



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Good afternoon. We will now begin the orders of the day, starting with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you, Speaker. I beg leave to table a petition entitled:

“Whereas the current 2% rent cap is scheduled to increase to 5% in 2024” - which it has - “expiring in 2025; and

Whereas the cost of living in Nova Scotia is escalating at a pace which has not been seen in 40 years; and

Whereas a majority of Canadians live in jurisdictions with permanent rent control;

Therefore, we, the undersigned, call on the Government of Nova Scotia to implement permanent legislated rent control in Nova Scotia.”

There are 50 names, and I have affixed my signature, as per the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

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

DAVE RITCEY: Speaker, as Vice Chair of the Committee on Law Amendments, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bill:

Bill No. 407 - Antigonish Consolidation Act.

The committee recommends this bill to the favourable consideration of the House, without amendments.

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues on all sides of the House, I beg leave to table the Annual Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to table two documents that I will refer to in my member’s statement, one entitled “New Report Reveals Alarming Growth in Both Prevalence and Cost of Eating Disorders” and “Types of Eating Disorders.”

THE SPEAKER: The documents are tabled.

The honourable member for Victoria-The Lakes.

HON. KEITH BAIN: Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition that was ruled out of order by the Clerks, but to make the concerns known to the public as part of the member's statement I'll be making later on.

THE SPEAKER: The document is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, before I read my Government Notice of Motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, it is a special honour for me to acknowledge the presence of powerful women from the African Nova Scotian community in the House.

Let me start with guests sitting in the gallery. I ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the House: Tia Upshaw, the dynamic CEO of the Canadian Blk Women in Excellence Society; Dr. Afua Cooper, professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University - Dr. Cooper is Chair of the Lord Dalhousie Scholarly Panel on Slavery and Race and founded the Black Canadian Studies Association; Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley, Vice-Provost of Equity & Inclusion, former full professor of Pan-African Studies, and current Graduate Faculty of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University; Tracey Thomas, Associate Deputy Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs; Ann Divine, founder and CEO of Ashanti Leadership and PDS; Habiba Diallo, author of #BlackInSchool; and on the floor, Suzy Hansen, MLA for Halifax Needham. (Applause)

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

RESOLUTION NO. 940

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

Whereas women have played a crucial role in shaping our societies through their resilience, innovation, and unwavering commitment to justice and equality, overcoming systemic barriers and contributing significantly to the advancement of civil rights, science, art, literature, politics, and so many more; and

Whereas women, representing 49.75 per cent of the world's population, are making strides to amplify their voices and advocate for their rights, at the same time challenging gender stereotypes and biases; and

Whereas tomorrow, March 8th, International Women's Day, is celebrated all over the world, honouring the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women, and serves as a call to action for advancing gender parity;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislative Assembly reaffirm their dedication to celebrating women's achievements and recognizing their resilience by committing to foster an inclusive environment where every woman, regardless of her background, has the opportunity to thrive and lead.

Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 941

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

Whereas Farm Safety Nova Scotia is an organization dedicated to the safety of all those involved in the agriculture industry, working to promote a safety-first mindset here in our province; and

Whereas nothing could be more important than making sure that hard-working people come home to their families; and

Whereas March 10th to the 16th is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, a week where we take the time to consider how important good safety practices are within the agricultural sector;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House join me in both thanking Farm Safety Nova Scotia for all they do to encourage safety in Nova Scotia agriculture, and expressing our complete support for Canadian Agricultural Safety Week and the safety of this province's farmers.

Speaker, I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

[1:15 p.m.]

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. 427 - An Act to Amend Chapter 22 of the Acts of 2000, the Agricultural Marshland Conservation Act. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 428 - An Act to Expand Agriculture in Nova Scotia. (Carman Kerr)

Bill No. 429 - An Act to Increase Funding to the Justice System. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 430 - An Act to Amend Chapter 179 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Forest Act Respecting Forest Cleanups Following Natural Disasters. (Ronnie LeBlanc)

Bill No. 431 - An Act to Amend Chapter 31 of the Acts of 2004, the Police Act. (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 Lunenburg.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Before I begin my statement about Allen Sullivan, who was an extraordinary volunteer in our community, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

BECKY DRUHAN: In the Speaker's Gallery, I'm honoured to introduce members of Allen's family. If you could please rise. Joining us today: his wife, Anne Sullivan; their daughter Cheryl Sullivan-Hanel and her husband Jerry; and Allen and Anne's son Michael and grandson Luke. I would ask all of you to accept the warm and much deserved welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly.

The honourable member for Lunenburg.

SULLIVAN, ALLEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Over this past week, family, friends, and community said goodbye to Allen Sullivan, a remarkable, humble man who was a model of community kindness and service to others.

Al - or Uncle Al, as he was known to many - was passionate about giving to community. He served 41 years as an active firefighter with the Pleasantville and District Fire Department and volunteered with Autism Nova Scotia, the Bridgewater and Area Lions Club, and Pentz Elementary School. He was a supporter of Relay for Life and the Gift from the Heart Radiothon. He even helped Santa at the EHS Great Haul-A-Day Food Drive.

Near and dear to their hearts, Allen and his wife Anne worked to create the South Shore Regional Hospital Journey Room, a cancer care room where they actively volunteered. These were just a few of the many groups that Al supported, and he was well decorated for his volunteerism. He received the Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond and Platinum Jubilee Medals and was District of Lunenburg 2008 Nova Scotia Provincial Volunteer Representative, among many others.

In honour of Allen's memory his family, his family encourage us to give an act of service wherever we see a need. Allen was passionate about spreading the message that if everyone would do one thing to help those around us, our world would be a better place. I can think of no better tribute for this generous and caring man who will be deeply missed.

Speaker, I ask members to rise for a moment of silence in memory of celebration of Al Sullivan.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by Chief Andrea Paul, regional chief for the Nova Scotia Assembly of First Nations; Ms. Stacy Juckett Chesnutt, Race Director & Founder and Coach of Sole Sisters; Ms. Micheline Gélinas, executive director of the Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Ms. Mélodie Jacquot-Paratte, representative of Acadian and francophone women for the Halifax area of the Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Ms. Sue Uteck, Executive Director of the Spring Garden Area Business Association; and Merveille Tabuku, communications manager for the same organization. Please stand and be recognized and enjoy the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

INTERNAT'L WOMEN'S DAY: CALL TO ACTION - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Tomorrow is International Women's Day, a time where we celebrate the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. This day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality in our province and country.

Today we recognize the leadership of our guests, each of whom is playing a unique role in their community, whether it's supporting business and commercial development on Spring Garden Road, advancing issues for francophone women within communities throughout Nova Scotia, or supporting women to become healthier through exercise and running. These women are extraordinary community leaders and deserve our praise in the House.

We especially want to recognize Chief Andrea Paul, who is the first Nova Scotian Aboriginal woman ever to be elected as the Chief for the Nova Scotia Assembly of First Nations - a historic achievement which we applaud along with those of our accomplished guests. Each plays a crucial role in building a future where Nova Scotian women can reach their full potential, because we know women's success is everyone's success.

We thank these individuals for their leadership and the sacrifices they have made along the way as they continue their respective journeys to create pathways for success for women in Nova Scotia and beyond.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I beg leave to make a couple of introductions relative to my member's statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

LISA LACHANCE: In the Gallery today, we are joined by Shaleen Jones, who is the executive director of Eating Disorders Nova Scotia and Hannah Bailley, who is a board member from Eating Disorders Nova Scotia. I ask them to rise and accept our warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

EATING DISORDERS N.S.: RECOVERY HELP - CONGRATS

LISA LACHANCE: Eating Disorders Nova Scotia was founded by a group of women who knew first-hand the importance of community support in recovery. Hundreds of people are helped along their path to recovery each year - youths, older adults, trans folks, BIPOC communities and more - by a team of peer supporters, therapists, and dietitians.

In 2023, the Public Health Agency of Canada recognized the good work being done here in Nova Scotia, and awarded funding to launch a national program, Body Peace Canada. This program aims to reduce inequalities such as barriers to access. A referral or diagnosis is not needed to access support and the program is free.

Traditionally marginalized groups like trans youth experiencing eating disorders are able to find community. Since starting just last year, Body Peace Canada has already served over 1,100 people.

I ask all members to congratulate Shaleen, Hali, and the whole team at Eating Disorders Nova Scotia for taking a successful Nova Scotia model nation-wide.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

MEYERS, JILL: HOCKEY LEAGUE CREATION - RECOG.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Jill Meyers from the community of Parrsboro.

When Parrsboro lost its minor hockey program in 2015, Jill decided to do something about it. With the help of her husband and the community, she started a minor hockey league in the community. All the gear and equipment was either donated or provided by Sport Nova Scotia, ensuring that at least 32 children were able to be equipped and ready to play this past season in the Parrsboro Lions Recreation Centre.

This coming Sunday, Squad Red will be playing against Squad Blue to show off their talents at 5:00 p.m., so come out and support them.

Please join me in thanking Jill and all the volunteers in the Parrsboro area for ensuring these kids were able to play hockey once again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

DEVICHAND, TRIPTA: LITTER CLEAN-UP - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, in recognition of International Women's Day tomorrow, I rise to thank a special constituent of mine, who is also a dear friend: Tripta Devichand. Tripta is a retired physiotherapist who has been a pivotal part of the Clayton Park West Litter Prevention Committee, a group of community leaders who are passionate about making Clayton Park West the cleanest neighbourhood in HRM.

Tripta is always available to help organize our litter pickers and shows up at each clean-up with gloves and bags. In her other spare time, Tripta volunteers with ElderDog Canada and helps teach English at the local library. Our community is richer and cleaner with citizens like Tripta who contribute their time and talent. Speaker, I ask the House to join me in thanking Tripta for her contributions to a clean environment and helping fellow neighbours whenever she's needed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

UNIFOR LOCAL 100: CN RAIL STRIKE - THANKS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to recognize the heroes of Unifor Local 100, who are currently on a very wet picket line at Autoport in Eastern Passage. In the face of an inflationary crisis, they are standing up for themselves, their families, and all workers in Nova Scotia. While CN Rail has posted a profit of \$4.5 billion and while share values have increased by 57 per cent last year, they don't seem to think they should share that windfall with the workers who created the success. Not only that, but eight hours after the

strike had started, they had train scabs working, which calls into question whether they ever bargained in good faith to begin with.

