



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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Third Session

TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021

Sixty-third General Assembly

Third Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Kevin Murphy

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Keith Bain, Susan Leblanc

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We will 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.

RESOLUTION NO. 222

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

Whereas Nova Scotia joins the United Nations in proclaiming March 21st as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and

Whereas the day honours the 69 lives lost after the white South African police opened fire on unarmed Black South Africans who were peacefully protesting the apartheid pass laws in Sharpeville, South Africa; and

Whereas the Government of Nova Scotia remains committed to supporting individuals from all races, cultures, and backgrounds, and to striving for full inclusion in all aspects of society;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize March 21, 2021, as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in the Province of 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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

RESOLUTION NO. 223

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

Whereas David MacKinnon, systems planning coordinator with the Department of Environment and Climate Change, has dedicated nearly 30 years of service to protection and conservation, providing an exceptional personal dedication to both private and public land conservation; and

Whereas for nearly 15 years, David has played key roles with the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas, and maintains an active role as a board member for the Atlantic Canada Conservation Data Centre; and

Whereas on March 17th, David MacKinnon received the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Fred Packard Award for Outstanding Service to Conservation;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in congratulating David MacKinnon on this prestigious accomplishment and being an outstanding member of the Public Service.

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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

RESOLUTION NO. 224

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

Whereas COVID-19 has brought many challenges to restaurant and café owners across the province over this past year; and

Whereas Restaurants Canada and the Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia has worked hard to be proactive, communicate with their members, and develop and implemented a plan to reopen restaurants safely; and

Whereas restaurants now have the option to use an app to collect patron's contact information for contact tracing which helps reduce the burden on business;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize the important contribution of Restaurants Canada and the Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia in supporting business owners and keeping Nova Scotians safe.

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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 225

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

Whereas each year Farm Safety Nova Scotia celebrates Canadian Agricultural Safety Week through campaigns, workshops, and events to reinforce a safer and more productive sector; and

Whereas the initiative serves as an opportunity to reflect on the importance of farm safety and provide producers with the resources needed to make their farms safer; and

Whereas the Canadian Agricultural Safety Week took place March 14th to 20th with the aim of safe and stronger farms, empowering farmers, farm families, and farming communities to build, grow, and lead the agriculture industry in safety and sustainability;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize the efforts of Farm Safety Nova Scotia and the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association to make sure safety is everyone's responsibility and to reinforce a path to a safer, more productive sector.

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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

[1:15 p.m.]

RESOLUTION NO. 226

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

Attendu que le 20 mars, la Nouvelle-Écosse s'est jointe à la communauté international pour souligner la Journée international de la Francophonie; et

Attendu que cette manifestation annuelle rend hommage à la culture, aux traditions et à la diversité de plus de trois cents millions de francophones qui vivent partout dans le monde; et

Attendu qu'une communauté acadienne et francophone dynamique habite en Nouvelle-Écosse depuis la fondation de l'Acadie il y a plus de 400 ans;

Par conséquent, il est résolu que les députes de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi et à tous les Acadiens et les francophones de la province, du pays et de partout dans le monde à reconnaître la Journée international de la Francophonie pendant ce mois des Rendez-vous de la francophonie.

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

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

Whereas on March 20, 2021, Nova Scotia joined the international community in celebrating International Francophonie Day; and

Whereas this annual event recognizes the culture, traditions, and diversity of the more than 300 million French speakers living around the world; and

Whereas Nova Scotia has been home to a vibrant Acadian and francophone community since the establishment of Acadia more than 400 years ago;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me and all Acadians and francophones across the province, across the country, and around the globe to recognize the International Francophonie Day during this month of Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie.

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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

RESOLUTION NO. 227

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall move the adoption of the following resolution:

Whereas Budge Wilson, an acclaimed Nova Scotia writer from Halifax, recently passed away at the age of 93; and

Whereas Budge began her writing career later in life at the age of 56, and wrote more than 30 books for all ages, including *The Leaving*, *Lorinda's Diary*, *Thirteen Never Changes* and *Before Green Gables*, a prequel to Lucy Maud Montgomery's famous series of books around Anne Shirley; and

Whereas Budge was a gifted storyteller who always wrote long-handed, mentored many Nova Scotia writers, and received many awards including: the Municipality of Halifax Mayor's Award for Cultural Achievement in Literature; 19 Canadian Children's Book Centre's Our Choice awards; two Ann Connor Brimer Awards; and was a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in acknowledging the extraordinary life of Budge Wilson and her contributions to literature across Nova Scotia and Canada.

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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of the Public Service Commission.

RESOLUTION NO. 228

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

Whereas March 21st was the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and

Whereas this past year we have witnessed many shocking and heartbreaking instances of racial discrimination and hatred that have outraged so many of us and moved people around the world and here in Nova Scotia to speak out and take action; and

Whereas public servants, through our All Together strategy continue to work to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive work spaces to address conscious and unconscious biases, prejudices, and stereotypes against Black, Indigenous, and people of colour communities, and to diversify our workforce, particularly at the senior leadership levels;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House recognize this important work and renew our commitment to act together to eliminate systemic racism, discrimination, and prejudice in our workplaces, our communities, and 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.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

RESOLUTION NO. 229

HON. LABI KOUSOULIS: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice that on a future day I shall:

(1) read and table the message from His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, transmitting the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, for the consideration of this House;

(2) table the Estimate Books;

(3) table the Government Business Plan;

(4) table the Estimate resolutions;

(5) deliver my Budget Speech; and

(6) move that the Estimates of Sums required for the service of the Province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, being Supply to be granted to Her Majesty, be referred to the Committee of the Whole on Supply.

Mr. Speaker, for the information of the House, the budget will be presented on March 25, 2021.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 29 [Corrected: Bill No. 28] - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 250 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Land Titles Clarification Act, Respecting the Land Titles Initiative. (Hon. Randy Delorey)

Bill No. 30 [Corrected: Bill No. 29] - Entitled an Act to Establish Emancipation Day. (Brad Johns)

Bill No. 31 [Corrected: Bill No. 30] - Entitled an Act to Establish a Commission of Inquiry into Long-term Care. (Susan Leblanc)

THE CLERK: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I would just like to clarify and correct an error on my part. The first bill introduced today, An Act to Amend Chapter 250 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Land Titles Clarification Act, Respecting the Land Titles Initiative - I assigned the incorrect bill number to that. That should be Bill No. 28. The second bill introduced, An Act to Establish Emancipation Day, is Bill No. 29. And An Act to Establish a Commission of Inquiry into Long-term Care is Bill No. 30.

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that that bill and the others previously mentioned be read a second time on a future day.

Bill No. 31 - Entitled an Act to Establish a Co-ordinated Maritime Pandemic Health Strategy. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

- Bill No. 32 - Entitled an Act Respecting Green Jobs. (Gary Burrill)**
- Bill No. 33 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 8 of the Acts of 2008. The Personal Directives Act. (Kim Masland)**
- Bill No. 34 - Entitled an Act to Support the Creative Economy. (Susan Leblanc)**
- Bill No. 35 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 8 of the Acts of 2002. The Guardianship Act. (Kim Masland)**
- Bill No. 36 - Entitled an Act Respecting a Pilot Project for Seasonal Tourist Businesses. (Claudia Chender)**
- Bill No. 37 - Entitled an Act Respecting the Viability of Cape Breton Regional Municipality. (Kendra Coombes)**
- Bill No. 38 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Homes for Special Care Act, Respecting Staffing Levels. (Susan Leblanc)**
- Bill No. 39 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Homes for Special Care Act, Respecting Public Funds. (Susan Leblanc)**
- Bill No. 40 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1998. The Municipal Government Act, and Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008. The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting Inclusionary Zoning. (Kendra Coombes)**
- Bill No. 41 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Homes for Special Care Act, Respecting a Room for Every Resident. (Gary Burrill)**
- Bill No. 42 - Entitled an Act to Establish an Economic Recovery Task Force. (Gary Burrill)**
- Bill No. 43 - Entitled an Act to Recognize Housing as a Human Right and Adopt a Provincial Housing Policy. (Gary Burrill)**
- Bill No. 44 - Entitled an Act to Limit Increases in Rent for Residential Premises (Lisa Roberts)**
- Bill No. 45 - Entitled an Act Respecting Tenants' Right to Know About Human Health Hazards. (Lisa Roberts)**
- Bill No. 46 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes of 1989. The Residential Tenancies Act. (Lisa Roberts)**

[1:30 p.m.]

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

SMITH, CHERYL - NURSE PRACTITIONER: HEALTH CARE HERO - THANKS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize one of Cumberland North's health care heroes, Cheryl Smith. Cheryl is a nurse practitioner at the Nova Scotia Health Authority and a doctor of nursing practice. Cheryl's role is in primary care and has exemplified great leadership skills during this pandemic.

During COVID-19, Cheryl has taken great care of our aging population in long-term care, collaborating with clients, individuals, and families as well as our management teams. Cheryl has been an outstanding educator in our community and is constantly increasing her wide range of practice.

I ask all members to join me today in thanking Cheryl Smith as one of Cumberland North's health care heroes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

SINCLAIR, ALASDAIR: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember one of our province's outstanding public intellectuals and a long-time NDP member and supporter, Alasdair Sinclair, who passed away on March 14th here in Halifax.

Alasdair Sinclair taught economics at Dalhousie for almost 30 years. He helped train generations of progressive economists and served as Vice President, Academic and as Provost, at Dalhousie. Alasdair ran for the NDP in Halifax Needham against then-Premier Gerald Regan in 1970, when our Party was still in its infancy in this province. He ran again for the NDP federally in 1974 in Halifax against former Premier Robert Stanfield.

Alasdair Sinclair was a lifelong upholder of social democracy and of the idea that people should expect something better from their government.

We join in lifting up the memory and the legacy of Alasdair Sinclair.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

BERRY, STEVE: YTOWN QUARANTINE CHALLENGE - THANKS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Yarmouth Town Councillor and now Deputy Mayor Steve Berry started the Ytown Quarantine Challenge Facebook group. This is an amazing initiative which brought our community virtually together during a time when we could not be together in person.

The Facebook group with over 3,000 members would frequently discuss fun and inspiring topics and take part in virtual challenges and good deeds. This group was responsible for lifting many spirits in our community during a time when this was very much needed.

I'd like to thank Yarmouth's Steve Berry for creating the Ytown Quarantine Challenge Facebook group and for always giving back to our community, inspiring others.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount. The honourable member is muted. Would he unmute his microphone.

**NORTHSIDE/HARBORVIEW HOSP. FDN.:
FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS - CONGRATS.**

MURRAY RYAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Northside/Harbourview Hospital Foundation on raising \$53,000 during their Festival of Lights in December last year.

Every year in December, the front lawn of the Northside General Hospital and the garden area of the Harbourview Hospital are illuminated with thousands of lights and sculptures. The foundation invites families and friends for the special events, fireworks, Santa and hot chocolate.

This year, Mr. Speaker, due to COVID-19, this was prevented from happening. However, the organizers of the foundation found a way to put on the light ceremony and the fireworks and stream the whole experience live on Facebook for everyone to enjoy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

GASS, DAVID - PHYSICIAN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, it's my honour to speak of Dr. David Gass today. I will speak separately about what meaning and purpose we can take from the way he died, as a pedestrian in a crosswalk, but first let's think about how he lived.

Dr. Gass was a doctor, a teacher, a mentor, a leader, a friend, a colleague, a father and a grandfather. As granddad to Jason and Keira, daughter-in-law Lisa Lachance - wife of Heather Gass - wrote, “he buoyed us as parents and our kids with love. He provided guidance in a skillful way that strengthened our own capacity.”

Health consultant, colleague, and friend Mary Jane Hampton wrote that everyone remembers David Gass for being there exactly when they needed him, for the biggest life challenges and the gentle acts of kindness that defined him.

As a province, all Nova Scotians are indebted to him in ways that are difficult to quantify. He advised Health Ministers on primary care and he taught many of our physicians. According to the College of Family Physicians of Canada, he inspired countless young family doctors to be their best selves.

His loss is truly great and his legacy is even greater.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

ZINCK, MERVIN: COPA AWARD - CONGRATS.

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate Mervin Zinck of New Germany Lake for receiving the 2020 Director’s Award for the Maritimes from the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association.

Mervin is a member of the Bluenose Flying Club and Flight 196. For 12 years, he organized the annual New Germany Lake Pilots Picnic, which hosts up to 25 float planes from across the Maritime Provinces.

Hundreds of guests would attend this community event, enjoying live music, a free lunch, a mini-antique car show, model aircraft flyers and a skydiving demonstration.

The Director’s Award recognizes an individual’s personal efforts in advancing and promoting our Canadian freedom to fly.

Thank you, Mervin, for your commitment and enthusiasm to showcasing aviation in New Germany and for inspiring future pilots.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Mervin Zinck on receiving this COPA 2020 Director’s Award for the Maritimes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

STAPLETON, ALEX: PROV. VOLUN. OF THE YR. - CONGRATS.

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Alex Stapleton of Lower Sackville.

Alex Stapleton won the Provincial Volunteer Award for the Halifax Regional Municipality, which was presented virtually during the Celebratory Community Spirit and Volunteer Awards ceremony held September 28, 2020.

On Alex's days off, you will often find him volunteering at one of the groups he is involved with or spending time with younger kids, helping them explore their love of science. Although Alex's award had to be presented virtually, it does not take away from the significant contribution that he has made, and continues to make, in our community.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding Alex Stapleton for his continued dedication and commitment of volunteerism in this community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY: ACCESS IN EDUCATION - IMPROVE

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, Sunday was World Down Syndrome Day. My brother, Adam, and my cousin, Barbara, have Down syndrome. Our family feels incredibly blessed to have Adam and Barbara in our lives. They have a kindness we can only wish to have, a joyful spirit that will brighten any room, and immeasurable love. Adam and Barbara have taught us so much about love, compassion, acceptance, and patience.

However, our family, like many families who have children with disabilities, often find barriers in education such as access to full-time aides, access to programs, supports, and housing. Families and individuals with disabilities are met with wait-list after wait-list. They spend most of their lives going from one list to another. Families like mine fear the day they no longer are able to care for or be an advocate for their children.

Mr. Speaker, as we move to destigmatize, let us remove the barriers they face as well.

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

SMB STEWARDSHIP ASSOC.: ISLAND NATURE RESERVES - CONGRATS.

HUGH MACKAY: I rise today to congratulate the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association on the success of their 15-year campaign to have many of the St. Margaret's Bay islands designated as nature reserves.

To date, the Stewardship Association has been successful in having 11 of the 30-plus islands designated. These islands include coastal barrens and forests, beaches and dunes, as well as nesting habitats for rare species.

