



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Kevin Murphy

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

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

Third Session

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:	
2020 Financial Rpt., Auditor General	384
QEII New Generation Proj. - Hfx. Infirmery Expansion and Com. Outpatient Ctr. - Phase II, 14 July 2020, Auditor General	384
Government-wide: Contaminated Site, 28 July 2020, Auditor General	384
Follow-up of 2015, 2016, and 2017 Perf. Audit Recommendations, May 2020, Auditor General	384
Nova Scotia Liquor Corp. - Phase 1, June 2020, Auditor General	384
GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 231, Rose, Alyssa: IWK Fundraiser - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	384
Vote - Affirmative.....	385

Res. 232, Les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie - Best Wishes, Hon. L. Metlege Diab	385
Vote - Affirmative.....	386
Res. 233, Co-op Educ. Incentive: Meaningful Work Opportunities - Congrats., Hon. L. Metlege Diab	386
Vote - Affirmative.....	386
Res. 234, Admin., Teachers, Staff, Students, Families: 2020-21 Successes - Recog., Hon. D. Mombourquette	387
Vote - Affirmative.....	387
Res. 235, Nova Scotians: Climate Change Ldrs. - Recog., Hon. K. Irving	387
Vote - Affirmative.....	388
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 47, MGA (amended) and HRM Charter (amended), Hon. B. Maguire	388
No. 48, Health Serv. and Insurance Act (amended), T. Houston.....	388
No. 49, Local Action on Anti-racism Support Act, K. Coombes.....	388
No. 50, MGA (amended) and HRM Charter (amended), Hon. B. Maguire	388
No. 51, Dept. of Addictions and Mental Health Act, J. Lohr	388
No. 52, Workers' Compensation Act (amended), K. Coombes.....	389
No. 53, Clothesline Act (amended), L. Roberts.....	389
No. 54, Statistics Act (amended), C. Chender	389
No. 55, Real Property Act (amended), C. Chender	389
No. 56, Emancipation Day Act, Susan Leblanc	389
No. 57, African Nova Scotian Justice Institute Act, Susan Leblanc	389
No. 58, Defibrillator Public Access Act, Susan Leblanc	389
No. 59, Vital Statistics Act (amended), Susan Leblanc	389
No. 60, Mental Health Crisis Hotline Act, B. Comer	389
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Thomson, Heather Cameron: Online Kitchen Party - Recog., K. MacFarlane.....	389
Desmond, Mary - Author: <i>Good Morning, Mr. Charlie</i> - Congrats., Hon. L. Hines.....	390

Village on Main: Tacoma Drive Mural - Thanks, T. Halman	391
Island Breast Friends: Paying It Forward - Thanks, K. Coombes.....	391
MRWA: Stewardship of Hiking and Biking Trails - Congrats., Hon. B. Maguire	392
COVID-19 Pandemic: Resilience and Creativity - Commend, L. Harrison	392
Eviction Ban: Needed Throughout Pandemic - Recog., Susan Leblanc	393
Mawiejig: Eradicating Racism - Commend, A. Paon.....	393
Paramedics - Recipients: Exemplary Serv. Medal - Congrats., Hon. B. Jessome.....	394
Millwood High: Class of 2020 - Congrats., B. Johns.....	394
L&F: Meeting, Fillmore and Minister - Disappointment, L. Roberts.....	395
Wm. Black United Church: 200 th Anniv. - Congrats., H. MacKay	395
Kings Co. Seniors' Safety Soc.: Putting Srs.' Needs First - Recog., Hon. L. Glavine.....	395
LeBlanc, Maurice - Pasteur: Mort de - Hommage, Colton LeBlanc	396
Tatamagouche Brewing Co. - Multi-medallist: Cdn. Brewing Awards - Congrats., Hon. K. Casey	397
Foote Fam. Farm Market: Delivery Serv. During COVID-19 - Thanks, J. Lohr	397
Mulock, Christine: Death of - Tribute, Hon. M. Furey.....	397
Frizzell, Robert - Cpl.: Commanding Off. Comm. for Bravery - Congrats., K. Masland.....	398
MedMira: Bus. Success - Thanks, R. DiCostanzo	398
Local Schools: Admin., Teachers, Staff, Students - Commend, D. Ritcey	399
The Laker News: Bus. Success - Congrats., B. Horne.....	399
Bell, Roberta: Blood on the Coal Tartan - Congrats., T. Rushton.....	400
The Blue Bldg.: New Cultural Infrastructure - Commend, L. Roberts.....	400
Chester Health Ctr.: Love Where You Work Prog. - Congrats., H. MacKay	401
Ignite Labs: Bus. Success - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	401

Steele, Pam & Stephen - Paramedics: Career Achievements - Commend, B. Comer	402
Power, Janice: Com. Serv. - Thanks, Hon. S. Lohnes-Croft	402
Williams, Patti: Portapique Mem. Ribbons - Thanks, S. Craig	403
Vail, Kassandra: Lions' Speak Out Competition - Congrats., Hon. K. Regan.....	403
Borden, Russell - Member: N. Glasgow Town Council - Congrats., Hon. P. Dunn.....	403
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 45, Prem. - Vaccine Rollout: Vul. Grps. - Consider, T. Houston.....	404
No. 46, Prem.: Housing Crisis - Action, G. Burrill.....	406
No. 47, H&W: Suicides/Attempts - Numbers, J. Lohr	408
No. 48, H&W: Bricks & Mortar - Doctor Recruit, J. Lohr	409
No. 49, H&W - CBRM: No In-patient Beds - Comment, B. Comer	410
No. 50, Prem.: Homelessness Crisis - Response, L. Roberts.....	411
No. 51, H&W: Gambling Prevention Supports - Comment, M. Ryan.....	412
No. 52, H&W - TMJ Surgery: Wait Times - Cost, J. Lohr	414
No. 53, Prem.: Affordable Housing - Investment, L. Roberts.....	415
No. 54, H&W: Doctor Relocation - Support, K. MacFarlane.....	416
No. 55, Prem.: Northwood Recs. - Implement, B. Adams.....	417
No. 56, Prem. - CBRM: Homelessness - Address, K. Coombes.....	418
No. 57, Elect. Act: Elections N.S. Recs. - Action, A. Paon.....	419
No. 58, H&W - Northside Gen. Hosp.: Care Clinic - Funding Cut, M. Ryan.....	420
No. 59, H&W - All Saints Hosp.: Blood Coll. - Maintain, T. Rushton.....	422
OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 43, Housing as a Human Right Act L. Roberts.....	423
S. Craig	427

Hon. G. MacLellan	429
G. Burrill	434
A. Paon.....	438
No. 24, Emergency “911” Act,	
Susan Leblanc	440
D. Ritcey	445
Hon. B. Maguire	446
K. Coombes.....	450
A. Paon.....	452
L. Roberts.....	456

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5):

Govt. (N.S.): Universal Access to Mental Health/Addictions Support -
Key to Healthy Living

J. Lohr	458
Susan Leblanc	461
Hon. Z. Churchill	463
B. Comer	466

ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Thur., Mar. 25th at 1:00 p.m.467

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3):

Res. 236, David Blackburn Serv.: Bus. Success - Congrats., Hon. I. Rankin.....	468
Res. 237, Buchanan, David - Fire Chief, Baddeck: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	468
Res. 238, Fricker, Andrew - Fire Chief, Bay St. Lawrence: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	469
Res. 239, Jardine, Wayne - Fire Chief, Big Bras d’Or: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	469
Res. 240, Robert Leblanc - Fire Chief, Boisdale: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	470
Res. 241, Rambeau, Kyle - Fire Chief, Cabot: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	470
Res. 242, MacNeil, Brian - Fire Chief, Christmas Island: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	471
Res. 243, Cavanaugh, Tracy - Fire Chief, Englishtown: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	471
Res. 244, Green, Andy - Fire Chief, Frenchvale: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	472
Res. 245, Briand, Travais - Fire Chief, Georges River: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	472
Res. 246, Barron, Ervin - Fire Chief, Ingonish Beach: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	473
Res. 247, Costelo, Ryan - Fire Chief, Ingonish: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	473
Res. 248, MacNeil, Colin - Fire Chief, Iona: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	474

Res. 249, MacKenzie, David - Fire Chief, Middle River: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	474
Res. 250, Smith, Margaret - Fire Chief, Neils Harbour: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	475
Res. 251, MacEachern, Randy - Fire Chief, North Shore and District: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	475
Res. 252, Symes, Dwayne - Fire Chief, Ross Ferry: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	476
Res. 253, Macintyre, David - Fire Chief, Southside Boularderie: Com. Serv. - Thanks, K. Bain	476



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 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. Before we begin the daily routine, I will remind everybody that as it is Wednesday, Opposition Day, the topic for late debate - as submitted by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition - reads as follows:

Therefore be it resolved that providing universal access to regular, reliable, publicly-funded mental health and addictions support will make Nova Scotia a healthier, happier place to live.

The late debate, coming to you at the moment of interruption this afternoon.

We will now move on with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: As Speaker, and pursuant to Section 18(4) of the Auditor General Act, I am tabling the following reports of the Auditor General to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly: the 2020 Financial Report; the QEII New Generation Project - Halifax Infirmary Expansion and Community Outpatient Centre - Phase II report, July 14, 2020; the July 28, 2020 Government-wide: Contaminated Sites report; the May 2020 Follow-up of 2015, 2016, and 2017 Performance Audit Recommendations report; and finally, the June 2020 Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation - Phase I report.

The reports have been tabled with the Clerks.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 231

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

Whereas the IWK Health Centre provides quality care to women, children, youth, and families in the Maritime provinces and beyond; and

Whereas Alyssa Rose underwent a 20-hour brain surgery and eight weeks of intense radiation at the IWK and has since, at the age of 15, fundraised \$21,042 for the IWK Foundation; and

Whereas Alyssa set a goal to raise \$10,523 this year, which would make her three-year total \$31,566 raised for the hospital that helped save her life;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House congratulate Alyssa Rose on this great accomplishment and thank her for her continued dedication to give back to the IWK Health Centre.

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.

RESOLUTION NO. 232

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

Attendu que ce mois de mars marque les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie; et

Attendu que cette manifestation annuelle célèbre la francophonie canadienne dans ses cultures, sa diversité, et son inclusivité par un dialogue ouverte, une écoute et un respect mutuel; et

Attendu que la Nouvelle-Écosse, depuis l'établissement de l'Acadie il y a plus de 400 ans, abrite une communauté acadienne et francophone dynamique;

Par conséquent, il est résolu que les députés de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour souhaiter à tous les acadiens francophones et francophiles de la Nouvelle-Écosse et à travers le pays des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie de 2021 riche en échange et en découverte.

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 this month of March marks the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie; and

Whereas this annual event celebrates the Canadian Francophonie in its cultures, diversity, and inclusiveness through open dialogue, listening, and mutual respect; and

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

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in wishing all Acadians, francophones, and francophile from Nova Scotia and across the country a 2021 Rendez-vous de la Francophonie filled with positive exchange and discovery.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for 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 Labour and Advanced Education.

RESOLUTION NO. 233

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

Whereas employers across the province continue to recognize the benefits of hiring co-op students; and

Whereas the Co-operative Education Incentive supported more work experiences for college and university students in 2020 than ever before, with 861 co-operative student positions through the incentive this year; and

Whereas Nova Scotia businesses have continued to provide valuable career-related work experience to co-op students in the midst of the pandemic;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in congratulating the co-op students on their success and thank employers across Nova Scotia for continuing to create meaningful work opportunities for students and strengthening Nova Scotia's future workforce, especially during these challenging and unprecedented times.

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 Education and Early Childhood Development.

RESOLUTION NO. 234

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

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges and has changed the way education is delivered everywhere, including Nova Scotia; and

Whereas the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development worked closely with Public Health, the IWK, and our education partners to create a back-to-school plan to support the full, safe return of students and staff to schools; and

Whereas schools are the best place for our children for their education, development, and socialization, and it has taken everyone working together to ensure our schools remain safe and open during this difficult time;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize our teachers, administrators and school staff, students, and families who have helped to make this school year a success, with Nova Scotia being one of the only jurisdictions in the country to keep students in school since September.

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. 235

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

Whereas we are seeing the impacts of climate change right here in Nova Scotia with extreme weather events, coastal erosion, and sea-level rise; and

Whereas Nova Scotia has an enormous opportunity to be leaders in climate change, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, protecting our lands and waters, creating good jobs across the province, and making the lives of Nova Scotians healthier; and

Whereas each one of us has a role to play in climate change adaptation and the Province of Nova Scotia has committed to achieving 80 per cent renewable energy by 2030;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House acknowledge the role they play in helping to achieve a cleaner, more sustainable province for all Nova Scotians.

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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 47 - 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 Accessibility. (Hon. Brendan Maguire)

Bill No. 48 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 197 of the Revised Statutes 1989. The Health Services and Insurance Act. (Tim Houston)

Bill No. 49 - Entitled an Act to Support Local Action on Anti-racism. (Kendra Coombes)

Bill No. 50 - 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 Codes of Conduct. (Hon. Brendan Maguire)

Bill No. 51 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 376 of the Revised Statutes 1989. The Public Service Act to Establish a Department of Addictions and Mental Health. (John Lohr)

Bill No. 52 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 10 of the Acts of 1994-95. The Workers' Compensation Act. (Kendra Coombes)

Bill No. 53 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 34 of the Acts of 2010. The Clothesline Act. (Lisa Roberts)

Bill No. 54 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 441 of the Revised Statutes 1989. The Statistics Act. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 55 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 385 of the Revised Statutes 1989. The Real Property Act to Eliminate Covenants that Restrict Access to Food or Medicine. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 56 - Entitled an Act Proclaiming Emancipation Day. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 57 - Entitled an Act to Create the African Nova Scotia Justice Institute. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 58 - Entitled an Act Improving Public Access to Automated Defibrillators. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 59 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 494 of the Revised Statutes 1989. The Vital Statistics Act. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 60 - Entitled an Act to Establish a Crisis Hotline for Mental Health Emergencies. (Brian Comer)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

THOMSON, HEATHER CAMERON: ONLINE KITCHEN PARTY - RECOG.

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Heather Cameron Thomson, who began the Ultimate Online Kitchen Party Facebook page during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak last April. During a time of lockdown, fear, and uncertainty, this brought cheer, comfort, and distraction to the people of Nova Scotia and beyond.

The Ultimate Online Nova Scotia Kitchen Party was originally created to entice musicians and singers of Pictou County to upload videos of themselves performing their favourite tunes. Little did Heather know how the page would take off and expand across the province, across the country, and even to Bluenosers living abroad.

This page is still going strong, with nearly 275,000 members, and continues to be a fun, inspirational, and interactive way to connect online with one another. I applaud Heather for creating this page and for her continued dedication to the people to whom it brings joy. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The COVID-19 pandemic has shone light on issues in our communities, and one of the most troubling is people's access to technology and the internet, even in urban areas where connectivity is strong. In the (Inaudible) pandemic as workplaces, places of worship, and community groups pivoted their operations online, it became clear that those who did not have a computer or the internet were missing out. Never mind not being able to connect with family and friends - important public health information; school, work and health appointments; and even 12-step programs went virtual. Many people were left out or left behind.

This is where the GEO Project came in. Created by the Public Good Society of Dartmouth in partnership with Lake City Works, GEO - Getting Everyone Online - provided free internet, computers, webcams and headsets to those who needed them. It was a real lifeline for people in Dartmouth North and beyond. This past fall, the Bhayana Family Foundation awarded the GEO Project one of their Invisible Champion Awards.

The internet has become a basic necessity, and this province must find ways to get Nova Scotians who live on low incomes connected. We need . . .

THE SPEAKER: I think we lost the honourable member for Dartmouth North. We'll go to the honourable member for Guysborough-Eastern Shore-Tracadie.

**DESMOND, MARY - AUTHOR:
GOOD MORNING, MR. CHARLIE - CONGRATS.**

HON. LLOYD HINES: I rise today in recognition of a local author, Mary Desmond of Upper Big Tracadie. Her book *Good Morning, Mr. Charlie*, which was published earlier this year, teaches children the importance around taking the school bus to school.

Bus drivers teach students valuable lessons on safety and following the rules. They are the first to greet the students in the morning and the last to wave goodbye. Mary wrote this book as an ode to a local bus driver, but it is dedicated to all bus drivers who carefully

take our children to and from school every day. Bus drivers are an integral part of our education system that parents and children, especially in rural Nova Scotia, rely on.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mary on her new book, which is available for purchase now. I would also like to thank all bus drivers across Nova Scotia for the valuable work that they do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

VILLAGE ON MAIN: TACOMA DRIVE MURAL - THANKS

TIM HALMAN: I would like to offer congratulations to The Village on Main, the business improvement district here in Dartmouth East.

The Village on Main and their core staff of Sandra Conrad and Graziella Grbac work tirelessly to ensure businesses are supported in the Main Street area. One aspect of that work recently is the commissioning of a mural along the top of Tacoma Drive. This mural is stunning.

This colourful piece of art attempts to represent our community's many cultures, activities, and characteristics. Perhaps one of the most meaningful parts of this mural is the 22 books. All showing titles written by Nova Scotians, these books represent the 22 victims from the tragedy of last April.

I'm so grateful for the effort that the Village on Main, along with the amazing artist Lynda McConnell, have put into this mural for our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

ISLAND BREAST FRIENDS: PAYING IT FORWARD - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today to recognize a group of amazing women who are breast cancer survivors.

Island Breast Friends is an organization consisting of breast cancer survivors. Years ago, I had the pleasure of volunteering during their fundraising activities, and they are a fun group, I must say. The members include Patsy MacDonald, Heather McNeil, Wanda MacDonnell, Valerie Carrigan, and Agnes Martell.

For over 14 years, Island Breast Friends have been raising money in support of the Cancer Patient Care Fund at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital. This year they sold a third installment of their cookbook entitled *Comfort Cooking*, raising \$20,000. In addition to raising money, they also assembled comfort baskets for patients receiving treatment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Island Breast Friends for continuing to pay it forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

MRWA: STEWARDSHIP OF HIKING AND BIKING TRAILS - CONGRATS.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, recently I had the honour of organizing a socially-distanced community hike with the McIntosh Run Watershed Association. After months of isolation due to COVID-19, there is no better feeling than to explore MRWA's incredible natural hiking and biking trails with some great community members.

McIntosh Run Watershed Association is a volunteer-driven community organization. McIntosh Run Watershed Association's mission is to protect the watershed's ecological resources while providing sustainable public access and a wilderness experience for all community members. Over the years I have seen the tireless work of MRWA's volunteers in creating these pristine trails, all the while protecting our valuable ecosystem.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate MRWA on the construction of their new bridge on the Osprey Trail - it looks phenomenal. I would also like to thank Director Lawrence Plug, President Alice Morgan, Vice-President Kaarin Tae, and all the board members and volunteers that make this ongoing project possible. They are the voice and guardians of the McIntosh Run Watershed.

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

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: RESILIENCE AND CREATIVITY - COMMEND

LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, during the past year throughout Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley, as well as the rest of the province, businesses, organizations, and individuals have found creative and innovative ways to keep operating and communicating despite the restrictions placed upon them by COVID-19.

Working from home, participating in Zoom meetings, visiting family members through windows or telephone calls, and in some cases, completely altering work spaces in order to make them COVID-19 compliant, people have shown a resilience and adaptability that often surprised even themselves.

I wish to extend my sincerest appreciation and congratulations to all Nova Scotians for their strength, courage, patience, resiliency, compassion, and overall sense of community and togetherness throughout this past year. I know there are a lot of challenges facing this province, but I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

EVICTION BAN: NEEDED THROUGHOUT PANDEMIC - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, nearly a year ago during the first wave of the pandemic, the Province brought in a temporary eviction ban for those who have lost income due to COVID-19. This ban made sense. No one should be evicted due to a loss of income during a global pandemic. In fact, no one should be evicted during a pandemic at all. After all, one cannot stay home if one doesn't have a home to stay in.