One of the best ways to solve the impact of our inflationary crisis for Nova Scotians is to increase wages to make sure that workers can provide for themselves and their families, and the heroes of Unifor Local 100 are doing just that. On behalf of Nova Scotia New Democrats and all workers in the province, I want to thank them and let them know that we stand in support and solidarity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MATTHEWS, TONY: EAST DAL. COM. CLUB - RECOG.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the remarkable efforts of the East Dalhousie Community Club and its chair, Tony Matthews. The East Dalhousie Community Club stands as a beacon of community spirit and engagement.

The Club has consistently gone above and beyond in providing enriching events and opportunities for residents of all ages. From educational workshops, community suppers, exercise opportunities, and various community meetings to their Christmas tree lighting and carols and their Summer fair, the calendar is filled with events that bring the community together in meaningful ways.

Tony Matthews, as chair, and his team of dedicated volunteers have been instrumental in fostering a sense of unity and camaraderie within the small rural community out in the corner of Kings County. The club's tireless dedication to the betterment of their community is truly commendable. Through Tony's leadership, the club has become a vital hub for social interaction, recreation, and personal growth for residents of all ages.

I urge my fellow members to join me in recognizing the invaluable contributions of the East Dalhousie Community Club and its chair, Tony Mathews. Their unwavering commitment to enhancing the quality of life for those in their community exemplifies the best of Nova Scotia's community spirit, where everyone is always welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MOTHER, DONNA: 80TH BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES

FRED TILLEY: Today I rise to wish a very happy 80th birthday to my mom, Donna Tilley. She will turn 80 next week, and we won't be here, so I wanted to make sure I got this member's statement in for her. She's been the rock of our family, and I just wanted to wish her a happy birthday and all the best for the next year. I can't wait to get home.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

BORDEN, WALTER: PLAY PUBLICATION - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, New Glasgow-born Walter Borden is a provincial and national icon of stage and screen. He also occupies the centre of my very first memory of seeing theatre when he toured to my elementary school and performed in the gym in Shad Bay.

In 2023, Nimbus Publishing released Borden's semi-autobiographical play, *The Last Epistle of Tighrope Time*, which he has been creating over the course of the last 48 years. The play draws upon Borden's life experiences as a Black gay man and civil rights activist alongside the likes of Rocky and Joan Jones. It is considered one of the first Canadian theatrical productions to delve into male homosexuality from a Black perspective.

Excitingly, *The Last Epistle of Tighrope Time* is the first of three books acquired by Nimbus to be penned by Borden, the next two being a poetry collection called *Africadian Mi'kmaq Songs in the Key of the Universal Anthem* and a memoir entitled *A Word or Two Before I Go*. I look forward to learning more about Walter Borden's life or, as he calls it in *The Last Epistle of Tighrope Time*, "some itty bitty madness between twilight and dawn."

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

VCMH EMERG. DEPT.: REOPENING NEED - RECOG.

HON. KEITH BAIN: Speaker, in relation to what I tabled earlier, I wish to present the following member statement. In October 2022, the emergency department at the Victoria County Memorial Hospital in Baddeck was closed and replaced with a temporary urgent treatment centre or UTC, something the residents say has been neither consistent nor sustainable.

The residents feel it is necessary that the Department of Health and Wellness consider numerous issues within that petition, especially concerning more local engagement and providing a clear timeline for the reopening of the emergency department of ECMH.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

CAISSE POP. DE CLARE: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the remarkable efforts of Caisse populaire de Clare, an exemplary corporate citizen in our area. Their staff go above and beyond their regular duties, especially during the holidays. The Caisse organizes successful toy and food drives for Christmas Daddies, hosts Santa events, and spreads kindness through random acts such as distributing gift cards.

Beyond these seasonal activities, the Caisse consistently supports local groups throughout the year. Whether through financial contributions as seen in their recent support for the Clare Special Olympics and Clare Search and Rescue, or through active participation in community events, their dedication is unwavering.

I ask that all members join me in recognizing a good corporate citizen like Caisse populaire de Clare, who truly are part of our community.

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

EATING DISORDERS: SUPPORT REQUIRED - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, eating disorders are complex, common, and serious mental illnesses impacting 7.8 percent of the population, and are the third most common chronic illnesses amongst adolescents in Canada. Among children 5 to 12 years old, the rate of eating disorders is 2.6 per 100,000, far exceeding that of Type 2 diabetes.

A 2024 study from the Butterfly Foundation, which I tabled earlier, found a 21 per cent increase in eating disorders over the past 10 years. Recovering from an eating disorder takes time, support, and often treatment from a multi-disciplinary team. These are treatable diseases, especially when caught early, and everyone should have access to the resources they need for recovery.

I invite all members to consider how to support Nova Scotians with eating disorders better through provincial programs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

SINGER, CHESLEY & DORIS: 70TH ANNIV. - BEST WISHES

JOHN. A. MACDONALD: Speaker, on February 24th, Chesley and Doris Singer celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary. After celebrating, the hall was packed with friends and family. Seventy years together is a testament to their enduring love, commitment, and shared dreams, and I even asked Chesley: What's one thing you would give as advice? All he did was point to Doris and say: "This lady."

I invite all the members of the Chamber in joining me in wishing Chesley and Doris a happy 70th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

BRIDGETOWN VFD: 150TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, today I am pleased to acknowledge an impressive milestone recently reached by one of my volunteer fire departments in Annapolis. In 2023, the Bridgetown Volunteer Fire Department celebrated its 150th anniversary. For a century and a half, this department has contributed so much to our community through responding to fires and other emergencies, providing safety education to residents, hosting community events, and much more.

The great work of the department has saved lives and property, and added so much to the vibrancy of the Bridgetown area. I invite all member of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the Bridgetown Volunteer Fire Department on its 150th anniversary, and in thanking all members, past and present, for their efforts to make the community a better place to live.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

VILLAINS THEATRE: *DEEPWATER* PROD. - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to draw attention to Villains Theatre's new theatrical production *Deepwater*, which was written by Dartmouth North resident, Dan Bray, and directed by another Dartmouth North resident, Burgandy Code.

The play will make its world premiere at the Bus Stop Theatre in Halifax from March 13th to 17th. *Deepwater* is an original, dark mystery, which takes place in Hants County, Nova Scotia. Audiences accompany a police inspector as she looks into a seemingly inexplicable tragedy involving a reclusive marine biologist and her young daughter. The play explores the unknowable nature of life and relationships, and the ways that humans and deep sea creatures alike must create our own light in the darkness.

Dan Bray is the co-founder and artistic director of Villains Theatre. He is a Robert Merritt Award-nominated and -winning playwright, and interdisciplinary theatre and visual artist. Burgandy Code, a Merritt nominee and winner herself, is a 37-year-old veteran of the theatre in Nova Scotia - an actor, director, dramaturge, playwright, and teacher. I am thrilled that both of them have chosen Dartmouth North to call home. I wish them lots of good wishes and broken legs on the opening of *Deepwater*.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

POWER, SGT. PHIL: CPR RESCUE - THANKS

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I rise in my place to recognize Dartmouth East resident Sgt. Phil Power of the Halifax Regional Police. Many folks in Dartmouth know Phil as the owner and operator of Grasshoppers Taekwondo. He serves on the Dartmouth Health Board and he is also involved with the Dartmouth Whalers.

But did you know, Speaker, that Sgt. Power is a true hero? On Tuesday evening, while at a meeting at the Mic Mac Bar & Grill, it was brought to Sgt. Power's attention that someone was choking. When he got to that person, that person was non-responsive. Sgt. Power performed CPR for seven minutes, and I am happy to report to this House that that person is alive because of the heroic efforts of Sgt. Phil Power.

I'd ask all members of this Legislature to thank Sgt. Power, all our Halifax Regional Police officers, and all our first responders for what they do to serve Nova Scotians each and every day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

METCALFE-CHENAIL, DANIELLE: BOOK PUBLIC. - CONGRATS.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I'd like to recognize Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail, the Nova Scotia-based author of *Freddie the Flyer*, who is from Prospect. This beautifully illustrated picture book pays homage to aviator Freddie Carmichael, the first Indigenous commercial pilot in the Arctic, with each month of the year highlighting moments from his life, the beauty of the North, and the power of dreams.

Freddie has flown for 70 years, doing everything from supply runs to search and rescue to transporting dog teams to far-flung areas. The book celebrates Freddie's dreams of flying, his achievements, and the challenges he had to overcome by surviving residential school to get an education to become a pilot.

The book has also received a spot on a coveted list, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. The Dolly Parton Foundation has given out millions of books to children worldwide, including over 3.5 million in Canada. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library was founded in 1995 as a way for Dolly to honour her father, who struggled his entire life with literacy issues. The foundation puts books free of charge into the hands of children under the age of five to help fuel their imaginations and love of reading.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Danielle for her success as an author.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

INTERNAT'L WOMEN'S DAY: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today, in honour of International Women's Day tomorrow, I'd like to share a few words from a local constituent named Sara Jewell:

Women's voices: What if we stopped being polite? What if, when a man says something insensitive or ignorant, offensive or out of line, we don't merely raise an eyebrow and put a hand to our chin - a universal sign that only another woman would recognize? What if we didn't just sit there in disbelief at what we're hearing? Listen to that voice screaming in our head that he needs to stop talking, needs to stop. What if we stopped listening to those other voices telling us just to be polite, be quiet, be good, be dutiful, obedient, sweet, and accepting, and not make a scene? What if, when he finished speaking for now, finished disparaging for now, finished dismissing for now, finished not "getting it" for now . . .

I'll continue next segment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MEADOWS, CHRIS: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, Chris Meadows, a former teacher and principal, is a pillar of compassion and community spirit in his retirement years.

Meadows is known for his dedication to education and leadership. His skillfulness on the basketball court and softball field in his youth is now being channelled into supporting his community when they are in need. His kindness knows no bounds. His years of experience in education have equipped him with the patience and empathy needed to understand and assist those around him.

Chris always finds time to socialize weekly with several of his former colleagues. These gatherings are often an opportunity to reminisce about old times. Additionally, he cherishes the moments spent with his lovely grandchildren, relishing the joy of watching them grow and learn. His bond with his grandchildren brings him immeasurable happiness and fulfillment in his retirement years.

I personally have been very grateful to have Chris as a close friend and former colleague, and wish to thank him for his unwavering support over the years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou:

ORGS.: WORLD WOMEN'S CURLING CH'SHIPS - THANKS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place because, in about a week, it's going to be an exciting time in Sydney. Sydney is hosting the World Women's Curling Championship. There are going to be 12 countries participating. It's taking place between March 16th and 24th. I will be welcoming the world.