Along with the provincial government, the Stewardship Association has been working hard to preserve and protect the islands for community members to enjoy the beauty and culture of these precious biospheres. Some of the islands even include sacred Mi'kmaq burial grounds.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Mike Lancaster, Nick Horne, Ella McQuinn, and all current and past members of the St. Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association on their tireless work to preserve the significant islands in St. Margaret's Bay.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.

DARLING, NATE - ATHL.: NBA GAME - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Bedford's Nate Darling on being the first Nova Scotian to play in a National Basketball league regular season game. On March 13th, the 22-year-old played in a home game as the Charlotte Hornets defeated the Toronto Raptors 114-104. Nate made his NBA debut with the Hornets in December of last year, when he had two rebounds, three assists, and a steal in nine minutes of action.

Prior to declaring for the draft, Nate was one of the University of Delaware's top shooters. He set a school record with 107 three-pointers and was named a conference All-Star and team MVP.

Folks may remember back in 2015, Nate led Nova Scotia to the gold medal at the Canadian U-17 Boy's Basketball Championship here in Halifax. He scored 50 points in the championship game and was named tournament MVP. He went on to help Team Canada capture gold at the 2017 FIBA U-19 World Cup. It was Canada's first basketball title at any world or Olympic event. Bravo, Nate.

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

STEVENSON, HEIDI - CST.: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to the late Cst. Heidi Stevenson. Heidi was named one of Canada's Most Powerful Women by the national organization Women's Executive Network. Each year the organization selects 100 women with the ability to stand up for us all, influence change, and empower others.

We remember Heidi as an active mum, a loving wife, a dedicated daughter, and wonderful friend. Kindness and compassion led Heidi always to stand up for what she believed in. For 23 years, Heidi served as a Royal Canadian Mounted Police member, and lost her life tragically in the line of duty in April 2020.

[1:45 p.m.]

I ask all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in recognizing Heidi's Most Powerful Women Award and for her memory that reaches far beyond the Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage constituency.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**INTL. DAY FOR ELIM. OF DISCRIM.:
YOUTH AGAINST RACISM - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleagues and the Premier in marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21, 2021. This is observed annually on the day police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid pass laws in 1960.

If ever there was a year, a moment, to mark this day, this is it. In the past year Nova Scotia, North America, and beyond have witnessed an inescapable conversation about racism enter the public realm. Spurred by injustice and tragedy, no one can credibly deny the existence of racial discrimination any longer nor the need to dismantle it.

This year's UN theme is "Youth Standing Up Against Racism." With the powerful work of a new generation of activists and advocates from the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw communities advocating alongside other BIPOC folks, Nova Scotia can no longer look away from the injustices which have formed a part of our narrative for hundreds of years.

There was a time when it might have made sense to ask, "But what can I do?" and that time has passed, particularly for those of us in this Chamber. We must be allies, we must make space for many more BIPOC legislators to join us, and we must stand up, step up, change the laws that enshrine inequality and discrimination, and focus on equity as we move forward together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY:
COM. AWARENESS LDRS. - RECOG.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, it is said that diversity is being invited to the party and inclusion is being asked to dance. With the recent celebration of World Down Syndrome Day on March 21, 2021, I rise today to thank every advocate, from parents and professionals, non-profits, schools, and persons with Down syndrome, who work passionately as our community awareness leaders for inclusion and embracing difference.

In Kings South, we are fortunate to have many inclusive organizations. The Flower Cart Group, Acadia University's Sensory Motor Instructional Leadership Experience (SMILE) Program, and L'Arche Homefires work hand in hand empowering persons with disabilities by celebrating the joys of life together. L'Arche Homefires was just recently recognized for these extraordinary efforts as the recipient of *The Grapevine's* Best of the Bunch Award in the category of Best Non-Profit Organization. Congratulations.

Today I ask the members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to thank the persons across our province in their various roles who continue to choose to dance wondrously with one another, no matter their abilities. As the Canadian Down Syndrome Society says often, "See the ability."

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

**ROBINSON, JOE:
CAPE BRETON'S GOLF AMBASSADOR - CONGRATS.**

KEITH BAIN: Mr. Speaker, golf legend Joe Robinson, raised in Ingonish Beach, has recently been highlighted at DreamGolf.com as Cape Breton's golf ambassador.

Joe's passion for golf began when he caddied at the Highland Links at the age of 12. He spent 39 years as golf pro at Highland Links, helping put the course on the map.

At 71 years of age, Joe continues to enjoy his work as Cabot Cape Breton's Senior PGA of Canada Professional. Robinson is known far and wide for his graciousness and friendly demeanour. Having caddied in a group with Gene Sarazen, set course records, and welcomed tens of thousands to Canada's friendliest island, Joe remains Cape Breton's true golf ambassador.

I rise today to thank Joe for his contribution of more than 50 years to Cape Breton's golf community and to congratulate him on his title of Cape Breton's golf ambassador.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

NON-MOTORIZED ROAD USERS: SAFETY - PRIORITIZE

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, in wake of the outrageous loss of life of a pedestrian in a marked crosswalk in my constituency last week, I want to implore this government and all members to prioritize safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, children playing, users of mobility devices, and all vulnerable road users.

Immense and ongoing investment in highway infrastructure, particularly twinned 100-series highways, is justified by safety concerns, yet the province is slow to make regulatory changes, legislative changes, and more modest investments that would foster a safer and healthier Nova Scotia for those not travelling in motorized vehicles.

Recently the speed limits were dropped to 40 kilometres per hour in a neighbourhood of Halifax Needham, but only after waiting many months for the Province to consider and approve the change. In the last Assembly, the NDP brought forward legislation that would enable municipalities to set lower speed limits on municipal roads. Why not?

In this Chamber and in conversations outside it, I have heard about sidewalks in municipalities that end abruptly when the provincial road begins, or refusal by the Province to prioritize sidewalks on our highways that pass through communities. It is an issue in Hubbards and in East Preston. Nova Scotians deserve better.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

GRANDSON, NICHOLAS - BIRTHDAY WISHES

HON. LENA METLEGE DIAB: Today I want to congratulate a very special big boy, mon petit-fils, my grandson, Nicholas, on the occasion of his fifth birthday.

Nicholas has so enjoyed pre-Primary this past year. Il était inscrit au Programme prématernelle de la Nouvelle-Écosse - Grandir en français. He is so excited every morning as he puts on his mask, takes the bus with his brother Anthony, and travels to school.

I can also tell you just how excited I am as his grandmother to hear his stories and what he is learning, all in French. This weekend I cannot wait until we gather in my home for a celebration of good food, a number five-shaped birthday cake with Boo, a Super Mario character, and a Nintendo Switch Controller made of delicious chocolate hazelnut filling by local artisan baker Paula Joukhadar from As Sweet As Nina.

Je vous invite à me joindre pour féliciter Nicholas and wish him lots of fun and bonne chance with the rest of his school year.

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

KOSICK, HANNAH - AUTHOR: *BUMBLE BEES OF UNAMA'KI* - CONGRATS.

BRIAN COMER: Today I applaud Hannah Kosick of Port Morien, who had her book *Bumble Bees of Unama'ki: A Guide to Becoming a Buzzing Naturalist* published on Cape Breton University's Pressbooks site.

Hannah's hope for the book is for it to inspire people to do their own research, become scientists, and strive to become environmental conservationists.

Ms. Kosick is a 22-year-old Bachelor of Arts and Science honours student at CBU who is set to graduate this year. Her book is the first time a student's work has been published on this site.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Kosick on her current and continued success and wish her well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

BOULDER, CO: RECENT TRAGEDY - RECOG.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to acknowledge the horrific events that took place yesterday in Boulder, Colorado. I spent a decade of my young life in Boulder, and still have many friends and family in the area, and to them I send my love and strength. It is a small city nestled at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, smaller than Halifax, known for its friendliness and its beauty.

Like Nova Scotia almost a year ago, Boulder was rocked by tragedy yesterday when a man opened fire in a busy grocery store in a residential neighborhood, killing 10 people. This on the heels of the shooting rampage just last week in Atlanta, Georgia, where eight Asian American women were murdered.

Sadly, Nova Scotians can no longer look at these tragedies as bystanders. They trigger our own collective grief. Let them also be a reminder to all of us to always strive to remove the conditions for tragedies like this to occur.

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

MARRIE, TOM - PHYSICIAN: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

HUGH MACKAY: I rise to welcome Dr. Tom Marrie to the board of our health centre, fondly known to us in Chester-St. Margaret's as Our Health Centre (OHC). Dr. Marrie brings a wealth of experience to this position. He first started as a physician in Newfoundland and Labrador before becoming a specialist in infectious diseases and founding the Division of Infectious Diseases at Dalhousie University.

Dr. Marrie also worked in Manitoba and Alberta, then became the Dean of the Alberta University Medical School and was later appointed the Dean of the Dalhousie Medical School here in Halifax.

Recently, Dr. Marrie served as Nova Scotia's interim Deputy Minister of Health and Wellness. Among other things, Dr. Marrie's particular interest as a member of the OHC board includes work on the social determinants of health and looking at what makes us sick.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in welcoming Dr. Tom Marrie to the board of this important health institution, Chester's OHC.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston-Dartmouth.

**BEALS, KEONTÉ/BEALS, ANTONIO - AUTHORS:
I AM PERFECTLY ME - CONGRATS.**

HON. KEITH COLWELL: I would like to recognize Keonté Beals and his younger brother, Antonio, who is a Grade 5 student at Nelson Whynder Elementary School in North Preston for recently co-authoring the children's book *I Am Perfectly Me*.

The authors know that a real need exists for kids of African Nova Scotian descent to be able to open more books with a sense of pride when they see people who look like themselves. The authors want the children of all races, sizes and genders to know that they are beautiful and have a role in our society. They are busy conducting visual author visits and doing readings at schools throughout the province in the hope that the interest in their book will last longer than African Heritage Month.

Keonté and Antonio Beals are filling a real need in our schools' curriculum material, and their book demonstrates that developing includes reading materials that make a difference in the lives of all children.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**MACINTOSH, CATHIE - CAPT.:
COMMANDING OFFICER'S COMMENDATION - CONGRATS.**

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, in recognition of outstanding professionalism and commitment, Captain Cathie MacIntosh of Stellarton has been presented a Commanding Officer's Commendation. MacIntosh has been the catalyst for the development and advancement of pipes and drums training in Pictou County for 374 Flight Lieutenant Chisholm Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron and 219 New Glasgow Legion Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps. Cathie has been the squadron's personal champion dedicated to encouraging and promoting its success.

It is evident that MacIntosh loves teaching and continues to be committed to students' success. Cathie's teaching and mentoring achieved high standards through her discipling and team-working skills. Her ability to create strong bonds with cadets made her task rewarding.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to extend thanks to Captain MacIntosh for her assistance with developing self-confidence, teamwork and a sense of responsibility with her students.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

**RESERVE MINES SENIORS AND PENSIONERS CLUB:
MEALS ON WHEELS - COMMEND**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, on June 15, 2020, the Reserve Mines Seniors and Pensioners Club, led by President Mel Bryden and numerous volunteers, began their Meals on Wheels Program to provide hot nutritious meals to seniors. The volunteers have organized themselves beautifully. Mel oversees the daily program and the budget, Brenda Bryden oversees the kitchen staff and the packaging, and prep is led by Carol McKenzie. The outside area is led by Donnie and Shelly Mullins and assisted by Maureen McLean, who directs where meals go and coordinates delivery volunteers.

To date, these hard-working volunteers have served over 21,000 meals and put in over 30,000 volunteer hours. I applaud their efforts to ensure seniors in the community have nutritious hot meals.

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

LAFFORD, LINDEN: MESSAGES OF SUPPORT - RECOG.

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to admire and join the thousands who have sent messages of encouragement to Linden Lafford of Potlotek First Nation. Linden was subjected to hateful comments because of his long hair, one evening as his family enjoyed an evening of bowling.

Mr. Speaker, after Linden's mother spoke of the event on Facebook, Linden received thousands of messages of support and reassurances to be proud of his long hair and to recognize it is a symbol of strength and a source of pride in First Nations cultures.

Mr. Speaker, Linden's story reminds us that we still have a lot of work to do in welcoming and understanding the values and customs of all people but that there is hope for a future without bigotry.

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

SYDNEY: MOST LIVABLE COM. - CONGRATS.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize home. The community of Sydney has been ranked eighth out of 166 communities by RATESDOTCA as one of the most livable communities in Canada. This ranking is based on population growth, potential, scenery, and a number of other measurables that give Sydney such a strong score.

Mr. Speaker, at home there are hundreds of people who each and every day support the many organizations and the unprecedented investments that we're making, not only as a government but from the private sector. To everybody at home, congratulations. We do live in a beautiful community.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. At this time the House will now recess for our mandated 15-minute, COVID-19 protocol break. We'll resume with the order of business, Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, at 2:15 p.m.

[2:00 p.m. The House recessed.]

[2:15 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: VACCINE ROLLOUT - QUESTIONS

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians have a lot of questions about the vaccine rollout in this province, but it's not just Nova Scotians. Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Sinai Health and University Health Network Hospitals in Toronto, is quoted as saying in reference to Nova Scotia, "They certainly aren't, in my view, approaching their vaccination strategy with maybe the same zeal as other jurisdictions."

Many Nova Scotians were left to wonder the same thing when we saw our Premier on national TV, musing on whether or not to accept additional doses of an approved vaccine.

My question for the Premier today is: Does the Premier accept responsibility for a vaccine rollout in this province that continues to lag behind the rest of the country?

HON. IAIN RANKIN (The Premier): I appreciate the work of Nova Scotians getting us to the point that we are today, leading the country in keeping our cases low. It allowed us to put together a robust strategy for a vaccine rollout across the province.

Every week since mid-February we continue to put more and more doses in arms. We had a briefing today where we went over and gave updates to where we are in the schedule. We're well on our targets to get every Nova Scotian the ability to get their vaccine by the end of June.

TIM HOUSTON: That robust strategy is not as robust, obviously, as other provinces, where we continue to fall further and further behind. I'll remind this House that, just two weeks ago, the Premier stood in this House and said that Nova Scotia was a leader in distributing second doses. The facts notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, the facts actually show that Nova Scotia at the time was eighth among ten provinces in second doses - nowhere near leading.

Nova Scotia has administered the fewest vaccinations per capita in the country - the fewest. Nova Scotia has administered the lowest percentage of vaccinations on hand. The lowest, Mr. Speaker. In Nova Scotia, there's more doses in the refrigerator than there is in arms of Nova Scotians.

My question for the Premier is: Weeks after prioritizing first doses, why is Nova Scotia still struggling to get first doses into arms?

