



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS**

**Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane**

Published by Order of the Legislature by Hansard Reporting Services and printed by the King’s Printer.

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

**First Session**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2024**

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>SPEAKER’S RULING:</b>	
Two member statements made by the member for Cumberland North were out of order ([Hansard p.7927 & p. 7928, March 7, 2024]) .....	7967
<b>PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS:</b>	
Gov’t. (N.S.): Seniors Eviction Ban - Request, G. Burrill .....	7968
<b>GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:</b>	
Res. 942, International Women’s Day: Women in Leg. - Recog., The Premier .....	7968
Vote - Affirmative .....	7970
Res. 943, Reinhardt, Scott: Firefighter & Builder - Recog., Hon. J. Lohr .....	7970
Vote - Affirmative .....	7971
Res. 944, Yang, Christine Qin: Prof. & Vol. Success - Congrats., Hon. K. Smith .....	7971
Vote - Affirmative .....	7972

Res. 945, Upshaw, Tia: Blk Women in Excellence - Recog.,	
Hon. J. Balsler.....	7972
Vote - Affirmative.....	7973
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 432, Finance Act (amended),	
Hon. K. Irving.....	7973
No. 433, Motor Vehicle Act (amended),	
Hon. B. Jessome.....	7973
NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 946, International Women's Day: Women in Leg. - Recog.,	
G. Burrill.....	7974
Vote - Affirmative.....	7974
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Bland, Lisa: Com. Serv. - Recog.,	
M. Sheehy-Richard.....	7975
Cole Harbour Cares: Helping Imms. - Recog.,	
C. Chender.....	7976
Dental Assistants: Contribs. - Thanks,	
Hon. Z. Churchill.....	7976
Daughters: Accomplishments - Recog.,	
Hon. P. Dunn.....	7977
Advocates: Banning NDAs - Recog.,	
L. Lachance.....	7978
Wife & Daughters: Apprec. - Recog.,	
Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	7978
Children: Appreciation - Recog.,	
D. Barkhouse.....	7978
Const. Assts.: Work - Recog.,	
S. Leblanc.....	7979
Cluett, Amanda: Gift Box Bus. - Recog.,	
L. Nicoll.....	7980
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog.,	
Hon. K. Smith.....	7980
Women: Need for Inclusion - Recog.,	
K. Coombes.....	7981
Daniels, David: QEII Medal Recip. - Congrats.,	
Hon. K. Irving.....	7981
Women in Leg.: Firsts - Recog.,	
Hon. G. Morrow.....	7982
Gender Equality: Need - Recog.,	
S. Hansen.....	7982
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog.,	
A. Duale.....	7983
Women in Leg.: Firsts - Recog.,	
Hon. B. Adams.....	7983
MSVU Fac. Assoc.: Settlement - Recog.,	

G. Burrill.....	7984
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog., Hon. Z. Churchill.....	7984
Women in Leg.: Firsts - Recog., C. Chender.....	7984
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog., Hon. C. LeBlanc.....	7985
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog., F. Tilley.....	7985
N.S. Players: PWHL - Recog., S. Leblanc.....	7986
Layton, Meredith: Com. Serv. - Thanks, T. Taggart.....	7986
Paul, Tayla: Art Work & Activism - Recog., L. Lachance.....	7987
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog., R. LeBlanc.....	7987
Inspiring Women: Apprec. - Recog., L. Harrison.....	7988
MacLeod, Karen: GvHD Treatment - Recog., K. Coombes.....	7988
Female Fam. Mbrs.: Apprec. - Recog., C. Kerr.....	7989
Inspiring Women: Apprec. - Recog., S. Hansen.....	7989
McCormick, Linda: Vol. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., Hon. T. Rushton.....	7989
Women in Leg.: Apprec. - Recog., Hon. K. Regan.....	7990
<b>ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:</b>	
No. 1,466, Prem.: Energy Poverty Increase - Stop, Hon. Z. Churchill.....	7991
No. 1,467, Prem.: NDA Abuse - Stop, C. Chender.....	7993
No. 1,468, DOJ: NDA Misuse - Ban, L. Nicoll.....	7995
No. 1,469, DOJ: NDA Victims - Protect, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	7996
No. 1,470, DOJ: Sexual Violence Victims - Protect, Hon. K. Regan.....	7997
No. 1,471, DOJ: NDA Legislation - Enact, C. Chender.....	7998
No. 1,472, ECC: Coastline - Protect, Hon. I. Rankin.....	8000
No. 1,473, ECC: Coastal Consultation Purpose - Explain, Hon. I. Rankin.....	8001

No. 1,474, NRR: Bear Hunt Data - Provide, Hon. I. Rankin.....	8002
No. 1,475, ECC: Coastal Consultation Input - Table, L. Lachance.....	8003
No. 1,476, DOJ: NDA Legislation - Implement, Hon. Z. Churchill.....	8004
No. 1,477, DFA: Elver Fishery Enforcement - Improve, R. LeBlanc .....	8006
No. 1,478, DOJ: NDA Misuse - Ban, E. Smith-McCrossin.....	8007
POINT OF ORDER, A. Duale.....	8008
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:	
ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY:	
K. Coombes.....	8010
Hon. K. Regan.....	8013
C. Palmer.....	8017
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CWH ON SUPPLY AT 11:45 A.M.....	8021
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 3:57 P.M.....	8021
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Monday, March 18 <sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. ....	8022



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2024**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**9:00 A.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Before we begin the daily routine, I do want to make a Speaker's Ruling on something from yesterday. Having reviewed the guidelines and rulings of previous Speakers regarding statements by members, I must rule the two statements made by the honourable member for Cumberland North to be out of order on two grounds.

The first is because the statements were quotations of someone else's words. Generally, members are not permitted to quote from a document during a statement, as documents are not permitted to be tabled during statements by members. A member who wishes to quote from a document during statements by members must put the document before the House before then by tabling it during the order of business, Tabling Reports, Regulations and Other Papers. Even if the quotation had been tabled, the quotation was poetry, not prose.

That brings me to the second ground, which is that member statements are not to be used for recitation of poetry. Both guidelines were set out by Speaker Murphy during his Speaker's Ruling on October 20, 2014.

I would encourage all members to familiarize themselves again with the guidelines for statements by members. In going forward, just keep that in mind, please. Thank you.

### **PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Thank you. I beg leave to present a petition, which reads as follows:

Whereas over one-quarter of those who are homeless for the first time are over the age of 60; and

Whereas nearly 6,000 people are on the wait-list for public housing, with an average wait time of 2 years;

Therefore be it resolved that the provincial government ban evictions of seniors whose incomes would qualify them for public housing until there is a place in public housing for them to go.

This has been signed by a number of residents of Young Street and Connaught Avenue in the constituency of Halifax Chebucto, and I have also signed it.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

### **PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

### **TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 942**

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

Whereas today, on International Women's Day, it is fitting to highlight trailblazing Progressive Conservative women like Gladys Porter, the first woman elected to the Legislature; Maxine Cochran, the first female Cabinet minister; and Marie Dechman, the first

female Deputy Speaker - all members of the Progressive Conservative Party; and

Whereas the PC record of inclusion continues in the inspiring work of intelligent women like the first female African Nova Scotian Cabinet Minister, Twila Grosse; the first female Minister responsible for Military Relations, Barbara Adams; the first female Government House Leader . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Just a friendly reminder to not use personal names of members - but use either their government department or their constituency.

