



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2021

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2021

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

THE SPEAKER: Before we begin with the daily routine, under Rule 5(5), the late debate topic tonight will be:

Whereas municipalities and community organizations are eager and willing to partner, and with the looming threat of Winter the government has not yet articulated a plan to address the homelessness crisis and address the immediate housing needs that is adversely impacting those most vulnerable in our province;

Therefore be it resolved that the creation of housing solutions falls under the jurisdiction of the Province.

Again, this will be debated at the moment of interruption.

We'll now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

RESOLUTION NO. 3

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

Whereas the United Nations designated October 11th as the International Day of the Girl, a time to celebrate the voices of young girls and to highlight and address the needs and challenges they continue to face worldwide, while promoting their empowerment; and

Whereas young women like Rae Steeves, Anne-Sophie Bartenstein, and Kate James, three Grade 11 students at Citadel High School, are already having such an impact, recently winning a grant from Rising Youth Canada to write a book about intersectional feminism called *The Woman's Issue*; and

Whereas seven women were recently sworn into this Cabinet - the largest number of women in the province's history - and it is my hope that young girls across the province see this as a positive step toward a more equitable society;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in celebrating the young women and girls across our province and help them pave the way to a bright, equitable future where their opportunities and prospects are not limited by gender.

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. 1 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 5 of the Acts of 2011, The Elections Act. (Hon. Tim Houston, Premier)

Bill No. 2 - Entitled an Act Respecting Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Accountability. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 3 - Entitled an Act to Recognize Housing as a Human Right and Adopt a Provincial Housing Policy. (Gary Burrill)

Bill No. 4 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 24 of the Acts of 1998, The Public Archives Act. (Hon. Pat Dunn)

Bill No. 5 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1998, the Municipal Government Act, and Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008, the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting Inclusionary Zoning for Affordable, Temporary and Emergency Housing. (Lorelei Nicoll)

Bill No. 6 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1998, the Municipal Government Act, and Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008, the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting Inclusionary Zoning. (Kendra Coombes)

Bill No. 7 - An Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Residential Tenancies Act, Respecting the Protection of Renters. (Lorelei Nicoll)

Bill No. 8 - An Act to Compensate Tenants for Renovation Evictions. (Lorelei Nicoll)

Bill No. 9 - An Act to Protect Children from Abusing Drugs. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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 Bedford Basin.

[1:15 p.m.]

REDDEN, VELMA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I have very sad news to share. Last week on October 8, long-time Bedford resident Velma Redden passed away. I always called her Mrs. Redden, although many knew her simply as Vel.

Mrs. Redden was a long-time Bedford educator, a principal, and a daycare owner. She was no-nonsense and kindly at the same time. She was a person of note to whom my husband introduced me early on when we were dating. She had been his elementary school principal.

I liked her very much and was honoured to attend her 90th birthday party with friends and family at the Bedford Legion several years ago. Her granddaughter noted that in the final week of her life, she looked around at her family and said, "I guess I'm pretty lucky."

To be well respected by her community, much loved by her family, and to live to be 93? Yes, Mrs. Redden, I guess you were - and we were - lucky to have known her.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**PETERS, JUANITA:
DEBUT OF FIRST FEATURE FILM 8:37 *REBIRTH* - CONGRATS.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Juanita Peters whose first feature film, *8:37 Rebirth*, debuted at the Atlantic Film Festival this year. The thriller tells the story of Jared and Sergei, forever connected by a past act of violence. In the film, Peters deftly unpacks and explores the potential manifestations of trauma in her characters.

Juanita Peters is an award-winning playwright, director, actor, journalist, and documentarian, as well as the executive director of the Africville Museum. This statement could cover so much more ground, but in 60 seconds, I'll leave it there.

I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Dartmouth South's and Weymouth Falls's own Juanita Peters on this amazing milestone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

**MCNAMARA, COL. PATRICK:
NEW 12 WING SHEARWATER BASE CMDR. - CONGRATS.**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and welcome Colonel Patrick MacNamara to his recent posting of Wing Commander at the Royal Canadian Air Force 12 Wing Shearwater base in Eastern Passage. I was deeply honoured to have had the opportunity to attend the Change of Command Ceremony on July 16th, 2021. We bid farewell to Colonel James Hawthorne, who will be assuming the role of Air Force Advisor, Canadian Defense Liaison Staff in London, England.

Incoming commander Colonel MacNamara has an extensive background and portfolio that all began when he joined the military in 1990. His career accomplishments will be of great value to 12 Wing Shearwater.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in welcoming Colonel Patrick MacNamara to his new role and his new residence within the constituency of Eastern Passage.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

C.B. REG. HOSP. FDN.: FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN - CONGRATS.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise in my place to congratulate the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation, and everyone at home, for another successful campaign, where they raised over \$670,000 for an echocardio machine for the Cancer Centre.

As you would know, Mr. Speaker, our community rallies whenever we need to support one another. This was another extremely successful event for the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation. Again, they've raised millions of dollars to ensure that we have the equipment that we need to look after Cape Bretoners.

I rise in my place to congratulate everyone with the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation and the generosity of Cape Bretoners at home.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I would beg the House's permission to revert briefly to Introduction of Bills.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South begs leave to move back to the order of business, Introduction of Bills.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 10 - Entitled an Act to Limit Increases in Rent for Residential Premises. (Gary Burrill)

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

[STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

BUCKMAN, NANCY: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. JILL BALSER: I rise today to recognize the passing of Nancy Buckman, who was 86 years old when she peacefully passed away on September 25th.

Nancy was very involved in the community as a member of the Tiverton United Baptist Church, the Sunshine Bible Class, the Central Haven Cemetery Society, and the Past President of RCL Carpiquet Branch 92 Ladies Auxiliary.

Nancy was a manager of the Islands Museum and Tourist Bureau for eight years, and she was a member of Sunrise Rebekah Lodge in Tiverton for over 50 years. Nancy was a proud and active member of the local PC Party of Nova Scotia Association for many years.

She supported my dad, Hon. Gordon Balser, in his campaigns, and I am humbled that she did the same for me. Our hearts are with her family - including her two sons, Barry and Craig.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that we recognize Nancy Buckman's constant devotion to volunteerism with local groups and churches, service to the tourism industry, and being an overall generous community member.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

BACON, HON. ROGER: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise to pay respects to the late honourable Roger Stuart Bacon. I do invite everyone in this House to join me for a moment of silence after my statement.

The late Premier was a friend to me and a mentor to myself, as well as many of you here in this House. I first met Roger as a teenager about 40 years ago when he gave me a 4-H trophy at the Cumberland County Exhibition. He was a proud farmer, and he was a Cumberland County original.

He cared about people, and that was why he was so successful as an MLA. He served in this House from 1970 to 1993, in Opposition, as Minister of Housing, as Minister of Tourism, and nearly a decade as Minister of Agriculture. He became the 21st Premier of Nova Scotia when John Buchanan was appointed to the Senate.

Despite his many accomplishments in the world, including getting an honorary law degree from Dalhousie, he remained a humble man and often used humour to outwit his naysayers.

Although Roger retired from politics in 1993, he continued to support future generations. As I moved from business to politics, I could always count on Roger to give me the straight goods. He was a strong supporter of women in politics and backed it up with action. Roger is now with his beloved Clara.

Please join me in praying and supporting his family who have lost a great man, a father, a grandfather, and a great-grandfather. I ask everyone here to remember him today and what he has done for our great province.

THE SPEAKER: Please rise for a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

Thank you. Please be seated.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

WHITNEY PIER FOOD PANTRY: ONE YEAR ANNIV. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the one-year anniversary of the Whitney Pier Food Pantry. I want to thank this amazing team of community volunteers who have been operating a food pantry out of the Whitney Pier Senior Citizens & Pensioners Club for the better part of that year. I thank the team at the Whitney Pier Food Pantry for their commitment and dedication.

Mr. Speaker, food security is important to ensure all members of our community receive the nutrition they deserve and they need. No one should go without because of their economic situation and more needs to be done to ensure that all Nova Scotians are food secure.

I want to thank the Whitney Pier Food Pantry, as well as all food banks, for giving back to the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**GUTHRIE, SCOTT: CHAIR OF OTTER LAKE LANDFILL'S COM.
MONITORING COMM. - THANKS**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Scott Guthrie for his role as chair of the Community Monitoring Committee. The committee plays a vital role in monitoring the operations of the Otter Lake Landfill in Timberlea and is a requirement for the industrial permit for this facility as issued by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. CMC is there to protect the communities of Beechville, Lakeside, Timberlea, Hubley, and Prospect and was formed in 1999 as a result of a contract between HRM and the Halifax Waste Resource Society.

The Otter Lake Landfill is revered as a world-class leader for its next-generation approach to handling and processing solid wastes. The operations at Otter Lake Landfill have placed with facility as a leader for its four-tier process to sort solid waste. A front-end processor receives waste and sorts it into acceptable or unacceptable wastes. Unacceptable is rejected, and acceptable waste is further refined by a waste stabilization facility.

Given the close proximity of the landfill to one of the fastest-growing residential areas in HRM, the work of the CMC is vital to ensure the FEP and WSF remain operational to ensure a healthy community does not suffer from offensive odours or have the health risks that come with rodents that carry disease and destruction.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Scott for his important contributions to our community.

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

FERTILITY MATTERS CANADA: INAUGURAL 6K EVENT - RECOG.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to the group Fertility Matters Canada and to raise awareness of their inaugural 6K event coming up across Canada on October 15 to 17. Participants will be able to walk, run, bike, or wheel to participate on their own or in safe groups, at their own pace.

Today I would like to acknowledge Jessica Bourque from Hubley who is a tireless advocate for fertility funding in our local chapter. With October making Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness month and October 15th being Pregnancy & Infant Loss Remembrance Day, I feel it is time for more open dialogues about the realities regarding fertility. It is experienced by one in six couples, which makes fertility an issue for

heteronormative couples, those in the LBGTQ+ community, and single people wishing to have a family.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

[1:30 p.m.]

**MLA FOR ARGYLE:
USE OF CPR TO SAVE AUSTIN DOUCETTE'S LIFE - THANKS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring the attention of the House to what was a precarious situation in our region, that ultimately ended up as a happy story.

Mr. Austin Doucette was taking part in a local annual haystack building festival when he collapsed. Thankfully the honourable member for Argyle was there to help him. Using his skills and knowledge as a former paramedic, the member for Argyle quickly determined that Mr. Doucette's heart had stopped. He called 911 while someone started CPR, and then he canvassed the crowd to see if there were others who could help. The member for Argyle was part of a rotation of about six individuals taking turns administering CPR until paramedics arrived on the scene, and when he wasn't performing CPR himself, he was helping to coach the others who were.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this House to join me in thanking the member for Argyle for his quick and heroic action and leadership, as well as the community members and paramedics who all helped to save Mr. Doucette's life. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**INTL. DAY FOR THE ERAD. OF POVERTY:
FOOD, HOUSING AND MED. ACCESS - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, which is this Sunday, October 17th. Too many Nova Scotians are suffering from poor food security, poor housing conditions, and inadequate access to proper medical care. Our province also has the highest rate of child poverty in Atlantic Canada.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing this day and to work collectively toward the eradication of poverty in our province of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**POTLOTEK FIRST NATION:
GREENHOUSE INSTALLATION - CONGRATS.**

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Potlotek First Nation in Richmond County was one of the first Indigenous communities in Atlantic Canada to install a greenhouse with a geothermal climate battery and sustainable in-ground heating system in order to address food insecurity year-round.

In 2021, Potlotek had their first growing season and worked with other local growers who provided gardening advice on best practices in our growing zone. The greenhouse was able to provide the community of Potlotek and some adjacent communities with fresh fruit and vegetables all Summer and Fall.

I want to congratulate Potlotek First Nation on their achievements to date and wish them continued success as they tackle this global issue locally.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

**GLASGOW FAMILY: FIRST AFRICAN-CDN. FAMILY FROM NS ON
TV GAME SHOW - CONGRATS.**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I want to stand today to acknowledge the Glasgow family from East Preston, which is the birthplace of the Preston township. They are a tenth-generation Indigenous African Canadian family who live on the same land on which their family has been since 1739.

This month, they had an opportunity to show the country how strong their family is. I am pleased to say that they are the first African Canadian family selected from Nova Scotia to appear on a televised game show. Ms. Connie Glasgow, the mom to captain Gary and Adrienne, along with their cousins Ruby Williams and Kevin Brooks, were very proud to represent their ancestors, family, and community on *Family Feud* on October 6 and 7, 2021. The Glasgow family were focused, determined, and humble as they competed and won their first round and took home \$10,000. They did all of Nova Scotia proud.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the members of this House join me in congratulating the Glasgow family on their win and unforgettable experience.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

**MI'KMAQ HISTORY MONTH:
CEREMONY AND CONSENSUS THEME - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, in October we celebrate Mi'kmaq History Month. While we reflect on the impact of residential schools and Truth and Reconciliation, there is a renewed urgency now to educate ourselves on what it means to be treaty people.

This year, Mi'kmaq History Month focuses on exploring treaties and treaty relationships. For generations, ancestors have entered into these treaties with other nations in a long-standing tradition of relationship making. These relationships, based in ceremony and consensus, protected ways of life and honoured reciprocity. We are all responsible to the treaties, and without oral histories, there would be no treaty rights today.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to consider their role and responsibilities as treaty people.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

**MAIN-À-DIEU:
RECIPIENT OF LT. GOV.'S COM. SPIRIT AWARD - CONGRATS.**

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the community of Main-à-Dieu, Cape Breton, for being chosen for the annual Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award. The Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award celebrates the power, strength, and diversity of vibrant communities across Nova Scotia. It profiles their achievements and increases their visibility through a formal recognition program.

Having visited this fishing community many times over the past few years, I can attest to their compassion, sense of pride, and all-around community spirit. It is a true honour to stand here today and take this opportunity to applaud the residents of Main-à-Dieu on their continued community involvement and dedication to building a more resilient and healthy community for all.

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

**MT. ST. VINCENT UNIV.:
HOSTING PASSENGERS AFTER 9/11 DISASTER - THANKS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: In September 2021, the world commemorated a solemn anniversary marking 20 years since the horrific attacks of 9/11. On a day when the world opened their hearts and communities to more than 40 diverted flights, my university at the time, and now my alma mater, Mount Saint Vincent University, started wondering how they could be of assistance.

Realizing there would not be enough hotel rooms to accommodate the thousands of travellers, Dr. Sheila Brown, then president, knew that her staff and students were up to the challenge of hosting a flight of 300 tired and shaken travellers from Manchester, England. A week into the start of school, with residences already at capacity, the Rosario Student Centre became a makeshift hostel with donated supplies from the Red Cross, military, and the Fairview-Clayton Park community.