THE PREMIER: Facts matter in this conversation, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is, there are 36,000 doses that are going out to clinics this week for utilization. There are 21,000 doses that are being held in freezers, and all accounted for, for their second dose.

What I said last week is that of the doses that are administered out to Nova Scotians, a full one-third of those were second doses, which does make us a leader in ensuring that the second dose got to our long-term care facilities, health care workers. We need to continue to prioritize, keep our eye on the ball, ensuring that we're rolling out the vaccines in order of priority from our age cohorts, descending down.

I don't want to be compared to Ontario, where they've had some disruptions online. We had our system in place well before those provinces so that we can deliver a robust supply and that we can get our shots into Nova Scotians by the end of June.

TIM HOUSTON: Oh boy, Mr. Speaker. Nova Scotians remember when the system went online here and the problems with that. I wouldn't be too quick to point fingers. We have the lowest doses per capita. The very lowest.

The Premier's completely right - facts do matter. I'd like to speak to a Global News article. In this article, Global News checked with national experts on the infectious disease and asked them to rate the 10 provinces on their rollout. One of those was Dr. Sinha, who we've already heard is curious about the urgency that Nova Scotia is placing on the rollout.

Another is Dr. Brian Conway, medical director for the Vancouver Infectious Diseases Centre. Dr. Conway assigned letter grades to each province. He gave Nova Scotia a D, the lowest grade in the country.

I'd like to ask the Premier: Should Nova Scotians be satisfied with a D grade, despite the flowery language around the robustness of it? Should we be satisfied with a D, Mr. Speaker?

THE PREMIER: I'm very pleased by the performance of our Public Health team, getting out into community clinics across the province, ensuring that we work alongside our First Nations community getting those doses out, working with African Nova Scotian communities. We're going to continue to listen to public health and not politics that try to erode the system. It's very important that we work together as a province and focus on an effective delivery of the vaccine.

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

PREM. - LONG-TERM CARE: NEW BEDS - OPINION

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Premier about long-term care.

In the midst of this greatest graying tsunami in our history, with 1,300 and counting people on the waiting list to find a place in long-term care in our province, the total number of new beds which have been opened in the almost eight years that this government has been in power - I say opened, not planned, not on the drawing board, but opened - is 57.

What is the Premier's opinion of this record?

THE PREMIER: Long-term care will be a priority of this government moving forward. It's a priority for our province and governments across the country that have been affected by the pandemic. The conditions in our long-term care facilities need to be improved.

We need to start building more and more beds, especially in growth areas. There was an announcement previous to my time in this role that we're going to rebuild seven sites, 236 more beds, in the HRM area. There are plans that are fully under way in the Cape Breton area, in New Waterford, Eskasoni, and so on down the line.

We do have a capital plan - it's an aggressive one - as we do throughout the health care system. We're going to continue to make those strategic investments especially because of the impacts of COVID-19.

GARY BURRILL: The Department of Health and Wellness has been very clear for some time that moving from the older model of nursing home construction, which was built around shared multiple occupancy, to the newer construction standard built on one resident, one room, one washroom, is vitally important from the point of view of controlling the spread of infections.

Yet today in our province, we have right around 3,000 living in shared-accommodation designed facilities in long-term care facilities in Nova Scotia. At the rate at which this government has moved over eight years - 57 new beds having been opened - to address the needs of those 3,000 would take us multiple generations.

Mr. Speaker, is the Premier without embarrassment about this record?

THE PREMIER: I'm proud of the investments that this government has made in infrastructure across the province. Not only did we inherit a financial deficit that was at record levels in 2013, but we inherited an unprecedented infrastructure deficit.

Successive governments did not invest only in acute care at the VG and some of the aged buildings, but also in long-term care. That's why we continue to look at ways that we can manage the budget prudently, so that we have room for these types of investments that were recently announced. We're going to continue to look at other areas where we can prioritize investments in long-term care, in acute care, and the whole spectrum of continuing care.

GARY BURRILL: When we note that there are 1,300-plus people on that waiting list for long-term care, we're not talking exclusively about people waiting in their homes. We're also talking about the hundreds and hundreds of people who are being housed in hospitals.

In the last five years, the amount that this government has spent on housing people in alternate levels of care as it's called - housing people in hospitals - is \$60 million. That would provide financially for opening around 500 new nursing home beds, which is about 10-times the number that have been opened by this government over the course of its eight years.

Can the Premier tell us: What has been the logic? What has been the thinking and the rationale that has led the government to put so many people and leave so many people in this position?

THE PREMIER: I'm glad to be able to start off in this administration with such a strong financial footing, one of three provinces, according to the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Officer, that are on a sustainable fiscal path. That allows us to increase our investments across the board in continuing care. We're going to see historic investments in this budget on infrastructure and on staffing. We're going to continue to look at areas and target investment that Nova Scotians need and deserve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: FED. VACCINE PLAN - COMMENT

TIM HOUSTON: The concern with the vaccine plan in this province right now is that it's a promise built on a promise built on a promise - promises that, to this point, haven't delivered. There's no track record of delivery on those promises.

The very first promise is from the federal government. It's a federal government that has struggled so far. We know that Canada sits 47th in the world for vaccinations - 47th, Mr. Speaker. Imagine if our ice hockey team was ranked 47th. That's where we're at with vaccines.

My question for the Premier is: On a scale of one to ten, how satisfied is our premier with the performance of the federal government so far?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member points to the federal government. Our program does rely on the supply that's been committed to our province. All premiers are continuing to have dialog with the Prime Minister, as we continue to press for more and more supply. We have a system in place that we've been building the infrastructure for for months now and so we are ready for any supply that we're able to get. We continue to work on our priorities, and we're going to be adding more and more shots into arms every single week, as we have been since mid-February. We're going to be doing upwards of 10,000 - 12,000 a day.

Every time I do a briefing, we announce record days and then record weeks. We continue to make progress because of that hard work of Nova Scotians.

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, there is a nugget of good news in there. We have to keep doing better, we have to set a record every day because we've done so poorly all along. It's literally impossible to do any worse.

The second promise is that Nova Scotia can ramp up its vaccinations when it gets the doses. There's no track record to indicate that will happen. I've already mentioned that we're last in the country in terms of doses delivered actually being put in arms. The last in that category, too. We have more vaccinations in freezers than we have in arms in this province. That's what's happening right now.

This government has, as the Premier has said, had three months to deliver vaccines and the results are that we are very last in every category. Past history can be an indication of future performance. My question for the Premier is: Why should Nova Scotians have any confidence that the performance so far can ramp up to the point of 86,000 vaccinations?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, he may be entitled to his own opinions but not to his own facts. The member opposite talks about how many doses are in arms and those in freezers. There are 66,287 doses in arms. There are 57,000 doses waiting to be delivered and of those, half are being held back for second doses. If the member is going to bring forward some information to the House, next time it could be accurate.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: VACCINE PRIORITY PLAN - CONCERN

TIM HOUSTON: Just a smidgen rich, Mr. Speaker, just a smidgen rich. We're last in the country. That's an indisputable fact. If the Premier wants to take that up, he should take it up with pretty much every news network in the country.

We accept that the sands will continue to shift on the vaccines, but what we do know is what Nova Scotia has been able to control has not been done very well. We know there have been huge gaps in availability in Pictou County, in Victoria County - we've heard that before. We know that police were emphatically out of Phase 2 one day and then the next they were in Phase 2. We know that on March 3rd, the NACI extended the guideline to allow four months between the first and second doses and Nova Scotia set some bold targets of what they were going to prioritize the first doses.

I have to ask the Premier: Why hasn't that priority been showing up in the actual doses that are going into arms? The Premier's own numbers, which are close to mine, suggest that they're not.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the important point here is that all doses that we have that were allocated are being spoken for - either for their second dose. The member knows very well that was the preliminary advice that we had that we followed, and we are able to continue to do that because of our good epidemiology.

That policy has since changed and we're going to see a ramp-up as soon as we get more vaccinations out. When we get some one week, they're into arms by the following week. That continues to be the process laid out. We have our community clinics coming online week by week. We're going to have literally over 100 pharmacy clinics delivering the vaccine so that Nova Scotians across every region will have easy access to the vaccine.

TIM HOUSTON: OK, I think I understand. So, it's a priority sometimes but not a priority all the time for the first dose. Several groups have come out in recent days and

weeks, suggesting that those who are immunocompromised or at greater risk for serious complications should be given a higher priority.

The Premier has constantly stayed steadfast in his strategy that age-based is the best way to go. Mind you, the Premier was also steadfast in his statement that the police did not belong in Phase 2, but he reversed course on that one after learning what the police actually do in this province, I guess. Nova Scotia's position seems to be that we have this great plan to administer vaccinations, but the plan will be ruined if we actually administer vaccinations.

[2:30 p.m.]

Is it the Premier's belief that those who are at greater risk due to underlying conditions should not be given any priority in vaccination rollouts?

THE PREMIER: What I remain steadfast on is listening to Public Health. I have tremendous confidence in the team and their work that's got us this far. I think it's quite obvious to most people in the province that we continue to do good work. We're leaders in the country in many ways in how we're handling the pandemic, and we're going to continue to work alongside Public Health.

When a group brings forward some information, I think it's a duty for Dr. Strang to listen to that information. Once he makes a recommendation on things like the first responders to scenes - and he asked to have them put into the Phase 2 part of the program - of course we're going to listen to that.

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

H&W - ER CLOSURES: LACK OF DOCTORS - COMMENT

LARRY HARRISON: We spent the last year in a COVID fog, washing our hands, staying six feet apart, avoiding public gatherings, and heeding all of the advice we've been given. But now, with lowered restrictions, people are starting to look around and notice that the problems we had before the start of the pandemic are still with us.

We're now almost out of the far end of a two-day closure of the emergency departments at Eastern Shore Memorial Hospital and the Musquodoboit Valley Memorial Hospital, and it's because of doctor shortage.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Will the future still see ER closures because of the lack of doctors?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I appreciate the question from the member. ER doctors are a priority for us. We have recruited hundreds of new doctors to the province.

We've changed the remuneration for doctors. That makes our family physicians, certain specialities, and GPs who practise in ERs the highest paid in Atlantic Canada. We're training more doctors here in Nova Scotia and working to create incentives to plug the holes where they're needed.

I had a very good conversation with Doctors Nova Scotia last week. I believe we're going to keep working together to ensure that access to primary care in this province is enhanced and improved.

LARRY HARRISON: It doesn't just stop at the ER closures. When you layer in the ambulance response times, what has developed is an emergency medicine desert that covers from Musquodoboit Harbour to Truro to Sherbrooke - not the most densely populated area of the province, but an emergency call in this area could wait two hours to get to an emergency room. If there is a surge in calls or off-load delays at other hospitals, that wait time could be longer. Patient outcomes suffer the longer an emergency patient waits to see a doctor.

Is the minister comfortable with the fact that the residents of Colchester County and the Eastern Shore are left in this position, and if not, will changes be made?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Thanks for the question. We are moving to have an ambulatory emergency system that is based around patient outcomes, that isn't just based around response times. That's in line with recommendations that have come to us through Fitch and Associates, who are globally recognized for being leaders in this field.

Yes, off-load issues do remain. We've directed the Nova Scotia Health Authority to work with the department to address those off-load issues. They are affecting response times, but we are at the cusp of some pretty important transformations in our ambulatory system that are going to help us save more lives here in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

PREM.: AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIANS: COVID-19 IMPACT - COMMENT

SUSAN LEBLANC: My question is for the Premier. We know from other jurisdictions that COVID-19 has hit racialized communities harder. In Toronto's second wave of the virus, nearly 80 per cent of COVID-19 cases were among racialized groups. I can table that.

It is a virtual certainty that this problem exists here in Nova Scotia, but we just don't know for certain because this government has refused to collect race-based demographic data in health care, despite years of work and advocacy in the African Nova Scotian community to get this done.

How does the Premier expect to address racism in this province if his government won't collect basic data on the problem?

THE PREMIER: I appreciate the member bringing this very important issue forward. Disaggregated data has been a request over a significant amount of time, Mr. Speaker. It is a priority for this government, and I expect once consultation is complete in this regard, that that this will be out very, very soon.

SUSAN LEBLANC: With respect, the consultation has been done over and over and over again. African Nova Scotian communities have already developed solutions, but now they need action. The African Nova Scotian justice institute and policing strategy are ready to go. The African Nova Scotian health strategy is as well and would be a critical tool in the fight against systemic racism during this global pandemic. It has been promised by this government for years.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier agree that in the midst of a global health emergency, we need an African Nova Scotian health strategy now?

THE PREMIER: Disaggregated data is a very important part of how we ensure that we're looking at health from all the different realities that are present in our society. Those discussions started immediately under this administration. It started before this administration. I was aware of those discussions, and I want to make sure that all stakeholders involved in this discussion are part of that announcement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

H&W - PREGNANCY LOSS: BETTER PROCESS - COMMIT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Everyone who read the story of Lauren Howe feels compassion for the ordeal that she endured earlier this month after a life-changing event, a miscarriage. Because she was less than 20 weeks pregnant, she sought medical treatment at the Infirmary emergency room and waited for 14 hours.

Although this is difficult for me to read, I will share a quote from her: "I was crying to the nurses saying, you know, 'I'm losing a lot of blood. I can't sit up straight. I need to be laying down,' and it was basically just, 'Well, there's nowhere we can put you.'"

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Does the minister believe that a busy, overcrowded, noisy emergency room is the most appropriate place for a woman who is experiencing pregnancy loss?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I think anybody who heard Lauren's story was heartbroken over that situation. We of course want Nova Scotians to get the best service possible when they enter into our emergency departments. I can't speak on behalf of any

clinical or triage decisions that were made at that time. We do know that there is a lot of pressure on our emergency departments for a number of reasons, and that can impact outcomes.

It is a priority of ours to improve that system and relieve some of that pressure. We're approaching that in a number of different ways, including how we look at off-loading, patient flow and other access points to primary care.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Lauren Howe was eventually transferred to the IWK. She said the quiet, nurturing environment of the IWK was a relief after 14 hours in a hallway in a waiting area at the Infirmary.

In addition to the fear and pain that women experience during pregnancy loss, there's often a very overwhelming emotional component. The noise and crowds in an emergency room often make those feelings of sadness and loss worse. Statistics say that one in five of all pregnancies will end in miscarriage.

Although the minister has said that he's working on making changes, I think this is a different question that I'm asking the Minister of Health and Wellness: Will he commit to providing a more supportive emergency process that maybe doesn't involve a busy emergency room, for the hundreds of women who seek medical help during pregnancy loss?

