have been leaders in showing the way.

We are just a day past International Women's Day, and I think I would be remiss in not giving a shout-out to Dr. Lisa Barrett. Dr. Lisa Barrett has been, on many evenings, part of our supper table as my wife and I discussed what was happening with COVID in our province, in our nation, and around the world. She has brought epidemiology down to a level that all of us, as Nova Scotians, can relate to - and that really is a treasure for the time in which we live.

As I look at my colleagues today, I am proud to stand with a government that dared to be bold, to bring in organ and tissue donation legislation for presumed consent. While I began to speak about this six years ago, it was leadership by the former Premier, my colleague and member for Antigonish and, finishing it off, the member for Yarmouth, who made a team effort to do this, and we see it now as part of the way of the future.

There probably is, again, a very satisfying moment. Just in those past weeks at the Department of Health and Wellness, again as a team, we brought in the partners in care legislation. One of the most heart-wrenching moments as an MLA and when I became Minister of Health and Wellness was to see a couple of 50, 60, and even 70 years separated by the level of care. That will no longer be the way in our province; it is a new day for those couples.

I have always valued diversity in leadership, and I have had the good fortune of working side by side with three strong women leaders in our Deputy Premiers: Diana Whalen; the member for Cumberland South; and now the member for Bedford. They bring that part of leadership that has often been missing in many arenas of public life. I am also so pleased to see that while in office our government has given climate change a strong place. I know for our new Premier it will be a constant to see us play our part, one million Nova Scotians strong, playing their part for what we must do for the next generations - that is, deal with climate change.

It has been a great honour to serve as MLA for Kings West. I have had the good fortune of being involved with a number of projects that have, I think, brought a higher quality of life to the riding. I speak in particular of the Apple Dome project; the refurbishing of the Western Kings Arena, now called the Credit Union Centre; the opening of two libraries, the Kingston Library and the Berwick Library; and a health centre to the community of Kingston. A real gem in my riding is Brigadoon. Brigadoon is a transformative place for those children who are sick, disabled, and have high needs. That summer camp is in fact a world-class place, and I would hope that all of you, my colleagues, would get to visit at some time.

Without the hard work and support of constituents of Kings West, none of this would have been possible. It is in reflecting on these achievements and advances that I am humbled beyond words and want to thank you. In many ways that just doesn't seem enough. Again, I would like to reiterate what a privilege it has been to work with staff, my colleagues, and this government on behalf of Nova Scotians. In this, my last Session of this Chamber, I would say let us be kind to one another, let us bring respect and regard to the people's House.

With that, Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to second the motion that the Speech from the Throne pass as read.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in response to the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I'd like to congratulate my colleague, the Premier, on taking his new seat in the Legislature. Also our colleagues from Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River, and Cape Breton Centre, congratulations on taking your seat in the Legislature today.

As I read through the Speech from the Throne, it occurs to me that there are many aspirational ideas in this speech that are easy to get behind. We all support preserving our planet. We all support making sure that child care is accessible. We all support more jobs. These are things that are easy for all of us to get behind.

What we also need right now in this province is a government of action. I respect the Premier's initiatives with the environment, and we have many thoughts on how to improve that process and make sure that we preserve our planet. It has to be more than a talking point, it has to be more than sound bites, and our Party has always been committed to preserving our planet, even as far back as the EGSPA legislation.

I was pleased to see that the Premier intends to push the federal government to get funding to achieve our net zero carbon emissions goal. That's important, and it's nice to see a Premier who will push on the federal government in the interests of Nova Scotians. We haven't seen somebody advocate for Nova Scotians at the federal table, so I'm pleased to see that. I hope it also extends to standing side by side with other premiers when they go to the federal government to advocate for more health care spending.

We can all get behind some of the initiatives of this Speech from the Throne. Who can argue about the type of province we want to live in? We can't argue about that but, at the same time, we need to talk about the province that we do live in, and the province that we do live in can't wait to Page 7 of a 10-page speech to talk about health care. For the province that we live in - and there's a lot going for this province, I'm super-optimistic about this province - but we need to make sure we're dealing with the things that government needs to deal with.

The province that we do live in is a province that has wait times of over 1,000 days for some surgeries. It's a province that as of today has over 60,000 Nova Scotians on the wait-list for access to primary care. That is up from 55,000 in the previous reporting. That's the province we live in today. We live in a province that has up to a year's wait for access to addictions and mental health support.

In the Speech from the Throne, the reference was that 82 per cent of Nova Scotians value success as quality of life. We place a high value on quality of life here in Nova Scotia, no question about that. It's hard to have a good quality of life when you're waiting 1,000 days for a surgery. It's hard to have a good quality of life when you are worried about access to primary care and you are one of 60,000 people on a wait-list for primary care for

a doctor. It's hard to have a good quality of life when you are waiting up to a year to access addictions and mental health support.