Twenty years later, passengers from that flight are still reaching out to the Mount with messages of thanks for their kindness, compassion, and hospitality. This is a commendable example of how Nova Scotians are always quick to step up when others are in need or in crisis.

I would like to especially extend my personal thanks to Mount Saint Vincent University for showing the world what the community of Fairview-Clayton Park can accomplish in a time of need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**QUARMYNE, LILIONA:
OPENING OF NOCTURNE ARTS FESTIVAL - CONGRATS.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Tonight marks the opening of Nocturne, the Fall arts festival that inhabits Kjiptuk/Halifax and offers free accessible, professional, and community-made public art all over town for the next four days.

The theme of this year's Nocturne is Liminal and was developed by this year's curator, Liliona Quarmyne, a dancer, choreographer, actor, singer, activist, and very cool mom. Liminality is the occupying of a position at or on both sides of a boundary or threshold, or, as my colleague just said, the in-between space.

This seems particularly apt and innovative for where we find ourselves right now as a community. We are in the midst of a global health pandemic, we are at a critical threshold of climate change, and in both cases we can see where we've come from and a bit about where we're going.

At its best, art is a reflection of life and an influencer of what could be. It allows us to escape, but also challenges us to observe deeply the world around us and maybe motivates us to work at changing it.

I ask all of the members of this House to get out and take in some Nocturne events this week, and I offer congratulations to the entire Nocturne team.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

**CORMIER, CST. LAURA:
RECIP. OF RYAN AWARD FOR POLICE SERVS. - RECOG.**

HON. KIM MASLAND: I rise today to recognize Cst. Laura Cormier, who was awarded the Mothers Against Drunk Driving National Terry Ryan Memorial Award of Excellence in Police Services. Cst. Cormier is a dedicated police officer with almost 20 years of service to our community and has made enforcement of impaired driving laws a priority.

I'd like to commend Laura on her dedication to educating young people about the dangers of impaired driving. She started a TADD (Teens Against Drunk Driving) group at Liverpool Regional High School. She was also a Drug Abuse Resistance Education instructor for many years, and her commitment to MADD Canada's mission has been outstanding.

Cst. Cormier is an amazing member of our community and it's an honour to be able to stand here today and recognize her. I ask that all members please join me in congratulating Cst. Laura Cormier and thank her for all she does to keep our community safe.

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

**EDUC. COM. OF TANTALLON AREA:
EFFORTS DURING COVID-19 EPIDEMIC - THANKS**

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your new role.

The back-to-school bus can be a challenge year over year, no matter what the case is, but for the second time in two years, we went back to school with COVID-19 on the table. I just want to take a brief moment to acknowledge the students, families, teachers, early childhood educators, administrators, bus drivers, and volunteers in our school families in Tantallon, Hammonds Plains, and Middle Sackville.

Thank you for their work, thank you to the students for co-operating and buying in, and thank you to everybody who puts forward everything that they have to make the learning environment a safe and available place for our students.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

**FIRE PREVENTION WEEK:
SOUNDS OF FIRE SAFETY THEME - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today to recognize Fire Prevention Week, which took place October 3rd to 9th. This year's theme was Learn the Sounds of Fire Safety, which

reminded us that three loud beeps mean smoke or fire and, should we hear this, we must get out, call 911, and stay out.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all individuals within fire service, especially individuals in the volunteer and career fire service within the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, for the protection they provide when a fire does occur and their education advocacy on fire safety. I thank them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

SCHOONER *BLUENOSE*: CENTENARY OF LAUNCH - RECOG.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate a century in the making as we honour 100 years of a Canadian icon, the schooner *Bluenose*, launched in my hometown of Lunenburg on March 26, 1921. The legacy of the beloved *Bluenose* will be celebrated all year long by ambassadors and champions near and far. It is a true honour to be able to acknowledge 100 years of *Bluenose*, the Queen of the North Atlantic.

I ask members of the Legislature to join me in applause.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

POWER, PAT: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate you on your new role. You've never looked better.

Mr. Speaker, it is with profound sadness that I stand here today to speak of the passing of Pat Power. Pat was a family man, hard-working, caring and loving individual. I last saw Pat shortly after he was diagnosed with cancer. The diagnosis was surprising and terminal. Yet, as I sat at his kitchen table, he was cracking jokes and talking about his beautiful family.

Pat will be missed, and lots of love to his amazing wife Nancy and their entire family. May he rest in peace.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

CORRECT USE OF PRONOUNS: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment today to talk about the importance of pronouns. I deeply appreciate your remarks on this matter earlier.

Pronouns are one way that people can share their gender identity with others. You can't always know someone's pronouns by looking at them. It is a privilege not to have to worry about which pronouns someone might use for you based on how they perceive your gender. Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the simplest ways to show someone respect for their gender identity and foster an inclusive environment.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask all members of the House of Assembly to please join me in asking and respecting each other's pronouns.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

**MCCONNACHIE, ALEX:
COLLECTION OF COMM. DEVICES FOR NEEDY - THANKS**

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank Alex McConnachie of Lower Sackville. Alex, president of the Sackville Community Development Association, believes that phones are a source of safety, and that every adult should have their own phone or at least easy access to one.

Alex realized that not everyone has the means to own a phone, so over the past year and a half Alex has been collecting old phones, phone cards, computers, tablets, laptops and other devices to have them cleaned and given to members of the community who do not have access to any kind of communications link.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Alex McConnachie for his efforts in thinking of others in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**SMELTZER, BILL: THIRD PLACE IN GREAT HOWARD DILL
PUMPKIN CLASSIC - CONGRATS.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, autumn is upon us here in Nova Scotia and nothing says that more in the Annapolis Valley than the fields of pumpkins that dot our landscape. Can you imagine, though, seeing a pumpkin that weighs over 1,000 pounds? Well, that's not unusual for the participants of the annual Great Howard Dill Pumpkin Classic Contest held in Windsor. This competition has been held for 40 years and participants proudly present these massive pumpkins, the result of their effort and hard work.

This year I am proud to share that in the top three finalists at the Great Howard Dill Pumpkin Classic Contest we had a constituent and grower, Mr. Bill Smeltzer from New Minas, with a gigantic pumpkin that weighed an impressive 1,108 pounds.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Bill Smeltzer for growing this gigantic, prize-winning pumpkin and placing in the top three in the Great Howard Dill Pumpkin Classic Contest.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

HOUSING CRISIS: NEED FOR RENT CONTROL - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, the past three times that this House has met - or that I have been here when this House has met - I have started the session by ringing the alarm about the housing crisis, and today will be no different.

As it was in 2017, affordable housing, and rent control specifically, was the big issue in Dartmouth North this past election. Since then, many renters have called or visited my office, scared that rent control will end in February. The government has said it plans to keep rent control as long as the state of emergency is in place, but the health order needs to be amended to reflect this. Renters deserve that certainty and protection.

The housing crisis is multi-layered. There are people living outside in their car, in temporary shelters, and couch surfing. Some are housed but can't afford another rent increase and some live in unsafe conditions with nowhere else to go. Our solutions must also be multi-layered. Rent control is only one - albeit an important one - response to this crisis. We need not-for-profit and truly affordable housing, especially for those on fixed incomes, and, Mr. Speaker, we need it now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

**LACEY, LAURIE: SHARING KNOWLEDGE OF TRAD.
MI'KMAW PLANT MEDICINE - CONGRATS.**

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Laurie Lacey, traditional medicine maker, artist, writer, and naturalist. He has been involved with Mi'kmaq medicine, herbalism, and ethnobotany since 1974. His primary focus for many decades has been as an educator, sharing his knowledge of traditional plant medicine with Native and non-Native children and adults.

Mr. Lacey has delivered presentations, talks, workshops, and medicine walks. He has been credited with helping to spread interest in, and knowledge of, the traditions of Mi'kmaq medicines throughout and beyond eastern Canada and has been honoured as an herbal elder.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate and extend our gratitude to Mr. Lacey for guiding us on medicine walks, sharing knowledge of traditional medicines, and helping to connect Nova Scotians to the natural world.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

**KIRBY, B.J.: GRANDMOTHERS TO GRANDMOTHERS
CAMPAIGN WORK - RECOG.**

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize B.J. Kirby, a tireless volunteer from Cole Harbour who has for over 14 years devoted her time, energy, and resources to the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign.

In 2006, the Stephen Lewis Foundation launched the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign in response to the emerging crisis faced by African grandmothers as they struggled to raise millions of children whose parents died from AIDS-related illness. B.J. joined the Campaign in 2007 and has since worked tirelessly helping to raise funds in the community to support life enhancing programs run by African grandmothers.

The movement amplifies the voice and expertise of African grandmothers and shows the world that leadership by older women is critical in reclaiming hope and rebuilding resilience across communities. In the Spring of 2020, during the first lockdown and at a time when masks were unavailable, B.J. personally sewed hundreds of face masks which were sold with 100 per cent of the proceeds donated to the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign.

I ask members of the House of Assembly to join me in recognizing B.J. Kirby for her devotion to this incredible organization.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**DART. EAST ELECTION CANDIDATES:
COURAGE AND AMBITION - RECOG.**

HON. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize and acknowledge the outstanding Nova Scotians who put their names on a ballot in the last provincial election.

All of us in this House know the commitment and dedication that's required to put your name forward to serve your community. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work that they did. In particular, I want to acknowledge those in my community of Dartmouth East who put their names forward. I'd like to thank Tyler Colbourne, D'Arcy Poultney, and Sara Adams for putting their names on the ballot.

As everyone in this House understands, an election is no small task. It takes a lot of courage. It takes a lot of ambition just to put your name on that ballot, and I applaud those candidates for doing so. While we represented different Parties, and at times different perspectives, on the campaign trail, I know all of us are united in our mission to work towards a better Nova Scotia, both for the residents of East Dartmouth and for residents across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that everyone to join me in thanking all the candidates who put their name on a ballot - in particular, the candidates in Dartmouth East: Tyler Colbourne, D'Arcy Poultney, and Sara Adams.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**CAJEE, DR. ISMAIL: RECIPIENT OF
DRS. N.S. SENIOR MEMBERSHIP AWARD - RECOGNITION**

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity on this first time speaking to this House today to recognize a pillar of the health community in Nova Scotia, the recipient of the 2021 Doctors Nova Scotia Senior Membership Award and a friend, Dr. Ismail Cajee. For the last 24 years Dr. Cajee has been working in the emergency department at the QEII Health Sciences Centre, ensuring everyone who comes through the door gets seen no matter how busy he is.

He has also travelled to communities across Nova Scotia, often on short notice, so that emergency departments did not have to close.

He is a mentor to many people who come across him, with such energy for health care and problem-solving that it is inspiring. The Doctors Nova Scotia Senior Membership Award is acknowledgement of the amount of service this man has done for the people seeking emergency treatment across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize a Nova Scotian who has consistently stepped up and given a massive amount of time and energy to care for the people of this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**CHRIST CHURCH AND GRACE UNITED CHURCH:
HOSTING ELECTION DEBATES IN DARTMOUTH - THANKS**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Dartmouth's Christ Church and Grace United. In the past year we've been through - I don't have to remind anyone here - three government elections, at least in the HRM.

Today I'd like to take a moment to recognize the work done by these two churches to promote democracy in Dartmouth. At each election they provide a stage - and I can say this from experience - an exhaustive interrogation often lasting several hours, of prospective candidates and Party policies. Even during the pandemic, they found a way to safely host these evenings to ensure that Dartmouth residents had the opportunity to hear from each candidate in a fair and balanced forum that was also available online.

I am indebted to these churches for providing this service which allows residents to really listen to and consider each candidate as they relate to a range of issues that affect those constituents daily on topics from the climate crisis to housing, to poverty and beyond. These churches provide an invaluable opportunity for Dartmouth residents to hear from their prospective representatives.

I ask all members to join me in thanking Christ Church and Grace United for continuing to provide this vital democratic service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

**SACKVILLE-UNIACKE EDUC. COM.:
HARD WORK DURING PANDEMIC - RECOG.**

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge all those students of Sackville-Uniacke who, after two years of much uncertainty, finally headed back to their first day of school on September 7th.

I can't stress enough the commitment of our teachers, who have spent much of their time dedicated to finding new ways of teaching students during this difficult time and, additionally, to the special educators, educational assistants, child learning intervenors and therapists who helped to ensure the success of all of our students.

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to the custodial staff of our schools as well, who have been working tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic keeping our schools clean.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for all our hard-working teachers and support staff, and to wish all the students in Nova Scotia a safe and successful school year this year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**KHATTAR, CHARBEL: DONATING PIZZAS TO ESSENTIAL WORKERS
IN CLAYTON PARK - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a business owner who helped my office achieve our initiative to give back to essential workers at long-term care homes. Charbel Khattar is the owner of PZZA.CO in Clayton Park. Charbel has been an owner for the past three years but has been involved with the business for 15 years and is excited to be opening his fourth location. Last Spring, Charbel donated over 400 pizzas to essential workers. He also coordinated donations with my fellow member the Honourable Patricia Arab and former colleague the Honourable Lena Diab.

Charbel continues to give back to his community by generously donating to multiple organizations and says that it brings him joy to help others.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing Charbel for his generosity and kind heart and applaud him for his passion for community involvement and volunteerism.

THE SPEAKER: I'd like to remind the member, and indeed all members of the House, that you are not to use personal or proper names of members who are sitting in the Legislature.

The honourable member for Kings North.

**WOO, NATHAN AND BENJAMIN:
RECIPS. OF ROYAL CONSERV. OF MUSIC AWARDS - CONGRATS.**

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate two outstanding young brothers, Nathan and Benjamin Woo from Kentville. Nathan is 11 years old and is this year's winner of the gold medal in Atlantic Canada from the Royal Conservatory of Music for Grade 3 piano. Benjamin is nine years old and he was last year's winner of the gold medal in Atlantic Canada from the Royal Conservatory of Music for Grade 1 piano.

Nathan has been playing the piano for six or seven years and Benjamin for four years. The piano is a challenging instrument and a difficult skill to master.

Please join me today in congratulating Nathan and Benjamin Woo on receiving these prestigious awards from the Royal Conservatory of Music.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**GAUDET, KENNETH: RECIP. OF CSAP'S
PRIX DE RECONNAISSANCE - CONGRATS.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, aujourd'hui je tiens à féliciter Kenneth Gaudet, le récipiendaire du Prix de Reconnaissance décerné par le Conseil scolaire acadien provincial. Après sa retraite, M. Gaudet voulait continuer sa contribution au futur de CSAP et s' à présenter aux élections du Conseil scolaire en 2000. Élu, il a apporté au CSAP ses années d'expérience dans l'enseignement, y compris ses expériences au ministère de l'Éducation et à la direction du Conseil scolaire Clare-Argyle.