ZACH CHURCHILL: The member brings forward a really important issue. We do lean heavily on clinical advice when it comes to setting up the criteria for our emergency departments, but this is of course the situation, I think, that requires involving a deeper dive. I am happy to discuss the situation with staff here at the department and clinicians from whom we take advice on this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

H&W - PELVIC REPAIR SURGERY: WAIT TIMES - COMMENT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I do appreciate the response. When you think about the statistics - one in five pregnancies end in miscarriage - women of this province are looking for more support.

On that note, I want to share some data that about one in three Canadian women suffer with pelvic floor dysfunction. Members may know that pelvic pain and urinary incontinence are just some of the symptoms. For many women, pelvic floor-repair surgery is the only way to deal with this condition - a condition that can have a significant impact on quality of life.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness: How long must women in Nova Scotia wait to see a specialist and get this life-changing surgery?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm not sure in terms of the specifics of that surgery or wait times, but I will get the information from our staffer at the department and get back to the member.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'll share some of the data that we have here. Women in the Central District wait 699 days just for a consult with a specialist and a further average of 397 days for the actual surgery. That's more than three years that women in this province are waiting. The average wait for all Nova Scotia women is 645 days for a consult and another 414 days for surgery.

My question is: Does the minister think that our health care system is being responsive to women? I can tell you what women think, and the answer is no, not when they must wait more than three years for surgery that affects their quality of life so significantly.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you for the question. Obviously, those stats are concerning. I will have a conversation with folks here on that issue and get some more information for the member. I'm happy to also meet with the member and discuss this issue further.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

H&W: CANCER SCREENING BACKLOG - ADDRESS

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has increased the backlog within our surgical system. It is undesirable for any procedure to be delayed, but it is completely irresponsible to contribute to the backlog by stopping life-saving cancer screening . . .

THE SPEAKER: I think we have lost the honourable member for Pictou West. Your mute is on. I think you're back?

KARLA MACFARLANE: I lost connection. Can you hear me?

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please start again.

KARLA MACFARLANE: When the pandemic struck, many cancer screenings were stopped. This included at-home screenings. For colon cancer, the program is a huge success, and Nova Scotians who were feeling fine when they did the test - more than 800 out of the 10,000 were found to have cancer.

Although this program started up again in October, there was a seven-month delay where no at-home screening was being conducted. Using data from the previous years, though, we can assume that one would have found about 400 cases of colon cancer in this time which went undetected.

My question for the minister: Does the minister have an accelerated plan to catch up on the misdiagnosed?

[2:45 p.m.]

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you for the question. Of course, as our system prepared for what could have happened with COVID-19, it did impact some areas of our health care system. One area where it didn't impact was those who needed acute surgeries or cancer treatments. Those were all received on time during the COVID-19 period. Also, I will inform the member that 95 per cent of our elective surgeries that were delayed have either happened or have been rescheduled.

As the member indicated, our screening system is back up in place. I am happy to say that that operation is running smoothly from all accounts that I have received.

KARLA MACFARLANE: There are people on this Zoom meeting who have not had their kits received. We need a solid plan to catch up and treat cancer cases early. Localized colon cancers have a 91-per-cent five-year survival rate with proper treatment, so we cannot afford any delays.

We are not staying on top of our cancer screenings. New diagnoses of colon cancer are down 12 per cent, breast cancer diagnoses are down 19 per cent, and bladder and ovarian cancer diagnoses are down 25 per cent. We are missing cancer diagnoses. That means we are finding cancer later, and that means patients become sicker. That, in turn, means more treatments, more invasive surgeries, and worsening patient outcomes.

My questions is: Has the minister considered the long-term impacts on the health care system of delayed screenings?

ZACH CHURCHILL: I know that we have gotten used to the caseloads that we have had here in Nova Scotia. We have led the world when it comes to containing the pandemic and keeping it out of our communities here. I will remind the member that at the beginning of this, we didn't know that that was going to be the case. We saw stories of hospitals being overrun in Italy, in the United States, and even parts of this country, and we did act prudently to preserve and protect life during the pandemic.

As soon as the reality of the situation and the numbers around COVID-19 improved and we flattened the curve - not just once, but in two separate ways - our other processes

began to come online again. Our cancer screening, which of course is important - it does save lives - is one of them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PREM. - COL. CO.: RCMP CONTRACTS - ADDRESS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: My question is for the Premier. For years, the municipality of the district of Colchester has been raising concerns about contracting the RCMP to provide policing services, including understaffing, a lack of community policing, and officers only being available on an on-call basis. In April 2019, the council issued a news release requesting a full review of service levels and value for payment, and I can table that.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why the government failed to take timely action to address these concerns?

THE PREMIER: Policing does fall under municipal jurisdiction, but of course, we'll work with municipalities on how the policing service works, how shared services are administered, and how they're shared amongst municipalities. I don't have the individual information from that specific municipality, but I would endeavour to work with the Department of Justice to see how that correspondence was left, to ensure that they have consideration given to how the administration of that policing service works and how the province can support.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This isn't an isolated issue. Within the past year, members of the public have expressed concern regarding the RCMP more broadly: their handling of the mass shooting in Portapique, their approach to conflicts around the fishery in southwest Nova Scotia, and daytime raids conducted in Dartmouth and Halifax which saw police vehicles racing neighbourhood streets and surrounding a building adjacent to a school.

When I wrote to the Minister of Justice in December to ask about the promised review of policing services, he indicated that what the department was engaged in was an internal committee that is conducting a preliminary analysis.

Mr. Speaker, given the seriousness of these concerns, will the Premier commit to a transparent and accountable public review of all policing services separate from the Mass Casualty Commission?

THE PREMIER: All those events are extremely serious, Mr. Speaker, and we need to make sure that we're reviewing what took place in those events. There is a contract with the RCMP throughout the province, and there is a certain amount of time left on that contract. We want to make sure that we have the best possible service to protect public safety and have the required training in how they deal with complex situations.

If there is an alternative, Mr. Speaker, we will consider that. We need to make sure that we do have confidence in public safety and those who are protecting those in communities across the province. I await the review and to see what the terms are before making a decision on how that will work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

H&W - ARGYLE/BARR.: DIALYSIS SERV. - ACTION

COLTON LEBLANC: I unfortunately rise today on the topic of dialysis services in my constituency. This is an issue that has gone, now, through three ministers of Health and Wellness and that I have raised previously, and that my predecessor has raised previously, in sessions of this Legislature.

This issue has been raised for over seven years in my constituency, and when access to life-saving care was asked about back in 2018, the then Minister of Health and Wellness stated: The unfortunate reality is that there are other communities and regions that have an even further distance, and that's where we've been trying to focus on the first round of these expanded dialysis treatments.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Why are we now seven years into this government dragging its feet on bringing dialysis services to Argyle-Barrington, specifically to Barrington?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, in fact there has been a lot of investment and expansion in our dialysis programming here in Nova Scotia. We have expanded to a number of communities - Digby, Kentville, Bridgewater, the HRM area, and also in Cape Breton.

Folks in our neck of the woods do have access to dialysis at Yarmouth Regional Hospital but, also, we are looking at other modes of delivering dialysis as well for those who are further removed. People in the western part of our province can access dialysis at Yarmouth Regional Hospital on the South Shore side, and we will continue to look at ways to enhance that service as well.

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I fear that this is an issue that highlights the lack of access to health care in rural areas of Nova Scotia - seven years, three ministers of Health and Wellness, and I continue to advocate on this issue and have to report back to constituents in Argyle-Barrington that the needle has not moved an inch.

The minister noted that there have been projects announced in various parts of the province, but this does not include projects for those in Shelburne County. As the minister is very well aware, from the southernmost point of our province, the Hawk, to Yarmouth Regional Hospital is a fair commute. Doing that multiple times a week and in inclement

weather, that is challenging, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague from Kings West noted on Friday, he has been waiting for seven years himself.

Again, my question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Can the minister make a commitment to provide details regarding how dialysis services are allocated in Nova Scotia?

ZACH CHURCHILL: I absolutely can provide those details to the member. I will remind the member that dialysis services have been expanded significantly in the province. We have also incorporated home dialysis options as well for patients who find themselves at a distance from hospitals where dialysis is available.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

H&W - N. QUEENS: MEADOWBROOK MANOR - CLOSURE

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday I was made aware that Meadowbrook Manor in North Queens was closing its doors, making the future for seven seniors who call that facility home very uncertain. The staff at Meadowbrook Manor love the residents, they provide great care and delicious home-cooked meals.

Unfortunately, many of the beds at the facility are not occupied and the situation is no longer financially sustainable.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: When the government's own wait-list website shows that there are more than 1,300 Nova Scotians waiting for long-term care placement, why aren't any of those seniors being placed at Meadowbrook Manor?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, Meadowbrook Manor would be a private company that is operating that facility. It has decided to close its doors. The Health Authority has gone into that community already and is assessing the residents at Meadowbrook for placement in other long-term care options that are available. In fact, this government is investing significantly into long-term care. We are at the cusp of transforming our long-term care services to better meet the needs of our aging population and to provide, particularly what we learned during the pandemic, safer spaces to live in light of the risks we know about infectious diseases.

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, as soon as I became aware of what was happening at Meadowbrook Manor, I did reach out to the minister's staff, because I was very concerned about when and where the seniors who live at Meadowbrook would be placed.

Department staff did respond and advised that they would be working through the process. But, Mr. Speaker, the clock is ticking. The end of the month is quickly approaching and families and residents are consumed with fear and anxiety. They are calling my office looking for answers. We all must make the health and welfare of those residents a top priority.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister assure worried families that the residents of Meadowbrook Manor will not be the victims of this unfortunate situation and will receive the care and attention they need through this transition?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you very much for the question, member, and thank you for recognizing the work that staff here in the department have done on this. They are directing folks in the community to the Health Authority. The Health Authority is fully engaged with us. This is a priority for them, and they are going through the process to assess the current residents and find appropriate places for them to stay.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's.

L&F: NAT. RES. SECTOR - JOB & SKILLS RETRAINING

HUGH MACKAY: My question today is for the Minister of Lands and Forestry. Nova Scotians are pleased with the emphasis that the government of Premier Rankin is placing on transitioning to a green economy. In particular, Nova Scotians are pleased to know the government intends to follow recommendations from the Lahey report for the implementation of an ecological forestry model.

My question for the minister is: As we build back better from the pandemic, and we transition away from fossil fuels for power generation, can the minister confirm that workers in traditional natural resource sectors, such as forestry, will not be left behind, but in fact will be eligible to take advantage of jobs and skills retraining?

HON. CHUCK PORTER: As we move forward with greener and cleaner forms of energy, we will continue to work with all sectors to ensure that government is working with them as they adapt to new forms and ways of working. We will always be there with our traditional resource sectors, supporting their efforts. They make up a big part of what Nova Scotia is from an economic perspective, as well as other sectors.

HUGH MACKAY: My supplementary today is for the Minister of Transportation and Active Transit. Nova Scotians were pleased to hear that the national government will invest hundreds of millions of dollars in further development of active transit infrastructure. Can the minister please provide an indication of how this government will leverage the federal funding to augment its own spending to achieve better outcomes?

HON. LLOYD HINES: We're very, very excited about this news. The number that we have is \$400 million nation-wide, so there would be a proportionate share of that coming to Nova Scotia. We have many exciting projects in the pipeline across the province that would benefit from the funding. We look forward to getting the details from the federal government as to what the criteria is around this fund. It's great news, and we look forward to it and look forward to the challenge of this section of our new ministry.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

H&W - FUNDY SHORE: COL. CARE CTR. - COVERAGE

TORY RUSHTON: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. I represent one of the largest geographic constituencies in the province. This past year has caused us to reflect on many things, but none greater than the need for health care - the right kind in the right place at the right time.

The residents of Cumberland South have long suffered when it comes to access to health care, and this year's Annual Accountability Report on Emergency Departments proves my point. The emergency room in Parrsboro was closed for 2,249.5 hours in the South Cumberland Community Care Centre. This accounts for 30 per cent of all the closure time in the northern region.

My question is: When can all the residents of the Fundy Shore region expect to be treated like other parts of the province and receive 100 per cent coverage at their collaborative care centre?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Government's role in this is creating the conditions for success for our physician recruitment and for work. When there are physicians that are unavailable to work in our EDs, that does obviously impact their operations.

What I can tell the member is that we're training more doctors here in Nova Scotia than we ever have before. We're recruiting more internationally-trained doctors than we ever have before. We now have the highest-paid remuneration plan for emergency department physicians. We do have a lot of doctors here in Nova Scotia, and we're trying to find the right incentives to ensure that they are servicing our communities where they're most needed.

TORY RUSHTON: I recognize the work that all the communities have done to recruit doctors. We have brought many doctors into the province, and I applaud that - one locally in River Hebert. But how many doctors have we lost throughout this whole process? It's time that we move forward. Just last week, I looked on the Nova Scotia Health website and saw that there was a need for a family physician position at the Parrsboro Collaborative Emergency Centre.

[3:00 p.m.]

As the MLA in this area for nearly three years, I can't remember a point that this government provided full coverage at the CEC. Not only have closure hours increased, now they are non-existent at the Parrsboro facility. My question is very simple: When can the people of Cumberland South expect emergency services to come back to a full percentage at the CEC in Parrsboro?

ZACH CHURCHILL: I thank the member very much for the question. In fact, the Health Authority has put more money into addressing some of our emergency department closures as well, somewhere close to \$6.5 million invested to increase locums and to create more incentives to get practising medical professionals in these communities. That work is ongoing.

Again, we are setting the stage for the conditions, we believe, for success here. We have the highest-paid physicians in Atlantic Canada and that includes ones that are working in the emergency departments. We're training more doctors, we're recruiting more doctors and we're working with Doctors Nova Scotia to find ways to increase patient attachment to family physicians as well, which will take some pressure off of our emergency departments.

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

H&W: LONG-TERM CARE - STRATEGY

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, back in June 2019, Ocean View Continuing Care Centre's medical director and the other part-time physician submitted their resignations because they had accepted other positions. Now almost two years later, there has been very little progress on finding a permanent medical director or part-time physician for my constituents. During the Health Committee meeting on January 12, 2021, Dr. Kevin Orrell, the deputy minister, admitted to us that the government had promised to but failed to produce a five-year long-term care strategy for Nova Scotia. They announced in 2015 that it would be ready for 2017. Now here, four years later, there still is no long-term care strategy.

Can the Minister of Health and Wellness tell me why, after being in power for eight years, the current government still has no long-term care strategy?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, in fact, we do have a strategy to enhance our long-term care program services in Nova Scotia. We've invested in creating hundreds of new spaces, 400 new spaces already that we've announced, looking at replacing over 700 spaces as well. We're also looking at some of the labour supply challenges that we have and working with departments like Labour and Advanced Education and also the Nova Scotia Health Authority to develop recruitment and retention strategies for those

professions, like continuing care assistants for example, where we do have a labour shortage to fulfill the need.