Continue, Premier.

THE PREMIER: Thank you so much.

The first female Government House Leader, the MLA for Queens - surname Masland (laughter); the first female MLA for Hants West; and of course, Speaker, the first female Speaker in this House of Assembly; and

Whereas this year alone, the government will invest over \$7 million for salaries, staffing levels, and operating costs at 10 transition houses and 10 women's centres, in addition to the \$9.8 million core funding, which represents the first funding increase to transition houses since 2014;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislature salute the work and legacy of the incredible contributions and impact of the PC women trailblazers and honour the women closest to us - who for me are my mother, an incredibly strong woman; my sister, who has shown incredible strength over the past year; my mother-in-law, who is a true inspiration and a real miracle, to be honest; my wife who carries so much. All of our partners know that in this profession. Many times, it's difficult to be present mentally, even when you're present physically. My wife carries so much, and I love her so dearly; and of course, my daughter Paget, who won medals at Queens Law, crushed the New York bar exam, and is currently making it in New York City. If you can make it there, Speaker . . .

(Applause)

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 943**

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

Whereas hundreds of Nova Scotians experienced the devastating impacts of last May's wildfires, and are just now, almost one year later, beginning to rebuild their homes and their lives; and

Whereas my director of communications, Chrissy Matheson, and her family were among the many Nova Scotians who lost their homes; and

Whereas on June 1, 2023, two days after the fire, Chrissy was introduced to her future builder, Scott Reinhardt, whom she discovered that day was a volunteer firefighter who fought on her home, and while he was unable to save her house, he had a hand in saving many other homes in the Westwood Hills neighbourhood of Upper Tantallon, and even built her new home;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly recognize Scott Reinhardt, both in his role as a firefighter and as a builder, for stepping up in many ways to respond to this emergency on the front lines; Scott's team for their hard work and dedication to build a family home, a mere 10 months after it was lost; and Chrissy and her family, who moved back on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Welcome home.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?



It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. KENT SMITH: Speaker, before I read my resolution, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, you may.

KENT SMITH: In the East Gallery, I'd like to bring everyone's attention to Ms. Christine Yang, the Manager of Market Development for the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. She is the subject of my resolution. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 944**

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

Whereas Christine Yang, Manager of Market Development at the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, skillfully leads many projects to build the Nova Scotia seafood brand in global markets; and

Whereas, through her passion for social justice, she has volunteered and helped to empower Asian immigrants and international students, and her advocacy work resulted in May bring proclaimed Asian Heritage Month in Nova Scotia annually since 2020; and

Whereas Christine is one of 10 former international students from around the world recognized by the International Alumni of Impact Program, with a scholarship being presented in her name;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly congratulate Christine Yang on her professionalism and her volunteer success, and thank her for her commitment to collaboration, positive change, and building a better, more inclusive Nova Scotia.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, before I read my government notice of motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

JILL BALSER: It is my honour to introduce Tia Upshaw here with us in the Speaker's Gallery. I would like to thank Tia for joining us yet again - two days in a row, that's very impressive - on this significant day: International Women's Day. I would like to take the opportunity to recognize her contributions, inspiration, and support for women in business, not only to this point in time but for generations to come. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. It's nice to have you here again today.

The honourable Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 945**

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

Whereas International Women's Day is March 8<sup>th</sup>, with the theme "Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress," and is a day to recognize and celebrate the remarkable women, girls, and individuals who identify as women who contribute to the strength and wellbeing of our communities; and

Whereas Halifax entrepreneur Tia Upshaw is passionate about supporting and uplifting Black women to construct a more

inclusive entrepreneurial landscape, and is the founder and CEO of Black Women in Excellence, a groundbreaking organization that provides a transformative space for Black women in Nova Scotia and Kelowna, B.C. to foster connections, collaborate, and thrive; and

[9:15 a.m.]

Whereas Tia's unwavering dedication to empowering women and fostering entrepreneurship earned her a 2023 Human Rights Award named in honour of the late Burnley Allan "Rocky" Jones for her work to champion racial equality and foster economic empowerment for women of colour;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in recognizing Tia Upshaw for the important work she has done to invest in women, accelerate progress by breaking down barriers, and unleash the potential of Black women and girls.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

#### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 432 - An Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the acts of 2010, the Finance Act. (Hon. Keith Irving)**

**Bill No. 433 - An Act to Amend Chapter 293 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Motor Vehicle Act, Respecting Speed Limits Near Daycares. (Hon. Ben Jessome)**

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

#### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**RESOLUTION NO. 946**

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

Whereas the present NDP caucus contains the greatest percentage of women and non-binary persons ever to have been experienced in any Canadian jurisdiction, federally or provincially or territorially, since Confederation; and

Whereas this is the direct result of decades of focusing on and prioritizing the leadership of women in every aspect of the life of the New Democratic Party; and

Whereas the NDP is the only caucus in this House led today by a woman, the MLA for Dartmouth South;

Therefore be it resolved that the Legislature on International Women's Day calls upon all its bodies, structures, and standing committees to acknowledge and appreciate these historic and important features of the composition of the current House of Assembly of Nova Scotia.

I request waiver of notice and passage without debate, and I retroactively ask that this notice of motion may be debated on a future day. I request unanimous consent for this.

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.

Are there any further notices of motion?

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Before I begin my statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: In the East Gallery I have guests visiting today: Lisa Bland from Three Mile Plains and her husband, navy officer Alan Bland. I ask that the House give a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Nice to have you here today.

The honourable member for Hants West.

**BLAND, LISA: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: In honour of International Women's Day, I rise to recognize Lisa Bland of Three Mile Plains. Lisa is actively involved in our community lending her expertise over the years to Guiding groups, and recently earned her District Commissioner pin for the Hants District Girl Guides of Canada.

She is a member of the Valley Region of the Council on African Canadian Education, and a strong advocate for Wellness Within, an organization for health and justice. The Black Doula Toolkit she created not only addresses common health concerns of pregnant women of African descent, but is also a resource to assist with parenting, advocacy in health care, and birth planning.

Lisa is a busy mom of two, wife of a navy officer, hobby farm enthusiast, and a registered nurse, who has stepped slightly away from her work in women's health for a research role at Dalhousie University.

I have no doubt that Lisa will continue to be a very strong community leader and I thank her for all that she does.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite where we have a group of amazing volunteers, about whom I'm about to read a member statement. In the gallery we have the members of Cole Harbour Cares and I'd ask you to rise when I say your name. Diana and Danny Goodz, Anne Woods, Chris James, Dougald Kennedy, Marijke Simons, and Nancy Bowes - whom I should say, when the member

earlier read the statement talking about the decades of work that has gone into the New Democratic Party and the component of our caucus, played a major role in that. Please receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Nice to have you hear today to join us.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

### **COLE HARBOUR CARES: HELPING NEWCOMERS - THANKS**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Today I want to honour Cole Harbour Cares, a group of volunteers who've spent just shy of a decade helping newcomers settle in our province. The group worked tirelessly to bring two families to Nova Scotia: the Kilanis - a mom, dad, and three children - as well as the Al-Asadis - a mom, dad, and three kids, and they have since welcomed a fourth child since arriving. Every member of both families is now a Canadian citizen.