The eviction ban was lifted at the end of June. Since then, my office has been supporting several people who are being evicted during the second wave of the pandemic due to an inability to pay rent. In some cases, they cannot pay rent because their work hours have been cut or they have been laid off due to the pandemic.

Time and time again, the people who have stepped up to help these folks raise the money to stay in their homes are churches, benevolent funds, and not-for-profits. Folks scramble to these organizations and if they are lucky, each one helps with a few hundred dollars and, of course, we know that not everyone is getting the help they need. In HRM alone, right now there are 200 homeless people at least.

The government should not be reliant on charitable gifts to keep their citizens housed during a pandemic. A full eviction ban needs to be a part of this government's response to COVID-19.

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

MAWIEJIG: ERADICATING RACISM - COMMEND

ALANA PAON: I rise today to acknowledge this week as the Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling Against Racism and Racial Discrimination. Dating back to 1979, this week stresses the importance of everyone to strive toward racial equality and tolerance.

Mawiejig, a committee which means Let's Gather Together, works tirelessly throughout Cape Breton-Richmond to increase knowledge and awareness on the diversity of human races, ethnicities, and customs leading to overcoming racism and creating a better understanding and acceptance of all people.

Mr. Speaker, I call upon the members of this Legislature to continue striving to abolish racism within our province and continue to add to the international framework on eradicating that which only serves to divide as opposed to unite us.

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

RECIPIENTS: PARAMEDICS EXEMPLARY SERV. MEDAL - CONGRATS.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize paramedics across our province, and in particular four individuals who were awarded the Emergency Medical Services Exemplary Service Medal last year.

Colleen Carey, Kevin Carey, Donna Reid, and Mark Walker, residents of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, were presented with the award on September 24, 2020, by Lieutenant Governor Arthur LeBlanc. The award recognizes their dedication to Nova Scotians in their time of greatest need, sometimes at their own personal risk.

Speaking as the partner of a former first responder, paramedics can find themselves in life's most precious moments. However, in some cases they find themselves in life's most unfair and devastating moments, sometimes all in a day's work. The Exemplary Service Medal recipients have demonstrated exemplary service in their careers for at least 20 years, including 10 years in an emergency medical services position that involves potential risk.

I would ask all members to join me in congratulating Colleen Carey, Kevin Carey, Donna Reid, and Mark Walker on receiving this admirable distinction and thank them for their continued service.

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

MILLWOOD HIGH: CLASS OF 2020 - CONGRATS.

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a message that may be a little bit late, but it is important to take the time both to recognize and to congratulate the 207 students from Millwood High School's graduating class of 2020.

Sadly, this past year, due to COVID-19, there were no graduation ceremonies at Millwood High School. That's the first time I wasn't there in the last 15 years to actually extend congratulations, so I wanted to do so now that the House is back in.

It's quite interesting this year. Municipal, provincial, and federal elected officials from the area all came together, put partisan politics aside, and posted signs and balloons and everything else for the students. It just wouldn't be fair if I didn't stand up here in the House and take the first opportunity to recognize and congratulate those students from Millwood High School's 2020 class. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

L&F: MEETING, FILLMORE AND MINISTER - DISAPPOINTMENT

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House to express my great disappointment. Yesterday I attended a rally on behalf of biodiversity and the health and vibrancy of our environment and our forests across Nova Scotia, and particularly a rally in support of Jacob Fillmore, a young man who has been camping in downtown Halifax to raise his concerns around clearcutting since December and who has been on a hunger strike for more than 16 days.

Yesterday, amidst many concerns about where we are going as a province, there was one bit of hope that people applauded, which was that the Minister of Lands and Forestry was to meet with Mr. Fillmore today. Unfortunately, and to my great disappointment and his, the minister did not attend that meeting.

This is one of many reasons why we ought to be concerned about the leadership of this government on the file of Lands and Forestry.

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

WM. BLACK UNITED CHURCH: 200th ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the congregation of the William Black Memorial United Church of Glen Margaret on celebrating their 200th anniversary. The William Black Memorial United Church is one of the oldest surviving largely unaltered Methodist churches in Canada and is listed in the Canada's Historic Places registry.

In 1821 Reverend William Black built a meeting house where worshippers gathered regularly for class meetings, prayer, and Bible study. The church was first known as the Wesleyan-Methodist Church. Then in 1925, with the union of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches, the Glen Margaret church joined the newly-created United Church of Canada. In 1939, the congregation decided to rename their church in honour of the founder, William Black.

I invite all the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the congregants of the William Black Memorial United Church on their 200th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**KINGS CO. SENIORS' SAFETY SOC.:
PUTTING SRS.' NEEDS FIRST - RECOG.**

HON. LEO GLAVINE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Kings County Seniors' Safety Society for the incredible support they have provided the seniors in Kings

County since 2006. Seniors' safety societies address the safety concerns of seniors and provide overall support during times when it is most needed.

I have worked with Seniors' Safety coordinator Michelle Parker over the last 10 years. I can say with great respect that Michelle has always gone above and beyond to assist in any way possible. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Michelle has worked tirelessly, putting the needs of seniors above her own, to ensure that people are safe, connected with the community and receive necessary resources and are supported to the highest degree.

Michelle and the entire Kings County Seniors' Safety Society have immeasurably impacted the lives of hundreds of people and this deserves great recognition.

Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute honour to stand here today to duly recognize and thank the Seniors' Safety Society and Michelle Parker for the continued, unwavering support to seniors in our local community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle-Barrington.

LEBLANC, MAURICE - PASTEUR: MORT DE - HOMMAGE

COLTON LEBLANC: Monsieur le président, je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour rendre hommage au père Maurice LeBlanc, décédé le 12 février 2021 à l'âge de 96 ans.

Né à Pubnico-Ouest, le Père Maurice LeBlanc, affectueusement surnommé Père Maurice, a eu une vie pleine et active pour le moins. Il était un prêtre respecté, un professeur, un musicien, un artiste, un patriote acadien passionné et un ami à plusieurs.

Les arts, la culture et la communauté acadienne faisaient tous une partie intégrale de sa vie. Il a longtemps été professeur d'art et de musique au Collège Sacré-Coeur de Bathurst et à l'Université Sainte-Anne à la Pointe-de-l'Église. Il a dirigé des nombreuses chorales, a été pasteur dans les communautés acadiennes du comté de Yarmouth et a siégé à d'innombrables comités et organismes acadiens, notamment à titre de président de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Monsieur le Président, au nom de cette Assemblée, je désire transmettre mes plus sincères condoléances à la famille et aux amis du Père Maurice LeBlanc. Il nous manquera beaucoup.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**TATAMAGOUCHE BREWING CO. - MULTI-MEDALLIST:
CDN. BREWING AWARDS - CONGRATS.**

HON. KAREN CASEY: Mr. Speaker, the 18th Canadian Brewing Awards ceremony in Ontario was held virtually for the first time. More than 1,500 beers were submitted for their judges. Colchester North's Tatamagouche Brewing Company - or TataBrew, as it is often and more fondly called - led Nova Scotia's craft beer community by winning gold, silver and bronze.

The company has been brewing organic craft beer since 2014 and has won nine Canadian Brewing Awards and was the 2018 Atlantic Canadian Brewery of the Year.

After such an unusual and challenging year for brewers, co-owner Christiane Jost said it was especially rewarding to be able to celebrate with the staff, who watched the virtual ceremony together.

Our congratulations to the Tatamagouche Brewing Company and our thanks for such an excellent example of Nova Scotia's craft brewing industry, which is alive and growing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**FOOTE FAM. FARM MARKET:
DELIVERY SERV. DURING COVID-19 - THANKS**

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to rise to express my appreciation to Brad Foote and his staff of the Foote Family Farm Market. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was great concern about grocery shopping, the Foote Family Market offered a food delivery service to the residents of Centreville. This service was greatly appreciated by the community, especially by those who were at greater risk of COVID-19. By meeting this need they demonstrated how important small, local farm markets are in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in thanking Brad Foote and his staff for their commitment to the community and their thoughtful actions.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

MULOCK, CHRISTINE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. MARK FUREY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Christine Mulock, who volunteered for 52 years with the Italy Cross, Middlewood & District Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary. She joined in 1969 at the age of 18. She was the backbone of the organization. According to President Judy Jensen, she was involved in everything. She was

the number one cook, the bouncer at dances, served as president, ran car parties, and led the annual fish and chip fundraiser held at the South Shore Exhibition. She was known as the Cinnamon Bun Lady and would make up to 600 huge rolls for individual suppers.

Christine believed that the fire hall was a place for people to gather, have a good time, and get to know their neighbours. There is no doubt that she helped create that special place for many. Christine touched all of us who were fortunate to know her. Her recent passing has left a huge void. She will be dearly missed.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens-Shelburne.

**FRIZZELL, ROBERT - CPL.:
COMMANDING OFF. COMM. FOR BRAVERY - CONGRATS.**

KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, today I acknowledge the heroic efforts of Queens District RCMP officer Corporal Robert Frizzell. Corporal Frizzell was recently presented with a Commanding Officer's Commendation for Bravery, recognizing his courageous rescue of a resident from the Mersey River following a vehicle collision in May of 2020.

Placing the safety of others above his own, Corporal Frizzell demonstrated outstanding courage in the face of dangerous circumstances when he went into the river that day.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members join me as I extend to Corporal Frizzell sincere gratitude and congratulations on this well-deserved recognition. Corporal, you are a true hero and, on behalf of the entire community of Queens, I thank you for your service to our county, our province, and our country.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

MEDMIRA: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize an exceptional businessman in my community: Hermes Chan, the CEO and co-founder of MedMira.

I met Hermes and his wife Carolina Hui back in September 2019 while I visited MedMira research lab in Bayers Lake. Both Hermes and Carolina are distinguished scientists. They have built an outstanding diagnostic technology company here in Bayers Lake.

This company strives to combat diseases such as HIV and hepatitis B and C. In the past year, MedMira has expanded their staff members from 11 to 54, comprised mainly of

newcomers. This was due to the high demand for their REVEALCOVID-19™ Total Antibody Test that has been a weekly production of over 20,000 COVID-19 tests. These are being used by labs in the U.S.A.

Mr. Speaker, MedMira is truly an amazing Canadian immigration success story. Their employees come from 18 different countries and are all very hard-working new Canadians.

I would like to thank Hermes Chan and his wife Carolina Hui, of MedMira, for their contribution to our health, and for improving the lives of new immigrants in our province.

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

**LOCAL SCHOOLS:
ADMIN., TEACHERS, STAFF, STUDENTS - COMMEND**

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, the last year has been a difficult one for everyone. We have had to adapt to COVID-19- related precautions and restrictions. Throughout this, teachers and all staff of all the schools in Truro, Bible Hill, Millbrook, and Salmon River continued to teach and work during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part, preparing both in person and online lesson plans, in extra cleaning, and in addressing health concerns while keeping our children safe.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the teachers, the cleaning staff, administration, and support teams for stepping up and serving our community above and beyond any previous expectations. Most of all, I acknowledge and praise students for adapting and preserving their health during these unprecedented times.

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

THE LAKER NEWS: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

BILL HORNE: I rise to congratulate Pat Healey, founder of The Laker News.

Just over one year ago, Pat was shocked to learn that the Laker newspaper and the Enfield Weekly Press were two more local newspapers that would close. Our communities were not willing to give up the local news reporting and encouraged Pat to continue to do what he does best - report on the people and the events of the community.

Pat is now the founder and part owner of The Laker News, a digital news site which is free and overwhelmingly supported through community advertising. Pat's website and social media is the first place people reach out to for local news. For many during this pandemic, it is a way to stay connected to their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating Pat on the success and thank him for sharing the stories of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

BELL, ROBERTA: BLOOD ON THE COAL TARTAN - CONGRATS.

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise today and acknowledge Roberta Bell of Springhill, who was five years old in 1956 when the explosion hit Springhill and killed 39 miners, and seven years old when 74 were killed in the bump of 1958.

Mr. Speaker, Roberta Bell had a dream that inspired her to develop a coal miners' tartan in honour of all those who went deep into the earth and paid a heavy price to dig coal in our community of Springhill.

The tartan has black for the coal, yellow for the miner's lamp, white for life and hope, and red for the blood on the coal of the miners who lost their lives or were injured. The tartan has been recognized by the Scottish Register of Tartans in Edinburgh, Scotland, and has been officially registered.

Mr. Speaker, please join me and thank and congratulate Roberta Bell on this outstanding achievement, and we thank her for her vision that has turned into such a beautiful reality and positive outlook for her community of Springhill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

THE BLUE BLDG.: NEW CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE - COMMEND

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate and celebrate Emily Falencki on the opening of The Blue Building, a new contemporary, commercial, artist-led gallery located at 2482 Maynard Street. Currently in a beautifully redesigned and purposefully built space, one can see new work by Lucy Pullen, Sarah Maloney, Sheilah ReStack, and Ursula Johnson.

The Blue Building is one aspect of 2482 Maynard Street, which is a new, dedicated, accessible visual arts facility, which also houses Wonder'neath, led by Melissa Marr and Heather Wilkinson, which has provided accessible artist space - art-making space - that is much loved by many people in the constituency of Halifax Needham and beyond.

We have lost many studios and galleries in Halifax Needham over the past dozen years, and because artists can't work without cultural infrastructure, the opening of 2482 Maynard and The Blue Building is truly remarkable and worth celebrating.

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

CHESTER HEALTH CTR.: LOVE WHERE YOU WORK PROG. - CONGRATS.

HUGH MACKAY: Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to congratulate both the Municipality of Chester and Chester's Our Health Centre on launching a recruitment and retention program for physicians, branded Love Where You Work.

The shared goal of the municipality and the health centre is to improve local access to primary care and other health services, to support economic development, and the quality of life throughout the municipality. A crucial step for these goals is to attract and retain physicians. The first step of the program was to create a website giving potential physicians a virtual hello and a tour of the area and all the municipality's amenities.

Next, when interested physicians visited the area, they were introduced to current health professionals in the area, offered free tours of the community, and invited to social events, all as a way to help them feel welcome and part of this vibrant community.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the Municipality of Chester and Our Health Centre in launching this critical physician attraction and retention program.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

IGNITE LABS: BUS. SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, Yarmouth resident Doug Jones started Ignite Labs, an innovation hub, to foster entrepreneurship in Yarmouth and in the Pictou area. The focus is from the fishing industry to technology and Ignite labs has been an enormous success.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ignite Labs produced ear savers for our health care community, which were a great help to many, and another great example of Ignite's leadership and community spirit.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in thanking Doug Jones and Ignite Labs for contributing to the region's and the province's economic success, and for its innovation and assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

**STEELE, PAM & STEPHEN - PARMDEDICS:
CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS - COMMEND**

BRIAN COMER: I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to applaud two of my constituents, Pam and Stephen Steele of Marion Bridge, who together have a combined 35 years' work experience as paramedics here in Cape Breton, as well as 23 years of marriage as husband and wife.

Pam was recently praised by EHS after a patient commented about how professional she was, with a calming demeanor and her commitment to her patients. Regarding Stephen, it has been said, although very quiet, he's the most compassionate paramedic around and takes great pride in his job. He is well liked by his co-workers and members of the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend Pam and Stephen on their exemplary careers and dedication to their jobs as paramedics here in Cape Breton. I'd like to wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

POWER, JANICE: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Janice Power of New Germany for her volunteerism and dedication to her community.

Over the last few summers, Janice has dedicated time and effort to improving the New Germany community entrance. After having a Welcome to New Germany sign added a few years ago, she felt the entrance needed a refresh, and she began adding gardens. She brightened up the oxbow sign with a fresh coat of paint and dug up sod surrounding it and prepared the soil to plant flowers, plants, and sowed seeds to create a beautiful garden.

After the Spring of 2020, she added the Nova Scotia flag to the garden in recognition of the strength and bravery demonstrated by Nova Scotians. Janice's work has brought joy to many in the community. It is a thoughtful and kind action like this that demonstrates the good citizenships that makes this community a better place.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you and members of this House of Assembly to join me in recognizing the efforts of Janice Power and thanking her for her time and contributions to her community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

WILLIAMS, PATTI: PORTAPIQUE MEM. RIBBONS - THANKS

STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to thank Patti Williams of Lower Sackville. Following the horrific tragedy that took place in Portapique in April 2020, Patti wanted to find some way to show the victims' families that they were not alone. She decided to make Nova Scotia memorial lapel ribbons to be worn as a sign of support.

She was overwhelmed by the number she sold. She was only asking for a donation, which would be sent to the families. She even drove to other communities to purchase the ribbon, as she bought out the local supply - believe it or not.

I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in thanking Patti Williams for her kindness and applaud her for her efforts in raising over \$3,000 for the families of Portapique.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford.

VAIL, KASSANDRA: LIONS' SPEAK OUT COMPETITION - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate Kassandra Vail on winning the Bedford Lions Speak Out competition last month. On February 18th, we gathered for a socially-distant version of the annual competition. We heard three candidates give very passionate speeches on a variety of topics, including liberating constraints and the validity of multiple identities for teens.

Kassandra Vail gave a commanding speech about her love of taekwondo and its role in her life, and I will not be surprised to see her in the Olympics one day. She's only in Grade 10 and based on what we saw last evening, I expect great things from her.

I'd like to commend the Bedford Lions Club as well for working very diligently to ensure this competition could happen in a safe and socially-distanced way, and I would like to thank Charles P. Allen High School teacher Chris Hall for coaching CPA students in this competition every year. Well done, Mr. Hall.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

**BORDEN, RUSSELL - MEMBER:
N. GLASGOW TOWN COUNCIL - CONGRATS.**

HON. PAT DUNN: Russell Borden, an employee with Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education as a child and youth care practitioner, successfully won a council seat during the 2020 municipal elections. He represents Ward 1 on the Town of New Glasgow's council.

Borden is an open minded, confident team player and will use his skills as a competent problem solver in his new role. Russell has always enjoyed being a mentor for the youth in his community, possessing the qualities to inspire others and motivate them to reach for the stars. His energy is always focused on ways to have his community working together on common goals.

We are looking forward to many years having Russell Borden as our representative and voice on the New Glasgow town council.

THE SPEAKER: That about does it for the time allotted for Members' Statements. We'll now take our mandated 15-minute COVID-19 break, and the House will recess. We'll resume proceedings 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: VUL. GRPS. - CONSIDER

TIM HOUSTON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday I referred to a Global News report that gave Nova Scotia a D on its vaccine rollout plan. That, of course, was the lowest grade that was given. Part of the reason that we are getting such a low grade might be because we are neglecting those people with underlying conditions and special circumstances.

I have a map that has been put out by a group advocating for those with Down syndrome to receive priority vaccinations. You will see from the map that Nova Scotia is the only province refusing to give consideration to those with Down syndrome.

My question for the Premier: Does the Premier agree that these vulnerable groups do not deserve consideration?

HON. IAIN RANKIN (The Premier): While other provinces across the country are looking at another shutdown, we have a semblance of normalcy in Nova Scotia. It is because of the hard work of Nova Scotians and because of the Public Health team, the work they are doing, what they have done with testing, and masks.

We are starting to ramp up our vaccination schedule. We are doing very, very well. We are leading the country and that will continue as long as we continue to listen to Public Health. The proof is in the pudding. We are doing very well with COVID-19 and that is going to continue as long as we continue to base our decisions on evidence and facts.

TIM HOUSTON: We are doing well with keeping the COVID-19 case count down. Nova Scotians have done the work; now they want the government to do its part and roll out the vaccines. While we are leading on keeping the case count down, we are not leading on vaccines, we are at the bottom of the pack on that.