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the minister needs to go back and have a watch of the video of the session where his own deputy minister said we do not have a strategy. There is no government long-term care strategy in the province of Nova Scotia, and the government had eight years to do so.

With respect to physician recruitment, *Nova Scotia Health Authority By the Numbers* shows that in 2018-19 there were 2,687 doctors in the province and last year's number is 2,287. So, with all due respect, we are not moving in the right direction.

With respect to the long-term care expert panel's recommendations that were released in 2018, I asked Vicki Elliott-Lopez why there hasn't been an update on how those recommendations have been introduced. She said she was distracted by the pandemic. My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Can he tell me why all of our home care and long-term care patients are falling through the cracks, having their visits cancelled, and why there are still so many Nova Scotians - over 60,000 - without a family doctor in the province of Nova Scotia after eight years of this government being in power?

ZACH CHURCHILL: In fact, we have seen the trend going in the other direction, in terms of attachment to family physicians, until this year. There are some factors that impacted patient attachment this year. Thirty per cent of those 60,000 patients that are without a family doctor who we surveyed are new to the community they're living in. They're either coming from out of province or moving within communities here in Nova Scotia. We've seen an influx of new people into our province. That is impacting patient attachment and that's why that number has gone up this year. We get that information directly from the patients . . .

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

The House will now recess for its mandated 15-minute COVID-19 protocol break.

The proceedings will resume at 3:20 p.m.

[3:05 p.m. The House recessed.]

[3:20 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: 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. 23.

Bill No. 23 - Adoption Records Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I move that Bill No. 23 - An Act to Open Adoption Records in Nova Scotia - be read a second time.

I am so pleased to be sitting here today before both virtual and in-person members of this House to talk about our new legislation that will create more access to adoption records in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Speaker, adoption records have been sealed in this province since the mid-1940s. This meant that neither the courts nor the government shared information on adoption records with anyone. It is probably because this process was thought to be in the best interests of the adopted person and was intended to protect the privacy of the birth parents, the adopted persons, and the adoptive parents.

In 1996 the government of Nova Scotia passed the Adoption Information Act, which let adopted persons and birth parents share identifying information - with everyone's consent - through the adoption disclosure program. Since 1996, there have been no major changes to the bill, until now.

Mr. Speaker, we know that opinions and ideas about adoption have changed over time. We have heard as much through our robust consultations with Nova Scotians over the last couple of years. In those consultations, we heard that most Nova Scotians are not happy with the law as it currently stands. In fact, 82 per cent of respondents felt that our current law does not provide enough access to identifying information.

In addition to the public consultation we also partnered with the Association of Black Social Workers in the Spring of 2020 to conduct targeted engagements with the

African Nova Scotian community. We also received feedback from the Mi'kmaw bands regarding open adoption legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I was so happy to be joined at our bill briefing by Scott Pyke and Monica Kennedy from the Nova Scotia Adoptee Advocacy group. Both were such strong advocates of change and were instrumental in the creation of this piece of legislation. Stories like Scott's and Monica's only further validate why moving toward open and accessible adoption records is the right step forward.

Mr. Speaker, this bill flips the onus just as we did with the Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act. Under the new Act, consent will be presumed so that information that identifies a party to an adoption can be released. Now, there will be ways to object via privacy tools such as a disclosure veto or a contact notice.

This is a big day for many people, but I know that for some Nova Scotians the opening of adoption records may cause anxiety. Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the members of this House and all Nova Scotians that this legislation was created with those who will be affected in mind. I know this is a sensitive and deeply personal matter for many people. Throughout this process, we have heard many people's stories - heartfelt and some heartbreaking. I know many changes made to the legislation could profoundly impact lives.

I believe the bill strikes the right balance between meeting the needs of those who want open adoption records and those who want to maintain their privacy. With this in mind, Mr. Speaker, the new legislation will allow individuals to opt out, to register a disclosure veto. This is a document that a person will file with the government, saying they do not wish to share information that can identify them. Disclosure vetoes will be available to all adoption records in Nova Scotia, regardless of when the adoption took place. This is in line with what we heard in our consultations: 65 per cent of survey respondents felt that adoptions should be treated similarly no matter when they happened.

Another valuable privacy tool that will be available is a contact notice. There are several different ways to use a contact notice. A contact notice allows an adult adopted person or birth parent to indicate that they are willing to share identifying information but do not wish to be contacted, or that they are open to contact but wish to control how that contact will occur. The registrant can choose to remove or change their contact notice at any time, and it expires upon their death.

Anyone who doesn't wish to share their identifying information can opt out. They can file a disclosure veto to confirm their desire to maintain privacy. This includes those who previously did not consent to their information being released.

Anyone opting out will be encouraged to provide a statement detailing their reason or reasons for wanting privacy, to update their medical information, and to provide additional non-identifying details they may wish to share with the other party to the

adoption, such as cultural, racial, linguistic, or family history, or even personal interests. This information can have a significant impact to the person receiving the updates and can be critically important to the adoptee and to the children of the adoptee.

The bill also makes a number of necessary changes that are in line with what we heard during consultation. It will add a definition for potential birth father. This is defined as a person whose name is in the adoption record but who does not meet the current definition of birth father, or where there may be credible evidence of paternity.

If a potential birth father is named in the record, there will be attempts to locate him. If located, he would be counselled on his options. He can release his name and other identifying information or he can keep his information private. If this parent is not located within a reasonable period, his name could be released to the adopted person.

The bill also redefines the types of information that can be shared with a birth sibling to make it easier for a birth sibling to access information. Birth siblings will be able to access non-identifying information without consent. In order to access identifying information, the birth sibling will most often still require consent from the birth parent before they can search for the adopted person.

The bill also updates the definition of relative to be representative and inclusive of family-like relationships that exist in today's families, like extended family and close family-like relationships. Relatives will be able to apply to receive non-identifying information with the consent of the adopted person or the birth parent to whom they are related, or when the person is deceased.

The bill also makes provisions to recognize the unique circumstances of Aboriginal children. For example, if a child was adopted who is Indigenous, their community of origin will always be provided to them if it is included in the adoption records.

We typically imagine a positive and happy outcome when someone receives their information. However, the reality can be very different for some people. They may learn things that are difficult and upsetting. My department will have supports in place so that Nova Scotians can access the help they may need to emotionally process this new information.

These changes will take full effect in Spring 2022. This will allow people the opportunity to learn about the new legislation and to opt out if they so wish. It will also give us the time to further expand our program so we can best support Nova Scotians.

This is an important step forward for adoptees and their families. The legislation recognizes how attitudes toward adoptions have changed. It supports privacy for those who wish to keep their information confidential. It provides supports and services in a respectful, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive manner, and it reflects the views of

many Nova Scotians who participated in our consultation. I would like to thank them once more for their valuable feedback, either through face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings, writing letters, or completing surveys. Their perspectives, experiences, and thoughts have been instrumental in our work on this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this legislation strikes the right balance between meeting the needs of those who want open adoption records and those who want to maintain their privacy.

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

BARBARA ADAMS: I am very pleased today to speak on Bill No. 23, the Adoption Records Act. This is a very important time in our history, and I would like to start out by thanking the incredible advocates Scott Pyke, Monica Kennedy, and Mike Slayter, who, amongst others, have been working towards this moment for more than a decade. They have done an enormous amount of work on this issue in the past, and they have lobbied successfully. We're very grateful to them. Scott was quoted as saying that as a member of the Nova Scotia Adoptee Advocacy Group, this is a life-changing moment for many people.

I do also want to acknowledge, like the minister, that there are many people who are concerned about the emotional ramifications that this legislation may have on them, their children, and other family members. We are all aware of these concerns, and we hope that this legislation will not create undue hardship or distress for those who are impacted by the changes this legislation brings about.

I was aware that these changes were needed and that this bill was necessary to change how the province discloses information, to provide a streamlined method for contact preferencing, and to enclose a disclosure veto for those who choose that option. As all members of the House know, the Adoption Information Act of 1996 passed in 1997 and was enacted a long time ago. It outlined how everything should work back in the day.

Fortunately, attitudes have changed, and so did every other province. It is very unfortunate that we are the last province to be introducing this legislation and these much-needed changes. As you know, I have met with the stakeholders on both sides of this issue for years. I had met with adoption agencies from all the other provinces to ask about the pros and cons of the legislation and the impact that it had on them and their families, birth parents, and adoptees because they had years and, in a couple of cases, decades to work out the kinks and the bugs that were in that legislation.

Every other province indicated that the change was good, that there weren't as many difficulties as they thought. The one thing they were all very clear on was that there needs to be greater funded support for the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and the adoptees from the Department of Community Services to help them cope with the mental

and, in some cases, physical and financial changes that occur because of an adoption. The one thing that they all said that they wished they had done more of was to provide greater provisions for mental health services for everyone involved.

Although this legislation comes late to the table, we are grateful that it's here. As you all know, back on March 15, 2019, I had introduced the Adoption Information Act amendment - Bill No. 117. The government's response to that bill at the time, shortly after, was to announce that they were going to do consultations with the public and I am very grateful for that.

I did attend one of the consultation meetings to see what was asked and how the conversation went, and I also reviewed the online questionnaire. The comment that I heard from a number of people at that meeting and from those who also contacted me privately was that the consultation was a bit limited in scope and that the opportunity for feedback outside of the scripted questions was rather limited. They were concerned that there were some issues not raised during that process, so I think there is an opportunity moving forward to continue the dialogue after this legislation is passed.

I'm just going to mention a couple of things here, and then we'll save some of the other comments for third reading. There are a few things that are written in here that constituents and concerned Nova Scotians have asked about, and, indeed, I have a similar question. One of them is in a section where it says that the "Minister may delegate to any person, any power, or function conferred or duty imposed on the Minister by this act," and it doesn't specify what powers the Minister can give to someone else. There needs to be some tightening up of the wording in here so that people feel comfortable as to who is given what authority to do what.

In another section, it talks about the ability to conduct a reasonable search for a birth parent in order to notify them about the veto. I'm not clear from reading this legislation what a reasonable search looks like and how much the department is going to do to help with that.

When we went to the bill briefing, I was advised that the notification of the veto ability was going to be done solely through social media, and I'm not sure that that is sufficient to reach everyone who could be impacted, especially those who, unfortunately, do not have access to the internet or, simply, they're of an age where they're not on social media. So I am concerned about the ability to notify people of the potential changes that may impact them.

Another part in this legislation talks about providing copies of adoption records. In the old legislation from 1996, it says that the director may charge a fee in amounts set out in the regulations for copies. I'm looking for assurances from the minister that there will not be fees charged for Nova Scotians who are looking for these records. I personally believe that they should be provided free of charge.

One of the other things that was brought to my attention was . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I just want to remind the honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage that the overall general intent of second reading is not to pick the bills apart or debate line by line, but just to keep your comments general in principle and nature. So if you could just keep that in mind for your comments on a go-forward basis, we would all appreciate that.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage.

BARBARA ADAMS: Thank you very much.

One of the other issues in the legislation that's introduced now talks about disclosing things like your heritage or your medical history, but it also refers to the reasons why someone was placed up for adoption. I'm hoping during third reading that the minister can explain how much detail goes into that type of disclosure because that's beyond identifying information. That's going into rationalization for placement, and I was surprised to see that there.

The minister referred, as well, to potential birth fathers. In the old legislation, "birth father" was only mentioned three times. In the new legislation it's over 40, which is great, but there may be circumstances where someone is not, in fact, the birth father, but was named, or where they are the birth father but didn't get named. I'm just wondering how this legislation may impact that and what is going to happen if someone comes forward and says, "I'm not the birth parent." Is the government going to participate in genetic testing? How are they going to deal with discrepancies as to what is stated as who is a birth parent and what people are maintaining?

The last thing that I want to mention is that there are some circumstances - I know in British Columbia they've changed legislation where there was a same-sex female couple, where the female gave birth to the child from a known sperm donor, and the spouse of that person was not allowed to have their name on the birth certificate. They had to go through the legal and financial expense of adopting the child. British Columbia changed that legislation so that the spouse is automatically on the birth record. During the bill briefing, I did encourage the minister's office to consider that because that is an issue for one of my constituents already.

The last thing that all of the adoption agencies told me across the country was that they initially were not given sufficient staffing to deal with all of the flood of requests that are going to take place when this comes in. I'm hoping during third reading that the minister can comment on how the funding of this department is going to change in response to the change in the legislation because we don't want a backlog there that takes years to get through. I know that there are many who are eager to see this go forward.

I'm very pleased that our party will be supporting this legislation, thrilled to have it here, and look forward to hearing comments at the Committee on Law Amendments. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak in support of an Act to Open Adoption Records in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia is the last province in Canada to open up adoption records. It is unfortunate that for so long the province has allowed birth parents an automatic veto, forbidding sharing their names or other identifying information with adult adoptees or potential siblings who are searching.

For years, the Nova Scotia Adoptee Advocacy Group has been pressing the government to adopt its laws to catch up with the rest of the country. In 2003, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued the following statement about Canada:

“The Committee is also concerned that certain provinces do not recognize the right of an adopted child to know, as far as possible, her/his biological parents . . . The Committee recommends that the State party consider amending its legislation to ensure that information about the date and place of birth of adopted children and their biological parents are preserved and made available to these children.”

The United Nations expressed concern in 2003, so I think it is a fair statement to say that this bill is long overdue. Each year, about 150 adoptions take place in Nova Scotia. The province has nearly 32,000 adoption records dating back 70 years. Many adoption organizations and adoptees have pointed out that sealing adoption records risks perpetuating secrecy and shame about adoption and the adoption process. However, across many other pieces of legislation, we recognize that individuals have the right to their own information, especially as it relates to their own health. Opening adoption records helps protect these individuals' rights to information and to allow us to recognize the role of adoption more fully in so many people's personal experiences.

I am pleased to see that the Act establishes a role for the department to provide trauma-informed support services for adoptees, their families and birth families. However, I do have concerns about whether that work be adequately funded and supported. When changes were made to the Children and Family Services Act, we did not see resources added to match the increased responsibilities and workload. As a result, we have seen social workers employed by the department to be reporting increased stress, burnout and high turnover. We see the impact of inadequate government supports in other parts of the child welfare system in Nova Scotia.