Cole Harbour Cares has had more than 30 volunteers and dozens of donors support them over the years, coming from two different denominations in the community, as well as the community at large, with no religious affiliation. Supporters gave their time and money, their furniture, their household goods, and found a suitable first apartment for each family.

Most importantly, they supported the newcomers in their first years in Canada, tutoring to help children adapt to Canadian schools, helped with finding doctors and dentists, driving teenage kids to soccer, cheering at the games, helping to find jobs, and adjusting to new languages, culture, and climate. Please join me in thanking Cole Harbour Cares for their decade of community support.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

### **DENTAL ASSISTANTS: CONTRIBS. - THANKS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to recognize our dental assistants across the province, who are primarily women. Dental assistants are an integral member of patient safety, care, and enhanced patient satisfaction in dental offices around the world.

A qualified dental assistant completes formal education, passes national certificate exams, and upholds professional standards for safe, skilled patient care. They certainly are an essential component of everyday dental practice here in Nova Scotia.

March 3<sup>rd</sup> to March 10<sup>th</sup> has been designated by the Canadian Dental Assistants Association as the perfect time to acknowledge and recognize this versatile, multi-talented

member of the dental team. I ask this House to join me in thanking dental assistants in Nova Scotia for all their contributions toward preventive health care.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

### **DAUGHTERS: ACCOMPLISHMENTS - RECOG.**

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, on International Women's Day, we celebrate the remarkable strength and unwavering determination of women across the globe. Among these incredible women are my three daughters, whose journey embodies the essence of perseverance and dedication.

Our eldest daughter, Tara, an honours graduate of Harvard University, entered the business world following the completion of three degrees. She is currently the CEO of a surgical health company located near Los Angeles, California. She's also a member of the Harvard University NCAA hockey championship team and also found time to play on the university softball team.

Ashley, whose rank is commander in the Canadian Armed Forces, is presently working in the Office of the Judge Advocate Counsel as a legal officer. She is the only Canadian legal officer at NORAD headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. She also played five years of university hockey at Queens and the University of New Brunswick.

Our youngest daughter, Krista, a stellar Rugby player at McGill University, completed her undergraduate degree, attended the medical school of Dalhousie, returned to McGill to train as an ER doctor, and is currently working in our beautiful province.

They have become role models for future generations of women.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction relative to my member's statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

LISA LACHANCE: In the East Gallery, and I'll ask them to rise as I say their names, we are joined today by Ms. Erin Casey, Mr. Hank Benlalen, Dr. Wendy Carroll, and the Rev. Dr. Jay McGrath. I ask everyone to provide them with a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for joining us today. Welcome.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

**ADVOCATES: BANNING NDAs - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise on International Women's Day to recognize Dr. Wendy Carroll and Ms. Erin Casey, leaders in the fight to end the misuse of non-disclosure agreements in cases of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse. Erin and Wendy lived for more than a decade with an NDA related to workplace misconduct at UPEI. Through groundbreaking reconciliation work in collaboration with new leadership at UPEI, they are partially released, and sharing their expertise.

NDAs create an impenetrable wall of silence around workplace misconduct. Wendy and Erin's mission is to help us understand why limiting the use of NDAs matters. The equity of women and gender-diverse Nova Scotians in the workplace hangs in the balance - not just the right to safety, but to career success, advancement, and security. Every day, taxpayers' dollars are spent on legal fees to protect perpetrators.

I ask you to welcome Erin and Wendy and to recognize that workplace safety and gender equity are not controversial or political, but a human right.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**WIFE & DAUGHTERS: APPREC. - RECOG.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: On International Women's Day, I just want to recognize the three girls at home that I am blessed to have as a family. I always say I'm in fourth place - probably fifth place behind the cat, but that's all right.

I rise in my place to recognize two little girls who amaze me each and every day. They're getting a little older, as our kids do, and they get involved with a lot. You see them find their own path as they go. I want to recognize my wife, Stephanie, who is a learning centre teacher in the school system, and she has dedicated her life to helping kids.

I rise in my place happy to be in fifth place in my family. I love you all. You're home today because there's no school in Cape Breton, and I look forward to seeing you when I get home.

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

**CHILDREN: APPRECIATION - RECOG.**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Speaker, first, I would like to say I'm happy to be standing here to celebrate International Women's Day. I wish everyone a happy International Women's Day.



I never do this - not very often - but I want to talk about my children, specifically one of three beautiful children: Sebastian, AKA Sebby; Maddie, AKA Maddie-cakes; and Logan, AKA Logie Bear, who turns 27. As a single mother, I tried to instill strength - I'm sorry; my kids are my everything, so I get a little choked up - hard work, respect, love, determination. I have taught all my children that if they work the hardest and they work the smartest, even if they're the last ones being hired, they will not be the first ones fired. All three of my children, especially my son, show that every day - graduated college, went through more things that anybody can understand.

I just want to say Happy Birthday, Logie Bear. I love you so much.

[9:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Before I make a member statement, I would like to make a quick introduction not related to my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Joining us just now in the gallery is a group of French immersion students from Dartmouth High School, which is - I think the member from Dartmouth South and I kind of argue over which riding it's in, but anyway, it's on the border of Dartmouth South/Dartmouth North.

Cette semaine est la Semaine de l'éducation en français. Maybe that's why the French immersion students have chosen this day to come. I hope it is. I'd like to welcome their teachers, Holson Etienne and Kathryn Simms, and the students: Shamaar Borden; Kay Garrison; John Cluett; Luc Valancourt; Connor Macphee; Lian MacLellan; Nolan Stevens; and Taeyah Briand. Welcome everyone and anyone else I might have missed.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. It's really great to have you here.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

### **CONST. ASSTS.: WORK - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: On today - International Women's Day - I want to make mention of a number of amazing women who help us in the NDP Caucus do our work every day. Behind every powerful woman politician, there is a whole team of other powerful women, so I'd like to name them today and thank them so much for working so hard, especially on these hours of the session: Meredith O'Hara; Emily Stapleton; Lori Oliver; Evelyn Hornbeck; Grace Szucs; Abby Cameron; Lauren Skabar; and in our

constituency offices there are Ann and Donna in Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier; Aisha and Aminah in Halifax Needham; Shauna in Dartmouth South; Rebecca and Sandi in Dartmouth North; Sandi and Tessa in Halifax Chebucto; and Jen and Aminah in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. Thank you to all of those amazing people.

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

**CLUETT, AMANDA: GIFT BOX BUS. - RECOG.**

LORELEI NICOLL: Today, on International Women's Day, I stand to recognize the many outstanding women small business owners in our communities, including Amanda Cluett, a Dartmouth native who started Black Bow Gift Company in 2019, operating out of her home, where the business pretty much took over her whole house in the Russell Lake area.

After seeing steady annual growth, Amanda has recently moved her custom gift box business to a commercial space not far from her home to Mount Hope Avenue. Her new location is ideal for assembling her custom gift boxes for birthdays, anniversaries, and corporate functions. Black Bow Gift Company has six employees, with an increased workforce during the holiday season when she's the busiest. Amanda works with businesses on their vision and loves making the gifts unique for her clients.

I ask that the members of the House of Assembly join me in wishing Amanda, and all women small business owners, continued business success in their new Dartmouth location for Black Bow Gift Company.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

HON. KENT SMITH: On this International Women's Day I rise to recognize and acknowledge the most important women in my life. There are many, including the amazing women we are all surrounded by in this House, but there are six whom I would like to highlight.