Immédiatement, il a assumé un rôle de leadership au CSAP, élu par ses collègues conseillers à la vice-présidence pour deux mandats et à la présidence pour 17 mandats. Au fil des années, il a eu un impact considérable sur ses comités et ses initiatives. Je tiens non seulement à féliciter M. Gaudet, mais je tiens à le remercier pour son travail au CSAP ainsi que son engagement au sein de nombreuses organisations communautaires.

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to congratulate Kenneth Gaudet, the recipient of the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial Prix de Reconnaissance. After his retirement, Mr. Gaudet wanted to continue contributing to the future of the CSAP and ran for its council in 2000. Successful, he brought to the CSAP his years of teaching experience as well as experience at the Department of Education and as an executive director of the Clare-Argyle School Board.

There, he immediately took on a leadership role, elected by his fellow councillors to two terms as vice-chair and 17 terms as chair. Over the years he has had a significant impact on the CSAP's committees and initiatives. I want to congratulate him for his work at the CSAP and his years of service in many community organizations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

WOOD, SARA/MCNEIL, PAM: LAUNCH OF GIVING PANTRY - THANKS

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize an amazing partnership in our community: Sara Wood, host of Life School House in Enfield and Pam McNeil, owner of Cup of Soul in Elmsdale. They have teamed up to launch the Giving Pantry.

This community pantry, located at the Cup of Soul, is a place where people can drop off donations and those in need can pick them up. This will be replenished daily, and community members can find out through the Giving Pantry Facebook page what has been added.

Materials for the community pantry box were donated by East Hants Glass and J.A. MacRae construction.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give a very special thank you to Sara Wood and Pam McNeil for organizing this important project for our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**LETTICE, CLINT: VOL. WORK FOR SYDNEY MINES & DIST.
COMMUNITY CENTRE - THANKS**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize Clint Lettice, board member of the Sydney Mines & District Community Centre. Clint has been a tireless volunteer and leader in our community, ensuring that children and adults alike are able to use our wonderful community centre, from ensuring that the girls in our community have their own beautiful dressing room to a completely renovated community room available for use for many community events. Finally, the addition of a professional set of boards in the rink, which will extend the useful life of that rink for many years to come.

I had an opportunity to tour the facility and witness first-hand the amazing improvements made in that area with some of my caucus colleagues. Please join me in thanking and congratulating Clint Lettice for his tireless work volunteering in our community.

[2:00 p.m.]

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

The honourable Leader of the NDP.

GARY BURRILL: In accordance with Rule 43(1), I'm making a motion for an emergency debate.

Over 120,000 people in Nova Scotia rent. More than 23,000 households spend more than half of their income every month on housing. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Halifax has gone up 20 per cent in the last year. Across the province, homelessness continues to increase.

A 2021 count in West Hants, Kings, and Annapolis counties found 247 people either at risk of or experiencing homelessness. A 2018 count in the CBRM counted 278 individuals experiencing homelessness. An HRM count for this year identified 448 individuals in this situation.

The Progressive Conservative Government was elected on a platform which included no provision for new investment in housing. Yesterday they delivered a Throne Speech that mentioned blueberries more times than it mentioned housing.

Therefore, I wish to move that the business of this House be set aside for the purpose of discussing a matter of urgent public importance. That matter is the clear and present emergency posed by the housing crisis.

THE SPEAKER: Prior to the opening of today's sitting, I received the honourable Leader of the NDP's notice of intention to move for an emergency debate, as required by Rule 43(2). Under Rule 43(4), I'm now required to issue a Speaker's Ruling to decide whether or not it is proper to be discussed for emergency debate.

SPEAKER'S RULING

There are two factors set out in Rule 43(4)(a). The first factor is the extent to which the matter concerns the administrative responsibilities of government or could come within the scope of ministerial action. The second factor is whether the matter is likely to be debated by the House by any other means within a reasonable time.

I've considered both of these factors. Under the first factor, it's clear that housing falls within the administrative responsibilities of government and could come within the scope of ministerial action. However, it is clear under the second factor that this matter will come before the House within a reasonable time and through multiple means.

First, as I announced earlier today, the topic for this evening's late debate is the homeless crisis and the creation of housing solutions. Second, during today's daily routine, six private members' bills on the subject matter of housing were introduced. Finally, the housing crisis was also raised yesterday during the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

In sum, there are multiple and different means through which the House of Assembly is already seized with the housing crisis: the upcoming late debate this evening, the bills introduced earlier today, and the ongoing debate on the Address in Reply to the Throne Speech.

As such, the housing crisis is not just likely to be debated within a reasonable time, but rather it is certainly to be debated later, including at the very time that the emergency debate would have been held - that is, at the moment of interruption today.

Although I am dismissing today's motion for emergency debate, this ruling is without prejudice to bring forward a new motion to debate the housing crisis at a future date during this session. For example, in the event there is a change in the circumstances surrounding the housing crisis, any member is welcome to bring forward a fresh motion.

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

THE SPEAKER: We're beginning at 2:05 p.m. and we will finish at 2:55 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: HOUSING CRISIS - IMMEDIATE ACTION

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, the housing crisis is what is on everybody's minds. Congratulations to the new government. They have a plan to fix health care, but they also need to deal with the very immediate needs of Nova Scotians in finding safe and affordable housing. Winter is coming.

I'd like to ask the Premier, as we start off this session: What will he do to address the immediacy of the housing crisis in Nova Scotia?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question on this important topic. There is a housing crisis in this province and, sadly, it didn't start on August 18th - it started years ago.

We know that Nova Scotians are concerned about their ability to afford and access shelter. It's on the minds of Nova Scotians. It's on our minds and we're putting forward a plan that's a proper solution to make sure that we ease the anxiety of Nova Scotians. It will take time, there are many parts to it, but we are very focused on it.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, the decade-old problem here in this province was trying to attract population to this province. Our population is now booming. We have more and more people coming here in record numbers, especially from other provinces, more than ever before.

We had plans and investments, before the election, invested into the system. We expect those to be upheld, but we have to have some immediate solutions for the very immediate need. We have a state of emergency in place right now, but we need protection for people, especially before the Winter months that are before us.

My question to the Premier is: Today, will he consider extending out rent caps or some type of rental protection for tenants beyond the state of emergency?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'd tell the member that all options are on the table, for sure. We can't have the renters of this province paying the price for government inaction - the inaction of many layers of government - for a number of years. We don't want renters to pay the price for that.

When we put forward our solution in the coming days, there will be multiple moving parts of that. The main thing is that we need more supply. We need housing supply in this province. We're very focused on that. We put forward initiatives to attract young tradespeople.

We know we have to build more housing supply. We also know we have to protect the renters of this province, and when we put forward our program it will have many parts to it.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, what can't wait for days ahead is the need to address the people who are on the street, the people who are in the tent encampments. This isn't just about building more supply.

My question to the Premier is: Will he provide the right supports that are needed right now, for people? Will he provide the supports for mental health? Will he provide the supports for social workers on the street, people who need to go out and help people?

It's getting close to Winter. This isn't just about building supply. We can't wait days. As my honourable colleague said, this is an emergency.

My question to the Premier is: Today in the House, will he commit to more supports for those on the street who need it the most?

THE PREMIER: Yes, we will be committing supports for sure. We feel the urgency and we're very pleased that the members opposite who sat in government for eight years now feel the same urgency that many Nova Scotians have felt for so long.

Unfortunately, we can't fix eight years of neglect in eight weeks, but I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, we're sure going to try.

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

PREM.: HOUSING CRISIS - ADDRESS

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, our caucus was recently contacted by a person living in the HRM who spoke about how their rent for their one-bedroom apartment was taking about half of their income. These are their words: They are "freezing and starving just to occupy a space."

Mr. Speaker, so many people are already paying 50 per cent of their income, sometimes more, for their rent, and once the rent cap is removed they are going to be freezing and starving and maybe without occupying a space.

Now the Premier says that he feels the urgency and we've heard the Premier say this many times. Frankly, we are not primarily concerned about what the Premier feels. What we are primarily concerned about is what the Premier is going to do.

My question to the Premier is: What is he going to do for everybody who is living half an inch, today, from being on the street?

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell the member that I appreciate the question. This is a very serious issue. I know the member likes to kind of grandstand and make it a bit about himself, but this is about Nova Scotians.

What the Premier will do, what this government will do is put forward real solutions. We're not interested in a sound bite that grabs a headline. We're actually interested in real solutions. We've gone to work on that. We'll put our plan forward.

We recognize the anxiety Nova Scotians are feeling. We feel it too. We'll do the best we can, but we feel we'll act on it.

GARY BURRILL: Far too important a matter for the trading of mere personal invective. When the Premier says that he's interested in supply, surely, he understands that there are particular forms of supply that are particularly needed. Recently, someone who lives in the constituency I serve contacted us and said this: We don't need more \$2000-a-month one-bedroom units. We need affordable apartments based on what low-income households can reasonably afford.

I want to ask the Premier the question he failed to answer in the Throne Speech yesterday: What is he actually going to do to increase the supply of truly affordable, accessible housing in our province?

THE PREMIER: It's a good example of a lack of understanding of the complexities of the issue. We need supply at all levels. A \$2,000-a-month apartment can be moved into by somebody who may vacate an apartment that's more affordable for somebody else. For the member to suggest that there is only supply that's needed at one level just shows the member really doesn't understand the issue.

We understand the issue. We will put forward real solutions. We're not interested in the sound bites that the member is interested in. We're interested in serving Nova Scotians, and that's what we'll do.

GARY BURRILL: Let me tell you what I do understand. I do understand that when you walk up Chebucto Road past Dublin, there are 24 people living out in the park because there's nowhere else to go. I understand that there are 400 more like them in the HRM. I understand that if you go to Kings County or Annapolis County or Hants County, there's

another 200-and-a-half there. When you get to the CBRM, there's another couple of hundred, and even more than that in Cape Breton.

I want to say to the Premier: It's far too important a matter for us to worry about personal back-and-forth reciprocal diminishment. In this country, where it's getting colder every morning, where they're in their ninth week now of governing and nothing appreciably has changed, what is he actually going to do to see that people are out of tents in Nova Scotia and under roofs?

THE PREMIER: We're going to work to give them shelter, that's what we're going to do. We're going to do something that no government in this province has done for 12 years. We're actually going to focus on the problem and real solutions, and not political antics.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

HOUSING: NSAHC RECOMMENDATIONS - IMPLEMENT

LORELEI NICOLL: I'm going to give the Premier a break - my question is for the Minister of Housing.

The Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission provided a doable road map to follow what had been committed to by the previous government and this current government. What recommendations have been actioned for immediate implementation during the first two months of this government's mandate, and will they follow through on all previous commitments?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'd like to thank the member for the question. We've certainly been looking very closely at the Affordable Housing Commission's recommendations. As the member may know, there is the quick start initiative, which has been partially implemented. We look to implement that.

As far as exactly how many of the commission's recommendations we will implement, I expect we'll implement all 17, but I can't predict that. Some of them have implications for our municipal partners, so we need to discuss that with those municipal partners in terms of exactly how those recommendations are implemented.

LORELEI NICOLL: I'll ask the Minister this: Will the Province bring in amendments - in those discussions he's had - to the HRM Charter as recommended in the report, and what specific amendments will we expect to see in regard to the HRM Charter?

JOHN LOHR: I think the answer is yes. I don't want to foreshadow what those amendments will be. I know there were two bills raised this afternoon about inclusionary zoning. I will note that issue has been on the table for the government for two past

governments - the McNeil government and the past government - since 2016. We are looking at that. We're looking at other amendments.

[2:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DCS: HOMELESS SENIORS - PLAN TO ADDRESS

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the front page of *The ChronicleHerald* read: "Homeless seniors bracing for winter." I will table that.

The article highlights the heartbreaking reality of seniors in our province. With temperatures decreasing and Winter coming, the crisis is now reaching a life-or-death situation.

My question is to the Minister of Community Services: What is the government's plan to get our homeless seniors out of the cold before the onset of Winter?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for this very important question. I think we're all very well aware of the homelessness situation across this province. We are aware of all demographics. The Department of Community Services has been working closely with service providers across this whole province and all constituencies that are experiencing homelessness.

We have seen some progress in this. We will continue to work with individuals, because we know at the end of the day the best thing for anyone is to have a home where they feel stable and a sense of belonging. That is what we will continue to do.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the question. (Interruption) Oh, sorry, the answer. (Laughter) I thank the minister for the answer.

The reality is that the province takes on an extensive responsibility for housing. Temperatures are decreasing, Winter is coming, and our senior citizens are living on the street.

Through you, Mr. Speaker: What is the government's plan? What are they going to do to support these seniors to allow them to live in a safe, secure environment and to provide them with wraparound services, not just a roof over their head?

KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, a follow-up to that is that we are aware that individuals can apply for the Canada-Nova Scotia Targeted Housing Benefit, which you can apply for.

Look, we all know we are experiencing homelessness across this province. We will continue to work with our service providers. I ask each and every one of you to take this issue very seriously. Reach out to me. I've had no one yet in this Chamber on the Opposition side reach out to me about this (Interruption) Oh, excuse me - I did have one. That's right.

I want to work with you. All levels of government own this issue. We need to work together and keep focus on the common denominator, which is the individuals. Please know that I am accessible. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Just one point that I want to bring forward: if you're talking to a member on the opposite side, not to refer to them as "you."

The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

SLTC: SINGLE-BED ROOM PLAN - CLARIFY

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, in August 2020 the Progressive Conservatives pledged to add 2,500 single-bed rooms immediately to long-term care. I'll table their Party's release.

January 2021, same deal: The then-Opposition Leader commits to building at least 2,500 new single rooms. I'll table that release.

August 5th: The Tory Leader says the plan is to build at least 2,500 new single-room long-term care beds - and I'll table that as well.

We have multiple instances of the Progressive Conservatives pledging to build single-room long-term care beds. Mr. Speaker, the issue, of course, is what do they mean by building 2,500 new single-bed rooms?

My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care: Do they mean building brand-spanking-new bedrooms, or do they mean renovating some existing rooms?

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I'll just remind the member that it's the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

We are very proud of the fact that we committed to building and renovating to make sure that we have 2,500 long-term care beds above and beyond what was offered up in the last 12 years. We got elected on that promise, so I'm very proud of the fact that this government put forward a solution a year before the election was called, to unclog the system where we have over 400 seniors in acute care beds taking up space in our hospitals when they need to be in long-term care.