Here is a list of conditions that will move you up the vaccine priority list: organ transplant recipients; stem cell transplant recipients; kidney disease; liver disease; cancer; heart disease - I could go on. There are about 25 conditions on this list. Of course, you would have to live in another province to move up because here in Nova Scotia we do not offer that here. Other provinces are rolling out the vaccines much quicker than Nova Scotia. It is not slowing them down to look at special groups and special situations.

Will the Premier acknowledge that by not giving special consideration to all these vulnerable groups of pre-existing conditions, he is letting Nova Scotians down?

THE PREMIER: Our job is to continue to listen to Public Health. As Dr. Strang and the team has continuously said, we need to look out for all Nova Scotians. The goal is to have population immunity.

We continue to look at age demographics which, by far, are the ones who are most susceptible to the COVID-19 pandemic issues that are associated with that. That is why we concentrate on long-term care centres right away. Those individuals are getting their second dose; health care workers are getting their second dose.

As we continue to descend down, every Nova Scotian will have a chance to be able to get their shot by the end of June. In every single week, we are hitting records of how many doses we are putting in arms.

TIM HOUSTON: Of course, Nova Scotians have been listening to Public Health. It is good that the government has, too.

I have a question about the listening to Public Health. On March 3rd, there was a government press release. It used the language: yesterday, Premier Rankin directed Dr. Strang to come up with a plan for the additional vaccines. The word “directed” was new language that we have not seen in the government press releases over the past year.

I would just like to ask the Premier very specifically about his actions to direct Public Health to do something. Are we listening to Public Health? Are we directing Public

Health? Is it a mix of the two? Was that just a one-off that the Premier directed Dr. Strang to do something, or is it more common than that?

THE PREMIER: We always look at the evidence on any given situation. The recommendations come from the Public Health team and then they take direction from us.

I also directed the team to look at the homeless population after they were given advice that congregate settings could have expedited issues in those settings. We have a plan for mobile units to get out to the homeless population by the end of April.

Again, it is based on evidence and science. That is what this Party and this government will continue to do and not try to use fear and cynicism and try to pin one place in the province against another with different Acts before the Legislature. We will not try to politicize COVID-19.

He is taking a page out of his cousin Party in Ottawa with climate change denial. Now they contributing to vaccine hesitation.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

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

PREM.: HOUSING CRISIS - ACTION

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Erin Masters, who lives in Dartmouth, was going through the frustration that's recently involved with trying to get a place to live in the current super-tight rental market.

She tweeted this, which I'll table: "Getting an rental in HRM is like playing Jumanji." The video here is a stampede of rhinoceroses. "A place I just applied for had 150+ applications, and people offered rent ABOVE asking which was \$1200.. they raised the rental price to help the selection process WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE. When does this end."

Mr. Speaker, I think I know the answer to the first question. What is happening is a housing crisis, driven by a lack of investment in affordable housing.

Erin's second question is one that deserves the Premier's answer: What is his government doing to end this?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question on an important topic. We do have a substantial investment, the largest in our history in this province. Over the next nine years we'll be spending \$0.5 billion for our housing stock to contribute to supply.

The main issue is supply. Our population growth has continued to go past expectations. When we came into government, it was roughly 940,000. Now we are approaching 980,000, on our way to a million. That's a positive thing, but we need to make sure that we're working on making sure that we do have supply in the market - both market-oriented units, incentivizing people to build in this province.

The municipalities have a role, Mr. Speaker. We need to work with non-profits. We do have a housing commission that's putting together recommendations, and we're eagerly awaiting those recommendations.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, for women experiencing domestic violence, the availability of safe, affordable housing is key to being able to make a plan for leaving. But organizations that help women find safe places to live are speaking repeatedly about how finding any market rental apartments or housing stock is becoming very difficult. Advocates from the YWCA, Alice House, and the Transition House Association are all speaking to this problem. I'll table this document about where they've done that.

Understanding that the absence of available housing puts women in a situation of having to choose between staying in a violent situation or homelessness, my question to the Premier is: Will the Premier tell us how he can justify bringing in a capital plan yesterday which makes no clear investment in social or non-market housing?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to invest in infrastructure across this province at record levels. Housing is part of that. We eagerly await the recommendations from the housing commission that has those representatives from non-profit groups that advocate on behalf of shelters and other housing initiatives.

It is a priority for this government. We have put housing with infrastructure together in one department. I look forward to that work and the investments that are forthcoming. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier will perhaps recall the recent extreme case of landlord overreach that took place on North Street in the constituency that I serve, where a tenant in the midst of exercising his right to appeal an eviction experienced the landlord trying to evict him, first by a flood and then, when he left the apartment for a couple of hours, by an excavator.

This is the kind of thing that happens when an extremely short supply of available apartments makes some landlords feel emboldened.

Does the Premier understand that his government's failure to create affordable housing has increased the vulnerability of tenants across the board across the province?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, there's a lot more work to do in housing. We need to continue to look at how we can invest and how we can enable investment, working with municipalities and non-profits across this province.

We do have targeted spending alongside the federal government with the 50 per cent cost-share program. We have rental caps in place so that we don't have the issue of what I think are unreasonable rent increases. That is going to continue to be in place until we get those recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

H&W: SUICIDES/ATTEMPTS - NUMBERS

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. I rise today because I worry about the mental health of Nova Scotians over the pandemic. There is no shortage of stressors. I think everyone in this House has felt that since last March.

For many, what COVID-19 has left in its wake is unbearable. In Ontario, the McMaster Children's Hospital says it has seen a steady increase of youth in crisis since the COVID-19 pandemic began. According to the hospital, youth admitted for medical support after suicide attempts has tripled over a four-month period when compared to last year. The hospital said that patients are also staying in hospital longer due to increased magnitude of attempts. I understand that's been tabled for me.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Can the minister provide me and the House with the information around the number of suicides and attempted suicides in Nova Scotia since the beginning of COVID-19?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While we did experience increased distress in our population and an increased pressure on our mental health system - we did see about a 30 per cent increase of calls to our crisis line and redeployed our resources within the Department of Health and Wellness properly to respond to that - we did not see an increase in Nova Scotia of suicides related to COVID-19.

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, this is information we have seen go in the wrong direction across the country. In December 2020, there was a sharp increase in the warning signs with one in 10 Canadians experiencing recent thoughts or feelings of suicide, up six per cent in the Spring and 2.5 per cent throughout pre-pandemic. Suicidal thoughts and feelings are even higher in various subgroups of the population, including those who identify as LGBTQ+, 28 per cent; with existing mental health illnesses, 27 per cent; with disabilities, 24 per cent; ages 25 to 34, 21 per cent; 18 to 24, 19 per cent; and those who are Indigenous, 20 per cent. I will have that tabled.

These are trends we just cannot ignore and must address. My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is - and I'm not sure whether he actually answered the question: Did he say there were data, or did he say there were not data? I guess that is the question: Are there actual data, or is this an anecdotal statement by the Minister of Health and Wellness?

ZACH CHURCHILL: There are data that are tracked, and the data did not indicate an increase in actual suicides over the course of the last year, although the data did show a 30 per cent increase in pressure on our crisis line.

So there was an increase, I think, in distress in our society over the past year, and we have responded appropriately by redeploying resources in our system and also by hiring more. The member brought up a really key point about support for youth, particularly those from the LGBTQ community, and we're very proud that our government, before COVID-19 even started, significantly increased mental health supports in our schools and partnered with community organizations to give students more local support on this key area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

H&W: BRICKS & MORTAR – DOCTOR RECRUIT.

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, Again, for the Minister of Health and Wellness on another topic. There's an old saying: "Build it and they will come." Certainly this Liberal government believed that in the Fall of 2017, when the former Health and Wellness Minister opened a new collaborative care practice in Kingston around the corner from his constituency office, which has never been able to attract the full complement of doctors, the most recent ad which I believe has been tabled for me.

Fifteen minutes down the road in Middleton, the former Premier had a new collaborative practice open just a couple of months ago, and they are still seeking a doctor for that practice - and I will table that ad. The village of Canning has long put money into a collaborative practice and has been looking for a part-time doctor for well over three years.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is this: Which should come first, the chicken or the egg? Do bricks and mortar really attract new doctors in Nova Scotia?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, of course physicians want to work in new, modern, world-class facilities. That's why we're investing in transformations in our health care infrastructure, investments that have been a long time coming. That, of course, doesn't alone increase our supply of physicians. That's why we are investing in training more doctors than ever before here in Nova Scotia. That's why we're recruiting more international doctors and reducing red-tape barriers that had prevented them from coming

to Nova Scotia in the past. That's why we've invested heavily in compensation for physicians and specialists that we need here in this province. We now have the most competitive compensation framework in Atlantic Canada, so we are setting the stage for long-term success when it comes to physician recruitment and retention here in Nova Scotia.

[2:30 p.m.]

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister for that answer. In fact, the Western Zone has the highest number of people on the doctor waiting list, has the highest number of orphan patients.

The two communities I just mentioned have close to 20 per cent of the population who do not have a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. In Kentville alone, there are also three advertised positions, all in well-established collaborative care practices set up by local practitioners themselves, and those ads have been tabled for me.

My question for the minister is: Will he commit to having a full complement of doctors for residents of Kentville and Middleton and Kingston and Berwick, all these communities, which are so short of family doctors?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, until this last year, we have seen a positive trend in terms of attaching more patients to family physicians. Of course, we want that trend to continue. We are very much focussed on ensuring that Nova Scotia is a great place to work for physicians, that they are accepted in our communities, which is why we've also invested money in community initiatives, so that communities can play the important role that they need to play in recruiting and retaining family physicians, as well.

I want to thank the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage for partnering with us to ensure that those dollars are available for communities.

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

H&W - CBRM: NO IN-PATIENT BEDS - COMMENT

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, the Cape Breton Regional Municipality currently has a population of just under 94,000 people, yet none of our local hospitals have a single in-patient bed for children or the elderly being treated for mental health and addictions. My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Does he think this is acceptable?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, mental health has been a key area of focus for our government. We have increased our investments to \$310 million a year for mental health services. As the member will see this week, there will be additional resources put in place for mental health supports.

We have hired more clinicians, we have hired more social workers, we have hired navigators to help people navigate our system. We're investing in e-mental health supports, as well. We are seeing that this creates more support for people who are in need of mental health in our system. This work is going to continue. I look forward to the budget that's going to be tabled tomorrow, and the member will be able to see the more dollars invested in this key area.

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, we know that 75 per cent of mental illness begins by the age of 25. This has been well documented in the literature. We understand that mental health is a spectrum of well-being for all of us in Nova Scotia. We often only hear about mental health in the context of illness or disorders or in-patient treatment in a hospital setting.

My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Is there a specific strategy within your newly created Office of Mental Health & Addictions that is going to be focussed on stigma reduction and proactive identification of mental health in our youth population specifically?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for that question. He raises a very important point. I've heard clinicians refer to that as upstream support, preventive support, and we are investing heavily into mental health supports in our schools. We've brought in the SchoolsPlus program and enhanced that every single year with more school psychologists and mental health clinicians, along with other non-teaching supports as well.

We definitely do not want mental health to be stigmatized. Mental health is health and should be treated as health. That's why our government is not following through on the recommendations coming forth from the PC Caucus to set up a different, separate department for mental health and addictions. We do not want to fragment or stigmatize supports for those who require mental health services in our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

PREM.: HOMELESSNESS CRISIS - RESPONSE

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. In 2016, according to the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, there were about 140 people who were chronically homeless in Halifax. As of this week, eight years into this government's mandate, 331 people are experiencing chronic homelessness in HRM. These are 331 people who have been without suitable housing for six months or longer, but this government has not acted with any sense of urgency to respond to this crisis.

Is the Premier satisfied with his government's record of more than doubling the number of people experiencing homelessness in Halifax?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I share the priority to start looking at housing and homelessness in this province. I did meet with the Affordable Housing Association myself and went over the numbers. I'm not satisfied when we had, at that time, 480 people on the street in HRM. I understand the number is getting better, but we need to continue to make investments in places like the Affordable Housing Association.

We invested \$1.7 million into that organization recently. They have a seat at the table with the Affordable Housing Commission. This is a serious issue that we all need to take seriously.

LISA ROBERTS: Over the past two years alone, we have seen many investors buy small apartment buildings, particularly in Dartmouth North and in Fairview, only to demolish and redevelop them into larger, more expensive rental units. This ongoing loss of moderately affordable rental housing has put even more people at risk of homelessness.

Without plans to make significant public investment in non-market housing, how does the Premier plan to stop the growth of homelessness in HRM?

THE PREMIER: The way we tackle these complex issues is by working together. That's why we put together a housing commission. That was decided after I actually put forward a similar idea of a task force. We need municipalities at the table, especially when referencing HRM and the tremendous growth here. Having the second-fastest growing city now in Canada is a positive thing, but we need to continue to look at ways that we can increase supply. That's the core issue here.

We will be looking at ways that we can incentivize the private sector to continue to build units and looking at ways to ensure that we're supporting the hard-working non-profits across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

H&W: GAMBLING PREVENTION SUPPORTS - COMMENT

MURRAY RYAN: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. In February, the Province granted an Order in Council enabling Atlantic Lotto to offer online gambling in Nova Scotia. While I'm sure this will lead to increased revenues at Atlantic Lotto, I'm deeply concerned by what the cost will be to Nova Scotians who suffer from gambling addictions.

The government has conjured a perfect storm for gambling addictions in the province. The Liberals quietly began dissolving funding dedicated to gambling prevention and awareness, diverting it into general mental health funding instead of increasing support to match the increased access to gambling.

My question is: With the estimated wait times exceeding a year for mental health services, what steps is the Minister of Health and Wellness's department taking to ensure that the supports are there for those who suffer from gambling addictions?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm very happy that the current Premier has put Mental Health & Addictions as part of this portfolio. We have enhanced addiction supports in Nova Scotia as well. The member asked about wait times. When it comes to urgent cases that require assistance, we are meeting the benchmarks of responding to those cases within a week. We are meeting national standards when it comes to response times for non-acute cases as well.

MURRAY RYAN: I thank the minister for the answer. This has been a very challenging year for all of us, but this decision could make a difficult year even worse for Nova Scotians suffering from gambling addictions. We know that, like drugs or alcohol, gambling addictions can destroy families and ruin lives.

As the chair of the Gambling Risk Informed Nova Scotia said at the time, in the middle of COVID, isn't there more of a need to do this prevention work and community awareness work?

My question to the minister: Was the minister's department consulted on the decision by the Department of Finance and Treasury Board? Does the government agree with the decision that will increase the demand for services the department already struggles to provide?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you very much for the question. We know how challenging gambling addictions can be for individuals. What I hear from clinicians is that gambling addiction can oftentimes be associated with other mental health disorders or struggles as well. That's why we are investing significantly in enhancing mental health supports here in Nova Scotia, from what's available to our youth in school supports to what's available for acute urgent cases.

We have seen enhancements in our mental health and addiction services, from hiring more clinicians in this province to expanding our e-mental health supports to also ensuring that other non-clinical supports are available for individuals as well, like hiring more social workers and navigators to work through the system. We will continue to enhance supports in this critical area for Nova Scotians because we know how important it is.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

H&W - TMJ SURGERY: WAIT TIMES - COST

JOHN LOHR: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. TMJ or temporal mandibular pain is frequently associated with stress and anxiety, and I believe that has been tabled for me. In fact, one study found that TMJ joint disorder appears to be associated with depression, anxiety, and stress and remains largely undiagnosed in the general population, and that has been tabled.

The relationship is both ways. The presence of stress and anxiety can increase the severity of bruxism, or teeth grinding - that's what TMJ is about, I believe. As well, chronic pain from TMJ can increase levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

My question for the minister is: Is the minister aware of the correlation between teeth grinding and mental health?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: That is definitely not an area of expertise for me, but broadly I am being brought up to speed about the various factors that impact mental health. I am very pleased with the enhancements of support that we are providing here in Nova Scotia to help Nova Scotians deal with issues related to mental health, whether it is an acute, urgent matter or whether it is non-urgent.

JOHN LOHR: The reason I ask is that current wait times for surgery for TMJ have gone up from a total wait time of 667 days in March 2020 to now 962 days, or nearly three years. Given the invasiveness of this surgery, it is typically a last resort to other treatments. If people are waiting for this surgery, it's because they desperately need it and have no other option. I worry about the consequence of delaying this surgery for those who need it most, for the sake of their mental and oral health.

Teeth grinding, as I previously mentioned, can damage teeth, and people have to pay for that out of pocket to their dental professionals, not through MSI. The longer it takes to get this surgery, the more dental work the patient will need.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is this: Is he okay with downloading the cost of treatment by these delays from the public system to individuals?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, as we dealt with the pandemic over the last year, many non-acute or -urgent surgeries were delayed to ensure that we had capacity in our hospitals to respond to pandemic infections. What I can tell the member is that all of the urgent surgeries did proceed during the past year, and of the non-urgent surgeries that were delayed, 95 per cent have either happened or have been scheduled.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

PREM.: AFFORDABLE HOUSING - INVESTMENT

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. In January of this year, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives published a study showing how provinces had or had not used money made available by the federal government to respond to the economic impacts of COVID-19. The study revealed that the Nova Scotia government left \$12 million for the Rapid Housing Initiative on the table. These funds could have allowed for the purchase of housing stock.

Mr. Speaker, given that we are in a housing crisis, and given that COVID-19 meant that older hotels and motels became available to purchase and convert for supportive housing, how does the Premier justify passing up \$12 million of desperately needed housing investment?

THE PREMIER: I am aware of some of the investment that the federal government has put out going into some very important initiatives with Adsum House, in my constituency, and other important projects that are coming out that will help with the housing issue at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, as well.

We're going to continue to do our best to ensure that we provide adequate housing, work with municipalities, work with non-profit organizations, and work with the federal government. As I said, we have had the \$500-million investment that is going out over the next nine years to help with housing. We have rent supplements now working in the marketplace. We're going to continue to work with everyone involved to ensure that we provide housing for Nova Scotians.

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful that Halifax Regional Municipality ensured that more federal money was not left on the table. With \$12 million of federal funding, we could have done more, but that is not all that this government left on the table.

When they came to power, there was a first-ever housing strategy developed and ready to go. A product of extensive public consultation was planned for investment in non-market housing, including co-ops and non-profits across Nova Scotia. But instead of implementing that plan, this government built fewer than 200 units in their first seven years and they appear to be continuing that trend towards underspending in this year's capital plan.

My question for the Premier is: When will this government get serious about affordable housing and make the necessary investments?

THE PREMIER: Already, a month in, we're seeing positive signs of our economy rebounding, leading the country, frankly, in our numbers, rebounding back to almost pre-pandemic levels.

[2:45 p.m.]

Before the pandemic, we also had positive signs of population growth. We had positive signs of export growth. That strong fiscal management has allowed us to be in a position for this budget that will be dropped tomorrow to invest in those people who are most vulnerable, to invest in those who are most impacted by the pandemic, with mental health and addictions and long-term care.

I am looking forward to a positive budget tomorrow and I hope that the members opposite can support it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

H&W: DOCTOR RELOCATION - SUPPORT

KARLA MACFARLANE: With over 60,000 Nova Scotians on the wait-list for a family doctor, I think we can all agree that physician recruitment needs to be a top priority, for both this government and for the next one as well.

Two weeks ago, I did ask the minister: Why aren't these doctors among the many people moving to Nova Scotia? At the time, the minister answered, and it is being tabled in the Chamber now, the minister said: "... international doctor recruitment being impacted by COVID-19."

Mr. Speaker, my question for the minister is: What supports does the Province provide for international doctors considering relocating in Nova Scotia?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We are very lucky to have accepting communities, welcoming communities here in Nova Scotia, that appreciate the benefits that internationally trained doctors bring here. We have funding partnerships with communities across the province to support new doctors who are coming in. We supported them getting here by reducing the red tape and some of the regulatory barriers that prevented them from coming here and practising in the first place. We make sure that we treat them with the kindness that they deserve and treat them with respect.