Number 1: My partner, my best friend, and the most impressive woman I've ever met, Kelly Brennan. She is so kind, so caring, and she does so much work looking after our entire family while I'm here. I thank you, I love you, and I'm so lucky to be loved by you.

Number 2: My fun-loving, charismatic, athletic daughter, Maia Rei Smith. She is 11 years old going on 17. She loves everything Taylor Swift and is truly the joy of my life. I love you, Peanut.

Number 3: My mother, Beverley, a 35-year career educator. She impacted generations of youth in Sheet Harbour. She has recently taken a liking to Leg TV and she is a huge fan of the Speaker.

Number 4: My mother-in-law, Mary Eliza Humphries. She is one of the strongest and most independent women I know. She is an amazing role model and she has been so helpful to Kelly and me with the kids.

Number 5: My executive associate, Kim Preeper. She is so loyal and dedicated to the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture team. Thank you for all you do, Preeps.

Number 6: My constituency associate, Kelly Corkery. Kelly is an incredible asset to Eastern Shore. No one cares more about the people and the work that they do than she does. I miss being in the office with you, Kelly.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing these special women. Thank you very much.

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

### **WOMEN: NEED FOR INCLUSION - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today to acknowledge International Women's Day. We stand on the shoulders of strong women who open doors so we can step through, take their own chairs to meetings when others try to shut them out, break glass ceilings, stand up for the rights of others, and name sexism and misogyny. Strong women surround me: the women in my family - and a shout-out to my mother, who is a leader in her own right; my closest friends; women in my community; my colleagues; and my friends, who lead by example and spend every day tearing down the patriarchy to build a more inclusive and equitable workplace, community, and province.

Speaker, women have voices. They deserve to be heard and listened to without being shut down, dismissed, or bullied, yet we still have a long way to go to become a more inclusive and equitable province, country, and world.

I want to acknowledge the women who are denied their rightful place, who had their voices silenced, and who had their dreams taken from them. You are not forgotten, and we hear you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

### **DANIELS, DAVID: QEII MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, in Nova Scotia there are remarkable citizens who quietly work tirelessly as advocates for individuals and community. David Daniels of

Wolfville is one of those individuals. David has spent hundreds of hours keeping governments accountable, particularly with respect to municipal planning, accessibility, and transparency. David has also spent the past 20 years working with Nova Scotia Legal Aid, supporting and defending the rights of many Nova Scotians who cannot afford representation.

David, who has a generous, compassionate, intelligent legal mind, was recently awarded the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal to recognize his significant contribution to social justice in the Valley.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to join me in congratulating David Daniels on this well-deserved award and thank him for all that he has given to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

### **WOMEN IN LEG.: FIRSTS: RECOG.**

HON. GREG MORROW: Today is International Women's Day. The organization responsible for the day says that today is "a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women." When I think about political achievements, I think of the women who sit in this Chamber. I'm incredibly proud to serve with them, and I'm proud of the number of firsts we have thanks to our Premier - who stole a bit of my thunder, I will admit. But it bears repeating: the first female African Nova Scotian Cabinet minister; the first female Speaker of the Legislature; the first female Government House Leader; the first female Minister of Economic Development; the first female Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration; the first female Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care, who is also the first female Minister responsible for Military Relations. Wow, what a list.

Speaker, I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in congratulating these amazing women.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **GENDER EQUALITY: NEED - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to mark International Women's Day with the theme of Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress.

Imagine a world free of bias and stereotypes; a gender-equal world, free of discrimination; a world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive; a world where our differences are valued, appreciated, and celebrated; a world where my young girls can be who they are and embrace their unique selves.

This year's theme is meant to inspire inclusion. When we inspire others to understand and value women's inclusion, we create a better world. So let's step up, step forward in solidarity, and help to forge an inclusive world for women around Nova Scotia and the world.

Let us collectively call out stereotypes, challenge bias, and end discrimination. Let's uplift, celebrate women's achievement, and inspire inclusion. Black Girl Power.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

ALI DUALE: March 8<sup>th</sup> is International Women's Day. It is a global day to recognize and celebrate women's and girls' social, economic, cultural, and political achievement. I would like to take this opportunity today to mention individuals who made my life and what I am today, specifically my mother, who was a single mother and disabled. She is not with me today, but I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge her.

Secondly, I would like to also acknowledge my lovely wife, Sudi Jelle and my three daughters: Lul Ibrahim, Asha Ibrahim, and Qali Ibrahim. We know every good man, there is a woman behind him. We as men, we show up places to show our muscles, but we know who's behind those muscles.

I ask members of this House to join me and to salute all women on this Earth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

**WOMEN IN LEG.: FIRSTS - RECOG.**

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: As we celebrate International Women's Day theme of Inspire Inclusion, I rise to talk about some of the women who have had an impact in this Legislature over the past 64 years, when women were not readily accepted into this Legislature.

Back in 1960, when women rarely ran for political office, Gladys Porter was elected in Kings North as the first female MLA in Nova Scotia. Prior to that, Gladys had been elected in 1946 as the first female mayor in the Maritimes. She was a strong female voice where none had existed before. In 1985, Maxine Cochran of Lunenburg Centre became the first female cabinet minister in Nova Scotia.

I also want to recognize my amazing constituency assistant, Lisa Rochon, my staff, Jay E.M. Morales, Janet Smith, and Nadine Popke, and send a shout-out to my beautiful daughters-in-law Elise Lavoie and Pascale Martel, and my wonderful stepdaughter Melanie Lucas-Ronaghan.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**MSVU FAC. ASSOC.: SETTLEMENT - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: It is, I think, not inappropriate to mark International Women's Day by congratulating the Mount Saint Vincent University Faculty Association on achieving a settlement this week in their strike, which began nearly four weeks ago on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

The more than 160 faculty, librarians, and lab instructors of the union voted 93 per cent in favour of the collective agreement on Tuesday. Union members were back to work on Wednesday, and classes resumed yesterday. The settlement includes important advances in equity, diversity, inclusion, salaries, and pregnancy leave.

The majority of Mount Saint Vincent University's faculty are women. The union has continually pointed out the gendered character of the MSVU's faculty being amongst the lowest-paid in the province. Happy March 8<sup>th</sup> to the MSVUFA.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I want to, today on International Women's Day, stand and thank the most important women in my life: my mother, who brought me up as a single mother, Joanne Bishara, who has ensured I'd never live a day without unconditional love and support; my wife, Dr. Katie Churchill, who is the greatest source of strength and self-awareness that I have and whose love, kindness, intelligence, and wit have helped make me a better father, husband, and hopefully, a better person; and the two joys of my life, my daughters Cecelia Louise Churchill and Eva Irene Churchill, who fill my heart with joy and love and fear every day, and when I'm apart from them, with great longing as well.

I do want to also thank my constituency assistant Jacqueline Daley, who's been with me since I started this in 2010. I thank them all for helping me do what I do and filling my life with support, friendship and love.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**WOMEN IN LEG.: FIRSTS - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: When I was elected in 2017, there were no women in leadership positions in this Chamber, but subsequently, we have seen a change. We have seen the first woman Government House Leader, the member for Queens. We've seen the member for Dartmouth North, who is our House Leader. We saw the member for Pictou West, who became an interim leader and is now the Speaker of the House.