I do want to give a big thanks to all the organizers and the sponsors who are involved. Cape Breton has a great track record of hosting international events. I'm sure this one will be second to none.

I rise in my place to recognize and thank everyone involved with bringing the World Women's Curling Championship to Sydney. I wish all the teams the very best and welcome them to our community. We'll all be rooting for Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

INTERNAT'L WOMEN'S DAY: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: In honour of International Women's Day tomorrow, I will finish sharing the words of a local constituent:

What if we don't worry that we are on national television? What if we don't worry that there's a camera focused on our face or a microphone in front of our mouth? If we don't worry, we'll be called unreasonable, hysterical, or out of line. What if, when we are uncomfortable when we are subjected to when we hear negative words, we stop being polite?

What if we stopped being polite at home, at church, at work, on the street, or on television and simply said, "Stop talking." What if we stopped being polite? If he can't say anything nice, we will no longer say anything at all.

I send these words to my daughter, to my someday daughters-in-law, my sisters, my friends, every woman, and especially the women here in this Nova Scotia Legislature.

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

FRELICK, ANDREW: MUSIC SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Speaker, today I would like to rise to congratulate a Beaver Bank resident who is not only making waves here in Nova Scotia but also in Nashville, Tennessee.

Andrew Frelick is a country music artist whose duet with Amanda Riley - *It's Christmas Time Again* - won Holiday Song of the Year from the Josie Music Awards at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. This is not the first time Andrew has won a Josie Music Award.

Here at home, you may have seen him around, playing at local events such as White Point and the Cavendish Beach Music Festival.

Please join me in congratulating our very own country music legend, Andrew Frelick, and wish him continued success with his music career.

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

KELLEY, KATIE: MAR. INTERPRET. & TRANSLATION - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I'm only sad that I was unable to do this statement yesterday when this individual was here in the Chamber.

Today, I rise to celebrate Katie Kelley, the president and CEO of Maritime Interpreting and Translation, for her impressive leadership in promoting inclusive communication within our community.

Under Katie's guidance, more than 70 interpreters are offering vital interpreting and translation services to those in need. Their mission to fortify our community through language and communication is commendable, ensuring clarity and understanding for all the non-English-speaking clients who exist in our community.

With a client base spanning both government and private sectors, her team has completed over 2,900 assignments in 45 unique languages, bridging the communication gap and promoting accessibility for all. As a woman-owned business, Maritime Interpreting & Translation exemplifies empowerment and inclusivity. This impressive team continues to make a meaningful difference in countless lives, fostering a more connected and understanding society.

Let's applaud Katie Kelley and Maritime Interpreting & Translation for their commitment to breaking down language barriers and building a more inclusive community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, I'd like to retract two words I used in Question Period yesterday.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for doing that. This would be a good opportunity maybe to have the member for Dartmouth North retract and apologize as well.

[1:45 p.m.]

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to say what I was reacting to yesterday is a long-standing thing that I've observed in Canadian politics across the country and probably all over the world, where women political leaders are often characterized as being negative. That's what I was reacting to yesterday. That is what is misogyny, and that is what I called out yesterday. I'm sorry that I did it in an unparliamentary way. I apologize for my words, and I retract my statement.

THE SPEAKER: To the member for Dartmouth North, I would kindly ask - the retraction seemed to be more qualified by a preamble. I kindly ask if you would just stand in your place and please confirm just the retraction and then apologize. Thank you.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I retract the two words I used yesterday that were unparliamentary.

THE SPEAKER: And apologize, please.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm sorry. I will apologize, but Speaker - and I don't mean to challenge the Speaker - I believe the Premier was also asked to apologize, and I did not hear an apology from the Premier.

THE SPEAKER: Just to clarify for the House, yesterday the Premier on his own stood in his place without the Speaker actually requesting him to stand and did apologize and retract the statements, and then once again today was asked to retract. If we look at it, where I've received advice, the Premier is not actually required to apologize, because apologizing for yesterday, when he stood in his place - as well as the Premier's remarks had been ruled as unparliamentary language. The language that he used was a generalized statement and not language that described an individual.

The choice of language used by the honourable member for Dartmouth North was used as a personal attack against the individual, in the case of the Premier. Therefore, today I had to ask the honourable member for Dartmouth North to retract and apologize.

That is my ruling on this. I believe that it's been fair. I would like us - we're off to a great start today, and I would like to move forward. (Interruption)

Yes, the member for Dartmouth North did stand up again and retract and apologize. Again . . . (interruption).

My comments just a few minutes ago were addressing the fact that, yes, the member for Dartmouth North stood and qualified by using a preamble. I asked the member for Dartmouth North to stand again in her place and retract and apologize. She stood in her place, and she retracted and didn't apologize, but I asked her to stand again, and she did apologize.

Again, we're off to a good start. Let's move on from here, and we'll begin going back with statements.

The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

STEWART, RHYAH: HOCKEY ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the accomplishments of 17-year-old Rhyah Stewart, one of Canada's top young female hockey players.

In August, Stewart made Cape Breton Eagles history as the first female ever to attend the team's training camp and played in a pre-season game with a Québec Major Junior Hockey League team. In her 30 minutes of play, Stewart stopped all 24 shots she faced.

Stewart played for Team N.S. at the 2023 Canada Winter Games, where Nova Scotia took home the silver medal.

This past January, Rhyah played for Team Canada at the 2024 IIHF Ice Hockey U18 Women's World Championship in Switzerland, where Canada brought home the bronze medal. She also scored the title of top goaltender at the tournament. Next year, Stewart will play college hockey at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Cape Breton and Nova Scotia are very proud of you and will keep cheering you on.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

CPA HOCKEY TEAM: CH'SHIP PERF. - CONGRATS.

BRAEDON CLARK: Speaker, today I just want to recognize the C.P. Allen Cheetahs boys' hockey team. It was a great week for CPA Athletics in general. The boys' hockey team, which has been very successful over the past few seasons, reached the provincial final, and unfortunately, fell just short, losing in overtime to Citadel Phoenix 2-1. But the boys, of course, had a fantastic season to finish second in the province, and also had an amazing X account, so it was very easy to follow along with how the team was doing.

I want to congratulate the C.P. Allen Cheetahs boys' hockey team on their second-place finish and wish them the best of luck next season.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

BABIN, VANGIE: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I rise today to wish Vangie Babin from Antigonish a happy and healthy retirement.

December 21, 2023, marked Vangie's last day as the women's services coordinator and office manager at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services Association, where Vangie held this position for 29 years.

I have rarely seen Vangie without a smile on her face. She has offered positive, unconditional and warm support to so many over her tenure, and she truly treats everyone she meets with compassion and kindness. She has dedicated her career to helping people, and I know that many people have benefited from her reassuring presence, including myself.

I ask all members of this House to thank Vangie for her years of service to the women, girls, two-spirited and non-binary people in our community. I know she and her husband, Philippe, will thoroughly enjoy her retirement.

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

MCCORMICK, JILL: JILL'S BRIDGE CONNECTION - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Jill's Bridge Connection and club owner Jill McCormick. Jill has been a teacher of bridge lessons and director of games since before the turn of the century, and she enjoys the endless pleasure in the company of other bridge players almost as much as winning the game.

Jill's Bridge Connection recently opened in Millstone Square on Baker Drive in Dartmouth. Jill's Bridge Connection offers courses, workshops, drop-in sessions, and practice sessions on a schedule crafted to help accommodate traffic challenges. Everyone is welcome at the club, and no one will ever be refused a game for not having a partner or being about to pay for admission. Jill's philosophy is that the only requirement to play at the Bridge Connection is the ability to get along and exhibit great sportsmanship. Whether new to bridge or a returning player, stop by Jill's Bridge Connection and join her and her team as the hosts to connect or reconnect in their pleasant safe environment.

Happy International Women's Day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

SEGGER, PAMELA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, I rise today to remember Pamela Segger, a champion of documentary filmmaking in this province, who passed away January 22nd at the tender age of 50.

I have known Pamela for 20 years, since she brought her shining light back to her native province following a career in financial services out west. She was my daughter's dance teacher for a time, and I often marvelled at her personal grace, as well as her skills as a choreographer and coach.

It was through her contributions as a founder and executive and artistic director of the Lunenburg Doc Fest that Pamela truly made her mark. Driven by her belief that documentary film can inspire change, even as it entertains and educates, she grew Lunenburg Doc Fest into an event of international status. Along the way, she raised the profile and aspirations of our province's documentary film community.

I ask members to join me in celebrating Pamela's legacy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

MLA FOR PRESTON: INTRODUCTIONS - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Speaker, I would like to recognize the member for Preston today for inviting very powerful women members of our community. We know March 8th is International Women's Day. I'm happy to see this House and the member for Preston inviting this kind of leadership for our community and showcasing what they do and their impact on our community.

I would like to ask members of this House to join me in thanking the member for Preston.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MIDDLETON, JAMES: AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I would like to congratulate a Nova Scotian artist on a recent award. James Middleton received a certificate of merit from the portrait society of Canada for his portrait of Blue Collar CEO Mandy Rennehan. This portrait is one of a series of paintings of Nova Scotia business leaders. They hang in the Nova Scotia Business Hall of Fame gallery, housed at Dalhousie University's Faculty of Management. Mr.

Middleton's style has been termed by some as impressionistic realism. His work has been recognized by many organizations and publications.

I had the honour of getting to know Mr. Middleton a little bit when he painted the portrait of another Nova Scotian leader. His portrait of the 36th Speaker of the House of Commons currently hangs just outside the Chamber on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Mr. Middleton was a delight to work with, very thoughtful, and we were so pleased with his portrait of Geoff. I wish him many more years of painting both portraits and landscapes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

IMLAY-PRICE, VAHN: BALLET SCHOLARSHIP - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate 10-year-old Kentville resident Vahn Imlay-Price, who is a scholarship recipient to a summer training program at the prestigious Royal Winnipeg Ballet School.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet School, founded in 1939, is Canada's oldest ballet company and the longest continuously operating ballet company in North America.

Vahn Imlay-Price has been attending ballet classes for seven years. Ballet provides the opportunity for young learners to understand body movement, musicality, how to dance together as a group, as well as the ability to perform, which builds confidence and focus.