Under that previous government we have people in hotels, living there when they should be in long-term care, so we plan on renovating and building 2,500 beds.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at the Tories' election platform. First, it says they'll "Create over 2,500 New Single Rooms" - create, not build. Then with the same document the language changes again. Now they're saying, "Immediately renovating and building over 2,500 new single rooms." I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, that's backed up by the minister's mandate letter, which tasks her to renovate and build over 2,500 new, single-bed rooms over three years, but by this point they've moved away from their original pledge, but they've added a timeline. That brings us to yesterday's Speech from the Throne, which says they will build new, single-bed, long-term care rooms - no number, no timeline. I'll table that.

My question to the minister is: Given these multiple inconsistencies from August of last year until just yesterday, can the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care please clarify why is there no commitment to the number of new bed builds and no time commitment in the Speech from the Throne for this action?

BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, what we intend to do is to give 2,500 seniors a place to live, instead of out on the streets, in acute care beds, and in hotel rooms - something the previous government did not commit to doing.

For a point of clarity, we put this plan out a year before the election was called. There is going to be some renovation of some beds that will give people a room. We're going to build beds. It's going to be a combination of both, something that that government failed to promise and failed to do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

STATUS OF WOMEN - LACK OF HOUSING: INVESTMENT - COMMIT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act. In a recent op-ed, Shiva Nourpanah, the executive director of the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, wrote that a lack of housing options "is a key factor preventing women from leaving abusive relationships, and in many cases contributes to their choice to return to their abusers after they have left." I'll table that.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister commit, as only she can, as a member of the Executive Council, to making the investments needed today to ensure high rents and lack of housing do not leave women in abusive situations?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for this question, knowing very well how passionate the member is about this issue, as well as are all of us in this Chamber.

Currently, the Department of Community Services is providing \$100,000 in funding to four organizations to come up with a plan for a hub for 100 women and children, so please stay tuned for that endeavour that we are seeking.

Of course, we're constantly working with our different service providers in ensuring that there's always a safe place for women and children in this province. Thank you.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding that investment, Nourpanah goes on to point out that the housing crisis is also leaving women and children in transition houses for longer periods of time. Even when families are ready to move on, they cannot find permanent, affordable housing. Instead, what service providers are seeing across the province is that women and children are frequently moving into temporary housing like motels or even tents.

Mr. Speaker, given this reality, and notwithstanding the funding that has already been committed, does the Minister for the Status of Women think that more needs to be done? If so, what is it? Otherwise, women and children leaving abusive situations will continue to be shuffled from transition houses into motel rooms and tents.

KARLA MACFARLANE: As a follow-up to the member, Mr. Speaker, of course I think this is extremely important and addressing it has proven to be layered and complex. Everyone's needs are certainly different, but certainly we continue to work with our service providers. Just recently, in the last couple of weeks, we were able to place a number of female individuals and we will continue to do that.

I also would like to remind the Chamber here, too, that there are rent supplements. If you think someone is in jeopardy that they can . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. It's noisy in the House. Let the minister finish, please.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: This is a reminder of the rental supplements. That is one initiative, but there are many. If the member would like to sit down with me and discuss those, I'd be more than happy. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: HEALTH CARE STAFFING SHORTAGE - ADDRESS

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Back to the plan to fix health care, my colleague asked about the promise for 2,500 new beds in the system which we expect to be in place in three years. We also had a bold promise that the new government would hire 2,000 more support staff - nurses and continuing care assistants.

I want to ask the Premier: When will those positions be filled and are they above and beyond the vacancies that exist in the system? Is it 2,000 incremental to the vacancies? When do the people expect to have that in place?

THE PREMIER: I want to thank our health care workers who have been through a lot without the support that's been necessary for them. In fact, I did thank them when I toured the province, and looked them in the eye and listened to their concerns.

We need more health care workers. We need them across the spectrum of health care professions. That's our focus. That's what Dr. Kevin Orrell is focusing on. I have to say that there's a lot of work to do. There's even more than I thought.

I heard the member during the election when he said that there were 80 doctors waiting to come to Nova Scotia that would be here this Fall. Sadly, when I fact-checked that, there weren't 80 doctors.

We won't come up with just talking points. We actually need real health care professionals in this province. We're focused on finding them. Dr. Kevin Orrell is focused on finding them. We will find them and we will get them here to help our health care crisis.

IAIN RANKIN: A lot of rhetoric there, but I'm not hearing the plan on when they actually will be here, Mr. Speaker. I want to hear a plan on how they're actually going to be able to find 2,000 workers during a national shortage of health care workers across the whole country.

I want to ask if the government is prepared to increase seats at our universities or our Nova Scotia Community College like we proposed during the campaign? I want to commend them on the new Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment. We want to see work done at that new office to ensure that we have these positions.

The question is: When will we have the 2,000 in place, and are they prepared to increase seats at our universities and post-secondary schools?

THE PREMIER: As soon as possible, Mr. Speaker. That's the answer to the question. The member - the former Premier - knows the difficulties in recruiting.

I will say this: I do enjoy the talk of plans and the questions about plans because it means that finally, after eight years, that caucus has figured out that a plan is important. We never saw one for eight years. They've seen more plans from us in eight weeks than Nova Scotians saw from them in eight years. Nova Scotians are taking note.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on a new question.

PREM.: CCA INCREASE - ENSURE

IAIN RANKIN: We're still waiting for that plan. We see these bold aspirations. We see the promises. It's in the Throne Speech, but we're waiting. They've had eight weeks, like the Premier said, to come out with the plans. Where's the training required?

These are programs that are two and sometimes four years to have nurses, to ensure that we upgrade people who are wanting to get into the different professions of health care to make sure that they fulfill that promise of 2,000 incremental. I'll take the non-answer that it is 2,000 above and beyond the vacancies in the system, Mr. Speaker.

We signed a collective agreement in the time that I was Premier for CCAs who work for the Nova Scotia Health Authority. I want to ask the Premier: Will he commit to the CCAs across the whole province that they will get at least that increase and ensure in the next collective agreement that he'll shift to make sure that there are more full-time positions and fewer casual in the next collective agreement?

THE PREMIER: Yes and yes. We're only interested in moving forward. We're not interested in moving backwards. We know the challenge at hand. We are focused on addressing the challenge. I'll hold myself accountable to that. We'll come up with the plans. We'll table them for this House.

I searched the Premier's Office when I moved in, looking for these plans from the prior government. They didn't exist. We're creating them and anyone who's been paying attention knows we have been putting out detailed, costed plans for over a year. If the minister and the Leader of the Opposition want to see more plans, stay tuned because they are coming, too. That's our focus.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, the only Parties in this House that seem to want to move forward are both Opposition Parties. He's the only one in this House talking about the last eight years.

I want to ask the Premier: We had a historic \$10-a-day child care agreement that we signed with the federal government, and we looked through the platform and in the mandate letters and there's no mention on how they would provide more pay to early

childhood educators, Mr. Speaker. There is one commitment to people in the trades that they would reduce their income tax, less than \$50,000 if they're under the age of 30.

We want to make sure that other professions that are largely dominated by females and not males like they are in the trades - my question to the Premier today is: Will the Premier commit to increasing the pay for ECEs, like we did, as part of that agreement? We put forward a plan to make sure there was a full review on their pay. I want to ask the Premier if he can commit to ensure that ECEs are increased in the pay this year.

[2:30 p.m.]

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, this is an incredibly important issue. Access to child care - incredibly important. We hear that from Nova Scotians.

What the former government did was accept what Ottawa offered. They offered a deal. Most people would have signed that. We signed that we'll honour that. If the former Premier is concerned that there are deficiencies in the deal he signed, he probably should have thought of that before he put a pen on the paper.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

EECD: CHILD CARE AGREEMENT - COMMIT

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, again on the topic of early childhood education, we did sign a historic deal at the time, and it is still considered the best in the country.

It was a concern for me and a concern for many of the ECE workers across Nova Scotia that helped design that deal that there was nothing in the Speech from the Throne or also in the mandate letter for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

My question is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. I want to hear her commitment to the plan and to the support for the ECE workers across Nova Scotia.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you for the question, member. This is a really important issue for Nova Scotians. We are very excited to be implementing the early learning and child care agreement. We are very much committed to having that roll out successfully. Affordable, accessible, quality child care is vital for Nova Scotian families and Nova Scotian children, and we are absolutely doing everything we can to implement that agreement and we'll be living up to the commitments under it.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, again through you to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. I am happy to hear that response because in

the mandate letter there was no mention of early childhood, there was no mention of inclusion, there was no mention of many of the supports that a lot of the stakeholders around the province have been looking for. They have been reaching out to me, concerned that with not having that in the mandate letter was the loss of the work and the advocacy that they have been doing over the years, so specifically I'll ask about inclusion.

Not seeing that again, or very little in the mandate letter, and as a government we made significant investments over our last mandate, my question to the minister is: Can the minister update the House on what funding is going to be available and what investments are going to be made in inclusive education?

BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you again for the question, member. I will say that I want to comment on the fact that it was not addressed in the mandate letter. The reality is that our operations do continue within the province.

On an ongoing basis we have many things that we address in Education and Early Childhood Development that are not articulated in the mandate letter, that represent a pivot in areas of focus, but we continue on with the work that we are doing, which includes developing practices around and policies around early child care and also investing in that to support the needs of Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MUN. AFFS. & HOUSING: HOUSING CRISIS - PLANS

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The minister recently said that the current housing shortage is, and I quote, "the single largest crisis since World War II." I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, the platform that this Progressive Conservative government ran on included no new money for housing, zero dollars.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please explain how the government plans to address the single largest crisis since World War II with no new investment in affordable housing?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'd like to thank the member for that question. I'd like to point out that I said, "in my opinion." There may be other opinions on that. I do feel that it is a significant - the single most - the largest crisis in housing since World War II.

In terms of our plans, we have a number of plans we're working on. I look forward to announcing them in the coming days, and certainly the quick-start initiatives are part of that. We're not ready yet to announce them, but there are a number of different plans we're working on with a number of community groups and municipal partners. Those are all in the works, and it will be addressed.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Based on the Progressive Conservative platform, it seems like their big idea to address the housing crisis is to sell off public land to private developers. This is what happened when the Liberal government cancelled the Bloomfield project and the site was sold off. People in North End Halifax are still waiting for affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker, selling off public property to big developers has not created the affordable housing our communities need. Why does the minister think that this will work now?

JOHN LOHR: I'd like to thank the member for that question. The member is correct, in a sense. That is part of my mandate letter, to look at what lands the government owns that can be used for housing. I can assure the member that the focus is on finding places where this can be used for the type of housing that's needed in our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

H&W: SURGICAL BACKLOG - TIMELINE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. I want to congratulate the minister on her new post - a very challenging office, and I do want to commend her on taking that challenge on.

This government has promised to address surgical backlogs by establishing 24/7 operating rooms.

I'd like to ask the minister when Nova Scotians can expect 24/7 operating rooms to be in effect here in the province.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: As you can imagine, in the first several weeks of our mandate we continue to work with the Department of Health and Wellness and understand our resources and where best to place them. We do continue to meet surgical wait times for many of the surgeries that we require, and moving forward you will expect to see more about that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, it's an extremely ambitious goal to have 24/7 surgeries happening in the province of Nova Scotia. I have talked to medical professionals who do not think that's possible, simply because of staffing.

I'm wondering if the minister can inform the House what the staffing levels need to be to run 24/7 surgeries and if she could provide us with those numbers for anaesthetists, nurses, and other assistant medical practitioners that are required in surgeries.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, we continue to look at the staffing requirements throughout this province for a number of services. I don't have those numbers for you today. We are currently focusing on getting a better understanding of where we are in terms of staffing. The 24/7 OR model is something that we will look into, and extended hours are certainly on the table.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

ANS AFFS.: MIN. - CONSULTATION

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, congratulations for your seat. Welcome and congratulations to all who were successful in this past election.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs have stated on numerous occasions that they are actively consulting and listening to our communities. In fact, just last week the minister told the media that he had been consulting with myself and the member for Preston.

Mr. Speaker, we have not been engaged. We have not been consulted. We have not been invited to meet, despite the minister stating otherwise to the media.

Will the minister come clean and admit that he has not consulted with the four Black members in this House?

HON. PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. May I take this opportunity to also congratulate you on being elected as Speaker of the House, and the two Deputy Speakers, the honourable member for Preston and the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

Mr. Speaker, with reference to the member and the question, sometimes when something is said in the media and something is printed in the media the words get contorted, and sometimes the words that perhaps I did not use - I cannot remember any time saying that I consulted. I certainly had a few chats for two or three minutes with some of the members and I continue and will continue to work with them going forward because of their experience and knowledge in the African Nova Scotian community.

TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the minister for that answer. My supplementary question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to having discussions with myself and the other three members in this Chamber?

PAT DUNN: Mr. Speaker, I have the full intention of relying on the expertise of any member in the House, regardless of what side of the House they are on, going forward in my position as Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Cumberland North.

H&W - NURSES: FULL-TIME POS. - DISCREPANCY

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Health and Wellness. I think we would all agree in this House that our health care workers are working in a state of crisis and that they are all overworked and we really, all of us, owe them a debt of gratitude.

In Cumberland County we are experiencing a huge shortage of registered nurses. In the past few months, we have seen our surgical unit closed. We have seen our ICU beds decreased. Thankfully, they are back up to capacity, but now we have a huge shortage of nurses in our emergency department.

To keep our regional hospital open, four registered nurses have been mandated to move from Springhill, from All Saints, leaving them with a reduction of hours. Despite being told there are nine full-time vacancies for RNs at the Regional, three weeks ago a couple of registered nurses applied and were told there were no full-time positions.

My question to the minister is: Can the minister tell us why there is a discrepancy between there's nine full-time positions but registered nurses are not being offered full-time positions?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, the vacancies may not be permanent vacancies based on staffing issues within the facility. I don't have that level of detail with me but certainly we continue to look at the health and human resources required. There was a reallocation of staff to support the regional hospital.

There may be a variety of reasons why they are not permanent full-time jobs, but full-time hours available in that facility.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I think the reality is if we're going to attract and retain more registered nurses, we have to be able to offer them full-time positions. We can't expect them to leave full-time positions to come to our facilities and not be offered full-time.

We know the current processes in place don't work. For example, I had a registered nurse move from Ontario - she was an emergency room nurse as well - and applied. No one got back to her. There's a very centralized approach through a website.

We have a very non-human contact approach in our management in a very human contact profession and it doesn't work.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to addressing these concerns by allowing local decision-making, where local regional managers can pick up the phone and have conversations to hire, to recruit registered nurses?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, when we toured the province and we talked to health care workers across this province, we did hear a number of issues. One of them related to the recruitment process in terms of some of the red tape that was required. Certainly, the leadership team has been tasked with reducing the red tape and ensuring that people are hired in a timely manner.