I want to echo the thanks on this day when we lift up all of the women who came before. The government has pointed out all of the Progressive Conservative women who are a part of that canon, but of course, there are many more.

I think of Alexa McDonough, of course, who served in this Chamber and who serves as an example for me. I think of all of my women colleagues on all sides of the House, and I think of the need for more women. When I spoke in a school lately, I was asked the question, Is it hard for a woman to become an MLA? I said, Half of the MLAs are not yet women, so the answer must be yes. Let's lift each other all up and make sure we have representation in this Chamber.

[9:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I rise today to say a few words about the two most important women in my life as we celebrate International Women's Day. Of course, I'm speaking about my mom, Odette, and my grandmother, Donna, who is affectionately known to me as "Mère."

Both have had such an important role in my life: Mom as a single mother and Mère always being there to support our family. I'm forever grateful to both of them. Mom continues to inspire me as I travel through my constituency and hear so many positive things about her and her profession as a nurse.

Mère, who is probably watching right now, has put aside the soap operas and now turns on Legislative Television instead. I think there are probably higher ratings for Legislative Television nowadays than the *All My Children* that I watched with her when I was young.

Even though I'm more than three hours away from home, I hold both women very close to my heart. I want to recognize them for the special women they are and thank them very much. I love them both so much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

FRED TILLEY: On International Women's Day, I'd like to thank all the women in my life. My mom Donna, my wife Jean, my daughter Emily, my mother-in-law Carol, and my wife's twin sister Janet - they're all strong role models for their families. I couldn't do my job without the support back home and here as well.

To my colleagues in the House, happy International Women's Day. Let's look forward to a great year ahead.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**N.S. PLAYERS: PWHL - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: The Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) premiered on January 1, 2024 with a game between Toronto and New York.

On that historic New Year's Day, there were many players from Nova Scotia on the ice, as there have been since. Nova Scotians making "herstory" in the PWHL include Toronto players Captain Blayre Turnbull of Stellarton, defender Allie Munroe of Yarmouth, and goaltender Carly "C.J." Jackson of Amherst. Jill Saulnier of Halifax plays forward with New York.

As I speak, Toronto is on an 8-game winning streak. That's the longest current winning streak for men's or women's professional hockey. Yarmouth's Ali Munroe got her first goal of the league on Wednesday night, contributing to the 3-1 win over Boston. Tonight, on International Women's Day no less, Toronto goes up against the league's current number one team, Montreal, and Montreal's "Captain Clutch," Marie-Philip Poulin.

I wish all the Nova Scotia players just the best inaugural season and thank them for being possibility models for all the young women and gender non-conforming youth, like my daughter, who played hockey in this province and around the world.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**LAYTON, MEREDITH: COM. SERV. - THANKS**

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, on this International Women's Day, it is fitting that I rise to speak about Meredith Layton, a lifetime citizen of Great Village. She was a founding member of the Great Village and District Volunteer Fire Brigade's Ladies Auxiliary, which is celebrating 50 years of service.

Meredith has a long history of participating in various fundraising activities over the years in her community. She has served as a board member of the Elizabeth Bishop Society, the Women's Institute, the Great Village Historical Society, and the Friends of St. James United Church. Along with her husband, Meredith operated R.F. Layton's General Store, which was a mainstay in the community for close to 40 years.

I wish all members of this Legislature would join me in thanking Meredith for her volunteerism, for helping make Great Village a wonderful place to live, and for being a



shining example of the leadership role that women have played in our small rural communities over the years.

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

**PAUL, TAYLA: ART WORK & ACTIVISM - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Today I rise to recognize a multi-talented maker whose work can be seen around Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and beyond.

Tayla Fern Paul is a Mi'kmaw artist, metal fabricator, and activist based in Kjiptuk who makes art and shares artmaking with her community. Locally, her work has been shown at Nocturne, Dalhousie University's Weldon Law Building, and the Museum of Natural History.

Tayla is also a public speaker who raises awareness around social and environmental issues. Her art skills go hand in hand with this. Last Fall, she led the creation of a community place-making artwork at the corner of Larch and Jennings Streets to encourage trust and co-operation in the area. Most recently, Tayla created beautiful red dress prints for community gatherings on missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited folks. Where art meets activism and where activism meets art, you'll find Tayla's work.

Speaker, I ask my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating Tayla for using her art and voice to make Kjiptuk a better place for all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to wish everyone a happy International Women's Day. I just want to recognize my wife, Tina Dodman, whom I love very much. We've been married for 25 years, and together for 34 years. She has supported me throughout my life.

I also want to recognize my daughter, Mattea LeBlanc, who started teaching this year in the CSAP. She's a Special Olympics swim coach. I'm very proud of her and love her.

I have to recognize my mother-in-law, Anne Dodman. I'm sure she's watching right now. I want to say I really appreciate all she's done for me over my life, taking care of our daughter when we were both working.

I really love all three of them, and I just want to stand up and recognize them.

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

**INSPIRING WOMEN: APPREC. - RECOG.**

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, I rise today to join in celebration of International Women's Day. This year's theme is "Inspire Inclusion," and I'm honoured to be surrounded by strong, smart women who inspire me every day.

Before I get on to the caucuses, I just want to name two who are with me all the time to support me and to keep me going: my daughter Stacey and my constituency assistant Kim. They're just amazing.

I look around our caucuses and I see 10 amazing women in ours, and I also see many across the aisle as well. They're amazing women who put their names on the ballot, and they're so strong that they have chosen to represent their residents here in this Legislature.

I look at women like the member for Hants West, who was the first woman elected in the district. I look at women like the members for Antigonish and Lunenburg West, who are doing remarkable jobs in their departments, and have an impact on the lives of all Nova Scotians.

I am privileged - I really am privileged, folks - to be sitting with all of these remarkable women on this day. Where we are talking about women who inspire, I want to thank each and every one of them for all that they do in this province. Thank you all.

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

**MACLEOD, KAREN: GvHD TREATMENT - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: April 21 to 27, 2024, is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week. Advocate Karen MacLeod has been battling graft-versus-host disease since receiving an allogeneic stem cell transplant to treat life-threatening leukemia in May 2015. GvHD occurs when the donated stem cells recognize the recipient's body as foreign and attacks the body. It can cause people like Karen to experience a whole host of health issues that are often chronic.

Karen receives treatment called extracorporeal photopheresis - ECP for short - and goes to New Brunswick to receive this treatment. The treatments make Karen's symptoms more manageable, improve her quality of life, and mean that she does not require as much medication. However, travelling out of province has been financially and physically demanding.

Karen and many Nova Scotians are requesting that Nova Scotia begin offering treatment in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**FEMALE FAM. MBRS.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, I also would like to wish everyone a happy International Women's Day. I'd like to acknowledge my mum, Lynn, who raised three kids and who worked as a nurse in emergency palliative care and beyond in the Valley for many years as a community volunteer and a leader.

I want to acknowledge my mother-in-law, Florence, who's in the Netherlands, and especially my wife, who immigrated in 2013, has started several successful businesses here in Nova Scotia, and has done an exceptional job as the mother of our two boys.

I wish those three women a happy International Women's Day, and the women of this House and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**INSPIRING WOMEN: APPREC. - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate International Women's Day, but also to recognize women who have inspired and continue to guide me to be the person I am today. The West sisters - Mary, Beatrice and Shirley West - my mom and my aunties.