Speaker, please join me today in congratulating Vahn Imlay-Price, the recipient of this prestigious Royal Winnipeg Ballet Scholarship.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

PARSONS, MINNIE: 93RD BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, I want to wish my aunt Minnie Parsons a happy 93rd birthday next week, March 13th. She's the history of our family, and she's an amazing, energetic, lovely lady. She's beautiful. Happy birthday, Minnie. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time is now two o'clock. It's time for the Order of Business, Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We will finish at 2:50 p.m.

[2:00 p.m.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: GRAPE JUICE SUBSIDY - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, the Premier who ran on being loyal to Nova Scotia and encouraging purchasing Nova Scotia products is now using taxpayers' money to subsidize the importation of grape juice to compete with locally grown grapes and the wines that are produced with it.

He has said that it is a trade issue. We know that's not the case. There's nothing in the World Trade Organization Agreement that prescribes this sort of behaviour or action. There's no other jurisdiction that was implicated in that trade agreement that is moving forward with this. And now we have confirmation from MP Kody Blois that to say this is related to a trade issue is a complete fallacy. I'll table that.

If the government's decision to do this was not based on trade and based more on economic input and activity, my question is: Can the Premier tell us how many jobs this new program is going to create for Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: I thank the member for the question. This is an important issue. Our wine industry is incredibly important to our province. That's why, as a government, we've been supporting the wine industry in ways we can. We'll look for ways to continue to support them.

This is a trade issue. I did see the letter from Member of Parliament Kody Blois. In his letter, he says that "the policy as stated would allow anyone to 'start a winery' and receive taxpayer dollars to import the cheapest grapes possible, bottle it here, and then sell through the NSLC as 'Nova Scotian.'" That's absolutely false. To be Nova Scotian wine, it requires a certain content of Nova Scotia grapes.

Do you know why he thinks that? Because the member opposite is spreading those types of rumours. He's absolutely wrong. Kody Blois is a nice guy. He's wrong on this. He's also wrong on the carbon tax, but we support the wine industry and we'll continue to do that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: MP Kody Blois and I are voicing the concerns of an industry that has been very vocal on this. What the Premier is doing is using tax dollars to import cheap grape juice so that that cheaper product will then compete with Nova Scotia-grown products on the shelves of the NSLC. This is going to create an existential issue for those who are putting money in the ground and growing grapes here and actually employing 1,100 people across this province.

The Premier said to the press this week that this is going to be good for the economy. My question: I wonder if the Premier could please table the economic study to suggest that this is going to improve the economy if it jeopardizes the grape growers of Nova Scotia.

THE PREMIER: I believe that the grapes that are grown in this province are unique, that they're wonderful, that they produce an amazing product, and that they can stand on their own merits; 65 per cent of the wines already sold today are bottled elsewhere, most of that in Quebec.

I think our wines can stand the test. I believe in them. We'll continue to look for ways to support them and help the industry in ways we can. We'll do it in a trade-compliant way, but we'll do it in a fair, honest way that's respectful of trade rulings and respectful of the opportunity for the industry.

If the member really wanted to help the industry, there are many ways he could. He can start with standing up against the carbon tax. That's the first place he could start.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Clearly the Premier doesn't have any economic analysis on this issue. Here's the issue: Yes, our local wineries are competing with a market share of 65 per cent of wine that's bottled elsewhere, but guess what? None of that wine is subsidized previously by the taxpayers of Nova Scotia to compete against their own Nova Scotian companies. Now they're going to be.

We know that there's not as much economic value out of bottling wine than there is growing grapes and producing wine. In fact, the industry tells us that six people can bottle thousands of cases of wine in a day. Six people, compared to 1,100 that are working to grow grapes across this province.

We know that imported wine has a value to the Nova Scotia economy of \$16, whereas a product that's been produced here has \$76. The economic numbers don't make sense.

My question to the Premier is: Can the Premier please tell us why he thinks this is a good economic decision?

THE PREMIER: I just have to say that I completely disagree with the member. The way that things are characterized is, in my opinion, completely inaccurate. It shows that the member is only interested in political headlines. We know that to be the case. We've seen that in the Auditor General's report last week. The Auditor General said all that needed to be said about the member's approach to these issues in a report that is literally titled *Report on Misuse of Public Funds at the Liberal Association of Nova Scotia*. That is the type of opposition party we are dealing with.

We will continue to look for ways to grow this economy. We will continue to invest in Nova Scotians, just like the incredible budget that is before this House. Maybe the member will vote in support of that budget.

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

PREM.: MORE HRM SCHOOLS - BUILD

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would like to ask about investment in schools. This province's capital region is rapidly growing. We hear about this all the time - 80 per cent of last year's growth was in Halifax alone. I will table that. In 2022, in light of this, the Halifax Regional Centre for Education submitted a request to the Province for eight new schools to be built. Last year, finally, the minister did announce schools for HRCE - but only four. We still have no details, no locations, and no capital funding allocations.

My question to the Premier is: Where are the HRM schools going and when?

THE PREMIER: It is an absolute fact that our province is growing. Our province is growing at an incredible rate. The population of this province grew by almost 40,000 people last year alone. This is incredible growth. This is an amazing time in the history of our province.

We are building new schools, we are investing in health care infrastructure, we are investing in Nova Scotians, and we will continue to invest in Nova Scotians because that is what is necessary at this point in the growth of this province. It is an amazing time to be living in Nova Scotia. I am happy that we are going to be building new schools across this province, including four in the HRM.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: That's the thing. We are not building new schools in HRM. The HRCE has added 8,000 students in the last five years. That is enough to fill 300 classrooms, and this growth is continuing. Anyone who works, learns, or sends their children to school knows something about the challenges our kids are facing.

The president of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union said they were hoping the budget would signal a genuine desire on the part of government to create healthier, safer, and more sustainable learning environments for students and their teachers. Instead, what government delivered was the same old enrollment-based funding formula that has existed for the last decade. The government isn't doing anything faster or sooner when it comes to supporting children at school.

My question to the Premier is: Can the Premier tell the families in HRM and across the province why our children are still stuck in overcrowded classrooms without enough teachers to teach them at this magnificent time for our province?

THE PREMIER: I believe I heard the member say - when I said we are building four schools - the member said, But no, you are not building schools. I believe that's what I heard the member say. We have a capital budget for schools this year of \$208 million. We are investing in schools, we are investing in infrastructure, we are doing more, and we are doing it faster.

Four new schools is nothing to be negative about. I know that the NDP is completely negative on many things, including four new schools. We are not negative on four new schools. We are positive it means our province is growing. We will build up this province and invest in Nova Scotians.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I come into this beautiful room every day because I am so optimistic about the future of my three children, who are in a school that is 70 years old, after having been in a school that was 50 years old, that has no cafeteria and no prospect of being replaced. There are no schools currently being built in HRM. We have the promise of a future announcement.

The benefits of small class sizes are clear. We know they result in students being more engaged, doing better on tests, and feeling more comfortable. Despite knowing the benefits, this government, with its low investments and slow developments, is continuing to pack students into classrooms. At least 28 classrooms in the Halifax school system are exceeding the caps right now - the hard caps.

We need more schools, and we need more teachers. Again, my question to the Premier is: Can the Premier tell us when the government is going to finally build the schools that we need in HRM?

THE PREMIER: There is an incredible budget before this House, and the faster that passes, the faster we can get the money out the door and invest in Nova Scotians. I hope the members opposite will support the budget. A budget that invests in, for the first time in this province . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please continue. The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: . . . a budget that, for the first time in this province, invests in a school lunch program to support the students, invests in education, and invests in Nova Scotians. We will continue to invest in all Nova Scotians, including those who are providing such an incredible service to our children in the education system. I think we've shown that through our track record in working with Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

FTB: GRAPE JUICE ANALYSIS - TABLE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I love that the Premier talks about the budget as if it even matters. He spent \$3.7 billion outside of his own budget, over the budget estimates. Don't talk like those budgets matter in this Chamber. If he'd actually read the other Auditor General reports - which he seems to choose not to pay attention to - he'd get some insight on that, but the Premier is more focused on levelling a tax on the Opposition to deflect from a real issue that he's creating in our rural Nova Scotian economy.

He is bringing in a subsidy program to import cheap grape juice to compete with locally grown grapes and locally produced product here in Nova Scotia despite the fact that he ran on putting Nova Scotians first with local product. I've asked the Premier to table the economic analysis that substantiates this decision. He hasn't. Will he please table it now?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: As I have stated in the last number of Question Periods now, we have until the end of June to come up with a practice that is compliant and responds to the trade challenge that was brought on upon us. My hope is that, by the end of June, we will have something in place that is trade-compliant and that the industry feels good about.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister says he has until the end of June, but he's been dishing out money to commercial bottlers since last Summer. He told us that yesterday in the House. Could the Minister of Finance please tell us how much money has been given to Devonian Coast from his government over the last year?

ALLAN MACMASTER: We've been moving away from the preferential margins in place. In that sense, we've been dishing it out, yes, since last June, to everyone. For the member to suggest we're dishing it out to one is not accurate.

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

FTB: DEVONIAN COAST FUNDING AMOUNT - PROVIDE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Can the Minister of Finance please tell this House, right now, how much money has been given to Devonian Coast?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The member is persistent to suggest that we're favouring one over another. In terms of the amounts of money that have gone out since last June, we have until the end of June to have a system in place that is acceptable and that meets the terms that are required to ensure that what we have in place for Nova Scotia wineries is compliant.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The issue is that those subsidies were for companies that were putting money in the ground here, where there is a serious economic output. The government is now using taxpayers' money to subsidize the importation of cheaper grape juice to compete with our local industry and with what's produced here. That's the issue. Will the minister please tell us, since they've made these decisions, how much money has been given out and when?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Our discussions continue. We have until the end of June. I don't know how many times I have to say it. The member will no doubt not accept what I have to say. What matters to me in the end is the industry. My hope is that, by the end of June, they will feel good about what is in place for the industry.

[2:15 p.m.]

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

FTB: GRAPE JUICE SUBSIDY AMOUNT - PROVIDE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister keeps saying we have until the end of June to be trade-compliant when he's been giving out money to commercial bottlers to compete with our locally grown grapes here in Nova Scotia and the wine that's produced by them. Why can't the minister answer this simple question? He's the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. He's in charge of the money. He signs the cheques. Yet he can't be honest with this House and tell us . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would ask that the Leader of the Official Opposition please retract that unparliamentary statement.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I happily retract that comment, but we do need the minister to be forthright with this information. This minister needs to be forthright. How much money has been given out? I'm sure he would have signed these cheques. Please tell the House.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I always want to be forthright. The tale of the tape on this matter will be told when Australia agrees with what we have in place. That will be the tale of the tape as to whether what we have in place is trade-compliant. We must be trade-compliant. Period. That is our intention.