You can expect that there will be some appreciable change in that area in the coming weeks. We want to ensure that any health care worker who wants to come to this province has more than enough work than they need in order to support Nova Scotians.

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

EECD - DUC D'ANVILLE: COVID-19 EXPOSURE - CLOSURE

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development - and I'd like to welcome her to the Chamber and, through you, to her position.

[2:45 p.m.]

A school in my riding, Duc d'Anville Elementary, recently closed after days of pressure from parents and community to do so. These children are unvaccinated, their parents were scared, and I'm curious, through you to the minister, why the school was not closed for three days for a deep cleaning, as was the previous protocol.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We understand parents are concerned. We hear their concerns. I as a parent feel those concerns myself. I have children in the school system.

I can say that the school closure did not arise as a result of pressure from parents but as a result of continuing ongoing work with Public Health to consider the health needs of the students and the specific epidemiology of COVID-19.

We are continuing to work with Public Health to make sure we make the right response to COVID-19 in the schools. We know that the safest and best place for students is in schools for their emotional, physical, and intellectual well-being, but we will close schools when we are assured by Public Health and when we are directed by Public Health as a last resort that that's the necessary step to take.

PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's answer. I do find it hard to follow a logic of epidemiology and Public Health advice when we're talking about

a school that has zero vaccination and is following the same protocols that were in place, essentially the same as it was six, eight months ago when the protocol was to close for a deep cleaning.

I question the minister: Why did it take pressure from parents going to the media and a decline in enrolment of 50 per cent of students before that school was finally closed?

BECKY DRUHAN: I will reiterate yet again, the school was not closed due to pressure from parents. The school was closed as a result of consideration by Public Health of the epidemiology and the factors relating to that school.

The situation this year has in fact changed. We have a significantly vaccinated population now, which provides protection in our communities, which also provides protection in our schools. We are continuing to work with Public Health and the excellent advice that they've given us and kept us safe to date as we move forward this year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

NR&R: CRYSTAL CRESCENT BEACH - OPEN

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. We can all agree exercise and fresh air are extremely important for our physical and mental health, especially now in times of COVID-19.

More and more, we are seeing youth turn away from the outdoors and turn on their screens. This past weekend, provincial beaches and parks were closed down across Nova Scotia, cutting off access for hundreds of thousands of Nova Scotians. Will the minister commit to the resources needed, like plowing, to keep these parks open and accessible to all Nova Scotians all year round?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I quite agree that exercise and fresh air is needed by not just the youth but maybe us in relation as well here in the House. I certainly will commit to the member to have a review of the policy of why things are being locked down and what assets can we use in our department and talk with staff to see multi-season use within our department.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Respectfully to the minister, and I know the Speaker himself had an issue with beaches and parks not being open in the past, but respectfully, this is a review of something that the department has said has been going on for years now. It's quite simply - listen. You're in government now.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Crystal Crescent Beach was one of those beaches that was shut down. For those of you who don't know, and I'll gladly take the minister down to the beach, it's one of the most accessed beaches in all of Halifax. They gated it across, so if you have accessibility issues, you can't actually get into it, but if you don't have accessibility issues, you can get into it.

My question to the minister is: Can you look into specifically opening up Crystal Crescent Beach, which tens of thousands of Nova Scotians visit all year?

TORY RUSHTON: It's very important for us to have access throughout not just Crystal Crescent Beach but all of our parks throughout our whole beautiful province. There are many parks that we could be accessing.

Just a reminder that the past year review was from his government, Mr. Speaker, but I will continue to make sure that review does get completed. I will reach out and communicate to the minister what the results are.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

H&W - C.B. REG. HOSP.: PET/CT SCANNER - COMMIT

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, as everyone is aware, we are going through a very transformative part of our history in the CBRM, particularly when it comes to our health care redevelopment.

Over the last number of years, the medical community was really the driver of the new design of our hospitals and our health centres in New Waterford, North Sydney, Glace Bay, and the Cape Breton Regional. One of those aspects is the new cancer centre that is coming. One of the pieces of equipment that the community's been advocating for is a PET/CT scanner so hundreds of Cape Bretoners don't have to travel to Halifax to get that important test.

My question for the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Have you had any conversations with the Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation or anybody on the ground in Cape Breton about that important piece of equipment for our new cancer centre?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We have had some preliminary discussions about the PET/CT scanner at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital. We continue to look into that issue. It's been brought forward by several of the MLAs. Certainly, if there's anything in particular you'd like to speak about, I'm able to do that after.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the answer from the minister. The community has raised millions of dollars towards this piece of equipment. They're not looking for any money for the piece of equipment from the government but the operational

costs. That is something that we as a government have done in the past, whether it was through the hospice, providing the operational funds for the new hospice in the CBRM. In this case, they're looking for the operational costs for the new PET/CT scanner.

Will the government today, through you to the minister, will you commit to the operational funds for a new PET/CT scanner for our new cancer centre in Cape Breton?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I would say again is that we just recently began discussions about that. We will get back to you about that and are certainly happy to have more discussion with you as we continue to understand how we create infrastructure across this province to support the health of Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

H&W - MENTAL HEALTH: WALK-IN CLINICS - PLAN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

In the last provincial budget that was passed in this Legislature, there was dedicated funding for mental health walk-in clinics in every single health zone of the province. Is this government committed to continuing on with that plan to fund walk-in mental health clinics in every single health region of the province?

HON. BRIAN COMER: I think the situation with mental health and addictions in our province is going to require the work of all of us to work together. I look forward to working with everyone in the House. I've actually sent a correspondence making myself available to come to your constituencies and learn about each and every one of your communities.

I've been thoroughly briefed on your single brief intervention program, the sexual violence trauma therapy, the withdrawal management hubs, and the youth hub. I think they're all really good ideas. They seem to be informed by evidence, so I would say yes.

ZACH CHURCHILL: That's how you do it in the Chamber. Well done. I'd like to thank the minister for that answer.

When it comes to universal mental health access - this is a commitment that was made by the government - how many mental health clinicians, psychiatrists, psychologists are needed to ensure that there's universal mental health care coverage in the province of Nova Scotia?

BRIAN COMER: I think universal mental health care is part of the focal point of my mandate letter.

As you know, there are only four groups of medical practitioners in the province right now that can bill through billing codes in our province. I'll have consultations over the next few months. They're already being arranged within the department. I'll have much more to say about that in the coming months.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Advanced Education.

What are students striving to study in Nova Scotia . . .

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, it was a good first round of QP. I was joking with our Leader, saying that there may be a day the government will miss that mute button and miss turning the camera off, but it's good to be back in the Legislature.

I appreciate the conversations I've had with the House Leaders about Opposition Day. We provided some legislation yesterday so at this point now as House Leader for the Official Opposition, as we move into Government Business, I'm looking for the unanimous consent of the House to move forward to debate Bill No. 2, which is an Act Respecting Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Accountability; and Bill No. 5, an Act to Amend Chapter 18 of the Acts of 1998, the Municipal Government Act, and Chapter 39 of the Acts of 2008, the Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, Respecting Inclusionary Zoning for Affordable, Temporary and Emergency Housing.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition begs to discuss two bills this afternoon, Bill No. 2 and Bill No. 5. First, we'll deal with Bill No. 2.

Bill No. 2 - Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Accountability Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

Before we go any further, could the Pages please open the doors.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader has forwarded those two bills. Does everybody provide unanimous consent for those bills to come forward?

It is agreed.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll just say this as a Cape Bretoner, I am on my feet for the first time and seeing you in the Chair. I want to congratulate you as one of the local representatives from home. It's always great to see a Cape Bretoner leading the charge. You'll last longer than your Leafs, so we'll be okay.

Mr. Speaker, could we start with Bill No. 2.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment. Very happy to see you there. We've served in this Chamber together since 2010 when I began, and I know that you'll be a fair Speaker and treat us all with respect and due consideration.

I also do want to congratulate officially the Party opposite on running a very effective campaign, a very focused campaign on health care, with big commitments that really resonated with Nova Scotians, particularly Nova Scotians in rural areas. I commend you on having the ambition to take on these major challenges in our health care system and to hold yourself accountable to those commitments that you've made, when you face Nova Scotians again for a vote.

There were very significant, big promises that were made to the people of Nova Scotia - 300 doctors a year, 2,000 net new nurses into our system, 2,500 new long-term care facilities, universal mental health care coverage. These are all laudable goals and I believe that if the government is going to be successful in achieving these goals, the government does need to be focused on paying attention to how their initiatives are working.

I was very pleased to see a major theme in the Speech from the Throne yesterday being accountability as a focus of this government, a government that claims they want to be held accountable to the people of the province. The Premier himself has said that he will be judged based on how well we accomplish our said objectives in the health care system.

So, this bill is about that. It is about accountability. It is about ensuring appropriate and timely reporting to the people of Nova Scotia and to the House of Assembly on what is, I think, the primary commitment that has come out of the campaign and that rests with

this government: that is recruiting health care professionals - doctors, nurses, mental health clinicians, CCAs - everybody who is needed to run our health care system. As the Leader actually said today, we need real health care professionals.

I do encourage the government to look very closely at this bill. It is very similar to what we did when we were in government. I will say this before anybody gets on their feet and says that we didn't do something like this: we did, when we were in government. We did not promise a certain amount of health care professionals. We didn't say 300 doctors a year. What we did say is that we would attach patients to doctors, and what we did to hold ourselves accountable and to track our success was bring in the Need a Family Practice Registry, which the Opposition used very effectively. That was monthly reporting on how many patients in Nova Scotia were without a family doctor. The 70,000 number that was repeated regularly came from that initiative from our government to bring that in.

[3:00 p.m.]

This would be a very similar accountability initiative that would ensure the Department of Health and Wellness reports on recruitment numbers monthly, and also reports on vacancies in the system. After all, we are not going to get where we need to be in health care if we do not have the staff to run our health care system.

Specifically, this bill will ensure that the Minister responsible for the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment "shall, on an ongoing basis, collect data respecting numbers of (a) vacancies; and (b) professionals who have been successfully recruited" and report those to the public.

I will say that the signals that have come from this government early on are being received very well by the public when it comes to health care. I think they are giving people great expectation and hope on what can be accomplished in the health care system with such focus on it. But I will say so far it has only been signals. We will not know how well this government's plan is working until we actually assess the outcomes, until we actually see how many doctors, nurses, CCAs, psychiatrists, and psychologists are actually brought into our health care system and if our vacancies are actually starting to be filled.

If this government is serious about accountability, as we were when we made commitments to attach every Nova Scotian to a doctor - if they are serious about getting it right when it comes to recruitment and retention and filling vacancies - I believe this is a bill that the government should consider, or at the very least bring forward a reporting regime that is going to ensure that this is transparent and accountable to the public. After all, that is something that when we were in government we heard over and over again from the members opposite when they were on this side of the Chamber - accountability and transparency.

Of course, on top of this we have really major commitments on health care, promises that won this government the election. I think we can speak about that very frankly. In rural Nova Scotia, this election was fought and won on health care, on access to primary care. Without question, that was the ballot question. That's what people voted on.

I think that those people who voted for the government, those people who will vote in the next election, those people without a family doctor, those staff in our system who require help because they can't get their vacations because their departments are understaffed - all of those people deserve to know the progress that we're making and deserve to see the numbers.

With those short comments, I will take my seat and once again urge this government - if they are going to take this as seriously as they say they are, then reporting is absolutely critical, not just for accountability and transparency but also for ensuring that the initiatives you are putting forward are working and that the finite resources that are available in this province are having the intended effect that the government wants them to have.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the government's consideration of this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, may I join my colleagues in congratulating you on your position as Speaker? It was fun for a brief time to share the position of Deputy Speaker with you, and I know you are going to lead us well in the next several years. Congratulations.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to stand here and address this bill introduced by my colleagues in the Liberal Party. You shouldn't - oh, I guess he's not leaving. I was going to say some pointed things toward the member in a moment.

An Act Respecting Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Accountability - first I would like to take a moment to welcome my colleagues in the Liberal Party to this side of the Legislature. I know some of you have been here before. It's cozy. It's comfortable. It's calm.

I would like to mention to the member for Yarmouth that now he can expect and look forward to being reminded of his former government's record on the health care file and many other files, as the NDP had been reminded for the last eight years. So it begins.

Naught but a few months ago, Mr. Speaker, from when the member in the Liberal caucus could have enacted this very change that he wants to do, he could have done it as minister. After eight years in government, the Liberals are proposing that we should now count the vacancies in the health care system. On their first Opposition Day in the

Legislature since governing, this bill is their contribution to the health care crisis that Nova Scotia is facing. I must say, I am somewhat underwhelmed when this proposal is held up together with the record of eight years of Liberal power.

Mind you, and this is the important part, I do think that this kind of transparency would be very welcome, and I encourage the government to move on it. But we are well beyond the counting stage. In fact, we presently know much of this information, but it is worth repeating and reviewing here briefly.

Carolyn Ray reported in the CBC this morning that Nova Scotia has more than 2,100 health care vacancies, and I can table that article. This includes 1,086 registered nurse positions available and 27 paramedics. The Nova Scotia Nurses' Union says there are another 235 vacancies for licensed practical nurses and 12 nurse practitioners. The new Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment estimates 448 continuing care assistant openings, not including the 1,000 more that the government is hoping to recruit. This does not reflect the hundreds more professionals who are off injured or on stress leave, or who have left the province to work elsewhere.

The paramedics' union estimates that another 200 paramedics are on sick leave for mental or physical health reasons. On top of all of this, the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union estimates that 25 per cent of the province's nursing workforce is hoping to retire in the next five years. We also know that as of August 31st this year, there are 93 family doctor vacancies and 79 specialist vacancies, as well as over 77,000 Nova Scotians now on the wait-list for a family doctor.

This just reminds me of something that my colleague for Dartmouth South and I have been talking about for quite a few years now, and that is this retirement issue. We have all of these numbers in place, but it doesn't take into account those who are about to retire. We know in Dartmouth, for instance, that for a few years - when we first got elected, the numbers were really terrible for people who were attached to family physicians. Then the numbers got better a little bit, but they didn't take into any account the proposed retirements or the planned retirements.

The Nova Scotia Health Authority couldn't even address that situation, and so now the numbers in Dartmouth are worse again. The retirement part of this issue is a really important one. If there was a way to somehow publish numbers on predicted or expected retirements, that might be a good amendment to this plan too.

Beyond all of these numbers, the workers, the working conditions, and also the patients must be noted. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we didn't get here by accident. The pandemic is a huge factor, and we are experiencing national and global shortages of health care professionals. We know this.