On Page 7 of the speech today - Page 7 of 10 - we read that one of the legacies of COVID is telehealth. No, Mr. Speaker, telehealth is not a legacy of COVID. It predates COVID by almost a decade. In places like Germany and Philadelphia, they have had telehealth for a long time. That is not the legacy of COVID. It's not even one of the legacies of COVID. The legacy of COVID is a pandemic that took 65 lives in this province. A legacy of COVID can be that we become a province that learns the lessons that need to be learned and never is a province that ignores the cries of those in long-term care - cries like Northwood, that were crying out for years and years before COVID. The legacy of the pandemic has to be that we learned the lessons that needed to be learned.

[2:15 p.m.]

So as aspirational as some of the material in this speech is today, I would like to see our government putting forward a real plan to address surgical wait times. I would like to see our government putting forward a real plan to address the access to primary care issues that people are having - 60,000 people on a wait-list. I would like to see our government addressing - putting forward a plan to address - the issues that are plaguing our long-term care system.

We're at a point in this province where we need to stop talking about aspirations. We need to start talking about doing. That's why in our Party, on this side of the House, we've been very focused on being a Party of solutionists, of actually putting forward practical solutions to the issues that are impacting this province. I would have liked to have seen in this speech today a plan to decrease surgical wait times.

We have wait-lists in this province - 288 days for breast cancer surgery. Can you imagine waiting 288 days for breast cancer surgery, all the while wondering if the disease is progressing? It's 1,054 days for a knee replacement. Can you imagine the impact on your quality of life, waiting 1,054 days for a knee replacement? It's 399 days for prostate surgery - 399 days.

These are the statistics. This is the province that we do live in. These delays have been exacerbated by COVID, and yet we don't see them acknowledged in the Speech from the Throne, the government's plan for what is possible in this province.

We, on the other hand, as solutionists, have put a plan forward. In this province, when surgeons want to operate, when surgeons want to take it into their hands to address this wait-list, they will have access to operating rooms. There will not be anyone within the system who says "no, the operating room is closed." When they're ready to do surgeries, they will have it. That's the plan we've been putting forward.

In this speech today, we read about the explosion of visits to virtual care. There has been an explosion of virtual care taking place, and that's a good thing. But let me orientate you a little bit on that explosion, Mr. Speaker, because from March 2020 to June 2020 in Nova Scotia, just 7.6 per cent of doctor visits in Nova Scotia were virtual - 7.6 per cent of doctor visits were virtual. During that same period in Ontario, 38.45 per cent of doctor visits were virtual. During that same period in Manitoba, 33.73 per cent of doctor visits were virtual.

Mr. Speaker, 7.6 per cent is not an explosion, but I can understand why the government may see it as an explosion. It wasn't that long ago, only one year ago, when our Party talked about the need for virtual care, for telemedicine, in this province. It's not new. It's just new to Nova Scotia. Just about a year ago, on the floor of this Chamber, the governing Party laughed. They literally laughed. They said that the Opposition thinks Nova Scotians would be satisfied phoning a doctor or FaceTiming a doctor. Ha ha.

That was what was already happening the world over, just not here. We have a lot of room to go, and I would have liked to have seen a commitment from the government in the Speech from the Throne today to keep virtual care, and not only to keep it but to expand it. With the wait-list of people looking for a doctor - 55,000, now up to 60,000 - I would like to see the government following our lead. That's committing to give virtual care right away, on day one, to every one of those Nova Scotians who does not have access to primary care. That's a plan that we've put forward. That's part of a very robust suite of solutions that we've put forward for health care.

I would like to see those types of plans and solutions in the Speech from the Throne, action in addition to aspiration, Mr. Speaker. It's very, very possible, and we should have it here because virtual care is all about the right care at the right time in the right place. It is about putting the patients forward, and we can expand virtual care.

We know that virtual care is working for patients. It's working for physicians, and we know that. We could have seen a plan today that articulated the expansion of that for videoconferencing for care. We could have seen it expanded for specialists, for faster access for people who need access to a specialist, access to physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, and I could go on. Those are the discussions that I would like to have, that I would like to see the government promoting - an actual plan to make sure that Nova Scotians have access to the health care that they need. The legacy of the pandemic is not virtual care. The legacy of the pandemic can be much, much greater than that.

In the speech today, it said that the health of our people depends on how we are treated, with fairness and respect. I think that's an important - it's a nice sound bite, it really is. However, to get to there from where we are in our health care system - I don't know if the members have read the editorial from Dr. Robert Miller that talks about what it is actually like to work in the health care system under this government. The words "fairness"

and “respect” are absent from an actual physician’s editorial on what it is like to work under this government. So, the words are nice but it is the action that is necessary.