ZACH CHURCHILL: If the government's going to be forthright on this, they could table information from the Trade Policy division on why they're making this decision. I don't think they can, because there's been no advice from the Trade Policy division to do this sort of thing - to use taxpayers' money to subsidize the importation of grape juice that is farmed and produced elsewhere in the country and beyond.

If the government is going to be forthright, they could tell us how much money has been given out to commercial bottlers. They could tell the House that right now. If the government were going to be forthright on this, they could share with us the economic analysis that I'm sure has been done - because they're a government of due diligence, of course - that justifies this decision to use taxpayers' money to subsidize the importation of cheap juice.

I'd like an answer to these from the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, please.

ALLAN MACMASTER: Our government will be pleased to share the information once Australia signs off on it. Let me say something else. What good would the trade advice we get from our lawyers be if I were to share that publicly? It would become worthless. The members should know that, but if they don't, now they should.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: SJAM SCHOOL - REPLACE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Parents and students are frustrated by the painfully slow progress being made at St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary, SJAM. The temporary school lacks access to a gymnasium for physical activity and class and community assemblies. We're now hearing that students must make do with this inferior set-up until September 2025 - clearly not "more, faster."

Kids at SJAM shouldn't have to go another one and a half school years before gaining access to spaces essential for a holistic learning experience. Does the minister think SJAM students deserve an inferior school space for another year and a half?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Absolutely, our SJAM school community deserves to have excellent learning spaces that support their educational experience. That is why work is under way to build the new school for that school community. I completely understand and share the community's eagerness to have this up and going.

They're going to be receiving a PP-6 elementary school, and that school will also have a daycare, which will be an amazing addition to that community and that school community. We're very happy that progress is being made on that project. I look forward to sharing more in a few months.

SUZY HANSEN: We have only waited 15 years, so you know - just saying. Not only does a temporary school have inadequate facilities but it's not even located within the community. While students used to be able to walk to and from school easily, they now face long bus rides to travel across the city. This school community has been displaced for four years now - four years too long. Parents are choosing to keep kids at daycare instead

of busing them to preschool - brings me back to Africville. After many delays, the new school isn't scheduled to open until at least the 2025 school year, if we're lucky.

Historically, SJAM has been the school that's been last on the list for repairs, and now for development. My question is: Why is SJAM not a priority for this government?

BECKY DRUHAN: I can assure the member opposite and the SJAM community that they absolutely are a priority for this government. I spoke with the staff team at SJAM to talk to them about their experiences, and that is a passionate and dedicated staff team.

We talked about the concerns that they have with that transportation. I completely understand that while we're waiting for that new school to be built, it is a challenge to have that transportation in place. It's not the same as having a school in your home community, so I share the community's eagerness with getting that in place.

I'm happy to say, Speaker, that that passionate staff team is absolutely doing a great job in managing through that and working through that to support students. I can say as well that the construction tender has been awarded. We've only been at this for two and a half years. We will get it built. It's a priority, and we'll build all the others in the Halifax Regional Centre for Education too.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

FTB: COMMERCIAL BOTTLER PGM. - EXPLAIN

HON. KEITH IRVING: Let's clarify the timeline here. Last year, we pressed the government to get a trade-compliant agreement in place by June 30, 2023, which in fact they did. They announced it just before the deadline: a trade-compliant program with the farm wineries. The farm wineries were happy. Then something happened in January: they created a new program for commercial bottlers. Commercial bottlers didn't receive a subsidy under the emerging wine region program. Australia didn't issue a trade complaint against bottlers.

My question to the minister: Why is the minister continuing to say that this is a trade issue when it clearly is not?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The member is entitled to his opinion. He's wrong.

KEITH IRVING: What a brilliant answer. Could the minister explain to me how importing juice from Australia and bottling it in Nova Scotia would not be trade-compliant and would upset Australia?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I'll explain to the member that come the end of June this year, our hope is that we will have something in place that Australia agrees is trade-compliant and is also something that the industry feels good about.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

FTB: WINE POLICY CHANGE - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The evidence shows that this was not a trade issue. We have not seen any economic analysis to tell us why this decision was made. The question to the Minister of Finance is: Did the advice come from his department to make these changes, or from the NSLC, or did this come as a directive from the Premier's Office?

THE SPEAKER: Just a gentle reminder to speak through the Speaker, please.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, we consulted with the industry; we consulted with our trade lawyers; we consulted with Innovation, Science and Industry Canada, which is the federal entity that provincial governments would consult with when we are trying to solve these kinds of trade issues. Because it is our Canadian government, our national government, that enters into these free trade agreements with other countries. Those are all the people that we consulted with.

ZACH CHURCHILL: According to the industry, they said they were caught off guard, completely unaware, without any previous consultation on this. I'll quote: "We had one online meeting and one in-person meeting with government since this has happened . . . We were asked questions and we gave questions back to them, and they've never answered our questions."

There has not been consultation with the sector on this. This has not been a request from the farming wine sector. The minister has not clarified whether this was advice from his department or the NSLC.

That leaves us to believe that this directive came from the top of the government. Can the minister please tell us: Was he acting on a directive from the Premier's Office or advice in his department, or with the NSLC?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, the member can suggest whatever he wishes in here. At the end of the day, we consulted with a lot of people: people I just mentioned, people in the industry, people at Innovation, Science and Industry Canada, and so on, with our trade lawyers, most importantly. At the end of the day, we want something in place that the industry feels good about, and our hope is to get there by the end of June.

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

FTB: WINE FUNDING AMOUNT - DIVULGE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I'm not suggesting things. I'm asking, and I'm not getting answers for them on the floor of this Chamber. We've asked these questions. The Premier was asked, does he have a unique relationship with the CEO of Devonian Coast Wineries? You know what his answer was? He loves all Nova Scotians, and then he tried to gaslight Jean Laroche by asking if he was his friend. That's not answering the question. That's not being forthright.

I've asked the minister to give very specific information here today. He will not answer those questions, and that leaves us to be skeptical of this whole deal to begin with. Will the minister please answer these questions? How much money has been given out? Who directed him and his office to move forward with this?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, the member is asking questions to create a narrative, and I'm not going to buy into his questions or his narrative.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We're asking questions to get answers, and governments don't give answers when they think they've done something wrong.

If this was a decision that this government was confident about, they would actually answer these questions and would be forthright with those answers. To date, we've had deflection. We've had a Premier who keeps referring to one of the three Auditor General reports that have come out recently to cast aspersions on the Opposition. We've got a Minister of Finance and Treasury Board who won't answer these questions. They haven't tabled any documentation to substantiate their claims. Yet they say we're trying to create a narrative. You know what? If the minister wants to create his own narrative, perhaps he can start with answering these questions?

How about we ask again? How much money has been given out? Who directed him to make this decision? And was it in line with the advice of his department and the NSLC?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I think if we did a count at this point, I will have probably answered more questions than anybody this sitting in the House. I think I've gotten more questions in the last three days than anybody has.

The member is trying to create a narrative by asking questions. At the end of the day, I've answered questions. I will state very clearly: This is a trade issue. We have until the end of June to put something in place that is trade-compliant, that Australia will agree with. Our hope is that, between now and then, what is in place will be something the industry feels good about.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

EECD: TEACHER BURNOUT - ADDRESS

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, Nova Scotia's population is growing, and enrolment in our schools is increasing in step. This is putting immense pressure on our teachers. A recent survey from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union found that 84 per cent of Nova Scotia teachers have considered leaving the profession in the last five years due to burnout, a lack of resources, and several other factors, and I will table that.

My question for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is: What is this government doing to protect our teachers from burning out?

[2:30 p.m.]

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: It is incredibly important that our staff team of 20,000 across the province - 10,000 of whom are teachers - and others feel supported to be able to provide the support and education that our students need. Our government knows and understands this. That is why we have spent so much time connecting with, listening to, and acting on the advice, recommendations, ideas, and suggestions of teachers and educators across the province.

Speaker, I'm excited to tell you about all the things that we've heard. I have met with over 60 staff teams in meetings. I've been to dozens of schools, and they've given us ideas, like how we add more food to schools. We're introducing a lunch program based on that advice.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm going to table an op-ed by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union president, Ryan Lutes, which talks about the need for another way to support teachers, which is making sure that we support our substitutes. One way to take the pressure off our schools is by addressing the chronic shortage of substitute teachers.

The wages of Nova Scotia's substitute teachers have not kept pace with the steep increase in the cost of living. In fact, they have not even kept pace with the wages of substitute teachers in other provinces. Our substitute teachers are some of the lowest-paid across Canada. I will table that op-ed. My question to the minister is: Will this government give Nova Scotia's substitute teachers the pay raise they need?

BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I've said on many other occasions that I value and respect the bargaining process, and so I'm certainly not going to engage in that on the floor.

The question of substitute teacher pay is one of the types of issues that can be at the table as teachers bargain, so I am not going to address that. This is something that I've spoken to with those thousands of teachers I've talked to. While we await that bargaining process to unfold, we've taken action. Based on the request of teachers across the province, we've increased the term subs, so that we now have term substitute teachers across the

province who are available to be deployed into classes when they're needed, as they're needed. They build relationships in schools, and that's something we've done on action directly on advice from teachers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

FTB: WINE BOTTLING POLICY - CONFIRM

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, we understand from the Premier that he is anxious to "ramp up" the bottling industry. Our understanding is that there are no caps or limits on new entrants. Could the minister please confirm that?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The member is - I'm not quite sure what he's asking. Limits on new entrants for . . . (interruption) bottlers. Okay. No, there are no limits on entrants for anybody in the wine industry in this province. If people want to come here to make wine or to bottle wine or to grow grapes, there are no limits on any of that.

KEITH IRVING: We are hearing that other large bottlers are now looking at setting up in Nova Scotia to collect millions of dollars in subsidies. Why wouldn't they? They can come here, import a dollar's worth of juice, and get \$5.15 from the Government of Nova Scotia. You can come here, open a bottling plant, create six jobs, and receive millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. I ask the government: Is this good economic policy?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I'll remind the member of the good economic policy we had - I know through the Minister of Agriculture. I don't think it was entirely all to the farm wine industry, to the grape growers. For the polar vortex it was \$15 million, because our government wanted to be responsive to the situation that they were in, and continue to be in, because of the flash freezes that we had at that point in time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South on a new question.