In recent months, institutions like the Nova Scotia Community College and Mount St. Vincent University have stepped up to offer free tuition for former youth in care, filling gaps left by the government. In general, we are seeing increasing complexity of intersecting issues facing families and a lack of resources to meet the need. It will be critical for the government to commit the resources, the funding and the appropriate staff to successfully implement this Act.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to see the broad definition of “relative” included in this Act. As we write new legislation, it is necessary for us to recognize the spectrum of ways in which family bonds are formed, which may not be reflected by a more narrow, traditional way of defining relationships. Unfortunately, this Act continues to use the gendered language of “birth mother” and “birth father,” when the gender-neutral “birth parent” would be far more appropriate. I will be happy to bring this forward as an amendment at a later time.

I look forward to the opportunity to hear from the stakeholders at the Committee on Law Amendments and applaud the hard work of many of the advocates that have brought us to this point. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important piece of legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak to Bill No. 23, An Act to Open Adoption Records. Allowing and facilitating adopted children - after reaching the age of 19 - and birth parents to access adoption history is a progressive and appropriate forward step.

Questioning one’s identity and heritage is highly personal. Not everyone will want to know who their parent is, what were the circumstances around being given up for adoption and the true impacts that choice had on their lives; however, some will. Many will, especially in today’s climate. This legislation will help in providing that information and some closure. The supports mentioned will be necessary.

Mr. Speaker, the main question I have as we proceed with this legislation is around the Act’s scope, relative to the minister’s role and responsibilities. I mention this only because I truly do not know the answer. The situation would be if a child, a youth, under the permanent care of the minister is never adopted and their parentage is not known to them, are there provisions in this proposed Act to allow for that disclosure when the youth reaches the age of 19 and ages out of the system?

Mr. Speaker, the PC caucus supports this impactful piece of legislation and looks forward to hearing the public’s views when presenting at the Law Amendments committee and then participating in the subsequent debate at third reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[3:45 p.m.]

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

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KELLY REGAN; Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members of the House for their comments surrounding this bill and I look forward to going to the Law Amendments Committee.

I will just address some of the issues that have been raised here today. I would say that we are quite fortunate here in Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker, to be able to learn from what other provinces have done when they opened their adoption records - things like having the ability to opt out actually became part of the case law. So, because other provinces have gone ahead of us it means that we have had the opportunity to learn from them.

In terms of ministerial delegation, there are many instances in which bills will refer to “the minister can,” “the minister can,” and in fact I will not be overseeing the individual release of information, so that is why you see some delegation there.

I want to assure the honourable member for Cole Harbour-Eastern Passage that while we will employ social media, that will not be the sole process. She would have seen other provinces putting ads in the paper, for example, letting people know that in fact the rules around adoption information were changing, so it will not simply be social media although that will be one of the ways we will do that.

In terms of naming the birth father, what a lot of people don’t realize is that in the past a man’s name could not be added to the record without his consent. He could just simply say no, I am not the birth father, and that’s it. That is why you have some language around that in the bill.

In terms of young people who come into the care of the minister and who are not adopted, there is a process that is not part of this. This is the Adoption Information Act and this is about adoption, but young people who have been in the care of the minister can, in fact, find out information about themselves through FOIPOP - and we routinely deal with that particular access.

I look forward to seeing some potential amendments, from my colleague for Cape Breton Centre, around the gendered language. I think it has existed in many bills around adoption information because we’re dealing with traditional birth roles, I guess, but I am absolutely open to seeing what can be accommodated there because I would never want anyone misgendered or anything like that as they are going through this process. Anything we can do in this particular way to make things better would be most appreciated.

I am just trying to see if there was anything else that I could add here today, but I am sure we'll have opportunity to work through this.

Oh, the staffing issue. Yes, in fact we have been approved for more staff and some additional operating funding to be able to support Nova Scotians as they go through this process of finding out who they are and where they've come from, or where their child they gave up for adoption has gone and where they are now.

So with that, I want to thank all my colleagues for their thoughtful comments. I'll be pleased to hear from the community.

With that, I move to close second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 23. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

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 the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I move that the adjourned debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be now resumed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, I'm pleased to speak to the 63rd Session of the General Assembly of the Nova Scotia Legislature on behalf of the people of Cumberland North.

I would first like to congratulate the member representing the electoral district of Timberlea-Prospect on becoming Nova Scotia's 29th Premier, and as well, congratulate the members for Antigonish and Halifax Citadel-Sable Island for their contribution to democracy. I know first-hand the commitment that it takes both individually and as a family to participate in a leadership race. Congratulations.

Secondly, I'd like to thank the staff here at the Legislature for preparing this session for us to be able to gather in this hybrid model to discuss and debate legislation on behalf of the people of Nova Scotia. Thank you.

Thirdly, I would like to thank the leadership of Dr. Robert Strang and his team at Public Health. Over the last year, we have gotten to see first-hand the value of our medical officers of health. Public Health are the experts in times of pandemic. They prepare for such a time as this. My husband and I have watched proudly as one of his colleagues, who graduated from Nova Scotia's Dalhousie School of Medicine, Dr. Bonnie Henry, Medical Officer of Health in British Columbia, has led our country. Our Public Health experts across the country of Canada have gained much admiration and deserve our respect.

My Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne today is on behalf of the people that I represent in Cumberland North here in the people's House. I was pleased to see such an emphasis in the Throne Speech on climate. Certainly, we have a very real threat in our area of Cumberland North with increasing sea levels and the frequency and intensity of storm events. Our Chignecto Isthmus contains critical transportation and utility infrastructure that links the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The Chignecto Isthmus is only slightly above sea level, and in some places, without protective dikes, some areas of the isthmus would actually already be inundated by existing sea levels.

I am hopeful that this government is committed to working with our neighbours in New Brunswick and our federal government to ensure that the Chignecto Isthmus Climate Change Adaptation Project Comprehensive Engineering and Feasibility Study - it's a mouthful - that is currently being undertaken will be acted upon when the study is released, which is expected to be in April of this year.

The Chignecto Isthmus has had large dike areas dating back as far as 1671. The study that's scheduled for release in April is pertaining to an area where there are 35 kilometres of these dikes. The strategic importance of this infrastructure to all of Atlantic Canada, and in fact our nation, cannot be overstated. As an integral component of the Atlantic Gateway and Trade Corridor, it is actually the principal routing for all land-based trade and passenger travel between Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and all points west. The high-voltage transmission lines are the primary connection to share and balance electrical generation between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

My husband and I have four adult children - who, by the way, have all been living at home during this pandemic. It has been incredible, actually. I know first-hand that our millennials in this province and in this country expect our governments to make climate a priority, and I share in making that a priority along with my colleagues in Opposition.

Secondly, the Throne Speech spoke to our economy. I want to talk about this in relation to the people I represent in Cumberland North. Our economy has taken a hit to

many regions due to COVID-19. I can tell you that no area of Nova Scotia has taken the hit as hard as our border community in Cumberland North.

The first entrance into Nova Scotia is Exit No. 1. It leads into our Town of Amherst and on to Laplanche Street. This exit has been closed for one entire year as of today. This Exit No. 1 leads to businesses all along Laplanche Street, including agricultural farm machinery businesses and several other businesses, family-owned businesses that have gone without for the last year. This road leads to our downtown.

We have hundreds of small business owners in our downtown who have suffered greatly in this last year due to revenue losses directly linked to this government's decision to close Exit No. 1. We have not seen one bit of provincial support for our business community - not one.

Our economy has been disproportionately affected due to our geographic location as a border community. Soon after the inter-provincial border restrictions were put in place, I started hearing right away from businesses that were losing immediately - a drastic drop in revenue, some 60 to 80 per cent.

Our border community has developed natural economic trade zones that have developed over decades - actually, really, over centuries. Our economy in our border community is naturally integrated with southern New Brunswick. We have never, not that anyone can document, ever experienced a division of the trade like we have seen in the last year.

Throughout the pandemic, our residents living in our border communities believe the federal government has let them down. In the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Sections 6(2) and 6(3) pertain to the right of inter-provincial mobility. At no time over the past year has the federal government or the elected federal representatives for Cumberland stood for the rights and freedoms as written in the Canadian Charter for our people.

Our economy has been directly and negatively harmed. Again, some businesses consistently have had as high as 60 per cent loss of revenue due to a loss of our customer base from southern New Brunswick.

As we discuss equity and fairness, I have to ask a question. Where has our government been for the last year for the people I represent in Cumberland North? There has been no equity. There has been no equity and fairness for the people of our border community, for the people and the businesses of Cumberland North.

We have been forgotten, and we have been ignored every time I have brought the concerns to the table. We are a part of this province, and we expect to be included. We

expect to be supported in times of need. We expect to be considered when decisions are made and the impacts of those decisions is on our people.

Almost four years ago, in the first speech I gave in this Legislature, I spoke about the importance of securing a safe food supply. That still remains a priority for Cumberland North. The pandemic shone a light on the food supply chains and just how susceptible we all are as we rely on other provinces and other countries to feed us. Depending on what literature you read, it's estimated that Nova Scotians import between 87 and 92 per cent of our food supply. This exposes us all to risk.

Cumberland North and Cumberland County has fertile, arable farmland. In fact, it's documented that we have 30 per cent of Nova Scotia's arable farmland. We would like to be part of a province-wide strategy to increase the food supply in this province.

I'll share with you some data. Back in 2006, it was estimated that Nova Scotians spent approximately \$2.3 billion on food a year, keeping in mind only 8.4 per cent of that amount was spent on domestic farm receipts. Taking those numbers into consideration and also CPI - consumer price index - we could make an estimate that now we spend about \$2.7 billion on food here in Nova Scotia in 2021.

[4:00 p.m.]

If we were producing 50 per cent of our food supply, that could inject over \$1 billion into our Nova Scotia economy, and Cumberland North could contribute significantly to this. If we contributed our share, based on the fact that we have 30 per cent of the arable farmland, we could inject over \$300 million into the economy of Cumberland North.

Considering food miles, considering climate, this should be a priority and Cumberland North is ready to be involved. We deserve to be involved. We deserve to be included in the plans for Nova Scotia. Our economy is hurting, and we need help.

Our land is one of our greatest assets, and our land can help increase our food supply. Ensuring we can feed our people must be a priority. Ensuring we reduce food miles and finding ways to reduce our carbon footprint must be a priority, and Cumberland North is ready to be a leader in this area.

Thirdly, the Throne Speech spoke to equity. More specifically, it spoke to issues of fairness such as systemic racism, and I have learned first-hand - even here in this House, in this Legislature - how much words matter.

Black lives matter, and the Black Lives Matter movement has shone a light on the challenges that our African Nova Scotian people face, including our African Nova Scotian families in Cumberland North. Clearly, changes are needed. Also, in recent years historical

events have shaped the experiences of the Indigenous people of Nova Scotia and it's been brought into the light now and we cannot ignore it.

I'm looking forward to working with government and with my colleagues to ensure there is equity for all people in Cumberland North and throughout Nova Scotia, and the change does start with each one of us. Although we do not have any First Nations communities in Cumberland North, my people welcome reconciliation with the Indigenous people in our area.

It is actually documented that 81 per cent of all Aboriginal people live off of the reserves in Nova Scotia. They're our neighbours, they're our friends - people like Evange Landry in my community of Amherst. Amherst is proud to house the federal offices of Indigenous Affairs, and I look forward with them to help all of us making equity and systemic racism a priority.

Although the Throne Speech spoke to many important issues that I've mentioned, the Throne Speech did not once mention the hardship that my people in Cumberland North have been experiencing most of the last twelve months, and I'm going to talk a bit about that. I'm going to talk about it to honour them.

March 22nd - a year ago yesterday - was a day that my constituents living in a border community will not soon forget. I remember it well. It was a Sunday, and at noon, the former Premier announced that Nova Scotia was now under a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 coronavirus. The changes announced that day with the state of emergency affected our provincial borders. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 posed so many challenges, even with communication between us MLAs and government, and I did my best within those parameters that were set forth by the former Premier.

On March 22nd, the day the state of emergency was declared, I experienced the first of a year of challenges. As soon as that announcement was made, I immediately started receiving messages from constituents. Within an hour, I had over 300 messages, and the number just grew exponentially throughout the day - people asking for clarity about the border restrictions because they go to school, they work, they have family across that border.

The number of people that were confused and worried grew as the day went on because, you see, for centuries Cumberland has shared health care services, has had integrated economies, has shared educational resources and, most importantly, shared friendship and family with our neighbours in southern New Brunswick. In fact, most in our border community, which is sad to say, feel more connected with our friends and family in Westmorland County than with the rest of Nova Scotia. Over the last 25 years, the Cobequid Pass tolls have only increased the alienation that our people feel from the rest of Nova Scotia.

On March 22nd, I reached out to the Department of Justice and asked for help with clarifying the border rules. Not only did I not receive any clarification of border rules and restrictions, I was left out in the cold, unable to find answers for the people I represent. The frustration just grew worse in the weeks and months ahead.

The people living in our border community had been forgotten and have been ignored by this government during this pandemic. The last year has been incredibly eye-opening for me and for the people I represent. Very discouraging, very disheartening and very frustrating, and it continues.

I care about the people I represent, and this past year has taken its toll on those living in our border community. I don't think anyone in the rest of the province realizes the integration of our two provinces. I don't think anyone fully understands the integration of our Maritime provinces, of our Atlantic Canadian provinces. Hundreds if not thousands of people need to cross the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick border every day for work and for other essential reasons - nurses, paramedics, respiratory technicians, correctional officers, obstetricians, teachers, cooks, and the list goes on. Our communities are completely interconnected.

For my friends and colleagues in HRM, I am going to use an analogy, which I often use for my colleagues, and I would compare Halifax and Dartmouth. I would ask them: I want you to imagine if the provincial border was the harbour between the cities of Halifax and Dartmouth. Imagine if you had family on the other side that was literally five minutes away but you were not able to see them for months on end. If you lived in Halifax you could drive to Yarmouth, and if you lived in Dartmouth you could drive to Sydney, Cape Breton.

Imagine that you had a medical appointment on the other side, a surgery that has been scheduled for nine months but because you live on the other side, it's cancelled. Imagine that, yes, it's a pandemic but you have no COVID-19 cases in either area. Imagine that your side - let's say you live in Halifax - forced your children to have three COVID-19 tests every time they wanted to see their other parent on the other side of the harbour, even if it was only five minutes away and there were no positive COVID-19 cases in either community.

Imagine if you were allowed to cross because you met one of the exemptions of work, school, child custody, but you actually decided to stay home because you didn't want to deal with the intimidation and the bullying by the people that are working at the border. The calls that I have gotten are unbelievable.

Imagine all of that and you will just get a tiny glimpse of what the people have been living with in our border community. Just a glimpse.