Certainly, the Liberals' approach to the health care crisis did not help. From amalgamating the health authorities, which the Progressive Conservatives voted for, to refusing to implement the needed minimum standards in long-term care, to not listening to doctors and nurses when they would tell us what they need, we find ourselves in a very, very dire health care human resources situation.

The new Progressive Conservative government has an incredible amount of work to do to address this situation, and it sounds like it's ready for the challenge. But in order to do it, we're going to need to do more than just rearrange the health care administrative system or rename a couple of new offices or count the missing workers. They will also somehow need to do it while instituting a 50 per cent corporate tax cut.

In order to do it, they're going to need to work with their Opposition colleagues and listen to ideas from every corner. That includes things that our NDP caucus has been asking for, for a very long time. We have been asking for the government to fund community health centres adequately so they can work with communities to address primary care needs.

That doesn't necessarily mean many doctors in all of those community health centres. We understand that communities have different needs, and the residents who live in them have different wants for their community health centres. The community health centre is really the best model to address primary care needs.

We have been asking the government to legislate the 4.1 hours minimum standard in long-term care to support nurses, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants to work to the full scope of their practice; to open same-day, next-day mental health clinics; to open collaborative emergency centres across the province; and to recognize poverty as a critical input in health and healthiness, and end it. And for that matter, to recognize housing as health care.

Just before I finish, I want to remind people of my age. Way back when you were allowed to smoke in bars, there was a brief period of time when people would have their cigarettes on the bar, on the table of the bar. I didn't smoke, but I'm just saying there were lots of cigarettes around on the bars, and there was a brief time when the warnings on the cigarette packages were positive warnings. Instead of saying this is your lung after smoking five cigarettes or whatever, or this is your heart after it explodes after smoking, it was like: if you quit today, you will have this much reduction of the risk of a heart attack or stroke. It was hopeful.

I think publishing the numbers of vacancies is really important, but I think, too, Nova Scotians need to know when there are successes and we need to have some hope in this health care crisis, because we are in a crisis.

Again, yes, let's publish the numbers. Let's make sure we all know what vacancies are there and where we need to be filling in the holes and in which direction we need to be working, but let's also make sure we articulate the numbers in a way that we see what gains we have made, if in fact there are gains to have been made.

If we can do all the things that I've mentioned, the things that the NDP have been putting forward, the things that the Liberals have been putting forward, if we can do these all together, then we have a shot at adequately and actually addressing the health care crisis. On this very first day of actual daily business in the Legislature, I challenge the new Minister of Health and Wellness, I challenge the new government, and I challenge we as Opposition Parties, in the best way we know how, to cooperate and collaborate to actually end the crisis. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to get to speak to a bill here in the House. (Applause) I'm very pleased to be doing so on such an important topic. I am a health care provider myself - I am a chiropractor, and my wife is a pharmacist. Certainly, we understand the issues that are facing health care in our province.

I will make some short remarks on this bill. There is certainly a shortage of health care professionals in the province. That is well-known. Also, we are not unique in that regard, as it's a global problem, a nationwide problem as baby boomers retire. The shortage is impacting services and causing burnout among staff. This cannot go on, and our government heard first-hand from health care professionals about the challenges they are facing because of the shortage.

I can tell the House that many health care professionals we met with during the recent tour of the province said that this was the first time that provincial health leadership has ever visited their facility. We established the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment to focus on recruiting and retaining doctors, nurses, CCAs, paramedics, and other health care providers.

The office is led by respected orthopedic surgeon Dr. Kevin Orrell, whose experience and connections are already bearing fruit. His office consults directly with doctors, nurses, and other frontline workers to attract and keep good people in our province, and to improve access to quality care. I am pleased to tell the House the office has had some early successes by attracting three health care professionals to Cape Breton, retaining two family physicians in Halifax, and working with several other physicians to come or to stay in the province.

The office is just beginning its work. Over the coming months, OHPR will meet with various stakeholders to understand all recruitment and retention efforts, levers, and barriers as one system. This will help to inform how to remove barriers, streamline

processes, and optimize incentives under a common agenda to attract and retain health care workers.

[3:15 p.m.]

I agree with the members opposite that data is vital to understanding the issue and providing accountability, Mr. Speaker. I would need further discussion with Dr. Orrell and his staff as they establish the metrics for the office and what is appropriate for accountability.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I too would like to share my congratulations with the Speaker. We have been sitting across from each other for quite a long time, and it's a delight to see him in the Chair. It is a delight to see so many new faces here in the Chamber. I'm so proud of our new members of caucus here, as no doubt members on the other side are as well. I kind of wish there were fewer of you and more of us, but that's the way it goes sometimes in politics.

Today we're discussing the Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Accountability Act. One of the things that strikes me is that the things that we care about are the things that we measure. We measure our children's height. We measure how much money is in or not in our bank account. We measure the things that are important to us, and that's why it's important to make sure that we understand what is going on in the health care field.

I know that the now-Premier indicated often throughout the campaign that health care was an important part of their platform. After the election, he indicated that he would keep every health care promise he made during the election. That's a tall order. That's a lot of promises. We want to help him do that. We want to make sure that he understands where he is in this whole recruitment scheme, make sure that they understand how many health professionals have been hired and how many are yet to hire. It's a tall order, that promise that has been made, and that's why we want to help.

When we look at what was in the news today on CBC, "Help wanted: Nova Scotia has more than 2,100 health-care vacancies", that's just vacancies. That's not to add to the expanded scope of practice or the number of hours in long-term care homes. That's just to deal with the vacancies. I can tell you from my experience as the former Minister of Community Services, there were times when we couldn't hire psychologists, for example. What we do know is that it's often difficult to get enough health care professionals. But we do know right now that we're short 2,100, and that's as of the article today. But it's not anything new. In fact, to make the pledge that the now-Premier did, they had to know that there was an issue going on in terms of health care worker shortages.

If you look at two days ago, October 10th - and I'll table all of these at once rather than making you stand there forever. If you look at October 10th, there's an article out, and it indicates - I think it's the *Globe and Mail* - "Canada's overworked healthcare sector braces for staff shortages as vaccine mandates loom." Of course, there's a very distinct possibility that we may in fact lose some health care workers who decline to get vaccinated - I don't understand why, personally - but we could well be short of health care workers if they decide that they're going to stay home and not work.

Then we look back at September 24th and there's another article: "Coronavirus Update: Nurses in Canada are exhausted, overworked amid chronic staffing shortages made worse by COVID-19 pandemic."

Absolutely, that evidence was there early on. Then we look back at September 15th, White Coat, Black Art radio program on CBC: "Canada was already desperately short of nurses before COVID-19. Now nurses say they're hanging on by a thread." In fact, the article goes on to say:

"In the first quarter of this year, nearly one out of five unfilled jobs in Canada was in the healthcare and social assistance sector, which includes nurses, according to Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey data. The biggest year-over-year increases in vacancies were among registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses, which had 7,200 more open jobs than in early 2020. Total vacancies for the whole sector were 98,000, with nursing and residential care positions representing the two largest subgroups."

Mr. Speaker, these are areas where, in fact, we know that in recent months there was concern around vacancies. It's going to take a lot of work to ensure that we do in fact fill those vacancies, and that's why we need to track it. That's why we need to know the number of health care professionals on a monthly basis who are being hired - who is leaving, who is coming, who is going. It is difficult to keep track of, but it's important work, and that's why we need this bill.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Would the honourable member share that information with the Clerk's Table.

KELLY REGAN: Yes, I had indicated that I would table them all at the end. I just didn't want our page to have to stand here for a long period of time, because there will be more.

It's not just in recent months. In fact, back in February of this year, The Current on CBC Radio had an article entitled "Canada is facing a nursing shortage. Here's why it's hard to fill the gap." The article said, "the health-care and social assistance sector saw a higher job vacancy rate than any other industry in the country in November, Statistics

Canada's January Labour Force Survey shows." Actually, "the Canadian Nurses Association predicted that Canada could see a shortage of 60,000 full-time nurses" by next year.

I wonder, where are these nurses going to come from that we're going to hire? Unless there's a plan to train more nurses or to import more nurses, we're going to have a problem. That's why it's important to make sure that we know how many are being hired every month - every single month - along the way.

I know that the Premier has been a staunch advocate of transparency and making sure that things are clear. When I look back at some of the press releases that came from the PC Party over the last number of months, transparency was a key theme of a number of those news releases. In fact, if I look on July 23rd of this year, transparency was key to a PC aquaculture plan. In fact, the now-member for Lunenburg said, "The cornerstones of the PC plan are effectiveness, transparency, and safety." So transparency is important, and it's important for the aquaculture industry.

I would say to you that if it's important for fish, then it's important for health care workers too. I would say too that the Premier has talked about accountability. Those of us who've been in the House have heard him speak for years about transparency and accountability. His latest salvo in this area, or latest entry into this area, was of course the Public Accounts Committee, which I'm honoured to be the Chair of. He said that he was going to give more tools to the Public Accounts Committee to hold the government to account.

So I would ask, Mr. Speaker, because the members opposite have been so committed to transparency and accountability, I know they will want to pass this bill proposed by my honourable colleague because it will give us transparency and accountability about the number of health professionals who are being hired and how many are leaving the system. That way we're going to know what we are dealing with here. We won't have to be whistling in the dark, we will know what the numbers are.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate all of the comments from colleagues opposite and my colleagues here in caucus in regards to Bill No. 2. So now we move on to the next bill.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry - can we have a motion from the member for Bedford Basin to adjourn debate on Bill No. 2?

HON. KELLY REGAN: In play it was a rookie mistake but we both know. I would just say it's been a long time.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I propose that we close debate on second reading for Bill No. 2.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I want to thank all members of the House for their comments on Bill No. 2.

Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 5.

Bill No. 5 - Municipal Government Act (amended) and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter (amended).

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, for those in the room who know me, they know I have been a councillor for the last 12 years in the Halifax Regional Municipality. I waited a long time to be here. Now it's Madam Speaker, and welcome. Very nice to see you in that Chair. (Applause) It's an honour to see you in that Chair.

THE SPEAKER: It is.

LORELEI NICOLL: As we know, I spoke earlier that there are 17 recommendations in the Nova Scotia Housing Commission report, which was initiated, received, and accepted by the Liberal government. Four of the recommendations in that report have short-term timelines, including recommendation number three, which this bill will address in part. It regards changes to provincial legislation and associated regulations.

[3:30 p.m.]

While this housing report lists changing provincial legislation and associated regulations, such as the Municipal Government Act, the HRM Charter, and the Residential Tenancies Act, the immediate need to allow inclusionary zoning now is critical. The report states that municipalities in Nova Scotia do not currently have the ability to partner with the private sector - both community housing and private developers - to offer a range of incentives for the creation of affordable housing as exists in other provinces.

A new legislative framework could allow municipalities to allocate funds for private sector development, generate new revenues, create or protect affordable homes, and adopt more inclusionary and efficient zoning. For those who may not know what inclusionary zoning is, it's a tool that enables municipalities to negotiate for affordable housing.

The HRM Charter was a constant area of concern during my 12 years on Halifax Regional Council. As you can imagine, it was approved by the former NDP government just as I came into Council in 2008. My concern, one I expressed to the former Leader of the NDP government, was that you have the Charter now, you are free to do as you wish. Well, after 12 years of having a long list of legislative amendments, I would counter the fact that it is not the panacea that it was promised to be.

I would like to relay the strong messages that I received from my former colleagues on Halifax Regional Council to the Housing Minister. They want me to plead their case - and I'm proud to do it - on how much HRM needs inclusionary zoning now. The pandemic has exacerbated the current housing crisis, as many have mentioned in this House today, not only in HRM but in all municipalities in Nova Scotia. We have all witnessed the needs of the unhoused during this state of emergency.

The Municipal Government Act and the HRM Charter need to allow municipalities across Nova Scotia to implement land use by-laws to provide affordable, temporary housing during an emergency such as we are in now.

Now to the second part of the bill. We all know and realize climate change is real. With climate change being an ongoing future concern - we will continue to experience flooding, ice storms, and other extreme conditions - we must legislate housing zones now to be prepared to respond to all emergencies waiting for all of us in the future. We have experienced major weather events in the past. We have also seen severe flooding in Truro, Sydney, and the Isthmus of Chignecto, forest fires, coastal erosion. These occurrences are expected to become more frequent in the future and something many Nova Scotians fear and have strong concerns for.

Residents don't need to know, or care to know, which order of government is responsible for what. To put the policies and to change the Charter and the Municipal Government Act is extremely important to get the work done that the residents have elected us to do.

Halifax Regional Municipality has set up two emergency sites offering 24 modular units that provide safe accommodations for 73 individuals. These sites are temporary and not zoned for this use. This bill would allow HRM and other municipalities to identify suitable lands for this purpose and create temporary housing solutions that arise from emergency. We need to be prepared now. Municipalities must be given the mandate, the tools, and the resources to be an effective partner in delivering housing solutions.

The first step is amending Chapter 18 of the Municipal Government Act to assist all municipalities in Nova Scotia, and Chapter 39 of the HRM Charter respecting inclusionary zoning for affordable temporary and emergency housing. This bill will do that, and I am very passionate about it, and I am hoping that I will get good debate in response to it and finally have some support..

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Madam Speaker, it is important to add that Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier to my new riding, which I am falling further and further in love with.

I am happy to rise today to speak to this bill. Inclusionary zoning is an important land-use planning tool for municipalities. As a former municipal councillor, I know this. It allows municipalities to make requirements for any developments to include affordable housing in certain areas. As we see some communities becoming unaffordable for all but the comfortable or the wealthy, as we see people getting pushed further and further to the margins, it is an essential tool for creating inclusive, diverse, healthy communities, where people are able to stay in their communities, live close to services and workplaces.

Inclusionary zoning - yes, we support moving on legislation that allows it, but I do need to say that the Liberals' turn to housing policy has been incredible to watch. In the election, when it became clear that they were losing votes because of their opposition to rent control, they suddenly saw its value, for which I am grateful. Now in Opposition, they are crusading for rent control as if they never had the power to implement it permanently.

Now they bring forward a bill for inclusionary zoning, when they ignored very similar legislation session after session in government. In 2016, Marian Mancini brought forward a bill to amend the Halifax Municipal Charter to include components of inclusionary zoning. In September 2018, Lisa Roberts, the MLA for Halifax Needham, tabled the Affordable Housing through Inclusionary Zoning Act. In March 2021, I myself tabled the bill again.

Madam Speaker, are we supposed to believe that the Liberals had some kind of conversion, and now they are able to see the real impact of the housing crisis on Nova Scotians and that the bills that the NDP have been bringing forward for years are necessary, critical, and game-changing? We did not bring forward the proposals for inclusionary zoning in a vacuum. We did so because we were listening to municipal leaders. This request was reiterated just recently by Mayor Savage at a press conference concerning what the city was doing to address the homelessness crisis - a press conference held by the city, where the Province, which has the responsibility for housing, was nowhere to be found.