In the speech on Page 8, it refers to shifting health care spending to place more emphasis on public health with an emphasis on early intervention. Absolutely, that is necessary. Right now the reality of the province that we live in is that Nova Scotia’s health administrative costs are 35 per cent higher than the national average. Yet, there is no regular financial reporting. There are no human resource metrics. We don’t even know how many doctors we have in this province.

I remember very well being at a Public Accounts Committee meeting and questioning the people leading our health care system and asking them a very simple question. It is very hard to manage a system when you don’t have regular financial reporting. It is very hard to manage a system when you don’t understand how many health care professionals are working in the system. In fact, I would say to you that that is the very polar opposite of a system that respects and values people. It’s not even knowing who is working in the system.

There was an opportunity today in this speech to lay out a plan to address that. We need a plan to address that. We need a plan that puts patients first, that focuses on improving health outcomes, because right now what we have is the costs are going up, but the outcomes are going down.

I would like to see this government talking about an actual plan and talking about an actual clinical health services plan and establishing one for every region so that the people managing health care actually understand the assets and the people working in the system and can also look at what’s necessary and then have a plan to address it. That is how we will get to improving health care in this province. We won’t get to improving health care in this province with nice sound bites and aspirational words in this Chamber. We actually have to roll up our sleeves and get to work alongside those on the front lines.

These are the types of things that I think are possible for this province, but only possible when we actually get to work on practical solutions. I hope that we start to see some from this government. It’s been a long time in the making - seven years. Costs are going up and outcomes are going down. There’s a lot of work to do, and we’ve laid out a number of plans that can help us get there.

In talking about the long-term care and learning the lessons, let’s never be a province, again, that ignores the pleas of those working in long-term care. When they call out for help, let’s listen. Let’s respect them. Let’s treat them with fairness. We put out a plan because we have to address the human resource challenges in our system in long-term care. We can do that only by normalizing the workload of the staff.

Staff-to-resident ratios in long-term care have been quantified as something that should be reasonably expected to be in the range of one staff for every six to eight residents. In this province, we have a ratio right now of one staff for every 12 residents. We're well above that and with staffing shortages, we know the pressure on the people working in long-term care with those staffing shortages, the ratio actually goes a lot higher.

It's not good enough. We recommend that the government acknowledge and work to accepting the minimum staff-to-resident ratios that provide 4.1 nursing hours of care per resident per day. That's the recommendation from the experts at the Nova Scotia Nurses Union. Today, we're somewhere in the range of 2.4 hours to 3.3 hours. That's a big difference. That's a big block of care that's not available to our residents that should be. We need to hire more staff at our long-term care properties. We've laid out a plan as to how that can happen.

I think what we're looking at right now is in today's speech. It kind of sums up the difference between our two Parties. On the one hand, we have government-speak, telling you what you want to hear. It tells you what they think you want to hear. We see nice government words like "measurably." Nice government words like "regenerate." These are nice government words.

I see the world a little differently. What I've been told guides the plans that we're putting forward for Nova Scotia, and what I'm hearing from Nova Scotians is that they don't want government-speak and they don't want government words. They want to know if this makes sense for Nova Scotians who are just trying to make ends meet. They want to know if they can access the health care system when they need it. These are the things that Nova Scotians want to know. They want to know the practical plan.

On the one hand, you have a government, telling you what they think you want to hear. On the other hand, you have practical, people-focused solutions, delivering what you need - not what you want to hear, but actually deliver what you need. That's the difference between the two Parties. I think it's a time in our province where people want to know what the government is going to do. No more aspirational words.

We're the Party that's about Nova Scotians and practical solutions. We're the Party that's about getting it done. They're the Party that's about government-speak and process-speak. That's a difference that Nova Scotians will see over the next little while here and should have seen.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I would adjourn debate for today and take the opportunity to follow my reply in the coming days. Thank you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: There is a motion to adjourn debate.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you. The motion is carried.

The House will now recess for a few minutes.

[2:30 p.m. The House recessed.]

[The House reconvened at 3:39 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Earlier today, the Government House Leader asked for unanimous consent to introduce a motion. Unanimous consent was not given, and I, as Speaker, incorrectly indicated that the motion was tabled when, in fact, I shouldn't have said that because there was no motion introduced.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a discussion with the House Leaders, Opposition Parties, and Independent members, I would like to beg leave once again for unanimous consent to introduce a government notice of motion.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

RESOLUTION NO. 1

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

Whereas, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, special measures are required for the Winter-Spring 2021 sitting of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly;

Therefore be it resolved that the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly be suspended or amended as follows for, and only for, the duration of the Winter-Spring 2021 sitting of the House:

1. Paragraph (2) of Rule 3 is suspended and the time for the ordinary adjournment of the House of Assembly is at seven o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesday and Thursday, 30 minutes after six o'clock in the afternoon on Wednesday, and 45 minutes after one o'clock in the afternoon on Friday and, subject to Paragraph (2B) of Rule 17, the daily schedule is as provided in the schedule to this resolution.