FTB: WINE BOTTLERS SUBSIDY - CONFIRM

HON. KEITH IRVING: Let's put one more clarification on this economic policy. I failed to make it clear, and the minister can confirm that this will be millions of dollars annually for a new bottling company to put six jobs here. This is annual subsidies for every bottle produced - \$5.15 for six jobs. Will the minister confirm that this is an annual multi-million dollar subsidy to bottlers?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I can't really say anything more than I already have and that's that we continue to have discussions. The members are putting things on the floor of the House here today, which they're certainly entitled to do, but at the end of the day, what I have to put forward is something that's trade-compliant - and I will.

KEITH IRVING: Has the minister ever met with representatives of Devonian Coast in person or by Zoom - yes or no?

ALLAN MACMASTER: My understanding is that I think I've met with everybody in the wine industry at this point.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DPW: CHIGNECTO ISTHMUS - PROTECT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. There's been a lot of debate here in the Legislature on the importance of our province's 13,000 kilometres of coastline. I've asked over and over again that something be done to protect the stretch of coastline between Nova Scotia and the rest of North America. As we are all aware, the Chignecto Isthmus contains critical transportation, utility, and communication infrastructure, and \$35 billion worth of goods travel across that isthmus each and every year.

Once again, we're only months away from the hurricane season, yet no work has begun to protect the Chignecto Isthmus. Can the minister update the House on when we can expect to see work to start to protect Nova Scotia from becoming an island?

HON. KIM MASLAND: The member would know that we have launched a constitutional reference case before the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal regarding this infrastructure, which we know is very precious to not only us in Nova Scotia but to New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and of course the rest of Canada. We have filed a funding request with the federal government through DMAF, the Disaster Mitigation Adaptation Fund. We're waiting to hear from them, but the work has not stopped.

We continue to do data collection, preliminary design, Indigenous consultation, regulatory work, stakeholder engagement. We know how important this connector is to the province, and we'll continue to do that work.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: We need to actually see shovels in the ground and work started. This government continues to have delays to protect the Chignecto Isthmus by holding things up in the courts. Residents in my constituency watch the weather forecast and tide tables with an anxious eye. Maybe because the minister doesn't live there, she does not understand how much anxiety it causes. It's the truth.

You listen to our mayor and listen to the people who live there. We cannot wait 10 years to be protected from the rising tides of the Chignecto Isthmus from the Bay of Fundy. Every week I hear from residents across the province. You know what people think? They think that once again the people of Cumberland County are being ignored by this government. Let me tell you, this affects every Nova Scotian.

THE SPEAKER: Question.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: When will we see work done on the Chignecto Isthmus, shovels in the ground?

KIM MASLAND: This member across the aisle can stand here and say I don't care because I don't live there, but that's absolutely ridiculous - and she knows it. This file has been ongoing. We have not stopped the work on this file. We're doing preliminary design. We're doing environmental reviews. Yes, it may be in front of the courts, but we're also waiting for the federal government to put up their share, and they darn well haven't.

I care about the Chignecto Isthmus. I know how important it is. You know what? You're welcome to grab a shovel.

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

EECD: 2SLGBTQIA+ SUPPORT GUIDELINES - DELIVER

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. In the 2023 Student Success Survey, 51 per cent of 2SLGBTQIA+ students reported having experienced homophobia or transphobia while at school. I'll table that. Teachers and school staff urgently need updated training, curriculum, and support to be able to adequately support 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Yet we still wait for the government to make crucial updates to the guidelines for supporting transgender and gender-non-conforming students.

Will the minister stand today . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. There's a little bit of chatter here. Can the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island start again, please?

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. In the 2023 Student Success Survey, 51 per cent of 2SLGBTQIA+ students reported having experienced homophobia or transphobia while at school. Teachers and school staff urgently need updated training, curriculum, and support to be able to adequately support 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Yet we are still waiting for this government to make crucial updates to the guidelines for supporting transgender and gender-non-conforming students.

Will the minister stand today and assure 2SLGBTQIA+ students and their families that an update to the guidelines will be delivered by the end of this school year, June 2024?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: All children have the right to live, learn, and grow in a space where they're respected and where they belong - where they feel safe, where they are safe.

The well-being, health, and safety of our 2SLGBTQIA+ students is incredibly important to our government, to the department, and to regions. In fact, that's why we do the work around that Student Success Survey, and why we disaggregate those data so we have an understanding of the experiences of our students.

The guidelines that are in place were put in place in 2014. They were put in place in collaboration with, and on the advice of, health professionals, of colleagues across the education system, and we are working to review those right now.

LISA LACHANCE: We've known that 2SLGBTQIA+ students are vulnerable in our school system for years now. This sense of vulnerability, and the anxiety that comes with it, is only worsening. 2SLGBTQIA+ students are very well aware that their very existence is a source of political fodder in other provinces by other premiers and by a federal leader.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has warned that this increase in extremist rhetoric against the community is likely to inspire greater violence this year. I'll table that. While Nova Scotians wait for concrete action, will the minister stand today and assure 2SLGBTQIA+ and their families that they are safe today and always to use the pronouns and names they choose in Nova Scotia schools?

BECKY DRUHAN: I can absolutely say that we are committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all our students and, specifically, our 2SLGBTQIA+ students and their families.

Speaker, it's more than guidelines. Ensuring the safety of our students within classrooms is about more than guidelines and policies. What does that look like for our 2SLGBTQIA+ students? That means we also need to ensure that our school spaces are spaces that they see themselves reflected in.

Beyond policies and guidelines, that means having resources that reflect their families - all of our families in the diversity communities. That also means that we have training in place for our educators, and that is in place. We'll continue to work toward the safety of these students.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

SLTC: BETTER LONG-TERM CARE POLICIES - IMPLEMENT

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before my question, if I may?

THE SPEAKER: No, you may not during Question Period, I'm sorry. Go ahead, please.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: All right. When Kate - who is with us here today in the gallery - entered long-term care, her care plan provided by the VON community health nurse was accepted by the facility and then totally ignored. Kate's catheter and hygiene care suffered, producing 13 UTIs in 15 months. That's almost one a month.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The clock is not working. My apologies.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'm going to start over.

When Kate entered long-term care, her care plan provided by the VON community health nurse was accepted by the facility and then totally ignored. Kate's catheter and hygiene care suffered 13 UTIs in 15 months. This is unacceptable.

My question to the Minister of Seniors and Long-term care is: What is the minister doing to identify facilities that ignore implementing care plans for residents like Kate?

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: As all members of this Legislature know, we have an aging population, and the care needs of our seniors are becoming more complex every year. We have protections for persons in care, and inspection and compliance teams that are dedicated to all our long-term care facilities. Whenever there is a concern about the care or safety of one of our loved ones as an adult, we encourage all Nova Scotians to reach out to the Protection for Persons in Care team. They will investigate, and they will report back to the department any concerns they might have.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I thank the Minister for the answer, but Kate's issues are not just hygiene. Her care plan was totally not adhered to. She has written to the minister, and nothing has happened since. Nothing has changed.

Kate is not advocating for herself only. She's advocating for 8,000 residents so we can implement better policy in monitoring care plans in long-term care facilities. Can the Minister tell Kate today what tools the department has to facilitate - to make them accountable? Whatever we have right now is not working.

[2:45 p.m.]

BARBARA ADAMS: We have over 8,000 residents living in our long-term care facilities. I want to advise all Nova Scotians who haven't had the opportunity like I have - to work in long-term care - that within two weeks of someone moving into long-term care, their care plans are assessed with their loved one, as well as with any alternative decision-makers.

In each case, the care plan is reviewed on a daily - if not weekly - basis, because our seniors are changing in terms of their cognitive status, their frailty levels, and their dietary needs. Whenever there is a concern, including in Ms. Jocko's case - I have met personally with Ms. Jocko, as have my inspection and compliance team, and they will continue to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader for the Official Opposition.

DED: GRAPE JUICE POLICY CHANGE - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: On October 24, 2023, the Province made an announcement that \$250,000 would be going to Devonian Coast Wineries, which is managed by the Minister of Economic Development.

Considering one of the arguments that's been put forward by the Premier - that these changes are being made because of the economic opportunity - could the minister please tell us if her department has been involved in an economic analysis and what she thinks the return on investment is to Nova Scotia by changing this funding and using taxpayers' money to import grape juice from other parts of the country and the world?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I would reiterate, as my colleagues have, that we have the utmost faith in our wine industry in Nova Scotia. They have taken national and international awards for their products.

When it comes to my involvement in wineries throughout our programs, Invest Nova Scotia works correctly, as the member has mentioned, one-on-one with businesses to look at the unique opportunities that they have for growth. That is different from my colleagues at Agriculture or the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, in terms of their work.

ZACH CHURCHILL: It's clear there's been no economic analysis done on this issue. There is enough room to have serious doubt that this is a trade issue, considering that commercial bottlers weren't even implicated in the trade decision or the trade challenge. Period. They weren't even involved in that.

This is why we in this House are concerned about this idea. We have the government stand up and tell us how much they care about the industry, how much they value it, and how much they support it, yet they are making a decision that the industry itself says could be catastrophic to their businesses and that could put them under. That is something that needs to be paid attention to.

My question to the Minister of Economic Development is: Has she met with farm wineries here in Nova Scotia that create 1,100 jobs, and has she asked them what the impact of this decision will be on them and their future?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I have not met regarding these issues that have been raised in current months, but I have met often with the grape growers and the various wineries in the capacity of Nova Scotia Loyal. When it comes to applications for programs such as the Innovation Rebate Program, we absolutely analyze the business cases for those investments. So it is that, yes, we have an investment, for instance, with McConnell Gordon Estates - which most of us would know as Benjamin Bridge Vineyards - which is investing in facilities and production.

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

The honourable member for Clayton Park West on an introduction.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Correct.

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction. In the gallery with us today we have Gary MacLeod, Chair of the ACE Team, Paul Jenkinson, Communication Coordinator with the ACE Team, and our special guest is Kathy Jocko, a brave Nova Scotian living in a long-term care facility and advocating for everyone.