The PCs had more to say in Opposition. One of the last times we debated housing in this room, the then-PC Critic for Housing accused the NDP of leaving it to the Liberals to come up with a plan for housing. We were debating a bill that would set priorities, targets, and timelines. How is that not a plan? Since then, we have learned a lot from the PCs about the existence of a plan. We have yet to see what this consists of beyond selling off public lands to developers.

In the recent budget update, there would have been emergency funds allocated to housing, but there was nothing from this government. In the Speech from the Throne, there

were vague assurances. Nova Scotians who are homeless, who are spending exorbitant amounts on housing, who are unsure how they will cope when the state of emergency lifts and the rent cap disappears need so much more.

Madam Speaker, in the CBRM, people are living in hotels, but they may not have that option as hotels are changing hands and being sold. In my office, housing is one of the major issues that we are called upon to help and intervene in. The stories that I have heard of people living rough on the streets would break your heart, but the breaking of our hearts is not what is needed. What is needed is action, and action is so much needed, Madam Speaker, on this issue. All the tools are needed. Inclusionary zoning alone will not solve the housing issue, but it is a critical tool for municipalities.

The Liberals ignored very similar legislation when they were in office and failed over and over to take action on the housing crisis. I implore the PC government not to do the same.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Madam Speaker, congratulations. It's very nice to see you there. (Applause)

I also would like to recognize my former colleague on HRM council, the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, who interestingly enough would sit on the other side of the Chamber, but we were definitely on the same team. It's a pleasure to see you here.

I would like to speak to Bill No. 5. I will not read the title, but I will refer to it as Bill No. 5, if I may.

I want to apologize to the members - the members who know me from the previous session know I do have an issue with my voice sometimes. It will gargle and so on, so I do apologize for that in advance.

In 2016, HRM did ask the Province of Nova Scotia to allow for inclusionary zoning. Inclusionary zoning essentially gives HRM and other municipalities the power to require developers to enter into negotiations to provide more affordable units that can be made available below the market rate for that particular area.

It has two main benefits: one, of course, is that it can increase the number of affordable housing units in the overall housing stock; also, too, it can open up more areas for developers to build and move forward.

For example, imagine living in an area where you didn't have transit. You need transit to get to work or to get your education and those types of things. It's a very important tool when it comes to municipal planning and actually having units built. It can be a

valuable tool, but it's not a silver bullet. The housing situation and the crisis requires more options than just this. That has been acknowledged earlier.

The fundamental question we have on this side is: Why are housing units not coming on board at a pace that keeps up with the growing population and why does it outstrip the household earnings of people in our province? It's a very good question and one that we will be addressing.

Why does it take too long for a development to get approved? We have experienced that as municipal councillors. There are rules and there are certain things that are set forth in legislation that need to be addressed. What about the appropriate levels of density? That, too, has to be considered in everything we look at when it comes to this housing crisis.

I had asked, to the growing population, in one of the committees that we had that I spoke at - Natural Resources and Economic Development - I asked the deputy minister of the day, why is it that we find ourselves in a housing crisis when you have the throttle on immigration? What consideration was given to providing housing? The answer truly was not forthcoming.

I will note in the mandate letter that we have that we are mandated, if you will, to work cross-departmentally with our colleagues to come up with solutions and to make Nova Scotia a better place for Nova Scotians. Right in the mandate letter, we are to work with each other and make sure that our staffs work with each other to get the job done.

Let me go back: In 2016, there was application first made to the Province. Housing at that time fell under the Ministry of Community Services. The minister at that time was for Dartmouth North. In 2017, the Department of Community Services with Housing fell under the member for Bedford Basin.

In 2016, Housing was shifted - those of you in the House will know that I asked these questions in the previous session. In 2019, Housing shifted from the Department of Community Services to sit within the mandate of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Then in the last session, just before the new government of the day under the then-Premier, Housing was shifted to the Department of Infrastructure. In my short tenure here, I saw three ministers and three departments where Housing had no place to live.

[3:45 p.m.]

When you take a look back at the last eight years, and it was mentioned earlier, a comment was made about looking in the rear-view mirror - my paraphrasing - why do that when you're not looking forward? Indeed, we are looking forward. We learn from the past.

If we had learned and taken action in the last 12 years, which was mentioned by the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, we wouldn't be talking about this today.

We would be talking about small checks and balances, not the dire crisis that we find ourselves in.

When it came to the housing commission that was formed, I think at the last moment to delay the inevitable - and that was to get us to this point. Now the good thing is, the benefit of having the Housing Commission is that we had a lot of good people working on solutions which this government will actively look at and engage with.

We now have a provincial housing crisis. I noted, as the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth would attest, as a councillor, when it was first indicated that in HRM we had only 220 homeless. When the challenge was put out to the director giving that number, what it was was a point in time of basically the shelters on the peninsula of Halifax; it did not stretch into the suburban rural areas of this province. Now, as it was mentioned earlier, we are in excess of 400-some odd.

We have societies that are trying to do their best with the resources they have. We have co-operatives trying to do the best with the resources they have. We have community services and people looking to be housed, those with disabilities. We have long-term care who need housing.

Housing is basic and fundamental to each and every one of us and needs to be looked at. So Bill No. 5 is a component toward enabling another order of government to add more tools in its efforts to provide affordable housing.

We on this side of the aisle are going to start bringing forward robust plans with multiple solutions very soon. The comment was made earlier about now. Now is relative. When you take a look at 12 years, a couple of months is nothing. A couple of months is now.

I look forward to seeing what happens when this goes to the Law Amendments Committee. Madam Speaker, I thank you very much for the time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Madam Speaker, I'd also like to acknowledge you in the Chair and congratulate you. Also, our Speaker of the House, whom I see has returned, and member for Victoria-The Lakes. I had the pleasure of sitting on the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board with the member for Victoria-The Lakes and we always had great debates and wonderful conversations. So congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about Bill No. 5 and its importance. Before I do that, I'd like to address the comments made by the honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier with regards to rent control. It was the Liberal government that put rent control in place during our state of emergency and ensured that it would remain in

place until such time as the supply would be tied to the supplied. As a matter of fact, in a bill that is tabled today we looked at a 3 per cent minimum vacancy rate that would be lifted, before that could be lifted.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we wanted to wait for the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission, with that commission tabling their report, so we could understand the necessary options that were needed in order to improve housing.

I'd also like to address the member opposite with regard to a couple more months being nothing. Mr. Speaker, Winter is coming and a couple more months may be a little bit too late.

The bill we have before us today is a very important bill around inclusionary zoning, temporary and emergency. Contrary to popular belief, this is not an urban or a Halifax problem, this is a Nova Scotia problem. This bill will be a very important tool for municipalities to deal with the homelessness that we are experiencing across this great province.

Mr. Speaker, as a former principal of the Nova Scotia Community College in Cape Breton, I can tell you first-hand the issues facing our young people in this province with regard to housing, homelessness, and food insecurity, students who are not able to pay their tuition, students who are not able to put food on the table. This is a very, very serious problem for the young people of our province - one that requires immediate action.

I would like to move on a little bit to talk about seniors. I can't tell you the number of seniors that I have spoken with who would like to sell their home. Their home may be too big for them. Their home may need a lot of repairs. However, they can't afford to sell their homes because they can't afford to pay rent.

Mr. Speaker, the rent that seniors are forced to pay in this province is just out of reach, out of touch for them to be able to live comfortably. Because of this, their houses become in disrepair. Some of the sights that I saw on the campaign trail really hit you right here in the heart as seniors are trying to sell off their furniture to pay their oil, sell off their belongings to pay their rent, or pay their mortgage or pay for food and medications.

Seniors want to be able to move closer to their health care services. Many of our health care services are in the centre, but seniors can't afford to do that. It costs too much to move. They can't afford the rent, therefore they have to stay in their home. I heard one story where a senior is not able to access the second floor of their home. Due to health reasons, they can't access that level of their home. Therefore, it has essentially become abandoned. They're living on one level of their home. They can't afford to sell because when they sell, everything that they've worked their entire life for will just be gone in no time to pay their rent.

On the campaign trail - I heard earlier today a member - I believe the Leader of the Party opposite - talk about seniors paying over half of their income in rent. Well, I can tell you that that is a very modest estimate. I've had stories at the doors of people trying to live on \$150 after paying their rent, and that's a subsidized rent, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about rent subsidies, that's great but it's not cutting the bill right now.

That same property that I talked about with the person, they took me inside and showed me their fridge. There was a bottle of water, a couple of frozen dinners, and that's about it. Those stories will just break your heart. We need to do something not only for our young people but also for our seniors so that we can ensure that they have access to affordable housing.

Since I have been elected, over 70 per cent of the calls to my office have been about affordable housing. I have been acting on behalf of those constituents and working with the different agencies and housing authorities. I would like to thank the staff in those agencies right now because they are overwhelmed. They're overwhelmed with requests. They're overwhelmed with lists. They're overwhelmed with phone calls. They're just at the breaking point of being able to do their job.

Families - single moms with kids couch surfing because they can't afford to go out on their own and have their own apartment. Kids who need proper rest sleeping on the floor, sleeping on the couch. They just can't function. They have to be in school to try and learn. Again, it breaks my heart.

A lot of the calls have been around power and other utilities being cut off. It's either pay your power or pay you rent. I've been dealing with lots of that as well.

Winter is coming and that has kind of been a theme that I've heard a lot about. Without power, without utilities, it gets quite cold. As long as your rent is paid you need lots of blankets, but we need to do more to allow our residents access to affordable housing.

The biggest thing that really gets me, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about seniors and seniors calling my office, calling me at home. I'm getting close to that age so I have a lot of friends who are seniors and knowing that they're calling me and they're crying because they can't pay their oil, they can't pay their power. Do they get groceries or do they get rent?

Many seniors are self-medicating because they can't afford all of their medications. We need to pass this legislation so we can get more affordable housing in our communities across this province.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the Affordable Housing Commission and the report that they put forward. They list inclusionary zoning and temporary zoning as a very important piece of that report, which the Liberal Party did accept and made part of our

platform. So we put inclusionary zoning in the platform and that's why we're bringing this bill forward, to complement some of the other members that are also talking about this.

The second part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, talks about the time. This will provide stability for renters so they will know what their rent will be for a period of time, so it gives flexibility, another tool for municipalities to work with developers to create that affordable housing.

A very important part of this bill, as well, is around emergency housing. An example that I can use is the flood that took place in Sydney a number of years ago. Many people were taken from their homes, they had to leave, they couldn't stay. There were a lot of issues with safety and people ended up in hotels, as we all know. If this bill could be in place for future emergencies like this then municipalities would have flexibility to provide temporary and emergency housing for any other natural disasters that may come.

These things can happen anywhere. As we know, with climate change, natural disasters are happening across the country, across the globe, it's very important. I would ask the members to really take a strong consideration of this bill. We need to do this and we need to do it for our families, for our seniors, and our young people in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I propose we close debate on Bill No. 5.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to close debate on Bill No. 5. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, that concludes Opposition Business for today. I will now pass it over to the Government House Leader to provide business for tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I now move that the House rise, to meet again on Thursday, October 14th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Government Business will include second reading of Bill No. 1, the Elections Act; and Bill No. 4, the Public Archives Act; and we will also allow time for Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

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

[4:00 p.m.]

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have reached the moment of interruption. The adjournment debate was submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Atlantic:

“Whereas municipalities and community organizations are eager and willing to partner, and with the looming threat of Winter, the government has not yet articulated a plan to address the homelessness crisis and address the immediate housing needs that is adversely impacting those most vulnerable in our province.

Therefore be it resolved that the creation of housing solutions falls under the jurisdiction of the province.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

GOV'T. (N.S.): INCREASES IN SPENDING ON HOUSING AND IN HOMELESSNESS ACROSS PROVINCE - CLEAR AND PRESENT EMERGENCY

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, everyone, for staying for a very important topic.

The numbers that were spouted out today were, in HRM, over 400 homeless people, hundreds across the province, and thousands who are within seconds of being homeless.

First of all, we don't really know the true numbers because the Department of Community Services doesn't actually keep those numbers. They're not in at the shelters. They're not in on the streets counting and finding out. They don't actually know the number of people who are homeless.

When you talk to the experts on the street, when you talk to the frontline workers and you ask them the numbers - one of the individuals from the department had told them that they thought there were 35 homeless people. This is what they were told.

This is one of the first problems we have with homelessness in Nova Scotia - is that nobody has a specific number. If you go to AHANS, if you go to Metro Turning Point, if

you go to Cape Breton, if you go to the department, if you go to the Department of Health and Wellness, everybody has different numbers. Who's keeping track of who's homeless and why are they homeless?

I would ask all the members right now: How many people are up at the tent cities on any given night? How many people are there? How many people visited them? What are the issues? Where are the wraparound services that those people need?

When we talk about homelessness, there's also chronic homelessness, people who are constantly fighting and battling to get a roof over their head. Giving them an apartment or giving them a hotel room and then kicking them out is false hope. You can't tell them we're going to take care of you, and that means putting them up in areas where there are no wraparound services. There are no addiction services. There are no mental health services. How do I get a job? Where do I get a resume? None of this stuff is happening. None of it.

When you talk to individuals, nobody wants to be homeless. Nobody wants to be homeless. They don't care - and I know people are going to stand up and say, well, I presented this bill, or you were in government and you did this and you did that. You know what? They don't care. I see some of the members shaking their heads. You know what they don't care about? They don't care who's in power. They don't care if it's Liberal, NDP, or Conservative. All they care about is: How do I put a roof over my head?

For us to stand here and point - I'll be the first to say, could we have done more? Should we have done more? Absolutely, 100 per cent. I shoulder some of that blame, too. We had a plan. We made investments. Could we have done more? Yes. Our platform said and showed that we were going to do more.

Those people who are homeless right now, where do they go? The shelters are full. They're full of people. There's no place to put them. If you're a single mother who is escaping an abusive situation, where do you go? I've had that phone call. You know what they say? Go to the shelter. They call the shelter - we have nowhere for you to go. Adsum House, full. Metro Turning Point for men, full. I guarantee you, every single shelter in this province is full. Out of the Cold, full. All full.

Other jurisdictions are looking at these problems, looking at these issues, and they're being innovative. Three years ago, I went to the Department of Municipal Affairs and talked about building code regulations. Tiny homes were illegal. Think about that for a second. We have a tiny home manufacturer here in Nova Scotia, and it was illegal to have a tiny home.