Soon after March 22nd, when that state of emergency was declared, I started receiving phone calls from law enforcement saying, Elizabeth, you've got to help us, get some clarification. I asked what was happening. Border officers were put in place at the Nova Scotia border by our government, and it was implied many times during press conferences that these border guards were protecting the people of Nova Scotia.

However, under the state of emergency in Nova Scotia, our Nova Scotia Health Protection Act actually did not give those border guards - who were all correctional officers - the power to do anything except to give verbal instructions about self isolation. In fact, there was not one piece of data collected at that border until after the Atlantic bubble was formed.

So in April and May, law enforcement were contacting me. They could not believe that our border officers had no power to prevent people from coming into our province. People who were fleeing COVID-19 in high-risk areas like Texas, Arizona, New York - even Ontario and Quebec. One Sunday, they counted 66 licence plates from Quebec alone. Persons were coming into our province with full-on COVID-19 symptoms and our border officials had no power to protect Nova Scotians.

Honestly, knowing what I know and watching it, I believe it is truly a miracle that Nova Scotia has had such low numbers of COVID-19, and we can all be very thankful for that, but knowing what was happening at that border, it was not protecting us.

I do want to make mention of our correctional officers who worked at our border. They were incredible. They worked in the snow and the rain, in the cold, 24/7. They worked from a wedding tent. That is what our province provided these correctional officers to work from - a wedding tent. And, actually, they had a porta potty. I guess the government figured since they were conservation officers and they often worked in the woods, they didn't need anything more sophisticated.

If you have ever been on the Tantramar Marsh, you know the winds and the temperatures are a challenge. One night I could not sleep because the winds on the marsh at my house were over 110 kilometres per hour. I was worried about our correctional officers at the border, and I knew that their only shelter of this tent would not withstand the wind. I went out in the early morning with some hot coffee to check on them and discovered they had actually anticipated the wind and took the tent down the night before.

These dedicated conservation officers provided a service that they knew was providing nothing more than a false sense of security and political optics for the Liberal government, but they never stopped. They provided the service they were asked to provide, and I want to thank them.

Between March 22nd and July 3rd, students were refused to cross the border to complete their education. Many of our students in our border community lost their year of

tuition even though many had only weeks left to finish. Students studying nursing, paramedics, carpentry, and other students across the rest of the province were not faced with that. Our government did nothing to advocate for the people in this situation. Our businesses were refused to deliver goods to customers, our farmers were refused to enter their own land; landowners were refused to go to their own properties that they owned, and families could not see one another often living minutes away, but across the border.

[4:15 p.m.]

Businesses lost up to 60 per cent of their customer base, medical appointments were cancelled, and cancer patients were told they could no longer travel to Moncton - only 40 minutes away - and their doctor, if they had one, had to find a new oncologist in Halifax. For many patients that created a delay in treatment for chemo and radiation, up to eight weeks for our cancer patients who lived in our community.

The people of Cumberland North and all those living in our border community were all dedicated and wanted to do their part in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19, not only to protect themselves but to protect all people. They have really been incredible. I am telling you today, the government of Nova Scotia, failed in advocating for the rights for our people in our border community.

Back during May and June, as restrictions loosened throughout the province, someone in our border community could travel to Yarmouth or to Cape Breton, five to six hours away, but they weren't permitted to go see their family living only five minutes away across the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick border. The mental health of our people deteriorated. I had people calling me crying, daily.

By mid-May, the former premier allowed us MLAs to communicate with ministers, and I started communicating with ministers involved for Health and Wellness, Environment, and for Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and I asked them to address the concerns of the people. I asked that the government work with the government of New Brunswick. I wrote many letters, probably about two dozen, and I made many phone calls.

On June 10th, the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council released a paper called *An Atlantic Regional Bubble Can Help Manage COVID-19 Costs and Risks*. APEC called upon the Atlantic Canadian premiers to ease into provincial restrictions, and they also called for the provinces to take the same provincial principles they were using to manage COVID-19 and apply a more formal regional approach. To this day, a regional approach has not happened, and that's why I tabled the bill that I did today.

Back then, I contacted local municipal governments and I asked them for their help in asking for an Atlantic Bubble. So, on July 3rd - hallelujah - the Atlantic Bubble opened. However, it was a bit of a disaster. It was a clear indication for me and the people I represent

just how little our government understood the relationship between our province and our neighbouring provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

By seven o'clock, the lineups had started. My phone rang off the hook, traffic got backed up for over three hours on either side of the border, people were urinating, defecating in the road medians. I called the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and asked for porta potties, and by two o'clock, I received a call from someone to say, you've got to do something - the traffic is so bad that the government's actually calling in an EHS helicopter because our ambulances cannot even get onto the Trans-Canada Highway. Tempers were brewing. Families didn't have adequate water or food in their vehicles.

So, I called one of my MLA colleagues in New Brunswick and pleaded for some help. They got the New Brunswick Minister of Justice and Public Safety to call me, and he said, we'll open up if you'll open up. So I called someone I knew. I called on a favour within one of our departments, and thankfully they helped convince Nova Scotia to open up. We finally got traffic moving safely.

But where was our government? There was no one to be found, no leadership to be found. There was no one on the ground taking a leadership role, and it was stressful because lives were at risk. On a personal note, that night - I know we shouldn't ever talk about rashes - but that night I went to bed with a rash on my neck and I mentioned it to my husband, and he said - keep in mind, my husband is a physician - and he said, "Honey, I think you have shingles." I said, don't be foolish, I don't have shingles. I woke up the next morning and it was worse, much worse, and my husband was right. I only share that with you because it was an incredibly stressful day.

I'm sharing this with you - also because I'm asking for help - so the next time the Atlantic Bubble opens - which is, right now, scheduled for April 19th - I would like some help. I would like some leadership on the ground at our border. Maybe even our Premier could come.

Premier Dennis King, he was at the New Brunswick-P.E.I. border on the day the Atlantic Bubble opened. He greeted people as they came into his province. He gave them gifts, in fact. Gifts that were made - P.E.I. gifts. It actually was a brilliant, brilliant marketing opportunity. Premier Higgs in New Brunswick, he also came to the New Brunswick-Nova Scotia border - not on the first day, but he was there shortly thereafter - and he talked directly with people who were waiting in line for up to two hours. But Nova Scotia? We had no such leadership on the ground.

We were all very thankful for the opening of the Atlantic Bubble. I want to emphasize that. I'm just sharing that it could have been much better managed, and I hope, moving forward, that that's taken into consideration.

After the Atlantic Bubble happened, finally families could . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Sorry to interrupt, but we are due for a scheduled break. I'm sorry to have to stop you in the middle. We will take a recess, and we will return at 4:35 p.m. to continue.

[4:20 p.m. The House recessed.]

[4:35 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. We will continue with the Address in Reply.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I do want to say that the people of Cumberland North were grateful to have the Atlantic Bubble open on July 3rd. It was a welcome relief. Businesses were able to get back on track, families could see one another again, and medical appointments were made and kept.

Really, all went well from July 3rd until the end of November, when unfortunately New Brunswick had another major outbreak of COVID-19, putting border restrictions back in place. A few weeks later in January, as New Brunswick's COVID-19 numbers increased, Nova Scotia followed suit and also put in border restrictions once again. No one complained because they understood the need for restrictions due to the community outbreak.

With Winter weather conditions coming, the Departments of Environment and Climate Change and Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal decided to move the Nova Scotia border checks from the scale area, where they had been all along since March 23rd, right on to the Trans-Canada Highway. We who live locally were very concerned about the safety of this decision.

We had several meetings that included the Town of Amherst's mayor as well as the County of Cumberland's mayor. We were collectively concerned about the location of the border checks on the actual Trans-Canada Highway, where traffic goes between 100 kilometres and 120 kilometres an hour. We were worried about the safety of the border officials, so we offered them an alternate plan. We requested that Exit No. 1 be opened, and we suggested that border checks be done on Laplanche Street.

This would remove the safety risks of being right on the Trans-Canada Highway, and also allow our businesses on Laplanche Street in downtown Amherst to have customers once again be able to access them, because remember, Exit No. 1 has been closed since March 22nd. Again, we were ignored. Soon after, the Nova Scotia border checks were put in place on the Trans-Canada Highway.

I received a few messages from some health care workers, specifically one of our obstetricians, our respiratory technicians, and our obstetric nurses who live in New Brunswick but only minutes away from our regional hospital in Nappan. They were worried about the new set-up, that it might cause delays if they happen to be called for a medical emergency.

I brought this to the attention of managers, people in Public Health, and the Departments of Health and Wellness, Transportation and Infrastructure, and Environment and Climate Change. I was told that there was nothing that could be done, which is unbelievable. We're dealing with people's lives. The health care professionals themselves wrote a letter to the ministers, and they actually didn't even receive a response. They were also ignored.

Then a couple of weeks ago they were called for a medical emergency, and they were delayed eight minutes at the border set-up on the Trans-Canada Highway. Now, eight minutes can be the difference between life and death when a woman is birthing an infant, and there are complications. I wasn't surprised because the response to our legitimate request demonstrated the clear disregard for life and lack of respect for our medical professionals and the people of our area.

To further demonstrate this, at one of the meetings we held with the bureaucrats, we were talking about data and how many people are entering Nova Scotia through this pandemic. I was told casually that the number of people who enter the province is being counted at the Cobequid Pass. I was like, what? I said, excuse me, can you repeat what you just said? They repeated it, so I heard it correctly. I said, this is just unbelievable. It's unbelievable.

I invite everyone in government to take a look at the map of Nova Scotia to see that Nova Scotia does not start at the Cobequid Pass. In fact, Nova Scotia starts in Cumberland. Let me repeat that: Nova Scotia does not start at the Cobequid Pass but in fact starts in Cumberland. I started a campaign in an attempt to educate, and I have a visual map of the Maritime Provinces with Cumberland County outlined. Every email I send, it's on the email; every letter I send, it's on the letterhead. I am also partnering with municipal colleagues to showcase Cumberland and the integral role that Cumberland plays in our Atlantic Gateway Trade Corridor.

The people of Cumberland North want to do what's best for everyone. When COVID-19 numbers were high, they understood restrictions and patiently put up with the inconveniences at our border. But we had no COVID-19 in our area and neither did our neighbours next door. I've worked very closely with the MLA in New Brunswick for Memramcook-Tantramar - in fact, we talk weekly. In November, we actually asked for an exemption for the people living in our border communities to cross, but the request was denied.

Thankfully, COVID-19 numbers have been down now for weeks and the border restrictions are scheduled to be removed April 19th by all Atlantic Provinces. Patience is wearing thin. Last Friday our Premier removed the Nova Scotia border restrictions, which we're thankful for. However, it created confusion because he mentioned that this would make it easier for the people in Nova Scotia to see their families in New Brunswick.

Technically it's true, but many people, after a year, still don't understand that New Brunswick has its own set of rules and Nova Scotia has a separate set of rules. People have just had enough, really. They want decisions to be made on data, and they want decisions that are fair and reasonable for them.

I want to mention my staff in my constituency office, Dan Gould and Gladys Coish. They have been amazing. In fact, I think last week was one of the hardest weeks for Dan, because he took so many calls from our elderly people - 80 years old, 91 years old, 85 years old - who were so upset on the phone because they could not get through on the phone line after spending nine hours, both Monday and Tuesday. Then when they finally got through on Wednesday and Thursday they were told there were no appointments left. I think last week was one of the hardest weeks that he had, just feeling so helpless because our elderly just want a vaccine. They just want to be protected. I just want to say thank you to my staff. They are incredible.

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have had different rules, although we all have the same virus we're fighting. Our provinces haven't worked together. That's why today I tabled a bill asking for a Maritime pandemic health strategy. We actually have a long history of working together here in the Maritimes.

I did some research. Our Legislative Library helped me and my staff helped me, and I found numerous documents - Maritime agreements, back as far as 1971 - the Council of Maritime Premiers Act. Actually, I did table these documents electronically. I'm going to read this to you. It's very small print.

“1.03 The functions of the Council shall include:

- (a) discussion of matters of importance to the three Provinces;
- (b) initiation of studies on economic, social and cultural programs and policies which affect or concern the Maritime Provinces;
- (c) coordination of public policies which affect or concern the Maritime Provinces.”

I think the pandemic fits in there. I would encourage the Council of Maritime Premiers to take a look at what we could accomplish together.

I'm going to read to you a few examples from some of the messages that I've gotten - again, just to give you an idea.

[4:45 p.m.]

Here's one: I have a family member who has been diagnosed with cancer. She has been given six months. I can only cross the border when she has days left to live, or they told me I can cross for her funeral. Will you help me?

Someone else writes: I live in Sackville, New Brunswick, and I lost my children to CPS in Nova Scotia before I moved to New Brunswick. Nova Scotia is not allowing me to come to court to defend myself because of the Nova Scotia border restrictions.

Another one says: I have a mother that needs me to provide daily care for her, and I am being refused to cross the border. She will need to go to a nursing home without my help but there are no nursing homes taking patients. How can this be ethical?

Someone else writes: My child was attending high school at Tantramar High but he is being refused to attend school. I am worried about their mental health. They are not doing well at all.

Another one writes: The sadness is real. My sister lives in Sackville and hasn't seen our mom here in Amherst since the border rules have been put in place. Our mom is 86, and our Christmas gifts are still unopened.

The border restrictions are taking their toll. The latest Nova Scotia Public Health protocols have children in our border community being unfairly punished because they have a parent who lives maybe only ten minutes away but lives in a different province. They are told they have to have three COVID-19 tests every time they want to see their other parent.

Here's a message I received a few days ago: My ex-husband and I decided it was too much on our six-year-old to go through eight COVID-19 tests a month in order for her to see her father. She normally spends every weekend with him, but these testing rules are too much. She cries every night and does not understand why she can't see her father. Can you please help us and make the government look at the risks and make more common sense rules.

That's just a small example of some of the messages.

Today I am sharing all of this with you, with my colleagues, and with the government because I'm imploring you to start working with our fellow Maritime Premiers, and I'm asking Public Health to do the same. Nova Scotia starts in Cumberland North, it doesn't start at the Cobequid Pass. Nova Scotia starts in Cumberland.

Our residents are part of Nova Scotia. I ask our government of Nova Scotia to consider us. Consider the people who are part of this province when making rules and restrictions that affect them. Don't just hide behind Public Health officials because as MLAs you are elected - I am elected - to govern this province.

Yes, we should always listen and take advice from Public Health. They are the experts during a pandemic. At the end of the day, we are the ones to ensure that the rules and restrictions are fairly applied, that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is upheld, that the Canada Health Act is upheld, and that all people in Nova Scotia are treated equitably. That includes the people of Cumberland North.