Again, a big part of that, of course, is compensation, so they are coming into a province that has the most competitive compensation in Atlantic Canada. I know that is appreciated by doctors who we are recruiting here and doctors who are thinking about coming here.

KARLA MACFARLANE: I will say there are resources lacking. For example, recently we were made aware of two physicians - actually a married couple - who were considering relocating in a community on the South Shore.

Unfortunately, after months and months of frustration to try and figure out Canada's immigration system, they decided to remain in their country of origin, basically depriving a rural Nova Scotia community of not one physician but two.

By comparison, in Newfoundland and Labrador, physician recruiters will provide immigration lawyers to assist with what can be a complicated process. But in Nova Scotia, this simple step did not happen.

Can the minister please explain why our physician recruiters are not automatically providing prospective physicians from overseas with contact information for immigration lawyers?

ZACH CHURCHILL: The federal immigration process is quite complicated. I know in our constituency office that a number of us have probably heard complaints from people who are dealing with that. That is why we have brought in the international physician immigration stream.

I want to commend the Minister of Immigration & Population Growth for working with former Ministers of Health and Wellness and our government to achieve that. That has facilitated a better process to get physicians here and fast-track them through that immigration process. Obviously, we hope we can do that without the use of lawyers.

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

PREM: NORTHWOOD RECS. - IMPLEMENT

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, our Party, like many Nova Scotians, was disappointed to see the lack of a public inquiry into Northwood upon the death of loved ones due to COVID-19. We worry about the lack of transparency, but we were assured that the correct steps would be taken.

In the executive summary and recommendation submitted to the Minister of Health and Wellness by the Northwood Quality-Improvement Review Committee, 17 of the recommendations were made. Number 16 was to update all relevant legislation encompassing the long-term care sector. Mr. Speaker, we have not seen anything after we were prorogued at the end of last year, after a half-hour session.

My question is for the Premier: Why has your government failed to deliver on this key recommendation?

THE SPEAKER: A reminder of the honourable member to ask questions through the Chair, not directly to members opposite.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, long-term care has been impacted by the pandemic, there is no question. We in this province are prepared to make significant investments. We have announced that we are going to be bringing out more rebuilds, more beds, but we also need to deal with some of the challenges with workplace safety, investments for staffing - and that is what you're going to see in this budget.

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, my initial reaction to that is that you have starved the long-term care community for the last eight years, so coming in at the last hour is not going to be enough.

Mr. Speaker, at the time, those at the front lines were raising concerns about what was going on in long-term care, and I was in the building at the time. In fact, we had the NSGEU release their own report about this. They intended to present it to the government review committee but decided to not do that out of concern, because of the confidentiality clause, that their information would not be released to the public. They did not want what they had to contribute swept under the rug.

My question for the Premier is: Does this new Premier and this new government stand by the previous comments made by Doctor Strang that the NSGEU concerns were based in "fearmongering and hyperbole" - and that quote has been tabled by our Party.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on our long-term care sector. We have invested in the past in long-term care and in-home care because most Nova Scotians want to stay in their home when they can. Every single budget saw significant investment in home care. This budget will see broad investment throughout our continuing care sector.

With respect to long-term care, we are following the recommendations from our expert panel, and resources will be put into it to ensure that happens.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

PREM. - CBRM: HOMELESSNESS - ADDRESS

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. In 2016, the CBRM Affordable Housing and Homelessness Working Group identified 137 people experiencing homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. By 2018, the number had more than doubled to 278 people. During the height of the pandemic last Spring, the province agreed to pay 50 per cent of the costs for handwashing stations, portable toilets, and laundry facilities for people experiencing homelessness in the CBRM.

Mr. Speaker, aside from paying for half the costs of these emergency supports, what resources is the Premier putting forward to address the rapidly increasing number of people without housing in the CBRM?

THE PREMIER: This highlights the importance to ensure that our strategy, when we come out with more resources in this budget and future investment, deals with the whole province - when we have a booming economy and we have increased population, we need to make sure that we are dealing with structural issues within the marketplace.

I look forward to the recommendations from the housing commission that has been put together with significant representation at the municipal level and the non-profit level.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, once a person loses their housing, it is extremely difficult to access the services and supports needed to get back to appropriate affordable housing. Income assistance payments are immediately cut off for people who do not have an address - some people are able to continue to receive income assistance by using a friend's or family member's.

People living in shelters are able to access \$280 a month from ESIA, but those living outside get nothing.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier please explain how he expects people to access housing if they have no access to income?

THE PREMIER: It's important that we continue to look out for those most vulnerable in our society. I'm very pleased to come into government with a solid fiscal footing. We're going to look at making sure that when we look at our economic performance, that we're measuring well-being in this category that the member represents, it's a very important one.

Housing underpins literally everything in life, which is why investments are needed in income assistance. I look forward to this budget, where you'll see historic increases in these areas, and I look forward to the support from the member opposite.

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

ELECT. ACT: ELECTIONS N.S. RECS. - ACTION

ALANA PAON: All three political Parties have previously introduced fixed election bills, as did I on February 28, 2020, and as did our former Premier on March 28, 2013.

According to Elections Nova Scotia, in their Election Readiness Update Report in 2019, a fixed election date makes election budgeting more predictable, less costly, and ensures Elections Nova Scotia is fully able to comply with government procurement policies and processes. It saves money.

I'd like to ask the minister: Why does the government continue to ignore recommendations from Elections Nova Scotia that would ease the financial burden to taxpayers when all three Parties, and this Independent member, have been in favour of fixed election dates?

HON. RANDY DELOREY: In fact, as a Legislature, we passed amendments to the Elections Act just last year. That is an important part of the recommendations that came from Elections Nova Scotia.

ALANA PAON: I'm glad that the minister actually mentioned this bill that was proclaimed. I'm going to say that the election readiness in this province is fuelled with uncertainty.

Elections Nova Scotia has had the challenge of preparing for an election following two distinct election scenarios amid a global pandemic because this House - the government, really - has yet to proclaim Bill No. 225, despite it receiving Royal Assent on March 10, 2020. Bill No. 225 could lower financial barriers for candidates. It reduces voter confusion. It allows Elections Nova Scotia flexibility to use technologies like ballot counting. The list goes on and on.

I'm going to redirect this question to the Premier, if I may, because he ultimately is responsible for dropping the writ. I would ask the Premier: Why is his government purposely delaying the proclamation of Bill No. 225?

THE PREMIER: I'm very pleased to come into government in the position that we're in. It allows us to make immediate investments to those people who need it the most. It allows us to tackle very complex issues with systemic racism and dismantling those barriers, making progress on climate change, helping grow the digital economy with investments to our universities.

These are all positive investments and we're going to see more in this budget coming out with the priorities that I've campaigned on over the last several months. We're making a lot of traction over the last month. I look forward to the budget coming on. I look forward to support from the members opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

H&W - NORTHSIDE GEN. HOSP.: CARE CLINIC - FUNDING CUT

MURRAY RYAN: My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. For many across this province, the lack of a family physician is not a mere inconvenience, it impacts their daily lives. For the residents of North Sydney, Sydney Mines, and surrounding areas, this is especially true.

Last Summer, a private care clinic was established at Northside General Hospital, operating three days a week with three doctors alternating days, providing much needed services to those in need of a family physician. Despite the over 60,000 Nova Scotians on a wait-list for a family physician, the NSHA decided to reduce funding to this clinic by cutting it by one physician.

My question to the minister is: Given the importance of this service and given the need, why would the Health Authority cut this much-needed service?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The Health Authority's job is to deploy resources in the way that they best see fit to meet the needs of patients. I can tell the member that when it comes to physician recruitment, training, and retention - this is a top priority for our government.

We have, until last year, been attaching more and more patients to doctors in the province. We've done that through recruitment. We've done that through incentives to convince doctors to take on more patients, as well. We've done that by training more doctors and, of course, making sure we have a competitive compensation framework here for physicians as well.

[3:00 p.m.]

That important work is going to continue. We're going to focus on supporting those Nova Scotians who are unattached to doctors. I will remind the member one of the reasons that we have seen this bump go back up is because more people have moved to Nova Scotia and because people have moved within Nova Scotia as well. That comes directly from a survey conducted with those people on that list and 30 per cent of them indicated that they were new to the community that they were living in.

MURRAY RYAN: Mr. Speaker, the impact of the NSHA cutting the clinic by one-third has resulted in increased wait times for appointments for these orphan patients and their ability to get their much needed prescriptions and the like - the challenge faced by these individuals who have little recourse but to visit the emergency room in order to see a doctor.

For the residents of these communities on the Northside, their ER has been closed for over a year now. The nearest one, being the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, is a 30-minute drive or a \$25 cab ride. For the residents on the Northside, many of these prescriptions and treatments are time sensitive in nature and one fewer doctor can mean weeks of additional delay. My question to the minister is: Will the minister restore funding to this clinic so that they may rehire the lost physician and reduce these wait times?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, as the member mentioned, when patients are unattached to physicians and need prescription refills they do tend to go to the emergency

department and thus create more pressure on our emergency departments. This is why we've also expanded the scope of practice of other medical practitioners in Nova Scotia, like pharmacists, who can do certain prescription renewals - also, expanded the scope of practice for nurse practitioners so that they can relieve some of this pressure on our system as well. We're actually looking at expanding the scope of practice for our registered nurses as well, our RNs.

Our approach to expanding access to primary care, of course first and foremost, is about physician recruitment and attaching patients to physicians - we do have the most per capita in the country here in Nova Scotia - but also expanding other access points in our primary care sector so that patients get the care they need when they need it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

H&W - ALL SAINTS HOSP.: BLOOD COLL. - MAINTAIN

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, since the good Premier is fishing for some support for his budget, I'm going to go fishing for some answers for my constituents. That's in around blood collection services. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

The pandemic was very difficult for many people, and those residents and my constituents who use the All Saints Hospital blood collection services were no exceptions. When services were in shambles last year in a period where the new appointment system was being established, many people missed out on their blood service collections. When an appointment system finally came online there were numerous problems and glitches. Many people in Cumberland South regularly require blood work and were concerned, and at times they are still concerned when they don't get the appointments they need at the time.

My question for the minister is: Can the minister assure the people of Springhill and the area that blood collection service will not be disrupted any further and be maintained at the facility in Springhill?

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I know a number of us received calls when we did hit some glitches with the online booking system for blood collection. That was done for public safety reasons, to keep people out of the hospitals as much as possible. I do believe that those challenges have been ironed out. I know the former minister worked very diligently on that when we brought the concerns to his attention. I have not heard any complaints on blood collection related to booking issues in quite some time now.

TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, it must have been an initiative to close the ERs, as well, to keep people out because the ER system in Springhill also saw difficulties during the pandemic. I spoke yesterday and questioned the minister in the House about the Parrsboro situation in the ER. It still echoes today that we are missing out in Cumberland

South on adequate care, and blood systems may be the question of the day right now, but the fact remains that there are other services that have been interrupted. I did take the opportunity to sit in a meeting in Parrsboro just recently, in the Fall, and get an update of what we could expect . . .

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 protocol break.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Deputy House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

LISA ROBERTS: Madam Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private Members' Public Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

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

LISA ROBERTS: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 43.

Bill No. 43 - Housing as a Human Right Act.

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

LISA ROBERTS: For Opposition Day, it's my pleasure to speak on this bill. I am going to be doing that by talking about some of the "whereas" clauses that motivate this particular piece of legislation.

First I want to tell a few stories, with no identifying details, just to share with the members, and with Nova Scotians who may be so lucky as to not be on the front lines of the housing crisis, why it is that those of us on this side of the House - at least in this Party - are choosing to focus on housing during our first Opposition Day in well more than a year.

Here are some cases I have had some direct contact with in the past six months. A family of five who had recently immigrated to Nova Scotia, shortly before the pandemic - actually, not yet a family of five. When they contacted me they were a family of four but the mom was more than seven months pregnant and had two little girls. Because of school closing and so much else closing, that mom, who was more than seven months pregnant, was having a really hard time because they were living in one bedroom of a two-bedroom apartment that they were sharing with someone to whom they were not related.

Effectively they were roommates of someone else who had been a contact. Before they came to Canada, they couldn't find a place to lease overseas. Then with all the challenges of COVID-19, they never did find a place. Dad didn't initially find the work he had been anticipating, so they were there through the Summer, with mom expecting another baby. A family of four, soon to be five, in one bedroom.

Another family we have been working with just recently is a family of six in a two-bedroom apartment. If we are lucky and successful at the level of my constituency office, we will be able to get them on the priority access list with the Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority, except that the priority access list is now so long that it is actually meaningless. People go to that list to sit on the list because there are no units becoming available. I am told that by staff when I call and advocate for someone. They are like, well, we've got another 20 families waiting for a three-bedroom townhouse. I care about all those families too, so I won't push too hard, but it is really difficult to respond to a constituent to say, I'm sorry, we just can't do anything.

I've got two different moms in my constituency who both have adult children with disabilities who, with a little bit of support, could be living independently. But again, that's a wait-list that isn't moving because this government has not really pursued the road map which was supposed to be cutting the ribbons on small option homes and other sorts of supportive housing for adults with disabilities. So both those moms and those adults are frustrated in their experience on wait-lists.

Another is a grandma who has custody of her preschooler grandchild, who is facing eviction. We aren't able to get her public housing that she could afford, so we're trying to encourage her to take a Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit, which is the government's new program with support from the National Housing Strategy, except that that will still leave her paying an unsustainably large portion of her income for rent.

And then last, I'll just mention the couple that I would pass on a regular basis last Summer who were sleeping in a tent relatively close to my home. I don't know where they spent the Winter, but just in the last week since I've been back here in the Legislature, I've had some conversations with some other folks who are certainly in tents now.

When we talk about housing as a human right - there are multiple reasons to consider it a human right - but, certainly, one of the reasons that I find most clear and most

compelling is that it is such a fundamental human need. We would not consider water just a commodity. We would not consider air just a commodity. Literally next to water and air and food, housing is so fundamental. From previous legislative committee appearances by Jim Graham from the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia, I always remember his comment about how the life expectancy of people who experience homelessness is decades shorter than people who do not have that experience. We must consider it a human right.

And so if it is a human right, then what does that require from governments? Well, I would argue that it requires some of the measures that we talk about in this bill, including provincial goals and timelines that prioritize people in greatest need, a commitment to invest in an adequate amount of non-market housing, progressive action to realize the right to housing within a reasonable time, a commitment to the maximum available resources to increase access to affordable housing, and a recognition and a response to an analysis of how housing and how access to housing have been influenced by our history and by systemic inequality that flows from race and gender and disability and other human rights grounds.

Housing must be considered a human right because it is such a fundamental human need. To simply blame our current situation on a booming economy fails to recognize that, in fact, a booming economy can help to contribute to the challenges that we are facing in terms of a shortage of affordable housing.

Just today during Question Period, the Premier said, we're going to encourage investors, we're going to attract investment. Well, I have seen in my constituency investment that has resulted in a property that might have been ideal supportive housing being now empty. It was a convent. I spoke about it with L'Arche Halifax. AHANS was interested. Adsum House was interested. There was a bunch of scurrying around, but an investor got it for more money than Adsum was able to put on the table.

And now, contrary to the promises of the buyer that they were going to turn it into small units for students at the Nova Scotia Community College, instead they tried to do something that wasn't allowed in the zoning requirements and now the whole building is empty. And not only is the building empty, but they pulled out the heating system so that it would actually be currently uninhabitable, and then they were able to sell it for more money because, you know, investment. We can invest in this hot housing market.

We have to be looking at how we can use public investment in non-market housing to ensure that we are actually setting up Nova Scotia to be a place where people can live, and a place where workers can live, where people of various sorts of incomes can live. Just this week, I spoke with - I had a meeting with - Pam Glode-Desrochers at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre. They are looking at housing, and meeting with CMHC and trying to convince CMHC that programs that entice investors to invest in affordable housing where that housing ceases to be affordable in any definition after 25 years is actually not

very good public investment. We should be looking at housing that is going to be affordable in perpetuity by balancing the market, by going from what we currently have, which is only about five per cent of a non-market housing mix of non-profit and co-op and supportive housing, going from that to maybe 20 per cent.

[3:30 p.m.]

If we look around the world, we can see other jurisdictions, like Singapore, where somewhere around 80 per cent of housing is effectively not owned by the people who live there. It is, effectively, public housing.

I have had multiple conversations in recent weeks and recent months with people who refer to Halifax as the next Vancouver, and that is both a very exciting thing - Vancouver is a very dynamic, interesting place, lots of people like to move there from all over the world - and it is also a frightening thing. I have been spending some time understanding exactly how the BC Liberal government neglected the warning signs that their housing market was becoming dangerously unhealthy, unbalanced, unregulated, unsustainable for citizens.

I've also been looking at some of the actions that the BC NDP government put into place when it came into government, and they brought in a 30-point plan for bringing affordability back into the housing market in Vancouver, in British Columbia in general, but they're doing work to redress situations which are really starting to happen here now.

We see bidding wars where people are ending up with properties far over asking price, where we do see investment, and increasingly buildings in my constituency are not being built now as apartments. They are being built as condos, and my concern is that they may be condos that sit empty because, given what we've seen in the last little while, you could expect that that condo in perfect mint condition might sell for more money in another year. We can't just be treating housing as a financial investment - again, we need to treat it as a human right.

I have a lot of respect for some of the people who are sitting on the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission. Frankly, I have had quite a bit of respect for some people who have done various jobs in housing, but none of them have ever stuck around long enough to really get to work. We have had at least five different heads of Housing Nova Scotia during my four and a half years as an MLA in the provincial Legislature.

An affordable housing commission, if there is action, if there is commitment, including investment, could be good, but it is another case where this government has left housing neglected for years and years. Now we are going to come up with the answers and we are going to turn over a new leaf. Yet we look at this capital plan that was released earlier this week, and it's not at all clear that the urgency of the denial of housing as a human right is really being comprehended and responded to with that sort of urgency.

We are also concerned about some of the people who are not at that table, including the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities does not have a seat at the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission, and yet we see municipalities across the province really grappling with the dire consequences of a lack of affordable housing. The lack of affordable rentals, and rentals in adequate condition, is not a Halifax issue - it is an issue in Inverness, it is an issue on the South Shore, it is an issue in the Valley, and it is an issue in Pictou County.

I have heard it from speaking with Nova Scotians who are trying to respond to it, but without the provincial government's actual committed leadership and willingness to invest and willingness to remake, reimagine housing as not just a financial asset, but also as a human right. It is very difficult for those municipalities and for those non-profits who are identifying the issues and supporting the people caught up in these really dire situations. It's difficult for them to take the steps that are necessary, which this government has the resources to apply.

With that, I'm looking forward to hearing what my colleagues across the aisle and in the Official Opposition have to say. I am going to be, as I always am, continuing to work on this issue with that awareness of our constituents, of residents in this province who are experiencing the lack of this human right, their human rights really being denied to an adequate place to live, to feel safe, and to raise their families. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

STEVE CRAIG: Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 43 - An Act to Recognize Housing as a Human Right and adopt a provincial housing policy. The housing challenges the member for Halifax Needham opened up with are familiar and concerning to all members of the House and represent all of Nova Scotia citizens. COVID-19 laid bare many gaps in our housing situation in this province, and the limited number of shelter beds has exacerbated this problem.

We agree that the Liberal government is long overdue in delivering a plan with goals, timelines, initiatives, and results for housing and homelessness. As housing critic and MLA for Sackville-Cobequid, I wrote to the then-minister responsible to find out what his COVID-19 plan was for homeless shelters. Regretfully, no plan was forthcoming. I wrote a second time to the same minister to ask about the capacity of emergency shelters and what plan was there to increase that number. Again, no plan was forthcoming.