2. Paragraph (1) of Rule 5 is amended to change the reference to the ordinary time of adjournment of the House on Wednesday to 30 minutes after six o'clock to accord with the schedule.
3. Paragraph (1) of Rule 6 is amended to provide that members in virtual attendance at the services of the House by video count towards quorum so long as their faces are clearly visible.
4. Paragraph (1) of Rule 14 is amended to provide that
 - (a) only the Speaker (or other member presiding), three members from each caucus, and the two Independent members may be physically present in the Legislative Chamber of the House at the same time; and
 - (b) members not physically present are bound to attend the services of the House virtually with their faces clearly visible by video.
5. Paragraph (2A) of Rule 17 is amended to provide that Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers begins one hour and fifteen minutes after the daily routine commences.
6. Rule 22 is amended to
 - (a) permit a member physically present to speak from any place assigned to the member or the member's caucus in the Legislative Chamber of the House; and
 - (b) provide that a member in virtual attendance desiring to speak indicate in a manner directed by the Speaker.
7. Paragraph (2) of Rule 38 is amended to provide that questions in the House or a Committee of the Whole House shall be decided by a majority of votes, indicated as directed by the Speaker or the Chair, as the case may be.
8. Paragraph (1) of Rule 44 is amended to remove reference to a bill being printed.
9. Rule 45 is amended to read as follows:

45 Except by unanimous consent of the House, no bill shall be read the second time unless it has been published on the Legislature's website and has been subsequently marked on the Orders of the Day as "Published."
10. Rule 48 is amended to permit the clerk of the committee to which a bill has been referred to sign in place of the Chair of that committee.
11. Rule 49 is amended to replace printing or reprinting with publishing or republishing.

12. (1) Paragraph (3) of Rule 62F is amended to provide that questions in Subcommittee on Supply shall be decided by a majority of votes, including the vote of the Chair, indicated as directed by the Speaker instead of voices, and whenever the votes are equal, the Chair has a second or casting vote.

(2) Paragraph (4) of Rule 62F is amended to provide that all meetings of the Subcommittee on Supply be virtual and be webcast instead of being open to the public.
13. Rule 62FB is amended to provide, for greater certainty, that a minister may appear before the Committee of the Whole on Supply either virtually or physically with support staff.
14. Rule 77, is amended to provide that the Clerk shall cause the Orders of the Day to be sent electronically to all members and shall only provide Orders of the Day in the House for members physically attending the services in this House.

[3:45 p.m.]

The daily schedule is as follows: Tuesday and Thursday the daily routine will be from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.; a break will be from 2:00 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.; Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers 2:15 p.m. to 3:05 p.m.; a break from 3:05 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.; Government Business from 3:20 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.; a break from 4:20 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.; Government Business 4:35 p.m. to 5:35 p.m.; break from 5:35 p.m. to 5:50 p.m.; and Government Business 5:50 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

On Wednesdays, the daily routine will commence at 1:00 p.m. and go to 2:00 p.m. There will be a break from 2:00 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.; Oral Questions Put By Members to Ministers 2:15 p.m. to 3:05; break 3:05 p.m. to 3:20 p.m.; Opposition Business 3:20 p.m. to 4:20 p.m.; break from 4:20 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.; Opposition Business 4:35 p.m. to 5:35 p.m.; a break from 5:35 p.m. to 5:50 p.m.; Opposition Business from 5:50 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., followed by Late Debate from 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Finally, on Fridays the daily routine will be 9:00 a.m. to 10 a.m., with a break for 15 minutes at 10 a.m. Oral Questions Put By Members to Ministers 10:15 a.m. to 11:05 a.m.; break from 11:05 a.m. to 11:20 a.m.; Government Business 11:20 a.m. to 12:20 p.m.; break from 12:20 p.m. to 12:35 p.m.; and Government Business from 12:35 p.m. to 1:45 p.m.

On Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, during the time scheduled for Government Business, the government may call Private and Local Bills or Private Members' Public Bills. On Wednesday, after the time scheduled for Opposition Business, the government may call Government Business.

When pursuant to Rule 5C the House sits other than as provided above, there will be a fifteen-minute break after every hour of business unless the House will be adjourned when the fifteen minutes end.

With that, I ask for waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear a No.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That concludes Government Business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again Thursday, March 11, 2021, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Following the daily routine and Question Period, business will include Address in Reply.

THE SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned until Thursday, March 11, 2021, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

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

The motion is carried.

[The House rose at 3:48 p.m.]