I ask our Nova Scotia Premier and his Executive Council to work collaboratively with our Maritime Provinces. Please, please. Thanks to the people of our area - and all of Nova Scotia - we are one of the safest places to live in the world. We have much to be grateful for.

In my reply to the Throne Speech, I would be remiss if I didn't also mention a few other issues facing the people of Cumberland North: lack of housing, especially lack of affordable housing; lack of specialists in mental health, psychiatrists, which leads to people spending time in jail instead of spending time in a hospital getting the care that they need; lack of family physicians, which leads to delays in diagnosis and leads to missing management of chronic diseases.

The interprovincial border restrictions highlighted the integrated health care systems that we have enjoyed prior to COVID-19 with our neighbours and with the rest of Canada. Really, up until this pandemic, I would say it worked well for us.

The Canada Health Act has five principles, which are supposed to reflect that residents anywhere in Canada are supposed to be able to move interprovincially and receive health care in any province of this country, but that didn't happen. When I reached out to this government asking for help for all the people in our border community who had medical appointments scheduled in Moncton or Sackville and were cancelled, do you know what the response was? They did the same to the people in New Brunswick coming to our area. That was their response. How disappointing.

Although we've had no deaths directly related to the COVID-19 virus, that we are aware of, in Cumberland North, I can tell you that we have had a delay in treatment of disease, a delay in treatment of cancer diagnosis. We have a delay in detection of disease, and we have a significant increase, significant increase, in mental illness.

We have learned through our discussions that we can't place our lives and our health care in the hands of others. We need our Nova Scotia government, those living in Cumberland, we need our Nova Scotia government to start ensuring that all Nova Scotians, including those living in a border community, have access to health care in Nova Scotia. We are asking for a cancer centre in Cumberland, where cancer can be early detected through early detection clinics, where patients can have virtual visits with oncologists so they don't have to travel, where they have a place to receive chemo close to home.

Did you know that Cumberland Regional Hospital is the only regional hospital in Nova Scotia where people cannot receive systemic chemotherapy treatments, forcing them to travel? We want accessibility to our hospital, walking accessibility. We have beautiful bills before this House promoting accessibility, yet the hospital that was built by this province, in Cumberland, does not have safe walking access.

We want to be part of Nova Scotia. We want the separation, at the Cobequid Pass, and the tolls to be removed. If you do that, if the government would do that, the message that would send to the people north of the Pass. You just do not even understand how much people feel separated from the rest of the province. Please remove the tolls at the Cobequid Pass.

In conclusion, I want to mention how proud I am of Cumberland North. We have an incredible history of leadership for Nova Scotia, and in fact all of Canada. Four of the fathers of Confederation were born in Cumberland County. They helped build this country: Edward Barron Chandler, Robert Barry Dickey, Jonathan McCully, Sir Charles Tupper. During this pandemic, I believe we need to go back and look at the rights of Canadians and Nova Scotians and make sure they are balanced with Public Health rules and restrictions. Let us honour our forefathers and let us honour the women who have led before us.

I am confident we will continue to lead here in Nova Scotia on issues of great importance like climate, like equity, like our economy, and it is time to start leading in health care. Let us ensure that there is equity for all Nova Scotians, which includes the people who live between the Nova Scotia border and the Cobequid Pass. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I must say it looks good to see you there.

It is my distinct pleasure to have the opportunity to rise in this House, the people's House, as we are so often told, to reply to the Speech from the Throne. One year ago, the people of Cape Breton Centre entrusted me with the honour of being their voice in this hallowed Chamber. I do not take this great duty lightly. To be present in the Chamber after 365 some-plus days and to be granted the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of

Cape Breton Centre is indeed an honour and a responsibility. To the people of my riding, I promise I will be an honest, open representative, and I will take the trust that they have granted me seriously.

Standing here, I think of the women who have entered this Chamber before me. Two in particular stand out: Alexa McDonough, the first woman to lead a major recognized political Party in Canada, the Nova Scotia NDP; and Helen MacDonald, another former Leader and someone I am honoured to call my aunt.

When I was approached to run in my good friend Tammy Martin's place, it was not a decision I made lightly. After many conversations with family, along with their encouragement and support, I knew the time was right and I could give it my all. At this time, I want to thank my family - well, I want to thank my supportive family, I should say - without whom I would not be here today, even if they are overbearing and a tad opinionated. I'm joking, Madam Speaker, about being overbearing. But a tad opinionated? A bit.

I digress. I do in all seriousness want to thank my partner, Matt Brown, and our beautiful rainbow baby, Rory, my mum and two dads, my grandmothers, and my in-laws for their love, support, and encouragement. Thank you to my extended family - including my friends and their families - all of whom mean more than I could describe.

To my campaign team and the countless volunteers, I want to thank them all. I value their hard work to make this moment possible. They worked tirelessly and as safely as possible on sidewalks, roads, and driveways in conditions that I can only describe as icy.

I also want to thank our Leader of the Nova Scotia NDP for the encouragement and generosity he has shown me and my family, especially Rory and her artwork. Madam Speaker, the Nova Scotia NDP caucus and staff welcomed me with open arms and made me feel like a part of the team immediately, and it is my true privilege to work with a team that is indeed a team.

Madam Speaker, I have a fantastic constituency office team, as well, in Dillon, Anne, and Donna. I wish to thank them for their dedication to the constituents of Cape Breton Centre.

Madam Speaker, I'm a proud Cape Bretoner. My roots on our beautiful island run deep on my Scottish side. On two sides of my family tree, I'm third generation. One of my great-grandmothers came from Bohemia - Czech - and another from Lebanon. Due to their journeys, I stand here today, and I live on one of the most beautiful islands in Unama'ki - Cape Breton. In my humble opinion, there's no better place, but that does not mean Cape Breton is not without its struggles and strife.

Through all the hardships, Cape Bretoners come together in friendship and solidarity. In Cape Breton, one in three families live in poverty. One in two families live in poverty in Cape Breton Centre. In Cape Breton, 20 per cent of seniors - that's one in five - live in poverty. This is unacceptable. It is shameful and it is an absolute disgrace. Madam Speaker, I was alarmed and dumbfounded when reading the Throne Speech to find that poverty was only mentioned once - once, Madam Speaker, and it was only concerning lifting low-income earners out of energy poverty.

Poverty reduction and elimination should be front and centre, but it was not even mentioned. That is what is missing from the Throne Speech. There are people behind these numbers. They deserve our help, our respect, and our dedication to poverty elimination. We have fantastic organizations and individuals working extremely hard to help individuals living in poverty, but charity cannot be a pathway to upholding human rights to an adequate standard of living, Madam Speaker. This is the government's responsibility, not charities'.

Madam Speaker, you may not be aware, I'm sure, but I served as a councillor in Cape Breton at the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, and I enjoyed my time on council. I served with people who have a passion for improving the lives of residents. Municipal councils are the grassroots of governance. They are often being asked to do more with little financial help. Equalization, also known as provincial transfers, have not changed in years while the CPI has risen and while municipal transfers to the province have risen. For example, the CBRM receives from the province \$15 million, but sends to the province between \$19 and \$20 million in conditional transfers.

Municipal funding is extremely important to population retention and recruitment. Municipalities, including the CBRM, need proper infrastructure - roads, parks, sidewalks, water, sewer - but residents, especially new residents, find taxes too high in comparison to those services.

More funding to municipalities is needed to retain and recruit young professionals, including health care workers and specialists. I do want to acknowledge that the Throne Speech did mention doctor recruitment and I hope this includes providing more funding to municipalities so they can provide the services residents are looking for.

Madam Speaker, health care is a big concern for the residents of Cape Breton Centre and all of Cape Breton. Our health care has been starved for seven years. In seven years, not one long-term care bed has opened. Not one. I will acknowledge after seven years new beds are finally being built, including in my community. I'm grateful for this new long-term care facility. The residents of Cape Breton are grateful, but it's not enough.

For seven years, not a single bed was opened. Meanwhile this government sat on a surplus, while people had been dying in the hospitals awaiting placements or died at home also waiting for placements. Seniors are living in hospitals because there are not enough

beds and because of this, a backlog has been created in our hospitals that extends to our emergency rooms, which in turn has created Code Critical situations within EHS. I've been told, and I've witnessed, family members surrendering their mum or dad to the health care system because they can no longer care for them at home. The wait-list for long-term care is too long. Meanwhile, not one bed was opened for seven years.

[5:00 p.m.]

I'm encouraged, though, to see long-term care in the Throne Speech and making mention of investments into long-term care. However, I hope this means opening thousands of beds, not a few hundred. Also, improving the standard of care, proper staffing ratios and better pay for staff in order to retain and recruit. Health care workers do not need lip service. They need help and support before they completely burn out.

On a personal note, my daughter Rory is a rainbow baby, and she was born after I had two miscarriages. I can relate to the story that we heard earlier today during Question Period. I too sat in emergency, two emergency rooms, one in a waiting room as there was no place for me to go while I waited for my doctor. I understand that pain. I understand the problems with this health care system because I have been there and I have seen the tireless effort of the staff to help, but they are limited to what they can do because there is not enough of them and there's not enough space.

I am encouraged, though, that the Throne Speech mentioned a commitment to mental health and addictions. The need for mental health and addiction services in my community is immense. There are not enough psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, health care professionals. I know the need for health care professionals to fulfill the needs of the people of Cape Breton and to alleviate the pressure and the caseloads from other staff.

The stories I've heard are heartbreaking. People seeking help need to receive it when they reach out, not weeks later. People in need of mental health services cannot improve their mental health if every five weeks they're starting over. Mental health and addictions health-care workers are trying their best to fill in the gap but they need help. They too are on the verge of burnout, if they are not there already.

Let's go back to discussing seniors. Seniors are being affected by the lack of affordable housing options in Nova Scotia. Seniors need the government to invest in publicly owned co-op and not-for-profit housing to ensure there are more options for seniors and other Nova Scotians looking for affordable, appropriate housing. This government has encouraged seniors to stay home longer, but home care is often not enough, and families are exhausted. I have seniors in my community who cannot afford hearing aids, medications, and other necessities. We need to do more for our seniors, Madam Speaker. They, like many other Nova Scotians, are falling through the cracks.

I was pleased to see that the Throne Speech mentioned the difficulties faced by women in the workforce around child care. However, while working with the federal government is commendable, it falls short. I believe Nova Scotia can and should develop a provincial strategy. Women with young children experience the biggest loss in total working hours during the pandemic. However, the pandemic only casts more light on this issue, which many parents were already facing. How can they work if they do not have access to child care? If they can access it, how much of their paycheck is going to child care?

Nova Scotia needs to invest in sustainable, accessible, and affordable systems of child care. We need to pay the child care staff at these facilities better wages in order to recruit or retain child care providers.

In my community and across Nova Scotia, many workers do not have access to paid sick leave, some of whom are health care workers. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, workers were told to stay home if they have symptoms of illness. That is easier said than done. It speaks of privilege. For many workers, missing a day of work without pay could mean the difference between paying the bills or not. It also means that parents are choosing between going to work and sending their children to school or losing a day's pay due to not having paid sick leave.

Despite what some people may think, child care does not happen organically. It is disappointing that the Throne Speech made no mention of paid sick leave for Nova Scotians, especially during COVID-19.

I come from a strong union community. Unions play a large part in my family and household. During the days of coal mining, the largest union was the UMWA. New Waterford was the home of William (Bill) Davis, a coal miner and father of 10. It was also the location where BESCO thought they could bust the unions in the 1920s, especially in 1925, by demoralizing the workers and their families. This is sounding familiar, Madam Speaker.

When that didn't work, BESCO decided to starve the residents. On June 11, 1925, Bill Davis was among the crowd of up to 3,000 striking miners and community members who marched on Waterford Lake where the power and water to the town had been shut off. Bill Davis was shot and killed by the company police that day, but his legacy and that of the miners of the 1920s continues to burn strong.

Madam Speaker, they stood the gaff and won. Their reasons for striking are similar to the reasons workers strike today: livable wages, safe working conditions, the right to fair and collective bargaining. This government has had bill after bill of anti-worker legislation that led to over 75,000 Nova Scotians being stripped of their right to fair and collective bargaining.

I stand with these workers who have been demoralized, disrespected, and disregarded by the government, just as I did outside these doors on a hot September day in 2017. I am sure many members remember that day. We were quite loud and desperate for this government to hear us. This government needs to repair its relationship with the workers of Nova Scotia. This can be done by overturning the unconstitutional bills previously passed by this government.

Madam Speaker, I'd be remiss if I did not mention post-secondary education. We need to create a more accessible and affordable post-secondary education for students. When I attended Cape Breton University, I was lucky there was a tuition freeze, which made getting my degree more affordable. That was from 2007 to 2011. My cohorts and I were lucky compared to those entering post-secondary education after 2013. These graduates, sitting in their seats on graduation day - imagine sitting there in your cap and gown, accompanied by a mortgage-sized debt.

Post-secondary education is becoming less and less affordable, and right now graduates are entering an economy where carrying this kind of debt is even more unsustainable. We must eliminate the barriers to post-secondary education, and that includes eliminating tuition fees at all NSCC campuses.

As I draw my remarks to a close, I wish to acknowledge that there are many issues that need to be addressed and deserve more attention. I will continue to raise them in other ways in this House, the people's House. I hope the government will endeavour to work with us on addressing the issues concerning Nova Scotians. I know I'm willing. I'm proud to stand here as a member of the Legislative Assembly. I am proud to represent the residents of Cape Breton Centre, and I hope to do them proud.

Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Address in Reply.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Address in Reply. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Madam Speaker, this concludes the government business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow, Wednesday, March 24th, 2021, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Seeing that tomorrow is Opposition Day, I'd like to ask the NDP House Leader to provide tomorrow's agenda.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Tomorrow we'll begin with the daily routine, followed by Question Period, after which we will call two bills for debate for second reading: Bill No. 43 and Bill No. 24.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on March 24th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. We stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. Correction: 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 5:13 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 230**

By: Hon. Iain Rankin (Timberlea-Prospect)

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

Whereas Sawyer Burke, an 11-year-old, wrote to Dr. Strang to tell him he was faithfully watching his daily updates on COVID-19 and was following his advice, visiting the website and helping to educate his family and his community with accurate information about COVID-19; and

Whereas Dr. Strang's caring and compassionate approach to managing this pandemic so inspired Sawyer that he sent a donation to the QEII along with a letter thanking the front-line staff for what they were doing; and

Whereas Dr. Strang was so touched about how his messaging was having an impact on children, he publicly thanked Sawyer in one of his updates for his strong leadership and for showing how all Nova Scotians can work to support each other through this unprecedented event.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Sawyer Burke for his leadership and compassion to help others, and for showing all of us that you are never too young to make a difference.