Please give them a big welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. I hope you enjoy your visit.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALIDUALE: I rise to say a few words about the budget. As a member of the Liberal caucus, my role is the critic of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. I was hoping to see some fruits and some goodwill in this budget in regard to the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, even though I know the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is also the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. I was hoping to see some effort had been made in this budget. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

We as Nova Scotians know how much we cherish our history and our culture. I'm a believer in our culture and our heritage. It's part of our identity. It seems to me that this budget did not reflect that, whether we talk about communities, we talk about libraries, we talk about sports, we talk about museums. We know how all those places are very important for our communities and our society - specifically here, home in Nova Scotia, because we do have a long history in this country that we uphold and that we know. It's in our best interest to continue this culture and this heritage, and to pass it on for the next generation.

We know for a fact that money talks. We know what money can do. But unfortunately, I don't see this budget as a reflection of upholding our communities, our culture, and our heritage. We have so many museums in this province, so many libraries that we reference every time we want to look back in history and in the past. Those places will not exist if we don't invest. That history and those values will not have any benefit unless we invest.

Also, when it comes to sports and recreation - we know the value of sports and recreation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those volunteers and parents who made the sacrifice for our youth and our children to spend their own money and their own time, day in and day out, in order to create the next generation of this province. We know how much we feel proud when we see our youth engaging and competing with the rest of the country or around the globe when they raise the Nova Scotia flag. Those achievements did not come for nothing. There are the people who have invested their money and their time.

I'd really like to see this budget and this government invest for our youth and our recreation spaces, community centres, libraries. The reason I believe that is because those locations and those infrastructures are the foundation for our communities. That's where we build a community. Even though I haven't seen in this budget what I am asking and what I am suggesting, I am also optimistic for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board - the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. I know how much he cherishes his Gaelic language. I know how much he values heritage and culture. I am optimistic that there will be an effort made to invest in this subject matter.

We know we have very historical museums, most of them run by volunteers who sacrifice to uphold this wonderful history of our province, the people who built this province. I would like to see this government make that investment and allow these spaces to be useful for our community.

I remember way back, libraries used to be places that were only to go and pick up a book, and if somebody's making noise, people used to ask if they can hush so that other people can read and concentrate. That's not the case today. A library is bigger than a place just to pick up a book. It is a community hub, it is a community centre, to the point where we see in Halifax, libraries also become a shelter, whether you believe it or not, specifically during the Wintertime.

[3:00 p.m.]

We know the value of these locations that they uphold for our communities. I really believe that if we don't invest in this infrastructure and these community centres, our history will be in trouble. I will ask the government to put part of their priority what we cherish as a society, as a community.

There is a saying: If you don't know where you come from, you don't know where you're going. If we don't uphold our history and how we got where we are today, our next generation will be lost. The only way we can retain this is to invest. This budget doesn't reflect that.

We're talking about health care. We're talking about other things. But we don't value our heritage as a society.

Speaker, I'm standing here to advocate for communities, individuals, people who put their sweat into this province, put their time in to volunteer. What we're asking and what we are suggesting to this government is not billions of dollars. What we're asking is just to pay attention. For our communities.

We as elected officials know that each one of us comes from a community that serves our population, that takes care of one another. I believe we need to invest and to pay attention before it is too late.

I'm hoping this will be reflected in the next budget. As I said earlier, I'm also optimistic the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board will look at this budget and find ways in which we can invest in our communities, our culture, our heritage, and things that matter to our society and our communities here in Nova Scotia.

Sometimes there are certain things that we take for granted. Sometimes there are certain things that we overlook. I really believe that we need to pay attention to our communities, which make efforts day in and day out for us as a society to be connected to

each other and to assist each other and make effort to ensure our youth can be active and can have a better future for their future.

It seems to me this budget has no reflection of assisting the communities as well as arts communities. We would like to see this in the future. As I said earlier, I'm sure the minister who is responsible for this file, as well as the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, will look at these issues and will make efforts on how we can continue to support our communities - specifically libraries, museums, recreation spaces, and sports activities. All these things are interconnected with each other, and you can't remove one or the other. I really believe all these things will prevent a lot of disasters and a lot of loss before they occur.

I encourage the minister to invest and to pay attention for our communities, our culture, and our heritage. In the future, I would like to see investments being made, Speaker. These are the few words that I'd like to address for the budget. As I said earlier, I hope to see efforts being made in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I'd like to rise and say a few words on the budget that was tabled by the government. Earlier in Question Period I brought up a very important issue to the people I represent in Cumberland. It gets me very upset because it makes the people very upset when we continue to see lack of action on issues that matter to the people of Cumberland County.

This particular issue, the Chignecto Isthmus, affects all Nova Scotians. I hear from people from all over the province, every single week, saying, Do not let up on the pressure, this is too important. This just represents the frustration from the people in Cumberland County because for decades the people of Cumberland County have had lack of investment from multiple governments.

Most people in Cumberland County are tired of being forgotten. Most people say, Well, there's another announcement by the government; Cumberland County forgotten again; they think Nova Scotia ends at the tolls. We see that time and time again with announcements. That is why I was very disappointed in this budget not to see an investment, once again, in protecting the Chignecto Isthmus from the rising sea levels that we all know are rising each and every day.

This budget does not give enough to the people of Cumberland County. We need to see more Maritime collaboration. We need to see our province working with neighbouring New Brunswick, looking for ways to collaborate, looking for ways to improve all our economy.

Nova Scotia has a long history with the other Maritime provinces. We used to be the wealthiest in the nation, pre-Confederation. We traded with the U.S. Eastern Seaboard and we were leaders in bringing the country of Canada together. Since then, we've put up these provincial borders and we've seen a decline in the economy for the Maritimes - all Maritime provinces, including Nova Scotia, really, since Confederation.

The people in Cumberland County believe that if our province made more of an effort to work with our neighbouring provinces of New Brunswick and P.E.I., our entire Maritime region would see a dramatic increase in our economy and growth for our people. We see this in all areas, whether it's the economy or whether it's in health care. Being a border community, we see the direct impact when our government does not make policy decisions and legislation with consideration of our neighbouring provinces.

Just recently, we did have a positive announcement in health care, opening a community pharmacy clinic in the Town of Amherst. It's very positive, another way for people to access care when they need it. However, our neighbours in New Brunswick cannot access that community pharmacy clinic, violating the Canada Health Act. This is something that our government should be considering. We should be ensuring that we're complying with the Canada Health Act when we're making all of our health care decisions.

Being a border community, many of our residents go into New Brunswick for health care, and vice versa. Probably up to about 15 per cent of our primary care patients are New Brunswick patients, and then about 15 per cent of New Brunswick's patients in Sackville and Moncton would be Nova Scotia patients. We don't live as though there's a border because we are an integrated community. It's very, very important that our provinces work together.

We feel it when our provinces do not work together. Just recently, Prince Edward Island changed their policies around their patients seeing doctors outside of their province. If a patient from Prince Edward Island sees a family doctor in Nova Scotia, they refuse to pay it. They actually refuse to pay. Again, not in compliance with the Canada Health Act. We need to be working together as a Maritime region, and Nova Scotia can lead that way.

In the budget, we were pleased to see indexing of income tax brackets. This is something that I personally tabled a bill on, and I know my colleagues in the NDP and the Liberal Party also tabled bills asking the government for indexation. I know it's something that those in government had called on the previous government for when they were in Opposition. We were pleased to see this finally happen.

I do believe, though, it did not go far enough. The basic personal tax exemption should be increased. We are the lowest in the country, which still makes us the highest-taxed province in the country.

Cumberland County has some of the highest poverty rates in Nova Scotia. We also have the highest rates of disability in the province. When decisions are made by this government that hurt those most vulnerable, we feel it and see it in Cumberland County. I believe the government needs to do more to take care of those most vulnerable. When we have the highest taxation in the country, that is not helpful for those who are struggling financially.

I'm sure I'm not alone in this House when we speak to our constituents. Just recently, I spoke to a woman who is quite negative about politicians. She doesn't really expect that I'll be able to help her, but I gave her my word that I'm going to make every effort to. She's a senior - she's over 65. She takes care of her husband, who's disabled. She's also trying to raise a granddaughter. She can't afford to put food on the table. She said that for the first time, she's going to the food bank. It's not right. She and her husband both worked their entire lives and they cannot afford to put gas in their car.

In addition to increasing the basic personal tax exemption, I believe the government also needs to look at other ways so that people can have more of their own money - small things, but that make a big difference. Things like removing the tax on the sale of used vehicles. The people who are most affected by that tax decision are people who are living in poverty, because they cannot afford a new vehicle. I know that there are members opposite who actually advocated for that policy change, so I was surprised to once again not see that in this budget. We should not be continuously taxing the sale of used vehicles.

We also shouldn't be charging tax on tax. It's philosophically wrong. Once again, we did not see that in this budget. We're charging HST on top of federal excise tax on fuel - 10 cents a litre. We're charging HST on top of provincial motive fuel tax - 15.5 cents per litre. We're charging HST on carbon tax on fuel. It's just wrong.

We also, I believe, should be looking at the property tax rates. I have had numerous complaints about the rising cost of property taxes. In fact, just this morning I got an email from a very angry citizen saying she has seen a 75 per cent increase in her property taxes in the last couple of years and she cannot even drive up her road because of the conditions right now. People are fed up. They are saying: I am taxed to death, and I can't even drive on my road.

I have also tabled a bill asking the government to remove tax on tax when it comes to property taxes. Why are people paying income tax on the property tax that they are paying? Again, tax on tax. It is fundamentally wrong and should be changed.

I believe every provincial legislature - every budget in Canada - should be looked at through a gender equity lens, and when you look at this budget through that lens, we are not seeing things specifically to advance the women in this province. Specifically, my colleagues in the NDP - they tabled a bill. A similar bill has been passed in British Columbia and I believe Manitoba offering free birth control to women. That one thing

would fundamentally change the lives of many women in this province for the better. We are slowly increasing the number of women who are elected in government. It's time we actually start seeing changes that reflect that, when we start seeing a budget that looks through a gender equity lens.

[3:15 p.m.]

Just yesterday my colleague from Clayton Park West tabled a bill that would make a difference in the lives of women. It is important that we are looking at ways to advance women in this province, and each and every one of us, male and female, have a responsibility to advance that for the betterment of our province. Tomorrow we will be celebrating International Women's Day and I look forward to hearing all the speeches from those in here talking about how we can improve and empower the women in this province.