As young girls, they grew up singing in Africville in the back porch of their home, directed by my nanny. Their voices were so beautiful and powerful that folks said you could hear them outside as you walked by. Later in life they travelled the province singing gospel music, and were one of the very few groups who sang a cappella. They were asked to sing everywhere, lifting their voice in song.

These women have inspired and invested in me throughout my life, and have continued to uplift and guide me. I'm truly thankful to have been born into such a powerhouse of a family, led by strong, resilient women. I just want to say thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

**MCCORMICK, LINDA: VOL. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I can think of no better day than International Women's Day to rise and congratulate Linda McCormick. Linda has received the 2023 Provincial Volunteer Award for her outstanding volunteer efforts.

Linda has been volunteering in many roles around the Springhill area for more than 15 years, including the Salvation Army Food Bank and a leadership role in A Hand Up Society, a charitable organization that assists with food security in both Parrsboro and Springhill.

Linda has helped create and source funding streams for a weekly food bag program called Food for Thought, which provides students in need access to nutritious food for their families at no cost. Recognizing the need for additional milk products, protein, and fresh produce, Linda created a coupon program for local purchases of these items.

Linda also organized a campaign in memory of her son, Curtis, raising over \$50,000 for the Ronald McDonald House in Halifax. Linda's energy and passion for helping others is an inspiration. Please join me in congratulating Linda. Also, I'd be remiss if I didn't recognize my beautiful wife Tracey, my mother, and my bright, beautiful, spirited daughter Briar.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

#### **WOMEN IN LEG.: APPREC. - RECOG.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I would be remiss today if I didn't take this opportunity to thank the women of this Chamber, because I get to sit in here with them. I learn from them every day. Sometimes I don't like the lessons they teach me, but I have to say that I learn from them every day, and I'm so proud to be sitting in this Chamber with them.

I also want to thank the Honourable Francene Cosman, who was the first member from Bedford to sit in this Chamber, and was a woman. She was also the first Liberal, but anyway.

I do want to point out to folks in this Chamber that we have legislation before this Chamber that we could pass that would change the lives of women in this province, and that's to prohibit the use of NDAs. All of these sentiments are lovely and wonderful, but if we really care about women, we need to pass that legislation now. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd like to remind the honourable member that Member Statements are not supposed to reflect any discussion of bills that have been put before the Chamber here. So just a friendly reminder that orders that on the paper are not to be put in Member Statements - they're to be debated later. So just a friendly reminder with that.

I also just want to take this opportunity to say happy International Women's Day to everyone here in the Chamber. As well, it was really refreshing to listen to all members

speaking about the successes of all sides here in the Chamber. Happy International Women's Day. It was really nice to listen to all of your statements.

We will now go to Questions Put by Members to Ministers.

[10:00 a.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

### **ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: ENERGY POVERTY INCREASE - STOP**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: In two and a half short years, this Premier has overseen this province going from one of the most affordable places to live in the country to one of the most expensive. We have the second-lowest weekly wages in Canada, we still have some of the highest taxes, and a key driver of increasing costs for people has been the increase in our power bills. Despite the fact that the Premier said he would limit any non-fuel increase in power rates to 1.8 per cent and do everything he could to protect ratepayers, we have seen power rates go up by over 14 per cent.

This Winter, individuals like Danielle Fraser of Westville are saying their energy costs have tripled. Could the Premier please tell us what he's going to do to ensure that energy poverty doesn't keep increasing here in Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: Obviously, affordability is something on the top of minds of all Nova Scotians. The cost of electricity in this province is certainly part of that, so we're focused on that.

We've taken several steps in terms of legislation to try to make sure that there's a better balance between Nova Scotia Power and the ratepayers of the province. There's a bill before the House right now that's an important piece of legislation. I hope the members support that bill. There's no need for a filibuster on that bill. That's a bill that will, in fact, in the fulness of time, break the monopoly - an expression that member will be familiar with, because they campaigned on it 10 years ago and didn't do a darn thing about it.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Let's look at the record of this government's legislation on power bills. The Premier promised in his first session that he would keep power rates low. His legislation actually drove power rates up higher than they initially were going to go. Now what's the Premier doing to cover his tracks on this? He is using \$117 million of taxpayers' money to buy Nova Scotia Power's debt that he drove up himself. He is the first

Premier in this province to give this amount of taxpayers' money to Nova Scotia Power and then ask ratepayers to pay it back with interest. Guess what? It's the same people.

This Premier does not have a record on keeping power rates low, and that's why energy poverty is now at 43 per cent of ratepayers experiencing it. Will the Premier please tell us exactly how he's going to lower power rates for Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Once again, the members of this Chamber will be familiar with this, but the member has the facts completely wrong. They're totally misrepresented in his statement. The reality is we have a big demand for fossil fuel in this province. We have plans to change the makeup of the grid. There's been a lot of work done on that. We put it in legislation. In the meantime, while we're dependent on commodities priced on the international market, Nova Scotia Power has the ability, through the UARB, to true it up every year. They go to the UARB and say, This is what we think will happen in prices of commodities, and this is the rate we think we need. At the end they're allowed to true it up.

The rate shock that would appear to Nova Scotians from allowing that to proceed could have put the commercial rates up by almost 15 per cent and the residential by almost 10 per cent. We said that's not fair to Nova Scotians. We're going to amortize that over . . .

ZACH CHURCHILL: We're close to three years into this government's mandate, and we're still burning the same amount of coal that we did at the beginning of it. This Premier has not acted on this. This Premier promised this House and Nova Scotians that he had a plan to keep power rates low, but of course, when people had oil that wasn't delivered to them because Maritime Fuels went bankrupt, the Premier wouldn't even step in to help them.

He's cut back energy rebate programs. He has done things that have made energy more expensive in this province, including the legislation he brought in that drove up interest payments for Nova Scotia Power and drove their credit rating down. Now ratepayers are on the hook, not just for that but for taxpayers' money that's going to Nova Scotia Power.

Does the Premier not see that his record on this file is a complete failure?

THE PREMIER: I do want to finish the point on the fuel adjustment mechanism, because that was building up since 2018. We inherited a spring that was wound pretty tight from a lack of action from the prior government - when it unwound, it would have caused significant rate shocks. What we've said is that Nova Scotia Power will finance that over 10 years instead of in one year. That's absolutely necessary to clean up some of the messes that we were faced with when we came to government.

I would remind the honourable member that the only failure that we have seen in this Chamber is the failure of the Liberal Party to, ultimately, totally conceal the misuse of

taxpayer funds. They tried really hard to conceal it. The Auditor General reported on the fact that they tried to conceal the theft of taxpayer money until after the election because they're all about Liberals first. We're all about Nova Scotians first. Happy to table the Auditor General report - it's actually entitled Report on Misuse of Public Funds at the Liberal . . .

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

**PREM.: NDA ABUSE - STOP**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: On International Women's Day, I want to remind the Premier that there is near-universal public support for restricting the abuse of non-disclosure agreements. Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan have introduced their own legislation; 94 per cent of members of the Canadian Bar Association support this, Acadia University and The University of King's College support this, and the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour - including the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union and the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union - supports this. All these organizations have vocally called for this government to protect the survivors of sexual assault and harassment from being silenced, yet this government refuses to take action.

Why won't the Premier act to stop the abuse of non-disclosure agreements?