Gathering and publishing data on housing stock is a great step that we need to embrace. In this bill, the New Democratic Party has pointed out a well-known problem. We have some common ground. However, they have failed to lay out their detailed plan for fixing the problem, preferring to ask the Liberals to do it for them. I don't think they can.

On June 21, 2019, the Governor General signed into law Bill C-97, which contained the National Housing Strategy Act and the federal right to housing legislation. Housing is now an explicit right in Canada. Nova Scotia became a signatory to the National Housing Strategy and many of those elements of what this bill is are now in place.

It is well known and undeniable that housing is a key social determinant of an individual's health and wellness. The definition of housing affordability from the National Housing Strategy and CMHC is threefold: (1) no more than 30 per cent of total household income before taxes to cover rent or a mortgage, utilities, and municipal costs, like taxes; (2) the household is not in need of major repairs; and (3) the housing is suitable and appropriate to the household make-up.

The vacancy rates in Nova Scotia have been falling for years, with little government impact to reverse the trend since 2010 - the last eight years under this government. I believe the government does need to step up its performance, and to hear the Premier say in this House earlier today that his government now needs to take housing and homelessness seriously after eight years does not instill confidence in me.

Since being sworn in as a Member of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia a mere 20 months ago, the Housing portfolio has been shuffled three times from Community Services to Municipal Affairs and Housing, and from Municipal Affairs and Housing recently to Infrastructure and Housing. In this time, there have been three different deputy ministers, the most recent one being an outside hire, and three ministers, the most recent one having announced that he will not be reoffering in the next general election.

One fundamental basic in organizations and change management is that people need stable leadership to feel encouraged, empowered to make improvements, and making the situation easier rather than tougher - in this case to provide housing for Nova Scotians.

It was quite surprising and disappointing to me last year that during the budget cycle, there was no separate housing business plan nor accountability report provided by the then-Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In previous years, under the Minister of Community Services, there were substantial and separate reports that gave one a sense of openness, transparency and therefore accountability. In previous years they were also published on the Housing Nova Scotia website.

All orders of government - federal, provincial and municipal - are involved directly and indirectly to enable housing construction. The Canadian government has the National Housing Strategy being delivered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The Province of Nova Scotia has a National Housing Strategy federal-provincial agreement, now through the Minister of Infrastructure and Housing.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Housing also has the responsibility for Housing Nova Scotia to provide social housing. Nova Scotia municipalities have no formal

responsibility to provide this housing. Nova Scotia social housing, through Housing Nova Scotia, is not keeping up with the growing demand, and keeping housing stock in a state of good repair is a challenge. I believe this to be a lack of government leadership and performance.

Nova Scotia's population has been growing due to immigration, increased retainment of youth, repatriation of retiring Nova Scotians, and people coming to Nova Scotia, in part, to escape the COVID-19 pandemic severity. Income levels here are among the lowest in Canada and almost one in four children in Nova Scotia lives in poverty. All need housing.

Our non-market housing continuum includes emergency shelters, transitional shelters, private and public social housing - including cooperatives, housing societies, long-term care facilities, transition houses and housing for youth in care and those with disabilities, as well as apartment living and home ownership.

The government needs to take a more active role in facilitating housing construction across this continuum. The market and non-market housing stock has not kept up with demand, resulting in Nova Scotia's rental vacancy rates hovering around one per cent, where in a healthy economy it ought to be in the three per cent to four per cent range. Simply put, the PC members believe we need to increase housing stock across the entire spectrum.

Builders are facing with ever-increasing costs to build, renovate, and maintain housing, and landlords are challenged to keep rents low, yet keeping up housing in a very good state of repair. The government needs to grow and sustain the housing sector by providing and growing capacity in business skills, trade skill numbers and competency in Nova Scotia, working with all orders of government and other housing sector parties.

In closing, Madam Speaker, in this bill the NDP has pointed out a well-known problem. We have some common ground. However, they have failed to lay out their detailed plan for fixing the problem, preferring to ask the Liberals to do it for them. I don't think they can. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Housing.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I am certainly honoured and delighted to be here today in my place for the first time as the Minister responsible for Infrastructure and Housing. It means a lot that I get to stand in this debate and have a genuine exchange about where we are and where we want to be.

Certainly, as always, I want to appreciate the NDP for bringing this forward, in particular the Leader and the member for Halifax Needham certainly share in the

conviction and the effort to highlight this for Nova Scotians on behalf of Nova Scotians. That's always been the case for both members, in fact, so I appreciate that.

Of course, the PC Party will have their say as well. I'm not usually a negative guy and I don't do the attack mode ever, but certainly on my feet here - and I'd never start a debate and a piece with this - but the fact that the member for Sackville-Beaver Bank suggested that because I am on the way out that this isn't important and because I am not reoffering I am not going to take this seriously or do a good job, I will accept that challenge because that is absolutely not the case.

I think I have earned the respect of the House that I would at least get the benefit of the doubt in terms of having an opportunity to operate inside of a portfolio. The proof is in the pudding and I will again have that conversation with the member. I am disappointed; I think he is better than that. And if that is a written speech, I think the speechwriters are better than that too. I do not think that was necessary, quite frankly. I am going to do my very best and just because I have a personal path does not mean I am not going to give it my all every day.

[3:45 p.m.]

I want to start on that note, that I take this very seriously and this is critical for me because it is critical for the people of Glace Bay. Again, rightly so, every member highlights what this means for their respective communities and how it impacts the HRM and all points in between certainly for us. The member for Cape Breton Centre spoke about it today vis-à-vis New Waterford and what is happening in Industrial Cape Breton and all parts of Cape Breton.

It is a massive issue and, quite frankly, for me it has been since I started in 2010. I would not rank the three between Community Services, Health and Wellness, and Housing but they are probably tied for first in terms of the quantity of touch points that my constituency office has on issues across the board. Housing is a critical thing and understanding bits and pieces of it before entering elected life, and that is three years as an Opposition member I watched the NDP manage the file, manage the conversation around housing.

It is incredible, between seniors' units, family units, the amount of renovations that take place, the maintenance programs, even the things at units like snow removal, garbage removal, lawn mowing, things like that, the emergency RRAP grants, the loans, the assistance programs - these are not talking points, I have lived these things just through my constituents and sometimes through family. It is an incredibly important service and an incredibly important investment.

Again, that is not standing here taking credit for all that - of course, other successive governments built up that portfolio and built up that repertoire for government to have. It

was not enough 20 years ago and 10 years ago, and it is not enough today. I think that is the purpose of this debate.

For me, after living it all as an MLA, interestingly enough, it is very personal. My mum is a tenant at one of the seniors' units in Glace Bay and it is a great option. I can tell you for her, being in her early 70s and for my family, my sister, my brothers, it is a relief to know that shovelling and all those things - plumbing and the maintenance and the rents and power - all those things are looked after is an incredible, incredible relief.

When you think about the many families who are on the list who don't have that relief and, again, as an MLA seeing the way that goes - the dignity, the self respect, the confidence that they gain once people get that stability - that for me is what it is about. For someone who is on the way out, I am going to take this pretty seriously for the time I am here and, again, from my mum's perspective and seeing how it has really stabilized her life and, in turn, the family's, that is the importance that I hinge on it.

The day the Premier bestowed this honour on me - and I thank him for that because of the importance of highlighting housing and getting it into a department, a portfolio, that makes sense - I was delighted, and a couple of hours after it became public, I was sure I was going to get a text from my mother asking me if I would get her unit painted. So, I told her those things are off limits, I can't jump you up the list, I can't get you a soaker tub, ma, this is just how it works. I have no ability to do that.

That is pretty commonplace, now the aunts are looking for things too. But, really, I see it and I feel it, and it is a remarkable thing.

One of the things I want to highlight because anything that is brought up in terms of the housing file, it is something the former Premier and the current Premier - the Opposition highlight there is some tremendous work being done. That is not lost on anybody in this House. Every time I get to speak, particularly this time being my maiden voyage here on the housing file, the Department of Infrastructure and Housing do incredible work. The member before me did reference there were some alterations in their warehousing fit in the portfolio list, the departmental roster, and I always want to make sure that they are valued and respected and appreciated.

These people do tremendous work, and they don't care about NDP or Liberal or Tory or Independent. It doesn't mean a thing to them. They just try to help people. They see the stories that the member for Halifax Needham shared, that we all have. They just want to help.

Again, I'm not going to run through all the things that we do in the programs and the spending because we've all heard that. That's something we can publish and have a conversation about another day.

With the National Housing Strategy and the half-billion dollars, the tens of millions in those maintenance programs to fix units like Nolans Lane in Glace Bay and the many others, to support the new housing stock that will be provided with the federal government, with the private sector, to look at the rent supplements, the other homeowners' programs that are the difference-maker between them having to go to public housing or remain in their homes, and the first-time home buyers - all these things are good things, but they are very much the crafting of the staff and the implementation of the staff.

Every year, no matter who's in this chair and who's on this side of the House, these people work incredibly hard to understand the policy and the required investment behind it to make it work. They'll continue to do that regardless of what happens at the polls and what happens in the next five, 10, or 50 years.

That's the mantra of the Department of Infrastructure and Housing. I'm very proud to be part of their team. It's remarkable to see them work. I thank them for that all the time. Believe me, they've got ideas and ways in which they see the system being better and improved, and we're listening.

The expanded population piece - again, that doesn't make anybody feel better who is on a wait-list. That is a reality, and it is one of the symptoms of - that expansion puts added pressure on the housing stock. Again, the member for Halifax Needham referenced that there may be opportunities in that growth. That sounds pretty reasonable and good for us on this side.

One of the things that I always talk about - and you listen to one story or the other in the media when there's discussion around tenants. There's a framing that these tenants leave the place a mess and they skip out on their rent and they wreck the place. That is not reflective of your normal rental base. Just like developers are greedy, selfish, don't care about the people in their buildings, they just want profit, they're making a ton but they increase the rents anyway - that's also fundamentally inaccurate to categorize either group as being one way or the other.

The majority on both sides are just good people. On the tenant side, they want stability. They want to have that home and be there forever and have no problems. The developers, they want the same thing. Obviously in development, there is a profitability that's part of it, but they're not greedy and they're not looking to take advantage of those who are in trouble.

There are lots of times where there are challenges for them to pay the bills in terms of that capital expense. That's just the reality and I don't think that's lost on anybody. When we get talking about the extremes of either side, it raises that temperature and it's not super helpful.

To hear the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, the advocates, the developers, government - everybody trying to work towards some solutions, short-term, medium-term, long-term. Really, that's what it's all about. It is that partnership and the collaboration. The federal government is going to be a big player in terms of the investment. They are 50-50 cost share for the half-billion that we'll spend over the next number of years.

Of course, the municipalities have their fiscal challenges, but they've got ideas around zoning and around developments that they can participate as support. Again, not financially, necessarily but in other ways. They may want to do that. They feel the crisis for them personally, as well, as elected people and as staff members. It's not lost on anyone that that partnership is critical.

I just want to take a few seconds. I'm incredibly encouraged by what's been formed in terms of the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission. Dr. Ren Thomas is a champion for this. The list of people who will participate on this commission - to me, it's a perfect reflection of the type of collective thought that we need to get to the point of a better housing situation in Nova Scotia. It's that's simple.

When you look at the experience, the expertise, and the commitment on all sides of the debate in representing all sides, it's a remarkable thing. Each one of these individuals who are on that commission, they have other things that they could be doing, quite frankly. They're busy women and men, and they have a lot of things that they're trying to manage in professional life, personal life, academic, obviously the not-for-profit sector and the challenges. They're here and they're committed, and that's a good thing. I look forward to their recommendations.

When I spoke to the commission on a number of occasions - not to put pressure on them, but for me, this could very much be the road map. That's what the Premier and myself are hoping for, quite frankly. We're anticipating that their work and their background and their base will give us a template to work from moving forward. The only parameter and the only directive we've given the commission is there are no directives and no parameters. Whatever they come back with - we haven't told them focus on X, don't touch on Y. None of that. They're going to put recommendations together in earnest, and we're going to accept them and implement them in earnest in the same way.

Finally, I guess I'll end with the importance of the partnerships and how we all have to work together. That's a good segue from the commission. The advocates who represent tenants and people looking for affordable housing - the homelessness advocates and those who go to bat for people who are in a real tough spot - their input is as important as anyone else's. It's not a one-sided thing. It's very much that we really are all invested in each other to get something right.

There isn't an easy, tailor-made plan that every government could implement and solve this problem, or it would be done already, here and everywhere else. I think there are

issues and challenges that are unique to each jurisdiction, and we've got to take that into account. Everybody's perspectives and everybody's issues are important here.

As far as the housing strategy, it's make housing affordable for those who don't have it, fix the stock we've got, and build the stock we don't have. That's the strategy. That's everybody's strategy, so how you do it from there is really what the science is. That's where the commission, that's where the feedback, the understanding from the department about what works and what doesn't really becomes essential.

Again, I think that for us, having the opportunity to listen to the NDP talk about this, and the member from Halifax Needham, and the Leader, who I assume will have something to say on this - good - we get the point and we hear the perspective and the angle you have. In fairness, and I hope the Leader will talk about this, the strategy that was left behind in 2013 wasn't a fulsome strategy. There were a lot of blue sky visionary things, but I remember reading that very early on and I don't think there's an actual number in there. There's no number.

I know that it's not always about finance and numbers and data and balanced books, but sometimes it is. When you're trying to build buildings and fix buildings, it's about numbers. They're the things that we have to have. It would be great if we didn't, but we do. We don't have a plan unless we have a somehow costed understanding of how we're going to get to a better place.

But look, I think that strategy, which was presented to Nova Scotians a few months before the 2013 election, I think there were certainly foundational things in there. There's no doubt about it. It's not less relevant today than it was then. I just think there is some more solid work we have to do than wide-open sentiment about what could be done.

I happen to believe we're getting there, but the theme of my close is we are listening and there are things that make sense. Whether it's a national strategy that we're tied to, a provincial strategy, the recommendations from the commission - there's work to be done.

The Department of Infrastructure and Housing is doing tremendous building on behalf of Nova Scotians, but it's incumbent on government to get the policy and the investment that backs it to make sure that we put Nova Scotians in a better place when it comes to housing.

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

GARY BURRILL: I'm a person who really likes to walk. I know lots of people have very novel and captivating things that they do for recreation, but my habits are a lot more - literally - pedestrian. So, I walk every day, usually around peninsular Halifax and particularly around the constituency that I serve. Through the course of my walks,

particularly during this second half of the second mandate of the current government, I had begun to notice something that had not previously been a part of the picture.

There, that little bit of colour through those trees on that little corner of public land - what's that there? Oh, that's a tent. A couple of weeks later, the same spot, another colour - that's a second tent. Look, there's a third. There's one in that clump of trees over there. Another - look at that bit of growth. There was no tent there before. All over the city, a new Liberal addition to the landscape: tents and sleeping bags.

[4:00 p.m.]

In fact, they have become increasingly a part of the housing conversation in Halifax as we hear about social workers around the city rounding them up from friends for clients, scrounging them out of the corners of their budgets, doing whatever they can to make them available because they know that in Nova Scotia, where the average temperature from January to March is -2 degrees Celsius, there are significant numbers of people who absolutely, starkly, literally have nowhere else that they can go. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, very significant numbers of people.

Last week, the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia reported that in the HRM alone, the number of homeless people is 421. AHANS also reports that that number is more than double what it was one year ago, more than four times greater than it was two years ago, midway through this second Liberal shift. Hence the tents.

All kinds of fair-minded people in the face of this are quite naturally led to ask the question, what is going on here that we have come to a place where public policy has failed so completely that such significant numbers of citizens have been forced to live in tents in the winter? There are several different dimensions to the answer to this question.

One, I think, is government inertia. A failure to act with dispatch. A failure to move with energy, focus, force, gas. A failure to respond with priority and a sense of force in the face of a housing crisis which has been building and gathering throughout this government's time in office. Certainly that's the case when it comes to actual investment in new housing infrastructure for the people of our province.

At a time when the wait-list for public housing is 5,000 people, the total number of new housing units constructed in the eight years of the Liberal administration is under 200. The total number which they have on the books to build under the current federal/provincial agreement over the next three years is just about the same.

Inertia, too, when it comes to rents that have been systematically, annual hike after annual hike, moving beyond the capacity of people of any ordinary incomes to pay. The result is that today in Nova Scotia, one fifth of those who rent pay out more than half of their income on that rent, all the while having to listen to spokespeople for the government

pontificating about how rent control doesn't work, in their view. To which the thousands of people - who haven't got enough left over after the rent to even get the groceries - answer, in collective condemnation, work for whom?

Rent controls certainly are working for the thousands of people from whom a 500-pound weight was lifted off their shoulders last November when the government, under pressure from a multitude of quarters, brought temporary rent control in for the duration of the state of emergency. Rent controls work too for the majority of Canadians who live today in jurisdictions where rent control is part of the permanent and statutory picture.

Inertia, yes, that's part of the reason why tents have become such a feature of the housing landscape under the current Liberals. In addition to inertia, one of the dimensions for the reason for this is attitude in general.

Just once, over the multitude of times over the last number of years that our Party has questioned the government about the housing crisis - just once, it would have been nice to hear a note of humility. Like, "Yes, we grasp the scope of the problem, and we know that not every aspect of our treatment has been perfect, and now we're trying this or that or going in this or that direction." I'm pleased to say I did hear a note of that humility in the address just given by the present minister, but I think it's a note that has been all too rare in this conversation over the past number of years.

Instead, what we have heard repeatedly is a kind of intoning that the minister is pleased about this, the government is satisfied about that, we're looking forward to Z and Q, and so on. In my view, it is fair to say that the government stands rightly charged today with the serious shortcoming of self-satisfaction in the face of housing-based suffering, of providing every evidence that they are simply not moved by the hundreds of those who are forced to sleep outside.

So inertia and attitude, yes, these are key elements of the present government's housing failure. But at the root of it, all I want to say this afternoon, is a third component, which is an overarching, blind faith that the private market alone is the sector which is best positioned across the board to address the housing crisis. The present government abjured rent regulation for years while vacancy rates went to historic lows and demand pressures pushed rents to record highs because they believed - and they said so - that to do otherwise would adversely affect the market.

The current government has foregone and missed opportunity after opportunity to augment the housing stock by investing in publicly owned co-operatives and other non-profit forms of housing. They have missed those opportunities because of their mistaken core belief that the private market alone is best positioned to address this problem. The current crisis, in my view, is in significant part, a result of this wrong belief.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation we have brought before the House today, the Housing as a Human Right Act, proposes a different road, a different path, an altogether different framework. This different framework is reflected in the legislation's title: An Act to Recognize Housing as a Human Right and Adopt a Provincial Housing Policy.

This legislation proposes that the foundational framework for housing policy in Nova Scotia ought not to be the market and the various requirements of the market nexus, but rather the recognition, as the member for Halifax Needham has pointed out so repeatedly and soundly, that housing is a human right and that therefore, access to secure, affordable, quality housing must be one of the foundational guarantees of person that are provided to every citizen of Nova Scotia.

Under this Housing as a Human Right Act, Nova Scotia would be brought into accord with the federal government's 2019 National Housing Strategy Act, which recognizes the right to housing as a fundamental human right affirmed in international law. At the same time, we would be brought into compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which our country is a signatory, which recognizes the right to adequate housing and defines it as the right to live in a home in peace, security and dignity, which includes security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, cultural adequacy, and appropriate location.

This is a new and overarching framework for housing policy in Nova Scotia. From it flow a number of key components which flow from out of this umbrella principle. These make the key components of this present legislation. Some of these key components are: a statutory commitment to bring the maximum available resources - that is the force, the focus, the determination, the gas - that is required to bear and make a difference in addressing the housing crisis.

One of these components of a new framework contained in the bill is a statutory recognition of the importance of publicly owned and non-market housing and a commitment to increase the component of publicly owned and non-market housing across the province.