B.C., what did they do? The amount of homelessness they had in B.C. and the amount of addictions, numberwise, dwarfs Nova Scotia. It's not even close. What did they do? For \$3,000 a home, tiny homes. Boom, boom, boom. They took a piece of land, they

put people in there. They had a roof over their head. You know what? That's not good enough. You know what else we're going to do? We're going to send social workers in there. We're going to send experts in there to help them with their issues.

That's what's troubling, and that's what's weighed on me - I'll be quite frank with you - since I've been an MLA. I think most people don't care about homelessness because they don't vote, and that is a huge problem. We look at people on income assistance and we look at them differently. Nobody talks about that. They talk about middle income, lowering corporate taxes, doing this, doing that. Everybody deserves the dignity of a roof over their head.

I wasn't going to do this, but I'll use my own personal experience. I have been homeless. I didn't care who was in power. The only thing I cared about was: Which apartment lobby am I going to sleep in? I slept in a BFI can one night because there was nowhere to go. You're looking for any way to survive, and you feel alone, and you feel hopeless.

I was in my teens. I was in a lot better shape than I am now - I felt like I could defend myself - but imagine being a mother. Imagine being a transgender individual or someone from the LGBTQI community, who is more susceptible to violence. Where are they going to go? They're scared to death, and you wonder why, when we as politicians or we as leaders, approach these tents and these campsites, they say, get the hell out. They don't want us there. Everybody's been promising the same thing forever.

I implore the government. I know the Minister of Community Services. I know she has a massive heart. I've known her for eight years. I have faith. I actually have a lot of faith in what you're about to do. I'm excited, because I keep hearing from the government that there's a plan coming.

I implore you. It's not just about a roof over their head. Putting a roof over someone's head doesn't solve the issues. It helps, but we need to address their addictions. We need to address the issues that have put them there.

Nobody wakes up one day and says, I want to be part of the justice system, or I want to live on the street, or I want to be abused. People have pasts, and if we're going to get them to the next stage - every single one of us in this Chamber who is here now and will come after us should be judged on how we treat those individuals. I've heard former politicians say to me, I don't go into public housing. I don't knock on their doors. They vote at a 10 per cent rate. Why would I do that?

It made me sick, because those are the people who we are here to serve. Everybody's equal here.

I implore you to look at this holistically. You were all elected on a health care platform, and I've said this to many people - I hope you have all the success in the world, because if you're successful, Nova Scotia is going to be successful - that's absolutely God's honest truth.

Health care isn't just about access to primary care, it's not just about the short-term wins, it's about looking at this long term. How do we deal with addictions? How do we deal with chronic poverty? There is a reason why poverty is circular. The doors for most of us that we have access to - and I know my children are going to have advantages because of the way and how my partner and I are bringing them up and what they are going to - money, let's be honest. I spoke to a lady in one of my communities, her daughter was one of the smartest individuals I'd ever met. I asked her if she was going to post-secondary school - no, getting a job right away. Where are you going to go work? At the A Buck or Two.

Nothing wrong with working at the A Buck or Two, but if we are going to break the cycle of poverty, if we are going to help people get out of homelessness, there has to be more investment in the people and we have to stop pointing fingers and we have to stop saying you could have done this, you should do this.

I will do everything in my power to help any of you, which is probably not much, but I'll be the first one to give you credit, I'll be the first one to say the member for Pictou West did this, absolutely should be elected for the next 50 years. I'll be the first to say it.

I think when we think about homelessness you have to remember that it's getting colder outside. Think about that, go home tonight, each and every one of you, and leave your windows open and take the blankets off your bed and lay down and tell me how you feel. That's how they feel each and every night. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, and the member for Halifax Atlantic, I apologize for this, but you know how I feel about certain things so I'm just going to say it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today about an issue that was raised with me on many doorsteps throughout this election. Our NDP caucus has been focused on the need for affordable, accessible housing for quite some time. Reading the resolution we are debating here today, I didn't know if I should laugh or cry. We have Liberal members who sat in the government, many around the Cabinet table for eight years, putting forward a resolution that says that the creation of housing solutions falls under the jurisdiction of the province. Well, no kidding.

I have watched the Liberal government spend eight years not offering much in the way of housing solutions - some, but not much. What we do know is that for eight years

the Liberal government's plan to address housing relied on funnelling public money to private landlords.

When our caucus brought forward rent control legislation in 2017 and in the sittings that followed, Liberal Cabinet ministers wrung their hands and said their priority was balancing the interests of landlords and tenants.

During the pandemic the Liberal Government left \$12 million of rapid housing funding on the table because they had not done the work to be ready with housing plans that could receive federal funding. I respect this member very highly, so while I appreciate that the Liberals have brought forward this topic for debate, it is unfortunate that they have only discovered that housing falls within provincial jurisdiction now that they are an Opposition Party. (Applause)

[4:15 p.m.]

I am extremely happy to see hands clapping because I also want to see those hands clapping when the time comes forward to present certain things in order for us to actually make things move and have action.

Similarly, in the past eight years the Progressive Conservatives have proposed only two pieces of legislation on housing. Madam Speaker, I think that explains how we got here. For eight years we had a government that was happy to give public money to their big developer friends while the number of people struggling to pay their rent grew and grew - and we had a Progressive Conservative Opposition that didn't think that was such a bad idea.

I don't think any member in this House can look around and be surprised that across the province there are thousands of families who rent their homes who are worried about the next big increase. Over 120,000 people in Nova Scotia rent, so this is not a small problem. More than 23,000 households spend more than 50 per cent of their income each month on housing. It was mentioned before that sometimes it's more than 50 per cent. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Halifax has increased 20 per cent in the past year.

Rent control keeps rent in check. It means people can plan their lives. It means more people will be able to save up for a down payment to buy their own home. But we also know that rent control is only one tool that the provincial government has. It was mentioned as well by another member across the table.

We also need more housing. We need to build more affordable housing to make sure people can stay in their homes or find affordable places to move when they need to.

The NDP wants inclusionary zoning so that municipalities are able to require more affordable housing. This is why we have been talking about it and introducing bills to implement this for years.

The NDP wants the province to have the first right of refusal so the government can be the first in line to purchase those buildings and work with non-profit organizations to keep units affordable or create more housing options.

The NDP also recognizes that housing is a right, and profit is not. We need the Progressive Conservative government to listen right now, to take us seriously, to look at the bills that we're putting forward and to show us that they're ready to take real action to address the housing crisis. We also need to recognize that we need to explore all options in order for us to make this work, which means we're going to have to work together in order for this to be successful for our own government and for the province of Nova Scotia. We need to listen to each other and do what's right, not what we think our party wants us to do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: First, just let me say how thrilling it is to be able to say Madam Speaker. It's really a pleasure to see you in that position.

I would like to thank my colleagues for Halifax Atlantic and Halifax Needham for your comments. It's very obvious how passionate and caring you are about this subject matter. Just to let the member for Halifax Atlantic know, we have been on the ground. Our department has been on the ground. I have been on the ground. I didn't want you to think that we were not on the ground.

Look, there is no question that everyone ought to have a place that they can call home. Having a place to live brings with it stability, security, and of course a sense of belonging.

Madam Speaker, we know that the reasons for homelessness are varied, and there can be very complicated situations. They may include certain physical and mental health challenges relating to addiction, lack of affordable housing as mentioned earlier, and community and family breakdowns as well.

We know that the outcomes are very serious. Homelessness basically results in increased use of the health care system, an increase in substance misuse, increased danger of abuse and violence, and an increased chance of entering or re-entering the criminal justice system.

Madam Speaker, Nova Scotians experiencing homelessness are among our most vulnerable citizens. They need everyone's compassion as a society, and we have an

obligation as all members in this Chamber, and I would go as far as saying everyone in Nova Scotia, to do what you can. Reach out. We need to be a kinder and gentler society, given the circumstances, but I would say every day.

I know myself about 10 years ago, I had a young gentleman in my constituency of Pictou West whom I guess I had a soft spot for and took him into my home, with my two children, as a single mom at the time. I did the best that I could. Sadly, that individual is not with us here today. You always think about what more could you have done. What more could you have done? It's hard. This is a very delicate and sensitive issue to be discussing.

I do wish to let the members know that the Department of Community Services is determined to provide help. For the past several years, the department has been working to ensure those experiencing homelessness find appropriate housing and get the wraparound supports they need.

This would probably be a great opportunity to extend my appreciation of the great work that the past minister has done in that department and the minister before. I'm really honoured to follow in their footsteps and hope that I can do just as well. I really do.

Madam Speaker, many of those experiencing homelessness in HRM have taken up residence in tents and temporary shelters, as we know. In addition, shelters are frequently full. I have seen them. We are aware of the many individuals who are couchsurfing and residing in wooded areas, under bridges, around the city of course in HRM, but as well the whole province.

I want to assure you that the Department of Community Services is working closely with HRM to connect individuals in encampments with appropriate services. We have navigators on the ground. We are truly trying our best.

Our department continues to fund hotel-based sheltering for both the John Howard Society and the Out of the Cold Association at Gerald B. Gray Memorial Arena in Dartmouth. Of course, we are working with community partners right across this whole province, as we know it does extend into each and every one of our constituencies.

We are focused on long-lasting solutions. We need more affordable housing. We need more supportive housing. We have a road map to get there. As the Opposition would know now, we have a road map that was started probably about eight years ago.

At the Department of Community Services, the integrated action plan to address homelessness is guiding much of our work. This plan provides additional housing work support, diversion programs, and rapid rehousing initiatives that serve those experiencing homelessness. Since it was announced in 2020, the province has committed over \$20 million to support these efforts, and we are already seeing strong results.

The integrated action plan, just to give you an idea of what it has funded, there's a total of 23 additional housing support workers; four diversion workers providing support to people transitioning to living in community from health or corrections; three intensive care case managers for individuals with high needs; emergency eviction prevention support to provide one-time interventions; a housing locator to source units for individuals in need.

I can't stress enough, contact me. We will do our very, very best. We're not always going to be successful, and that is really hard for me to say. This does keep me up at night. I'm sure it keeps you all up at night as well. There're a number of other programs as well.

I want to just reassure too, as part of different investments the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia received \$3.5 million to support purchasing properties in the HRM. In addition, the province committed \$1.8 million per year to cover annual operational costs, on-site client services such as clinical care, peer support, addiction support, and mental health support. And this was, again, much of this was organized and prepared by the previous government, so thank you.

Madam Speaker, some of these units have just opened, and I have been able to visit one just recently on Pepperell Street. The province also recently invested \$1.1 million to help the Portal Youth Outreach Association create three new transitional houses for young people experiencing homelessness in the Annapolis Valley. This is something that everyone should be proud of.

These houses are now open for providing wraparound supports, which is always so important. You can provide a hotel room, you can find a shelter, you can couchsurf, but if we're not providing those wraparound supports, we're not actually getting to the bottom of why these individuals find themselves homeless.

In addition, with help from the province, the Cape Breton Community Housing Association recently opened supportive housing for 14 men in two locations in Sydney. Those living at those two sites will have access to clinical care, care support, addiction services, and mental health support.

Madam Speaker, the issue of homelessness is one that requires all Nova Scotians - all of us - and we have to think outside of the box. There's no wrong idea or suggestion. We need to collaborate and we know that all levels of government need to collaborate.

This is a complex problem, and I know one thing with certainty: we will not be able to stand alone in silos and try to fix it. So again, I'm very accessible. Throw me your thoughts. Throw me your ideas. My ears are open.

The initiatives and progress and work to date are just the beginning. There's so much more to do. I am honoured to serve as Minister of Community Services. It's a real pleasure and I think it's a good fit. I hope to lead a group of caring, compassionate

professionals who are committed to supporting our most vulnerable citizens, working together across all levels of government. I am confident we can address this challenge.

Madam Speaker, Nova Scotia's experience through COVID-19 demonstrated what we already know: we care. We all care about each other and we care about our province. Working together we can and we will ensure that those who need our help receive it and are treated with the dignity, the respect, and the heart they so rightly deserve. So let's get to work. Let's do it together. Thank you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Madam Speaker, I just wanted to say a few words. We're here to work with the government. This is a very serious issue that has been luminating in the province and certainly the pandemic is having a compounding impact. People want to be in Nova Scotia. No matter where you go in this province - our caucus was in Cape Breton and visiting shelters - they are full.

We certainly see the immediacy of the issue in Halifax, and of course the easy answer for government and the new Premier is to say, "You didn't do enough." Of course we could have done more. I go back to when I ran for leadership myself - I proposed a rent cap, tried to find a balance of how we continue to see investments in housing. I had proposed a 4 per cent rent cap. The government decided that 2 per cent was the way to go, tied to a state of emergency. We fully wanted to keep that protection in place while we built housing.

We have a bill on the floor that speaks to a middle-ground approach. Nobody owns the answers on this and how we solve this issue, but it's a good bill that looks at how we can tie rent caps to CPI. When we get to a vacancy of 3 per cent - which is a definition of a healthy vacancy rate, according to CMHC - then we can look at alleviating that rent cap to protect tenants, because then supply and demand have a better impact on how we protect people, because there's choice in the market. That's how it works.

We shouldn't be married completely to the market, like the market will control everything, whereas that's where I think the government thinks we should go. We shouldn't be completely tied to non-market units. It takes both.

We see working together with private sector development as part of the plan. That's what the housing commission looked at. That's why we proposed HST rebates, other tax rebates, and we had a number of other solutions. But we're here to provide support. In my short time as Premier, I provided \$25 million to address those short-term recommendations and also provided over \$7 million to provide for those permanent supportive housing units for over 100 people to find units.

We need wraparound supports. I'll continue to ask for that from this government. There aren't enough social workers working for the province. There aren't enough addiction specialists. There aren't enough proactive visits to these sites, even from our service providers. The service providers need the support so that we can go out and help people.

Nobody in this room is an expert and owns all the solutions, but we're certainly here to provide some ideas on where we think we can go. I do believe we've done a lot in the last six months. We provided \$30 million in the last six months, increased income assistance by more than it ever has been times five, and allowed it to be eligible for people who don't have a home address. There is a lot more work to do, and so we're going to work with you. When we provide solutions, we hope that you'll look at some of those, and we appreciate that you'll support some of them.

[4:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: In my short few seconds, I will suggest to the government that we form an all-party committee, including an Independent, to start working on solutions. I think it's time for us to stop the finger-pointing - we all know it's a problem - and start working on solutions together.

We did see the Premier commit to this on energy. It was encouraging for all of us to see that collaboration. This is not an urban issue. It is an all-Nova Scotia issue. We see it in urban and rural areas. I would love to see us work together on this to find solutions now.

THE SPEAKER: I wish to thank all the members who participated in the adjournment debate this evening.

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

[The House rose at 4:31 p.m.]