THE PREMIER: Supporting survivors with sensitivity and respect is important, and the Province agrees. Nobody wants to see non-disclosure agreements used to silence victims. Nobody wants to see that. We believe survivors should have the option to make an informed choice on whether to sign an NDA. It's currently an option. There are no good options when you're a survivor of sexual assault. Today, one of the options is to sign an NDA. That's an option that is available. We're concerned about removing that option from survivors. I would say Prince Edward Island is the only province with broad legislation. In Manitoba, the Manitoba Law Reform Commission recommended against NDA legislation.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: According to lawyer Ronald A. Pink, this is not an option. There is an option - I should point out - in a bill before the House. This is not an option. What Ron Pink says is that "these things are signed for one purpose: to protect the male harasser. The male harasser then goes on to do it again. He can continue to do it because he can buy his way out. That's what's going on." That's a quote. We have extensive evidence of this: close to home, the University of Prince Edward Island scandal; the 2023 IIHF World Junior Championship here in Halifax; and countless other cases where victims are barred from speaking out. They did not have a choice.

Despite this, the Minister of Justice continues to claim that there are pros and cons to the issue. Can the Premier clarify: What are the pros?

THE PREMIER: There are no pros when you're a victim of sexual assault. These are awful circumstances, for sure, and we want to be sensitive to that.

I would tell the member that I have heard from survivors who have entered into NDAs, and they tell me: I can't talk about it publicly, but I just want you to know that this was an important option for me, and I am thankful that it was there for me to take.

Obviously not for everyone - these are complicated, very, very personal decisions. I would just tell the member that there is another side to this story, and I do hear from survivors who have entered into them, and they were happy - not happy - they were appreciative that that's an option. They asked me not to remove that option from those who may want to choose it.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Premier will be glad to know we could retain that option and still protect victims. Since we're in the business of drawing parallels this week, here's another one: just like with the Coastal Protection Act, this government was originally favourable to the idea of legislation restricting the use. They spent months - years, actually - conducting endless rounds of jurisdictional scans and research, only finally to announce that although they disagree with the misuse of non-disclosure agreements, they actually plan to do nothing to stop it, despite mounting support from the public and organizations alike. The minister said that this government considered multiple factors but couldn't explain the about-face. The Premier has said he has talked to people.

Can the Premier tell me: Who is the Premier listening to? Is it the silent majority again? Can he actually table evidence of conversations he's had that have led him to this terrible decision?

THE PREMIER: It's an unfortunate situation when we can compare surviving a sexual assault to armour rock on a coastline. But what I would say is that I have heard from people who are survivors, who have entered into an NDA, and they tell me it was an important thing for them at that time. We're totally sympathetic. I'm not a survivor, I can't put myself in those shoes, but I can try to imagine the emotions of it.

It's a serious topic. It's not one to bandied around on the floor of the Legislature. I want to assure all members...

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Thank you, Speaker. I want to assure all Nova Scotians that we take this matter in the very serious manner that it needs to be taken.

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



**DOJ: NDA MISUSE - BAN**

LORELEI NICOLL: We know that women are disproportionately impacted by the misuse of non-disclosure agreements in the use of sexual assault cases. Despite more than 15,000 people signing a petition to ban NDAs, this government refuses to protect women. I'll table that. It's a common theme: people speak out asking this government to enact change, and yet they look away.

My question to the Premier is: What does he have to say to the 15,000 people who petitioned, asking him to ban the misuse of NDAs in this province?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'm acting on behalf of the Minister of Justice today. Again, to repeat what the Premier has already indicated, we recognize how traumatic this is. This is a very difficult moment in people's lives when they have these issues. We respect that. We want to support survivors. We want to work with them, but what I can say is that this is not an option that is being considered by our Department of Justice, which continues to look at jurisdictions across North America - including Manitoba, including New York - which have made these decisions that this is not the right option to eliminate this option of NDAs.

LORELEI NICOLL: For months this government wouldn't act on NDAs and stalled under the excuse of a jurisdictional scan being done. I have another jurisdiction to add to the list of those that have banned the misuse of NDAs: Utah, and I'll table that. But even though Utah is ranked as the worst state for women's equality, they are doing more than this government to protect people in cases of sexual assault.

It is time, on this International Women's Day, to support and protect women and ban the misuse of NDAs. Does the Premier agree? They don't want to silence victims, but actions speak louder than words.

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you to the member opposite for raising this important question. Yes, the Minister of Justice and others have answered this question in the House, and the answer stays as is.

Speaker, we also of course know the importance of International Women's Day, and to think about the ways in which we are supporting women and others who have experienced sexual violence, and thinking about ways in which we can prevent that from happening in the first place. That's why I am so proud of this government for investing in transition houses and women's centres to continue this great work.

Solutions are driven at the community level, and that's what I embrace as a minister, and that's what I know this government embraces. We are going to continue to support women in their time of need in every possible way we can.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

[10:15 a.m.]

### **DOJ: NDA VICTIMS - PROTECT**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: It's embarrassing to stand here in this Chamber as a woman today and to listen to the comments being made by the Premier and the members. There is no defence for not changing the laws around the misuse of NDAs in this province. There is no excuse. We know better. We know NDAs are being used to silence victims of sexual assault, harassment, violence, and battery.

My question to the Premier is: How can he continue to silence victims and hold up perpetrators of sexual assault in this province?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, again, on behalf of the Minister of Justice, we do care. We want to support survivors of sexual abuse. As the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration mentioned, there are a number of things that we are doing as government to continue to do that. We recognize how extraordinarily traumatic a moment this is for people, yet we look at what other jurisdictions are doing across North America who have done the deep dive into this and decided that this was an option that may be, in some cases, appropriate. Not wanting to take that away, we respect that.

Meanwhile, I can say that the Department of Justice continues to watch this very closely and continues to monitor it. We want to express that we know that this is not an easy question, and should this option be available, that's a question that we struggle with too.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, it's indefensible. It's indefensible. There is absolutely nothing that the members opposite can say to defend their decision to continue the misuse of NDAs in this province. I've seen it for too long. The first victim I met was in 2002, and it was a doctor in Cumberland County who used NDAs to silence victims. That person went on to harm so many people, and it was all because they had the ability to use money and an NDA to silence their victims and continue to harm more.

We all know victims. Again, my question to the Premier is: How can he defend his decision to hold up perpetrators and silence victims of sexual assault in this province? Answer the question.

HON. JILL BALSER: We know how passionate the member is in being able to feel the . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable Minister representing the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act has the floor.

JILL BALSER: Again, the question has been addressed and raised, but I want to take this opportunity again to acknowledge the incredible investment that has been made to women's centres across this province, to transition houses across this province. We know that women and those who identify as women and gender-diverse people deserve support in their time of need, and these organizations do incredible work to support and lift women and others up in their time of need.

We're going to continue to make those investments, engage in difficult conversations on an ongoing basis. We're committed to that work, and we will keep doing it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

### **DOJ: SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS - PROTECT**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Last Fall I was filling in for our leader at Cabinet outs, and I watched as the Minister of Justice spoke to reporters about this particular issue. He said, yes, he knew that NDAs were being used to silence women. Yes, he thought it was wrong. No . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. Sorry to interrupt, but there's chatter happening in the House. I'm going to ask the NDP caucus to just lower their voices. I know sometimes you have to speak to one another, but let's lower the voices.