Another component in this legislation of a new and better framework is a statutory provision that specific timelines and targets for realizing the right to housing in Nova Scotia be publicly reported on and be put in place.

Another component of a different and better framework for housing policy in our province, as is set out in this legislation, is that the timelines that are mandated in the bill be such as to enable our province to actually do what we are perfectly well capable of doing, which is eliminate homelessness by 2030, as our country has agreed to do under the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

The present government's record on housing over the past nearly eight years has brought us to the place where we are today. That is a place where we have 5,000 people waiting for public housing. That is a place where one-fifth of our people are paying more than 50 per cent of their income in their rent. That is a place where we have nearly 500 people in Halifax with no place to stay at all.

The Housing as a Human Right Act proposes a better path and a wholesale reordering of priorities, policies, and an overarching umbrella framework commended to this government. I want to say that were we the government, the Housing as a Human Right Act would now be proceeding towards third reading and enacted.

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

ALANA PAON: It's a pleasure to rise, to be able to speak to Bill No. 43 on housing.

I was sitting here and listening to all the previous members, and I want to say thank you very much for my colleagues in the Opposition, the NDP, in bringing this bill forward, and all of the comments that have been made by previous members.

I am going to start with this. We often talk about the crisis in housing and that we need to increase the capacity. We talk about increasing housing stock, and yet very rarely do I ever hear in this House what has caused someone to actually be homeless in the first place. Why is someone homeless? Why do we need, it seems all of sudden, to have this increase in affordable housing, that people cannot afford to pay rent, they have to choose, and I have plenty of people in my constituency - I get these calls every single day - that have to choose between whether to eat, to stay warm, to pay their rent, to pay their mortgage, to pay their taxes, never mind anything else that would be miscellaneous on top of that.

What is causing so many people in our province to need affordable housing? We understand that when - seniors, obviously, are in a situation where they need to move into a smaller housing situation. My mom is a perfect example. We still have our family home, five bedrooms, it's a lot. She's a very vigorous 84-year-old and keeps that up on her own. My hat is off to her. But it's not for everyone, and it's not for everyone that can be able to afford such a thing.

It's wonderful to hear that we have first-time home buyers' programs, we have energy efficiency grants, accessibility grants, all of these things that are available to people to be able to apply for within the province. However, if you're going to do the first-time home buyers' program, you need to be able to have a credit rating or the ability to be able to get a mortgage in the first place. That leaves a lot of people out. If you're going to apply for an energy efficiency grant, well, you have to own a home to apply for an energy efficiency grant. Accessibility grants are available to businesses as well as homeowners; however, again, you need to own space to be able to access these things.

I'm going to actually disclose something here, which is a conversation I actually had with my assistant last night when I heard that these bills were coming forward. I'm going to say this to the people that I hope are listening today on the importance of this bill.

Your situation today does not necessarily need to be your situation in the future. When I was an 18-year-old young woman, I found myself in Alberta and I found myself in an unfortunate situation that I did not have anywhere to live. It was Winter, and you think that the Winters here in Nova Scotia are cold, the Winters in Alberta are brutal. It's not every day you get a chinook wind that comes through. When you are homeless, you not only do not have a roof over your head, you are also usually very hungry and so you find alternative ways of trying to forage for food in the middle of the winter.

[4:15 p.m.]

The third thing is that you are cold, and this opens you up to all manner of unfortunate illnesses that you can get when you're in a position where - I'm going to use this word - extremely vulnerable, extremely vulnerable, and it is terrifying.

I would like the members of this House to think about how frightening it must be not to have a roof over your head. What are the circumstances by which someone must find themselves in this situation?

I will not go into any detail of all manner of unspeakable, horrible things that occurred to me during that time period in my life. I have never spoken about it publicly because everyone just assumes, because I am standing in this House today and I'm a member of this Assembly, that my life must have been just, you know, sort of an easy go. It was just quite the opposite, in fact.

For a lot of people, including the young man, whom I tip my hat off to - and who I spoke to on my way into the Legislature here today. It is very easy. You just take five, ten, fifteen minutes, however long he wants to chat - to Jacob Fillmore, who is out there, who has been out there since December, living in a tent to try and bring forward some advocacy around making certain that our forests are properly managed. He would like to see, basically, a moratorium on clear-cutting on Crown lands.

You know, it's heartbreaking to me to see a young man like that who is purposely putting himself - actually making himself homeless. He is now on a hunger strike for the last 16 days, and I spoke to him a bit about my experience and he kind of looked rather shocked that a sitting member, an MLA, really took the time to just sit and chat. You don't need a lot of news media around, which news media was around yesterday and a lot of fanfare. All you need to do, and as my honourable member across the floor mentioned, is just sometimes take a little walk, open your eyes, and have a chat with the folks who are actually experiencing these horrible vulnerabilities.

Mr. Speaker, I have only a bit of time left, and I appreciate that I have had any time at all to be able to speak on this matter, but I can tell you that with homelessness, with the increase of need for affordable housing, there is a greater problem for which we are not speaking about here that is occurring to put people in these vulnerable positions.

We are not talking about the need for obviously proper income. If somebody can't afford to pay, as I mentioned earlier, their rent, their mortgage, their food - I have so many calls coming into my office, from seniors especially, who are horrified that they're having to make the call in the first place, and I always encourage them to encourage others not to feel horrified to call me, basically, for assistance with just getting by with the basic essentials. We are not talking pie in the sky here. We are not talking about going out and asking for things that are not necessary. This is a basic human right. I don't even know why we are still talking about this, to be perfectly honest with you. Why has this not been solved already?

We keep rehashing in this House the same issues again and again and again, and as much as we discuss the problem, we need to just figure out the solution once and for all. It doesn't matter what government is in power, it doesn't matter who is speaking on the issue. How about I challenge everyone in this House - and don't go out with your \$200 camping equipment - you try going out there and sleeping outside in sub-zero temperatures just with basically the clothes on your back and very little else, and I think you would probably clue in fairly quickly about how much of a priority this should be to just get it fixed once and for all, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Time allotted for debate on Bill No. 43 has expired. We will now take our mandated 15-minute COVID-19 protocol break and the House will resume proceedings at 4:35 p.m.

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

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

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

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 24.

Bill No. 24 - Emergency "911" Act

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to rise to speak to our Bill No. 24 - A Series of Amendments to the Emergency "911" Act that would create province-wide emergency mental health response teams. This bill requires the Minister of Municipal

Affairs to ensure that 911 is able to dispatch geographically situated emergency mental health response teams across the province and to delineate the expertise, training requirements, and composition, and define the role of peace officers on the teams.

Mr. Speaker, this is a service that would save lives. It is consistent with what mental health professionals, community organizations, anti-racist advocates, and police themselves have asked for. The fact is that our mental health care system is bursting at the seams. It is simply not meeting the needs of Nova Scotians who have struggled with some of the highest rates of mental health challenges in the country, and who, since the COVID-19 pandemic, are struggling doubly.

We know what more people in this province have reported higher rates of anxiety than anywhere else in Canada since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Twenty-seven per cent of Nova Scotians describe their anxiety level as high, a 20 per cent jump from pre-pandemic levels. Sixteen per cent of Nova Scotians have reported high levels of depression since the pandemic, more than double the pre-pandemic number of seven per cent. People's mental health landscapes are simply more complicated than ever before, and the pressures that are pushing people to the brink are more real than ever.

Mr. Speaker, when there is a fire in your home or there is a worry of fire in your home and you call 911, when you can hear the sirens coming in the distance, that is a sense of relief. When someone is having a medical emergency - a physical health medical emergency - and you need to call 911 and you hear the sirens coming, that is a sense of relief. But people who are in mental health crisis possibly do not feel a sense of relief when those sirens start - they can hear the sirens coming in the distance. People who are in mental health crisis should be allowed to feel absolutely safe when they call 911 and know that they will be met by professionals who are equipped and ready to help.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this is not the case, and for too many people, the intersection of mental health crisis and policing can be deadly. In the last 20 years, 460 Canadians have died in encounters with the police. A substantial majority of these people who were lost struggled with mental health issues or substance abuse or both, and often these issues prompted the call for help in the first place.

The situation is getting worse. According to a CBC investigation, the rate at which people die in interactions with police has nearly doubled in the last 20 years. The investigation also found that Black and Indigenous people were over-represented in these deaths, and I will table that.

Tragically, we all know the names of too many of these Canadians. Only last year, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a Black and Indigenous woman with ties to Nova Scotia, fell to her death from a Toronto balcony after police were called to her home to help. A week later, police in Edmundston, New Brunswick, fatally shot Chantel Moore, an Indigenous woman, after being asked to check on her well-being. In April, D'Andre Campbell, a Black

man living with schizophrenia, was killed by police in Toronto after himself calling for mental health help. And, in June, Ejaz Ahmed Choudry, a Toronto man living with schizophrenia, was killed by Peel Region Police after being called to check on his well-being.

Closer to home, here in Halifax last year, a 28-year-old man died after police used a taser on him. They were called to the premises after reports that the man was inflicting self-harm. In 2014 in Halifax, Mohammed Eshaq, who lived with schizophrenia, died after he fell from his balcony in the South End while police were in his apartment. They were called there by a nurse after concerns about his mental health care. I could go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, this deadly problem is acute for racialized people. We know that structural racism is baked into our justice and policing systems and it is not a surprising outcome that so many people are met by harm when what they desperately need is trauma-informed professional help and de-escalation.

This incredible problem means, first, that racialized people are at a higher risk of being criminalized, harmed, or killed in encounters with the police when what they are seeking and what they need is help.

We recently heard Emma Halpern, the executive director at the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, speak about this at a Standing Committee on Community Services. She said,

“Over the last few years in our work, we’ve seen some very concerning trends. We see high numbers of African Nova Scotian and Indigenous girls engaged in our programming around trafficking and exploitation. We see the criminalization of trauma and victimization, particularly for African Nova Scotian and Indigenous women and girls. When police arrive, for example, on scene when an issue has occurred, we see young women and girls being identified as part of the ‘problem’ - being criminalized for small things rather than recognized for what is actually going on, which is their tremendous victimization and trauma.”

I can table that. I believe Emma Halpern would agree that this trend of criminalizing people in crisis is fuelling the over-representation of Black and Indigenous women in the justice system.

Second, it means that racialized people are less likely to seek help when they are in crisis if they know or suspect that police might be sent to the scene. It means that this government has a distinct responsibility to protect people seeking help in mental health crisis and to enable alternatives for the thousands of Nova Scotians every year who find themselves in this position.

People deserve better access to mental health care in this province, including, and possibly especially, when they are in crisis. That means making appropriate emergency help available to people, not necessarily the police.

All of this, Mr. Speaker, is why a key demand for the Black Lives Matter movement is to defund the police. From Black Lives Matter Canada:

“Taxpayers spend over \$41 million per day collectively on police services across the country. This does not include spending on the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, railway and military police, and government departments enforcing specific statutes in the areas of income tax, customs and excise, immigration, fisheries and wildlife. In engaging in these policing practices, police forces across the country routinely engage in surveillance against Black and Indigenous people, constrain our movements, harm and kill us. We believe that Black communities, and all communities, deserve better.

The \$41 million per day that is being spent on policing is not creating safer, more secure communities. This funding can be reallocated to create safer and more secure societies for all of us, and to rid Black and Indigenous communities of a serious threat to our safety.”

I will table that, Mr. Speaker. Allocating these resources and defunding the police means having systems set up that are safer and more appropriate. That is the spirit behind this bill, and I urge my government colleagues to support it.

It is important to explain a little bit about what the movement to defund the police is about. It is about reallocating resources to community-based and other government organizations that are better equipped to deal with the roots of the non-violent issues that police are mostly called on to address, such as homelessness, mental health, and addictions. The police are the first to admit that they are increasingly called on to address everything, from potholes to cats stuck in trees. It’s simply about ensuring that the best, most appropriate help is deployed, which will work upstream to address the root of the problems people are experiencing.

We will all know by now that police services across the country and here in Nova Scotia agree that they are not equipped to deal with the mental health crisis situations that they are asked to respond to. Chief Dave MacNeil of the Truro Police Service has said of mental health crisis response:

“This isn’t the type of work that we sign on to do, and it’s not the type of work that we’re actually trained well to do . . . We don’t call mental health clinicians to respond to break and enters, but unfortunately the police are kind of the agency of last resort . . .

We're the only 24/7 helping agency in most communities, and people call the police for all kinds of things."

Bridgewater Deputy Police Chief Danny MacPhee says, "We're not full-time mental health case workers. We're not in crisis management every day. We don't have that experience from working full time . . . That's not our profession. That's not who we are." Both have asked for more crisis response resources in rural Nova Scotia.

[4:45 p.m.]

Adrienne Peters, an assistant professor of sociology and a liaison and co-coordinator for police studies at Memorial University in Newfoundland, explains how this can go wrong. "We do live in the society in which there is institutional racism. Police are simply an institution within this working system, mostly governed by the priorities and the mandate of government and what they've set forth for them." I will table that.

This means that it is squarely in this government's set of responsibilities to develop alternatives to the currently dangerous and mismatched arrangement that is the case today for so many Nova Scotians in mental health crisis.

I feel it's important to comment on the cost of such an initiative, as I suspect this might be at the root of any opposition to the bill by the government members. Firstly, meeting the World Health Organization's recommended minimum 10 per cent of health spending on mental health, as is committed to by the NDP's Mental Health Bill of Rights, would help fund essential mental health services such as this.

Secondly, police are already doing the work of responding to people in mental health emergencies, though as I have described, many agree that they are not equipped to appropriately fill this role. The crucial point of defunding the police is about reallocating existing resources so that more compassionate, safe, and appropriate services can be enabled.

There are untold costs from the justice system that are rooted in criminalization of mental health issues, many of which could be avoided if we could get people suitable mental health support in crisis. Of course, the price we risk paying is in people's safety if we fail to act. To summarize all of the comments about cost: it is more expensive not to put this program into place.

When people are in physical health crisis - when they are experiencing cardiac arrest, or stroke, or are in a life-threatening accident - as a society, we have committed that they should have emergency help available to them no matter where they are or what time of day or night they may need it. Mental health crisis can be lethal, and there is no reason why we should not make this same emergency help available to people in distress.

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

DAVE RITCEY: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill No. 24, the Emergency 911 Act. Thank you to the member for Dartmouth North for introducing this important legislation. The PC caucus supports the intent of the bill but I'm afraid the Department of Municipal Affairs is not the right place to address matters with regard to mental health.

It has long been the position of the Progressive Conservative caucus that addictions and mental health should be in their own department. Recognition by the NDP in this bill that there is a crisis in mental health - this is not new.

The concept of a call to 911 in an emergency and response to mental health crisis should fall within the scope and responsibility of a separate department for addictions and mental health within the government of Nova Scotia.

The need for the right people to show up at the right time to de-escalate a situation is vitally important. Halifax Regional Municipality and CBRM have been using models of crisis response for some time. That model has issues for rural Nova Scotia, which currently has no crisis response teams. I think it is without a doubt one of the most important crises of our time, especially considering the strains of COVID-19.

I think the intent of this bill shows the ever increasing need for Nova Scotians to take the responsibility of mental health seriously. That is why, last summer, our caucus laid out a plan for addictions and mental health called Universal Mental Health Care. When somebody is looking for help, it is the duty of this government to act, and act swiftly, to respond and provide those in crisis with the resources they need. I feel it is incumbent upon us legislators to make sure that the right resources are made available at the right time with the proper training.

The PC plan for universal mental health care includes a separate department dedicated to mental health and addictions, opening billing codes to allow private practitioners to deliver their services to everyone, available to all regardless of income, not separate care depending on whether you have private insurance or cannot afford it. People should not have to wait weeks or months, or even years sometimes, to get the care that they need.

A 24-hour, seven-days-a-week mental health teleservice is important. No one should be left behind when it comes to addictions and mental health. The primary response in current situations are given to the responsibility of the local RCMP or the local municipal police departments in our communities, who only have seconds to make life and death decisions. I know that first responders in any situation must make very quick decisions and are subject to a lot of 20/20 post-situational perspectives.

As a lawmaker in the province of Nova Scotia, I feel all Nova Scotians need to get the right services at the right time. I believe that starts with a preventive plan, a 24-hour crisis line response, and a plan such as the PC caucus has laid out this last summer.

The legislation outlined by the NDP has great ambitions, but I'm afraid it lacks in a realistic response for rural Nova Scotians. While our caucus supports improving the lives of all Nova Scotians by addressing the needs of addictions and mental health, I do not feel that this bill will best serve the needs of the province in the most beneficial fashion. This bill puts the onus on the Department of Municipal Affairs and only adds another level of bureaucracy to the issue.

Nova Scotia is a unique province and has many great landscapes, but the population of the province is widely dispersed. Once you get outside HRM or CBRM, the need to respond to mental health crises needs to be looked at in a hybrid method, whereby we have as many of the right resources as possible to respond to such a situation. Again, I am not convinced that the proposal by the NDP caucus will meet those needs. Our caucus supports improved addictions and mental health response in this province, but this bill is short-sighted in considering the needs of rural Nova Scotia.

We agree there needs to be more training for first responders. We agree there needs to be a better plan. We believe that begins with better access and more resources in a timely manner throughout the whole system before a crisis.

Mr. Speaker, 2020 has not been easy for Canadians or Nova Scotians, with the pandemic, the mass shooting, and many other tragedies that we are all keenly aware of. It is on us to work together in partnership to respond to the needs of all Nova Scotians in a comprehensive way. With those few words, I would like to thank the NDP caucus member for raising this important issue and for their support for increasing mental health awareness through the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I thank both members opposite for their comments today. First and foremost, I think for me and a lot of us, we do recognize the tough job that our front-line workers have, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work that they do day in and day out, and just say that whether you're an EMT, a firefighter, a police officer, or any other frontline worker, 911 phone operator, you do an incredible job. We appreciate everything you do, and you help keep us safe. It doesn't go unnoticed.

I want to talk about the 911 service a bit. It is a fascinating system that we have here in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia was the first one to implement 911 in Canada. The individuals who work at the 911 centre have done an incredible job. They receive approximately 265,000 calls a year. Obviously, some of those are critical, some of them are not, but they handle each and every one of them. From there they decide quickly where

that needs to go - whether to our local firefighters, EMTs, police officers, mental health, and the service they receive and they send out are top- notch and second to none.

We are in the process of upgrading our 911 service to what is called the next-generation 911. Some of you may know we have an incredible individual at the helm, Dave Wilson, who has experience as an EMT - and some of you may know him in his previous job as MLA. Dave has taken on the job of overseeing 911. He is now the director for 911 for EMO. What that next generation is going to do is bring the 911 service into the 21st century. Instead of just placing a call, now you will be able to send pictures and texts.

That will arm our frontline workers with much more information. They will have a visual along with those phone calls and that information they get from the phone calls - potentially visuals - they will be able to know the scene they are going to, they will know the situation that they are getting themselves into, and they will have a more complete plan for when they land at that scene.

I do know a few people, I know we do have a few MLAs actually past and present that were EMTs, and I just want to talk about the experience of some of my friends who have shown up for 911 calls and that was their job. A friend of mine, Louie, who is now actually about to be a practising family physician here in Nova Scotia, he started out as an EMT, and he talks about the experience of showing up to those 911 calls, being able to adjust to the situation. A lot of times, whether it is our policemen and women, our officers, our firefighters, when they are showing up at these scenes, they are sometimes putting their own life on the line. Sometimes they are putting themselves in danger. They do not know what to expect when they go to those situations.

Louie has told me about the countless times as an EMT he has been bitten by a dog or he has had a dog attack him, and he is afraid to come into the house. Whether it is an irate or intoxicated partner, you know you have to get past to help the person in the room. These people do an invaluable service and they do an incredible job. Louie and I have had these discussions over the years about how difficult it is, but also how it has given him the ability to go on to do what he wanted to do, which was be a family physician. His experience in the emergency room as an EMT has helped him immensely. The services that they are doing is invaluable.