Going back to Cumberland County, I want to specifically talk about how the budget could do better, and that is in the area of mental health care. We have too many people in Cumberland County who are suffering from mental illness, and they do not have access to supports and services. We have people struggling in their homes, family members trying to get them help, and the help is not there. We call RCMP to do wellness checks and the RCMP will call back and say, Really, there is nothing we can do, and we are not trained. We are not mental health workers. We are there to enforce the law.

We've seen a decrease in health care services up in Cumberland County since this government took office and there has been lots of money spent but we are not seeing an improvement in the care. We are not seeing an increase in family physicians. In fact, we are seeing a decrease. We are not seeing an increase in services for those with mental illness and addictions. We are seeing a decrease. Our detox actually decreased hours. Instead of being open seven days a week, it is only open five days a week and people are told on a Friday, You're out the door. Most of the time they are not ready to be discharged home and some of them don't even have a home and they're discharged out and they're back on the street.

We had a hospital - a brand new hospital - that was scheduled to open last Summer in Pugwash - still not open. There's been no public announcement of when that date is going to be, but we're hearing rumours that it will be in May. No family physicians have been hired to work in that hospital.

We have a hospital in Amherst. The previous government made a very much-needed announcement for an expansion of the emergency department and dialysis unit - a new 12-bed dialysis unit - for it. That happened in December 2020. There was supposed to be a plan made and work started by now, but we haven't seen that either.

I'm getting messages by the day - several, in fact, just this morning - about a stoppage of the chronic pain clinic. We have residents who are suffering, in pain, who have nowhere to go.

Speaker, I'll have more to say on another day, where I'm going to continue to give a reply to this budget. I think it's important that this government remembers that Cumberland County is part of Nova Scotia, and we expect our fair share.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I'm happy to stand and speak to Supply, about this budget, for just a few minutes.

Speaker, as you well know, because you are soon going to be taking my place, I have had the honour and privilege of representing the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians organization here in Nova Scotia. And now I am representing the CWP-Canadian Region on the international stage of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. This means I am going to be meeting and chairing meetings with women leaders from all over Canada - the Canadian region - and also I meet quarterly with the chairs of the international steering committee. I'm meeting with people from Belize and Australia and Nigeria - I can't remember all of the other countries that are represented on that steering committee, but it's pretty amazing.

One of the focuses of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians is how we encourage - how we value - women in our parliaments and in our societies, and how we encourage women to run for office, accepting the notion, or the fact, that the more women we elect in public office, the better all people - all women and all people - will be.

This morning our honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs reminded us that women make up 47.5 per cent of the population. Maybe even slightly more than that - I'm not sure. We make up half of the population. I want to talk a little bit about this budget in light of that, as my colleague did a little bit, and talk about how we make sure that our budgets - whatever we do: our laws, our policies, and our budgets in Nova Scotia and Canada - reflect the needs of women and respect women as equals in our society. We would call that a gender-sensitive budget. If a budget did that, we would call it a gender-sensitive budget. Part of the work of the CWP that I'm involved in is having parliaments throughout the Commonwealth going through this process of gender-sensitizing their budgets.

This budget we're talking about today - there are actually some good things for women in this budget. There are. There's some money for transition houses. We know that this has been long asked for and is much-needed. We know that women all across the province are facing increased instances of domestic partner violence, violence at home, and need places to go, to escape. Transition houses have been a part of that solution for a long

time, especially in rural areas, and have been significantly underfunded for many, many years. So it is good to see money for transition houses in this budget. I applaud the government for making that decision.

Believe it or not, Speaker, school food is a woman's issue, actually. It's a children's issue, it's a family issue, but it does become a women's issue if we look at the number of single-parent families that are led by women, and let's face it, folks, most of the people who make the lunches in the mornings when you're sending your kids off to school.

Now I'm sure there are all kinds of guys in this Chamber who make the lunches - absolutely, and this is not about them. This is about the women who need the help, and the women-led households that the school food program will help. It's about those young girls who are going to have food where they wouldn't have - those hot lunches or those lunches at school that will help those girls excel at school and grow up to be strong and educated gals.

There are also some things in this budget that are wholly bad for women, and I would say one of those things is the freeze on income assistance rates. Again, we'll talk about women-led households in this province, single-parent households that are women-led. Those households in this budget are being ignored by this freeze of income assistance rates.

So yes, everyone is going to get \$150, and I am not pooh-poohing that. I am not shaking my head at that. I do know the benefit and the value of \$150, and I know what it can buy in a grocery store because I do the grocery shopping in my family usually. So I am not saying that that's a bad deal. What I am saying is that income assistance rates are way too low, and they have been for a long time.

People who live on income assistance, whether they're getting the \$150 one-time payment, whether they're getting the \$300 increase, it's still way too low. You can't pay for all of the things you need to pay for, especially if you live in market rental housing on income assistance. Something is going to give. It's going to be healthy food, food at all. It's going to be medication. It's going to be - forgive me for suggesting that someone should be able to pay for registration for soccer or take their family skating or to a movie every once in a while. It's definitely not considering any of those things.

We need to seriously look at the way we are funding and encouraging and treating, I guess is the right word, people of low incomes. In particular, we know that many women lead the lowest-income families in the province.

If we could take this budget and put it into a little computer program or put it into a little device that could apply to every decision made in this budget a gender-sensitive lens, then we would see that probably - and I haven't done this myself because I haven't had time, but I have pointed out a couple of things - we would probably see that there are

lots of things that could change in this budget and improve in this budget if we want to talk about a gender-sensitive budget.

Why am I talking about this today? Well, because this is a day that I get to speak to Supply. It's also the day before International Women's Day, and also, we've had a few back-and-forths in this chamber of late where we've said words like "misogyny" and we've said words like "sexism" - or actually, I'm just saying "sexism" for the first time today - but I want to be clear about what we're talking about when we talk about misogyny.

[3:30 p.m.]

Misogyny, in and of itself, the word, Speaker, is not unparliamentary. It is a word. It is a thing. It's defined as this: It is a form of sexism that can keep women at a lower social status than men, thus maintaining the social roles of patriarchy. Misogyny has been widely practised for thousands of years. It is reflected in art, literature, human societal structure, historical events, mythology, philosophy, and religion worldwide.

I didn't just make it up. I didn't just pretend that I knew way more than everyone else in this Chamber and decide to slap a word onto what I experienced yesterday in the Chamber. It's a real thing.

Misogyny and sexism are sometimes hard to see because they're insidious. They're omnipresent. It's everywhere. We're so used to it that we don't even notice when it's happening. That's because of misogyny. It's because of patriarchy, and because of all the reasons. It's colonization. It's the things that have created our society and the way it is, and this budget suffers from it.

There is not a woman on this planet who hasn't in some way experienced it - even women who have great partners. Even women who have had great lives, who are powerful women, and who have never experienced overt sexism have experienced misogyny or internalized misogyny. It's hard to see sometimes, but there's no denying the effects. It's why women earn less than men. It's why women are judged on their clothing. It's why women are judged for their career choices or for even choosing to have a career, and not stay home and take care of the kids, or to stay home and take care of the kids and not have a career. Basically, women can't get any of that right, ever, according to someone.

It's why women are disproportionately the victims of assault and harassment. It's why I could not leave the hospital when I had my baby - because I had to call my ex-husband and get him to tell me the date of our divorce so I could prove that I was divorced from him before I left the hospital with my baby. Come on. It's why we constantly second-guess our instincts and ask, "Was that okay?" after I speak or say something that I really believe in. "Do I look okay?" "Was that okay?" "I feel a little fat today."

It's why we're told to smile more. It's why when we question the merits of a powerful man's policy decision, that powerful man will call us negative and question our reputations rather than engage in the merits of the arguments. We see this all over in politics. Women and particularly women leaders - leaders of parties, leaders of countries, leaders of provinces - are characterized as negative, and that characterization is misogyny.

When I attend these Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians meetings - I would love to be able to go to Australia next year, although I don't know that my leader is going to let me go on that trip, but that's another story - I would love to be able to say that Nova Scotia is all set for women to join this Legislature, all set for women to open businesses, all set for women to do everything they can to live their best lives. But I can't do that. I would love to be able to say that whether you're in the government or in the Opposition, or whether you hold important, powerful positions in non-partisan offices like the Auditor General, being at the helm of Elections Nova Scotia, or being the Information and Privacy Commissioner - no matter what part of politics you want to engage in - I would love to be able to say that your voice will be valued and that you can count on the fact that Nova Scotia makes policies and laws that are created using a gender-sensitive lens. Unfortunately, when I go to those meetings - when I represent our Province and our country on the international stage - I will not be able to say that.

I would love for this government - whether it be the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board or someone else in the government - to table the documents and the lens through which this budget has been examined according to gender. Show us the metrics. Show us the documents. If ministers are asked in Estimates, "Has your budget gone through a gender-sensitive lens?" and they say "Yes," then show us where. Show us how. Show us the questions. Show us how we examined every line of this budget to make sure that it honours, protects, and uplifts women. There should be nothing less in this Chamber, and we should stop being misogynists.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I move that you now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself in the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to resolve into Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

The motion is carried.

We shall have a short recess in order to set up for the Committee of the Whole House on Supply.

[3:45 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse in the Chair.]

[7:50 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on Supply reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Supply has met and made progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[7:54 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[7:56 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Pursuant to Rule 5C, I move that the time of adjournment of the House on Friday, March 8th be not 1:00 p.m. but 5:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: We have a motion on the floor for the time of adjournment tomorrow to be not 1:00 p.m. but 5:00 p.m.

All those in favour?

There has been a request for a recorded vote. The bells will ring until the Whips are satisfied.

[7:57 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: The Clerk will now conduct a recorded vote.

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[8:47 p.m.]

YEAS

Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Michelle Thompson
Hon. John Lohr
Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Hon. Tim Halman
Hon. Kent Smith
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Jill Balser
Hon. Trevor Boudreau
Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
John White
John A. MacDonald
Hon. Pat Dunn
Hon. Keith Bain
Chris Palmer
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Danielle Barkhouse
Tom Taggart
Larry Harrison
Hon. Steve Craig

NAYS

Hon. Keith Irving
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Kelly Regan
Hon. Iain Rankin
Claudia Chender
Susan Leblanc
Kendra Coombes
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Hon. Ben Jessome
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

THE CLERK: For, 28. Against, 14.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move to adjourn.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do now rise to meet again tomorrow between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 8:51 p.m.]