We do have a unique 911 service. Actually, across Canada there are 170 languages - I don't know if people know that, but there are 170 languages that you can call the 911 services and receive help. When it is here in Nova Scotia, it is English, French, Arabic or Mi'kmaw. There are trained individuals there who are ready to help. We have done an incredible job with the system we have, but now it is time to move forward, upgrade those systems to work closely with technology and individuals to give them the resources that they need.

When it comes to mental health, we do have a Mental Health Crisis Line. I would advise any MLA out there to have that number ready, not just at their constituency but to have those numbers memorized so when people do reach out to you, you have that number and they know where to get the help. For mental health and addictions, the crisis line is 1-888-429-8167. For the Kids Help Phone, it's 1-800-668-6868.

[5:00 p.m.]

Mental health is a huge priority for us not just as a government but as individuals. We have seen increase in health care spending, in particular mental health spending. We saw the new Premier trigger the office of Mental Health & Addictions.

I know some want to say it shouldn't be an office, it should be a standalone department. I would prefer that instead of hiving off into another department, where resources get swallowed up into things that aren't going to be put on the front line, personally I would rather see those resources - especially in a time with COVID-19, we have seen that resources are precious - I would like to see that money, instead of being put into tables and chairs and seats and rooms, to actually be put into the front line so that the services are there. It's more important to me and to Nova Scotians to have the services than to stand there and say that we have a department of mental health. That doesn't make it any more or less important.

As I said, I have stood here and I have listened and I have heard this current Premier and the past Premier talk about the importance of mental health. To see on day one that one of the first acts was to create an Office of Mental Health & Addictions - I think everybody - everybody - in the Legislature should be very proud and very happy that that move happened and that it has again triggered the conversation around not just the importance of resources but what COVID-19 has done for all of us.

I worry. We see a lot of isolation now, especially in the early part of the pandemic. I think of my own family, of my children wanting to be near their grandparents. They're so used to seeing their Anee and Mimi. At least once or twice a week, we're over there; and they weren't able to see them. The behaviour and the patterns people get used to because of isolation and some of the restrictions - which are there to protect their health, obviously, to protect their loved ones and protect all of us.

When we look at COVID-19, I know it has been a hot topic in Question Period, but no doubt Nova Scotia has done far better - far better - than just about any province or territory in Canada. We are a glowing example. We are a bright light of dealing with COVID-19, and part of that is to do with the mental health and the health care system and our frontline workers and the incredible job that they have done during all this. We are seeing the results now.

As much as people don't want to talk about it, we're seeing spikes right across Canada. We're seeing spikes right across the United States. Here in Nova Scotia, when we get two or three or four cases in one day, that's a big spike for us, and that's saying something. That's saying something where we see Ontario, for example, the big spikes in Ontario, and see the big spikes in Quebec. I was just reading about some of the places in the United States.

We're seeing politicians, not just in the United States but in Canada, calling - screaming - for the opening up of restrictions and lifting these restrictions and essentially saying, let's let the dice drop where they may. Let's see what happens.

I'm proud that as a government, we have listened not just to Dr. Strang and the health care professionals there but also the mental health care professionals. We have listened to them. We have not succumbed to rhetoric and, I would say, trumped up accusations and posts and things like that. We've listened to the science, and that's what will help us. That's what will drive Nova Scotia to be the shining beacon that it is.

It's listening and putting aside the partisan calls and the electioneering and all that stuff and just saying, listen, this isn't about any particular Party, this is about Nova Scotians, this is about our parents, this is about our children, this is about you and me and our friends and family, to ensure that we come out of this safely. Again, a big part of this is the mental health strategy and working with our mental health experts, not just in Nova Scotia but right across the world, and listening to them.

We are in uncharted territory here, whether people want to admit it or not. In our lifetime, we've never had anything like this. We didn't know, going into this, what the physical and mental outcomes and impacts were going to be, but we have brilliant, smart people here in Nova Scotia whom we're working with and listening to.

Again, I go back to how proud I was that one of the first things Premier Rankin did was create an Office of Mental Health & Addictions, signalling how important it is that we work through this. We've seen . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I will remind the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs not to use the Premier's proper name, but to refer to him by title.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Sorry, I didn't hear what you said, Mr. Speaker. Was that because I named the Premier by name?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please continue.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Sorry, as a former Deputy Speaker, you'd think I'd know the rules but sometimes you just get going and it slips, so I apologize.

Yes, I go back to 2020-21. We're looking at more than \$310 million that was budgeted for mental health and addictions. That money needs to and will hit the ground. That's where it needs to be. It doesn't need to be in departments and fancy titles. It needs to be in the front line. It needs to be where people need it the most. It needs to be in addiction services.

When we see unprecedented restrictions and lockdown right across the world, obviously we're going to see mental health problems and addictions. Unfortunately those rise - we get more and more of those because of people being isolated. Depression and anxiety set in.

Again, one of the first things this Premier did was signal to Nova Scotians that this is a priority - we know what you're going through. Some of us go through it ourselves. Looking around at all your faces, I'm sure there is more than one of us here who has had issues with anxiety and depression. I've been very vocal about my own struggles with anxiety and depression. It's something I've struggled with for a long time.

The fact of the matter is, and I've said this a few times, but three years ago - I don't know if I said it publicly - three years ago I was in the kitchen with my partner Rena and my children and we were cooking supper together and I thought I was having a heart attack. She looked over at me and my face went pale and I thought that was it. I didn't know what was going on. She called 911 immediately. I didn't even have to say a word, to be honest.

Rena called 911 immediately and they were there quickly. I have to give them a lot of credit because it's not easy, I'm sure. Some of the members - our youngest member by age, I think, is a former emergency medical technician. Two of them walked into the house and one of them took my blood pressure and was speaking to me to calm me down and . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time allotted for the member's comments has expired.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre.

KENDRA COOMBES: I am pleased to rise today to actually speak to our bill, Bill No. 24, a series of amendments to the Emergency "911" Act that would create a province-wide emergency mental health response service.

I see first hand in my constituency the impact on communities of the lack of adequate access to mental health services, including emergency services, on Cape Breton Island. There are too many people all across this province, and most especially outside of HRM, who are not getting the support they need when they are in mental health crisis. The wait times and lack of availability of mental health services in Cape Breton are terrifying. I am certain that less people would reach a mental health crisis situation if they were able to have timely and regular access to preventative mental health care.

The impact that this situation has on Cape Bretoners and the people employed to support them cannot be overstated. The mental health needs are vast. I have heard from professionals of every stripe who are ringing alarm bells about the mental health service situation on the Island: doctors who are worried about people's access to primary care and the mental health care that would keep them safe and provide the preventative support needed; mental health professionals who are burnt out, and they are begging for help; and occupational therapists who are tasked with providing care that is outside of their scope because the mental health services that their clients need are simply not available in the region.

Our province has a two-tiered mental health care system. If you have a drug plan or can pay out of pocket, you get the care that you need. If you don't, then it's too bad - good luck. This is wrong, and this government has a responsibility to change this.

The mental health needs in Cape Breton are acute and are getting worse. How many people on Cape Breton Island do not have a family physician who could recognize the early signs of someone in distress, someone who might trust them enough to tell them, I'm not okay, I'm struggling, I'm thinking of ending my life? How many people are worse off because after reaching out for help, instead of seeing a professional every week or so and starting to feel better, they are waiting three months for an appointment?

How many people in Cape Breton are reaching a mental health crisis state and heading to emergency departments when they should have been helped months or years earlier? How many people in Cape Breton are met by police after calling in search of help, when what they really need is a trained mental health professional? We need investments in mental health services in Cape Breton, and we need an emergency mental health response team that is trained to meet people in crisis.

I would like to take this time to talk about the existing Mental Health Crisis Line because I knew it would be pointed out as a reason why a network of emergency mental health response teams might not be needed. Firstly, the service is not available outside the HRM. Yes, the phone line is answered 24/7 anywhere in the province, but teams are only available to respond in person within HRM, and between certain hours.

Those teams, if and when they are available, consist of a mental health clinician and a plain-clothes Halifax Regional Police officer who arrive at calls in an unmarked vehicle. Undoubtedly, that team does a lot of important and helpful work, but the program is underfunded with frequently long wait times before reaching a professional.

People often need to leave a message and wait for someone to call them back or be put on hold and wait. We know that people have poor experiences with the service. Still others are afraid to call because they are wary about police involvement. I know that the partnership with the Halifax Police is highly valued by the folks who work on the crisis line, but it is equally true that there are times when police, even plain-clothed, are not the

most appropriate respondent to a situation. That is why our bill contemplates the role of police. It allows for the possibility that there may be times or occasions that do not require police to respond at all.

Mr. Speaker, many other jurisdictions have developed services similar to this. Alberta has mobile emergency mental health teams available on call across the province. The existing emergency mental health emergency support services are not good enough and Nova Scotians deserve more, deserve better. There are literally lives on the line.

I feel it is important to briefly highlight some of the differences between the mental health emergency response team, as laid out in our bill, and what my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative caucus have proposed in other venues. The plan from the PCs commits to a 24/7 emergency phone line, presumably staffed by mental health professionals. This service basically already exists in Nova Scotia and it is unclear to me what the phone line would substantially add to the already existing emergency service, aside from changing the number to 988.

My colleagues make the point that it would be available through a simpler number rather than a ten-digit crisis line that is currently in operation, but my understanding is that 911 can and will routinely transfer calls through to the mobile Mental Health Crisis Line. It is not clear what is being proposed by my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party that is in addition to what already exists.

[5:15 p.m.]

The point is that when someone is in a mental health crisis, there is very often a need for an in-person support component. Police are asked time and again to fill this role, though they themselves have said they are ill-equipped to be the first on the scene in a mental health crisis. Nova Scotia RCMP respond to about five requests for wellness checks per day and this figure does not include the municipal police services.

Mr. Speaker, the need is enormous. I fail to see how my colleagues' plan would divert emergency mental health crises from police - the key issue at hand. In conclusion, too many Nova Scotians in mental health distress are not met with the support they desperately need. This must change. People outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality deserve the same access to mobile emergency mental health support, no matter the time of day, nor the region. If the government agreed, they would vote to pass this bill into law. Thank you.

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

ALANA PAON: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to be able to stand to speak on Bill No. 24 - the Emergency "911" Act Amended. You have a bit of an advantage when you are the last person to speak, to hear all the others who come before you and the matters that

they bring forward. So it has been very interesting listening to the commentaries of the other members in the House, prior to me standing.

One of the things that caught my attention - and actually, before I talk about that, I am going to mention the three things that come to mind and are with me when a problem comes to my office or someone asks me for help. I think of three things: what is the root cause that is causing this issue to; how have we arrived to this point with regard to the problem; and then I go into action mode and try to find a solution for whomever asks me for assistance. Those are the three tenets - root cause, how did we get here, and what's the solution.

I believe that I've heard quite a bit today about - perhaps a solution is what the members from the NDP caucus have put forward, as far as a possible solution to mental health - and I am going to use this word, which we use a lot and it's basically a buzz word and I don't even want to use that. It's like a key word, just like "transparency" is thrown around quite a bit right now - everything is in "crisis."

Our health care is in crisis, our mental health care is in crisis, our ambulatory system is in crisis, our roads are in crisis, everything is in crisis. Everything. We are in reaction mode and emergency procedures mode about everything, it seems, right now. I think to myself, how on earth did we get to this place? One of the things that comes to mind is really a lack of planning.

Mental health is not a new concept. Post traumatic stress disorder is not a new concept. Mental health issues have existed, I'm sure, since man began to walk upright. There are crises and difficulties that have happened for humans in the entire span, basically, since they have been walking the earth, but right now, all of a sudden - and I'm very glad to hear it - we are speaking about mental health issues more. I'm hoping that it will assist in not only being able to provide an opportunity to have better accessibility to mental health care, but also that it will decrease the amount of stigma that we all know exists around mental health. It's still there.

I can go and speak to anyone about the fact that I have a heart condition - I'm not saying that I do, I'm making an example here - and go and speak to anybody that I maybe have high blood pressure, maybe I have to have a knee replacement, all kinds of things that are - you go and see a specialist for certain areas, and it would be the topic of general conversation every day, and no one would really ever think twice about it. They just think, my goodness, I am so sorry to hear that you have that issue. Yet - and I can get backlash on this if anyone wishes to put it out there - but I think anybody would agree with me that we are not there when it comes to talking about mental health.

There is still this taboo around mental health. There is still this concern if you come forward and talk to your employer about the fact that you are struggling with a mental health issue, like you would be struggling, perhaps, with any other health issue. Why is it

that it is so difficult for us to get to the next stage of understanding that as much as there should be a crisis team or ambulatory care or specialists that are available, basically, for any other condition that a human being may have, we should be able to respond and talk and be open and non-judgmental - oh my goodness, it's so difficult - non-judgmental about someone being able to be brave enough - because it takes a lot of bravery to come forward and be able to say: I have a problem that is related to my mental health, and can you help me.

Now, can you imagine coming forward, then, with an issue around mental health and either being judged, stigmatized? Even worse, you go to ask for help at an emergency room or you're calling a crisis line, and there is nobody available to assist you.

I appreciate the idea behind the bill that is being put forward as far as to amend 911 and to have access to that person who is in crisis. We all know when someone calls 911, they need help right away. They are in crisis mode. As much as I think that it's a great concept in general, I'm not quite certain that we are in a position, considering that we can't even get it right as far as ambulatory response times. We have EMTs that are basically sitting in their ambulances - no fault of their own - and trying to off-load patients (I don't like that word) - trying to transfer patients into either a different hospital, where they need a different level of care, or to an emergency room, where they need immediate care.

So, are we asking for these first responders - either an EMT or someone who is a member of the volunteer fire service, who - there's no standardized funding available currently for all the volunteer fire departments that are across this province. It's basically the municipality that decides what kind of funding you're going to get, and it's based on population. It's absolutely ridiculous. So, we're going to actually put another level of training on these emergency first responders, including police officers, and expecting - considering - that it's going to be successful in some way when we can't actually get the systems that we already have in place to work properly.

It is concerning to me that we are adding one extra level of care or responsibility on those who are already coming to us and saying they are having issues and are struggling with being able to provide the proper service and the proper resources available currently. I am not sure that we should be adding another layer on them.

When a volunteer firefighter comes to me and has no access, or the department does not have any access, to proper PPE, nor proper access to the training to go along with how to use that PPE when COVID-19 first came into being - I believe actually that they still have not had a proper training program with regard to the utilization of PPE. I worry that we are again creating a solution which, in theory, should work, but I am asking again how is it that this is going to work when we can't get some of our basic needs correct, like responding to an emergency call in general.

I was talking about root cause, how we arrived, what is the solution, what is the cause of all the mental health issues that seem to be exploding. That is the best word that I could use - there is this explosion or crisis of mental health issues. What is causing all of this?

Or is it - and I am hoping that it is the case - that there is not such an increase but that in fact people are being brave enough to come forward and actually speak and ask for help? When you come forward and you are asking for assistance with any condition that you may have, especially in an emergency situation, you would hope that somebody is there to be able to help you.

I am not 100 per cent sure - I would have to take a better deep dive into this bill - that this is the entire solution or part of the solution. We have Law Amendments Committee, and I do not know that this bill is going to go that far - Opposition bills often do not. I am open fully to having a conversation about this and the items that are in this bill, but what really worries me is that we are actually adding an extra level of responsibility to first responders who are already struggling as it is.

I understand that a response team would also include other professionals away from just first responders, but I will put this out there to the other members of this House. I truly believe that as much as we speak about heart issues, high blood pressure issues - any health issues - that we should be encouraging those conversations to occur, and the training to be made available on mental health in a first aid package.

When I go to renew my emergency first aid as an emergency first responder, or just have general first aid, there is actually no component within there, so I'm going to put this out there. If we actually all became more aware, more sensitive, more informed through doing emergency first aid training for ourselves as we do, for again we know how to bring someone back from cardiac arrest - we learn that - we know how to do resuscitation. We know what to do if somebody is choking. We know what to do if somebody is in different crisis situations. But we are not trained with basic training to know what to do if somebody is showing difficulty around a mental health issue.

I think that needs to be part of the overall package: education and training for the general population. The other thing is I agree we need to have a better response system overall - those are regional teams - more services obviously available in other capacities. I think this might be one aspect.

Again, we need to get the emergency response services right that we currently have in place. We need to fix that in order for something like this to be able to even be successful. Otherwise we are just creating another layer that - it's painful for me to say, but in many ways I would not want to see as a failure.

[5:30 p.m.]

When somebody is calling and if it is a response team or 911, and asking again for assistance because they are in crisis, you want to make sure they are going to be able to have the help they need, just like when they're calling 911, they've had a car accident and they need assistance to be able to deal with that emergency situation, or their house is on fire, that situation. We need to make certain that all of the proper services are in place and that some of the basics - or what one would think would be the basics of an emergency response - that we're getting it right now.

We're doing a really poor job currently. I'll say "we." We're doing a really poor job in many respects when there are so many people, so many doctors, so many nurses, so many first responders who are calling us and pleading for us to assist them in being able to do their job properly and have the proper resources available to them to do their job properly.

I look forward to having further conversations with my colleagues on the idea they have put forward. All of us want to see any legislation that we put in place, or resources that are made available - we want it to be successful. That's the key thing. We want to be able to help people. That's the goal here: to make people's lives easier, to provide them with the services they need so they don't have to deal with the unfortunate situation that is currently occurring within our mental health services, or lack thereof.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Again, I appreciate further dialogue on this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

LISA ROBERTS: Mr. Speaker, with the last few minutes remaining in the time for the NDP's business today, I'll speak briefly to Bill No. 24 and just say that I am really proud to serve in a caucus that has done the thinking based on so many public conversations around what role we want police to have, and about reasons why we might want to consider defunding the police, and has brought those conversations into this Chamber.

While I am not entirely comfortable or anxious to talk about my personal experiences in this Chamber, I will say that I've had the experience of calling in a moment when a family member was having a mental health crisis and not at all trying to call for police. I had no intention at all that police would respond when I made a phone call, and that is what happened. It happened very quickly and it was very frightening.

I have reflected back on those series of events any number of times. I have to say that it is one of a small number of experiences in my life that have really caused me to reflect on my privilege, because I just believe that I would have been frightened out of my wits. It was already a very stressful circumstance, but frankly I would have been frightened

out of my wits had the family member for whom I had to make that phone call not otherwise presented as a very - yes, the way they were handled by police was with a lot of respect and a lot of compassion, and I was very grateful, but I just really felt that things might have gone otherwise.

I don't think people should, in a moment when they ask for help, end up with that interaction being handled by professionals whose professional training is really for something quite different. I think that is why the NDP's work in thinking about what a mental health response team or what regional mental health response teams across Nova Scotia could look like is really important. I'm proud to have been part of bringing this business to the House today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That concludes our business.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. GEOFF MACLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that concludes the government business today as well. I move the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow, Thursday, March 25, 2021, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Tomorrow, of course, is provincial Budget Day. We will have the Minister of Finance present the fiscal plan to the House and to all Nova Scotians. After the Budget Speech and reply from the Opposition, we will follow the daily routine, including Question Period, and if time permits, second reading of Bill Nos. 28, 47 and 50.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to adjourn to meet again Thursday, March 25th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have now reached the moment of interruption. We'll actually recess for 15 minutes. The House will be back at 5:50 p.m.

[5:36 p.m. The House recessed.]

[5:50 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We'll now begin late debate.

The motion under Rule 5(5), submitted by the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, is:

“Therefore be it resolved that providing universal access to regular, reliable, publicly-funded mental health and addictions support will make Nova Scotia a healthier, better place to live.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

GOVT. (N.S.): UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH/ADDICTIONS SUPPORT - KEY TO HEALTHY LIVING

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak to this debate this afternoon. In some ways, I feel that all debate that I’ve heard all afternoon has been on this subject, and I’ve certainly been very interested in hearing my colleagues’ comments from the other Parties.

As I was thinking about this topic of debate, I thought, well, we could have said “Therefore be it resolved that providing universal access to regular, reliable, publicly-funded health care would make Nova Scotia a healthier, better place to live.” The 60,000-some people who do not have a family doctor, and the many thousands more who simply haven’t bothered to put their name on that list, would agree with that, I think.

If we have a crisis in health care as it is, we most certainly have a crisis in addictions and mental health. I do want to say, right at the beginning, that the people who are working on the front lines in the Nova Scotia Health Authority - the NSHA, which I know has renamed itself - I want to express my appreciation for them, and say that I do believe that this crisis is not their fault. I believe they are overwhelmed. This is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed in a holistic way. It simply cannot be addressed piecemeal.

I do also want to say that I know there have been comments about police and ER. I do want to say that in my experience, particularly in one incident in my office about four years ago, the Kentville police were extraordinarily gentle in dealing with a mental health issue. I want to give a shoutout to our police chief, Julia Cecchetto, and all the officers there. My experience has been that they did an incredible job. I think I have told that story previously in the House.

Also, I do believe that our ER staff are also overwhelmed. If you have a mental health issue, going to the ER is often not the right place. It can be difficult. I know that

that's probably the only option right now. I'll just say that I do appreciate what they do, too, but the fact is that our system is overwhelmed and there are many, many issues.

A number of my colleagues on the other side of the House have already referenced our universal mental health care plan. I really appreciate them having done so, even though in some cases it's been to criticize the plan. I do want to say that I also recognize that all of us here in this Legislature want the best for Nova Scotia, even if we disagree on how it is to be done. I was thinking that in my seven or eight years in this Legislature, one of the hallmarks of those seven or eight years has been talking about mental health issues and addictions issues.

It feels like we haven't really gotten there, and if I could say something about this current Liberal government collectively, I think it's a matter of priorities. I don't believe that this has really been prioritized the way it needs to be. We've put forward a comprehensive universal mental health care plan as a Party, and I'm very proud of that. In fact, I think it's ground-breaking in our country. I think other jurisdictions are looking at the plan that we've put forward. In fact, I know they are.

One of the parts of the plan is for a separate department of mental health and addictions. I know my colleague member for Spryfield - I don't know if I got that name right - has said that's not a requirement. I would beg to differ. We know that British Columbia and Manitoba have done so, or are in the process of doing so, so other jurisdictions are seeing this as a step, too. I believe this is needed to put the proper focus on the issue.

Addictions and mental health are kind of out of control in our time. It's just a problem that seems to be growing. I don't know if "exponentially" is the right term, but it's growing, and I don't believe it's simply because we are identifying it more and talking about it more. I don't really know the reasons why it's growing. I certainly don't think it's the current government's fault, it's just something that is beyond any member of this Legislature or our governments. It's a social problem. It probably has to do with, possibly, the advertising media, possibly social media, drugs - and COVID-19 has certainly added to the problem, there's no doubt about that.

The reasons for the problem are no one's fault in particular, but something about our society. I believe that the plan that we are putting forward will address some of the issues. The main feature of our plan that we're putting forward is to say that we will open up the billing codes to allow psychologists and counsellors and mental health workers to have access to those billing codes.

Right now, we know that at least 40 per cent of the province has no access to what you would call the private side of mental health and addictions care. One of the big surprises to me in my time as critic for mental health and addictions has been how two-tiered the system is.

If you're a veteran, if you have a WCB claim, if you have Blue Cross, if you have money, you can get psychological care, counselling. You can get care, but everybody else who doesn't have that just doesn't get access. There are long wait times to get access into mental health care, and this is a problem. Our proposal, which I'm very proud of, is groundbreaking in the nation, is not without cost, but we have said many a time, and I believe it to be true, that we are paying the cost now, anyway, in human tragedy.

That plan of opening the billing codes will, I believe at least in some cases, divert people from having to end up in the ER or having to end up in police custody. We know from statistics that 80 per cent of people who, the first time that they exhibit a mental health issue, if they can get treatment, that it will be a much reduced problem. This is particularly true in our youth.

We're also talking about a 24/7 mental telehealth service and a 988 mental health crisis line. I do recognize that the 911 line will work too. Does anybody remember the two numbers my colleague from Spryfield already said? I don't remember 988. That's a reason for bringing that in. We know that we need more mental health professionals in Nova Scotia. Our plan includes that. We need increased training options for our mental health providers.

There's a huge need out there. It can't be done piecemeal. It can't be addressed in little dribs and drabs. It needs to be addressed in a comprehensive plan. We put forward a comprehensive plan. I know my colleagues in the other Parties have read it, or at least read pieces of it. They've addressed it a number of times. I'm very proud of that plan. We know that - I know my 10 minutes is going incredibly quick here, but I do want to say to the public of Nova Scotia, if any of them are listening, I've lived it too, we've suffered through this in my family. I know how hard it is to deal with a mental health issue in your family. The pain doesn't go away, even years later, and we've lived through it.

One of the lines in our plan, which is not a line for me - this is personal. I want to see this issue addressed, to do what we can do. No one plan is going to prevent every tragedy. There will still be tragedies, unfortunately, but I believe that our plan will go a long way to addressing those, will provide more people access to care at the right time, the right care at the right time in the right place. That's the goal of what we're putting forward. That's why we wanted to debate this.

Right now, universal mental health care and addictions support are not regular or reliable. Their access is limited. It's not the fault of the people we have working in the system. It's a systemic problem that needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way. We're putting forward a comprehensive plan, and I believe that other jurisdictions will take this plan up. I believe this plan, if we have the opportunity to enact it in Nova Scotia, will make a difference.

[6:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm really glad to rise to speak to this motion about access to regular, reliable, publicly funded, universal mental health care and addictions support. I would also like to take a moment to thank my colleague for Kings North, who is an outspoken member on this issue. I admire his courage, and it's nice to hear from him.

I would like to start by just saying essentially, yep, this makes a lot of sense - publicly funded, universal mental health and addictions support. We should have nothing less than this. I will start by noting for the record that as the representative of Dartmouth North, it's a constituency of people who have a range of intersecting mental health and other service needs. The removal of the Nova Scotia Health Authority's mental health supports from downtown Dartmouth to a location that is highly inaccessible for many people in my community is troubling. It's a crisis, to use that word again, and could very well mean the difference between people getting service and supports and not getting service and supports.

I will continue to raise this issue in this House and in the community and get a firm commitment from the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Province that we will have satellite mental health services in Dartmouth North when this move happens. It's not a good step for accessible health care in the community that I represent, and it's a troubling trend for this government.

Our caucus has been advocating for improved access to mental health services for years. That's what prompts me to say, yep. In 2018, we introduced a Mental Health Bill of Rights. That would commit the government to spending 10 per cent of its health care budget on mental health supports. That would be in line with the World Health Organization's recommendations. This level of increased funding would make possible the kinds of improvements that we need.

The Mental Health Bill of Rights states that anyone in Nova Scotia who is struggling to maintain mental wellness has the right to:

“(a) be treated with dignity and respect;

“(b) have prompt and appropriate access to publicly-funded diagnostic resources and treatment;

“(c) have timely access to client and family-centred support services;

“(d) have access to treatment and support that is appropriate for the person and the person's circumstances; and

“(e) have access to an advocate of the person’s choice or to a public advocate if the person is unable to chose an advocate.”

Since tabling that legislation in 2018, we have also advocated for access to same day/next day mental health counselling services across the province. We know there was a pilot project done at the North End Community Health Centre, which was very successful. We know that is happening again at the North End Community Health Centre, but it’s not an expansive program. It’s certainly not in all of the communities across the province that we need it to be in.

That idea means a network staffed by trained professionals offering counselling with no diagnosis or referral required to access, in complement to the existing tiered mental health system. An NDP government would also create a province-wide mobile mental health emergency response service, which we just talked about for many minutes. That would help people in crisis and divert resources from the police, who are often not equipped or trained to respond.

The key piece to all of these critical improvements lies in expanding our public mental health system’s capacity and in strengthening public options and structures. We need to bolster the services available in our public health care system and support the people who work in it with adequate resources.

It is a conscious set of decisions and political strategy that has left our public mental health care system in shambles. This must be reversed. Our Party is committed to doing that work.

I’d like to take a moment to address the idea of a separate ministry for mental health. This idea has been put forward by the Progressive Conservative caucus. This was discussed at a recent Public Accounts committee and I’d like to read the opinion of Dr. Andrew Harris, who is the Senior Medical Director of Mental Health and Addictions, that he gave at that committee meeting on January 13th. At that meeting, he said:

“My opinion is that we are better served by being closer to the entirety of the health care system . . . Psychiatry and mental health are a complex combination of neural behavioural disorders, some of which are based in brain dysfunction and some of which are based in social determinants of health. We have come a long way from the days when we used to institutionalize and saw psychiatry as a separate and distinct area of health care. My personal opinion is, it would be a step in the wrong direction to separate ourselves through the forming of a separate ministry.”

Mental and physical health are deeply intertwined. The idea of spending time and resources setting up an entirely different administrative structure to governmental health

when one already exists is troubling and problematic. These resources would be better put into frontline care and core funding for the myriad of important community-based groups that are providing support to people living with mental illness, such as Eating Disorders Nova Scotia or the Canadian Mental Health Association. Services for newcomers, and services in Indigenous communities and the African Nova Scotian community.

I would also like to take a minute to acknowledge how important it is that the safe supply of drugs is addressed by this government. We cannot allow any more lives to be lost because safe supply and effective overdose prevention supports are not in place. This is an issue that is important to me and to my constituents.

As the federal NDP talks about decriminalizing drugs, we need to think about how we are keeping people who use drugs safe, as well. Our caucus has been talking about these solutions and we are ready to get to work as soon as this government decides it is ready to move from words to resources and actions. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I do want to thank my colleagues the members for Kings North and Dartmouth North for speaking to this critical issue and for bringing this debate to the Legislature. I know that this is an issue that personally touches the member for Kings North's heart. It has affected his family. I very much appreciate his passion and commitment to seeing improvements in this area.

We often do hear about the tragedies that occur in our communities and our province related to mental health - people either not getting the support that they require or perhaps not knowing where to get that support. We oftentimes don't hear about the lives that have been saved by our mental health clinicians in our system or the people that are on the path to being well, or are well, because of the supports that are in place in our system.

Those stories exist, too, but they're a lot more quiet. I want to thank our frontline clinicians and support staff for the incredible work they do, which is very difficult and challenging work but it impacts the lives of people each and every day.

I do believe that there still remain some gaps in our system. Of course, there are still challenges to overcome. There still needs to be more resources in place, particularly as we learn more and more about the factors that contribute to mental health challenges. I do think it's important to note that this has been a priority area.

We have seen increased investment every single year since 2016 for mental health supports in our province and to expand the scope of care for people. We've put an additional \$35 million into our budget each and every year. We now do have well over \$300 million dedicated specifically to this and that's just within the Department of Health and Wellness.

Those dollars have gone towards frontline care. They've gone towards hiring more clinicians, supporting the hiring of more social workers, navigators, and people in our system that are there to help people each and every day. This has been a priority area, I think it's important to know that. We have grown and enhanced the system over the course of the past years.

[6:00 p.m.]

We see that happening at our school level where our government prioritizes investing in inclusive education support - hiring more school psychologists, mental health practitioners and child and youth care practitioners and funding supports for the LGBTQ community where we know there can be some additional challenges related to anxiety and depression.

This has been a priority area and we are funding this in key ways, and we have seen some success as well. We are now in a position where we are meeting the benchmarks for response time for the acute, urgent cases, which is within a week. So people are getting in to see somebody or getting their appointment scheduled within a week when they are dealing with an acute or urgent issue.

We also are hitting the national benchmarks for getting people in to see clinicians, or whatever the appropriate support is, in a timely fashion. So, we are moving the needle in the right direction in many ways here. That is almost, for the urgent cases, that is almost 100 per cent of cases are getting in within a week and that is meeting the benchmark.

There has also been funding to increase access to needed pharmaceuticals for patients as well. A key part of the strategy has been to also support high-quality community groups that are there for people and that do support people. We can't underestimate the role that these organizations can play, particularly with the non-urgent, potentially non-urgent cases as well.

We have also established a 24/7 crisis line. That is available now. People can call it. We have mental health practitioners who are there, and people can access 24/7. The number, if you are experiencing a mental health crisis, you can call the mental health crisis line at 1-888-429-8167.

A key area where we have begun and will continue to enhance care in mental health is also on the virtual side. This is probably one of the greatest applications for our virtual care, to create more access points for mental health support.

We have recently signed a bilateral with the federal government to enhance our virtual care strategy here in the province. This is a field where we will be growing the access points for mental health supports as well.

I know the Nova Scotia Health Authority has already created some really helpful virtual tools, so we do have a mental health support website that the Health Authority has in place. This is a very, very helpful website. Individuals can go on there and access every single point of support that is available within their community, provincially. I encourage every member to check out this website, familiarize yourself with it so you can direct your constituents bringing these issues forward to you with one window of everything that is available. That website is mha.nshealth.ca. Again, that is a very, very useful website.

There have been other virtual tools that the Health Authority has brought in as well. MindWell U is a free, online challenge. It takes just five minutes a day and can be accessed anywhere on any device. There is the therapy assistance online, which is a free and private online resource available to Nova Scotians and includes interactive activities and videos for people having challenges with their mental health. Again, there are some resources available. These resources will be further enhanced.

We are also creating the Office of Mental Health & Addictions. This will be in the budget. I am not breaking this news, the Premier did commit to this. I have received my mandate letter in relation to creating this office. This is to provide that system level focused leadership to coordinate the activities across government agencies, departments and our partners and communities to achieve enhanced mental health outcomes. I believe that staffing this dedicated focus, which will be part clinical, will help us further develop our mental health strategies as we look to further enhance them.

[6:15 p.m.]

I do want to register a concern I have with the Progressive Conservatives' plan to put mental health and addictions in its own silo. I want to thank the member for Dartmouth North for registering this concern, as well.

One of the challenges around mental health has been the stigma attached to it, the fact that we have treated it as something different than health when it should be treated as any other health concern that we may have, whether that's a chronic illness or anything else. It's not separate from health. It's our bodies, and it's our chemistry. It needs to remain a part of a robust and holistic approach to overall health. I do see risks with removing that from the Department of Health and Wellness and separating it. I think that could further create stigma and fragmentation around how we are approaching this critical issue.

I know the member for Dartmouth North mentioned the access points in her community, so I do want to address that before we close. The clinicians in that area did want to amalgamate a number of resources together to better serve the community, and the only available place was outside of downtown Dartmouth to accommodate that, based on the rules around the procurement. However, the Health Authority is looking at providing satellite options to support people who are unable to access that new location. I do want to

assure the member that the Health Authority is undergoing that work currently. I am sure the Health Authority or our staff here at the department can keep the member up to date.

In closing, I think we have made very important, critical strides in the right direction when it comes to mental health and supports. We will continue to move the needle in the right way and enhance access points for mental health supports to make them more robust here in Nova Scotia. The members will see further investment in these key areas in our budget, which is coming out tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg with just two minutes.

BRIAN COMER: This is a very important topic in our province, especially here in Cape Breton. I find it ironic that both Parties are kind of criticizing the PC universal mental health care plan. This plan actually allows access for over 300,000 Nova Scotians to mental health care who don't have it as we sit here today.

I find it ironic that we're being accused of fragmenting a system. I mean, 75 per cent of mental health disorders are diagnosed before the age of 25, and in this province right now, there is virtually no communication between the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Community Services or Health and Wellness, which is very unfortunate because these could be proactive measures. I would like to think that this new department would finally create a component of accountability and transparency that this department so desperately needs.

I would caution all members not just to listen to bureaucrats in the Nova Scotia Health Authority but to actually take the time to talk to frontline health care providers who work in mental health and addictions across the province to see what is really going on on the ground because I guarantee you it is much different. I know personally, I have seen it first-hand for over seven years working here in Cape Breton, both in addictions and mental health, the state of the system. I have worked situations where I had a 12-year-old who was suicidal on the same unit as a 34-year-old schizophrenic, with an 89-year-old geriatric patient. That's the sort of situations you are dealing with.

In regard to our crisis line, I think there is a reason why this received unanimous consent in the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, because when you are acutely suicidal, seconds matter. That is why I put forth this legislation today.

In closing, I would just like to thank everyone for their comments. We need to do better with mental health and addictions in this province, and this plan is exactly how we do that.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time allotted for late debate this evening has expired. I would like to thank all members for participating.

The House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 6:20 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 236**

By: Hon. Iain Rankin (The Premier)

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

Whereas David Blackburn Services Inc. is a company that does road building, excavation, and septic systems and was founded in 2012 by David Blackburn; and

Whereas David Blackburn, founder and general manager of the company, excels in excavating skills, communicating with customers and understanding their needs; and

Whereas each year the company has grown to its present compliment of eight employees all of whom are residents of Lakeside;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating David Blackburn for creating jobs in the community, excelling in customer relations and providing high quality excavation and road building work in Lakeside and throughout the Metropolitan Halifax area.

RESOLUTION NO. 237

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief David Buchanan and members of the Baddeck Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief David Buchanan and all the volunteers of the Baddeck Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 238

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Andrew Fricker and members of the Bay St. Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Andrew Fricker and all the volunteers of the Bay St. Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 239

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Wayne Jardine and members of the Big Bras d'Or Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Wayne Jardine and all the volunteers of the Big Bras d'Or Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 240

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Robert Leblanc and members of the Boisdale Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID- 19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Robert Leblanc and all the volunteers of the Boisdale Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 241

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Kyle Rambeau and members of the Cabot Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Kyle Rambeau and all the volunteers of the Cabot Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 242

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Brian MacNeil and members of the Christmas Island Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Brian MacNeil and all the volunteers of the Christmas Island Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 243

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Tracy Cavanaugh and members of the Englishtown Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Tracy Cavanaugh and all the volunteers of the Englishtown Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 244

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Andy Green and members of the Frenchvale Road Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Andy Green and all the volunteers of the Frenchvale Road Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 245

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Travaix Briand and members of the George's River Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Travaix Briand and all the volunteers of the George's River Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 246

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Ervin Barron and members of the Ingonish Beach Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Ervin Barron and all the volunteers of the Ingonish Beach Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 247

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Ryan Costelo and members of the Ingonish Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Ryan Costelo and all the volunteers of the Ingonish Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 248

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Colin MacNeil and members of the Iona Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Colin MacNeil and all the volunteers of the Iona Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 249

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief David MacKenzie and members of the Middle River Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief David MacKenzie and all the volunteers of the Middle River Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 250

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Margaret Smith and members of the Neil's Harbour Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Margaret Smith and all the volunteers of the Neil's Harbour Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 251

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Randy MacEachern and members of the North Shore and District Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Randy MacEachern and all the volunteers of the North Shore and District Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 252

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief Dwayne Symes and members of the Ross Ferry Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief Dwayne Symes and all the volunteers of the Ross Ferry Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESOLUTION NO. 253

By: Keith Bain (Victoria-The Lakes)

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

Whereas Chief David Macintyre and members of the Southside Boularderie Volunteer Fire Department continued to serve the public during COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21; and

Whereas this public service was done willingly and at great personal risk to themselves and their families; and

Whereas the COVID-19 pandemic also caused significant extra work and time commitment on their part in training, in extra cleaning and in addressing health concerns;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Chief David MacIntyre and all the volunteers of the Southside Boularderie River Volunteer Fire Department for stepping up and being willing to serve our community above and beyond any previous expectation, at great personal risk and placing the needs of others before their own during the COVID-19 pandemic.