The honourable member for Bedford Basin. Please go ahead.

KELLY REGAN: Thank you. Should I start over?

THE SPEAKER: Go ahead.

KELLY REGAN: Last Fall I was filling in for our leader at Cabinet outs. For the folks who don't know about that, that's when cabinet ministers come out and answer questions after Cabinet meetings.

I watched the Minister of Justice being questioned by reporters, and he admitted he knew that NDAs were being used to silence victims of sexual harassment and assault, and yes, he knew that it was wrong and, no, they weren't going to do anything about it. I was shocked. He was pretty naked and open about it. I was a bit gobsmacked, I have to say, that day.

My question is: When will this government take meaningful action to protect victims of sexual violence and harassment?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to acknowledge that I was a former sexual assault nurse examiner, probably 15 years ago. I have seen incredible changes in the supports that we offer victims of sexual assault.

It has improved over time. One of the tenets of the care that we provide after such a traumatic event is trauma-informed care. One of the tenets of trauma-informed care is that people have a choice. While it is not a choice for everyone, it is important that it is a choice available so the victim can decide what it is that they need in order to move forward after the assault.

KELLY REGAN: That kind of legislation actually does give victims the option. That's why I don't understand why the government - what don't they understand? Victims still have the choice, and they don't seem to understand - or they don't want to understand it, more likely - because it is not an absolute. The victim can still choose to have an NDA, but they don't want to have that. They don't want to give them the choice. That's what I don't understand.

Perhaps the acting Minister of Justice could explain why they don't want to give victims this choice.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As the Minister of Health and Wellness, we do continue to work across this province with individuals, through sexual assault centres, through the emergency departments in our province. We want to give trauma-informed care to individuals who have experienced sexual assault and sexual abuse.

I appreciate that this is a choice that is not something everyone wants but we have heard from individuals that this is a choice that some people want. We need to continue.

I know the Department of Justice is looking at the legalities. They're looking at jurisdictional scans. We are doing the right thing, we feel, at this time. We will continue to support victims. We'll continue to work across governments to prevent sexual abuse and sexual violence as well.

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

### **DOJ: NDA LEGISLATION - ENACT**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Let's talk about choice. The group that is organizing to end the misuse of non-disclosure agreements is called Can't Buy My Silence. When non-disclosure agreements are signed, there is a signature and a cheque in exchange for silence. That is not an equal distribution of power.

When we bring up any case where people are disproportionately powerless in this Chamber, we are told about balance. We are told about the need to take everyone into account. We see no need to take the perpetrators of abuse into account.

My question to the minister is: Why are we talking about a choice of whether someone's silence can be bought with money or whether they can be protected by legislation?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I believe there is power in choice when there is an impossible situation in front of you. It is very traumatic to be a victim of sexual assault. I have worked with a number of individuals over the course of my career. We do need to provide choice. It is not for us or anyone else to decide what the path forward is when someone is on a journey of healing.

I appreciate that NDAs are not a choice that everyone would make, but it is important that we continue to provide a number of choices moving forward after a sexual assault. We will continue to do that. We will continue to look at jurisdictional scans, and we'll continue to be open to the conversation about how best to support people.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The legislation in Prince Edward Island, which is based on the model legislation, explicitly gives victims a choice. It says that, with legal advice and by agreement of the parties, they can have the choice about whether to sign an agreement.

I'm going to say this again. Ron Pink has been a party to several non-disclosure agreements. After the University of Prince Edward Island scandal of a male abuser who bought his way through victim after victim after victim and concealed his crimes - some of those victims are in the gallery today - Ron Pink said: These things are signed for one purpose: to protect the male harasser. The male harasser goes on to do it again, and he can continue (interruption) to do it because he can buy his way out. That's what's going on. Women have choice either way. What is the real reason this government will not pass this legislation?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As we've said on several occasions, we appreciate the questions, and we appreciate the dialogue on the floor of the House. To me, as a former sexual assault nurse, as a registered nurse, and as somebody who has worked in the system, I believe choice is essential. I think we need a variety of choices. We need a variety of ways in which we support people who have an incredible journey ahead of them - who have experienced sexual assault and need healing.

I believe this offers a choice. While it may not be the way in which other members feel it is appropriate, this is the path we have. I know the Department of Justice is looking at this on a regular basis. It is not something we are ignoring. We continue the dialogue. This is the path we are on and we will continue for the foreseeable future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

### **ECC: COASTLINE - PROTECT**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: We have a beautiful coastline in our province, from Yarmouth to Sydney and all points in between, and it attracts tourists from all over the world. By scrapping the Coastal Protection Act, this government is going to hurt the future of tourism in this province.

The Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia spoke out against this government's action, calling it incomprehensible. I'll table that. They said, "Community outreach with hundreds of tourism and community members highlighted the value of our coast and natural assets, and reaffirmed the link between strong environmental policy and our brand as a preferred tourism destination."

My question to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change is: Given that 95 per cent of the land in the province is owned privately, does he agree with the hundreds of tourism workers in the province that not protecting the coastline is going to hurt our tourism sector?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I want to thank the honourable member for their question. Most certainly, there is a diversity of opinion on how Nova Scotia should protect its coastline. We are committed to protecting our coastline. That is why we have brought forward a coherent, comprehensive plan that will be enacted over the next number of months and years to protect the coastline, a plan that focuses on supporting informed decision-making, that works with our municipalities, and that deploys immediate resources for coastal protection.

IAIN RANKIN: The reality is that there's no protection in the government's plan now. They are removing potential protection in having that coastal protection zone. Don't take it just from me, the Opposition, and, I think, some of the government members. Take it from the minister himself, who said in 2022: If we don't protect our coastline, we will harm the future of one of our most important sectors in the province. Without protecting the coastline, our tourism industry, our agriculture industry, our forestry industry, and our fishery sector will all be harmed.

My question to the Minister is: Will he provide any data that shows how he changed his mind on this topic, and will he admit that the reality is that the only people who benefit from this action are the people who will make bad decisions and build on our coastlines?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: The reality is that there are a lot of different perspectives on how to protect the coastline. We have put forward a sensible plan that will protect the coastline. That work is ongoing.

[10:30 a.m.]

I met with several wardens, mayors, and councillors on Wednesday. I was discussing this coastal action plan with the Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity yesterday. We are putting in the work. We are implementing the plan. This government is united behind the coastal protection action plan. I want to know why that member, when he was Premier, didn't enact the Coastal Protection Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect on a new question.

### **ECC: COASTAL CONSULTATION PURPOSE - EXPLAIN**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I worked really hard to launch the initial consultations. We had previous Ministers of Environment who are reaching out to me now, upset that they're backtracking on this important piece of legislation.

The minister referenced a meeting with municipal units. He said before, when he supported the Act, that we have the support of municipal units; we have support from land surveyors and engineers; we have the support of the Tourism Association.

By scrapping this Act, all of these people are now against the new government policy. He told us in Estimates last year that he was going to consultation to clear up misinformation. "When I say consultation," the minister said, "to me that is engaging in a discussion with coastal property owners to make them aware that change is coming - change that I think is fundamental in the adaptation of Nova Scotia to the realities of climate change."

Was consultation really about informing the landowners that change is coming? Will the minister inform the House of what conversation was so compelling that it changed the minister's support to protect our coastline?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: As I've told the House, a lot of analysis went into this. This is almost three years of work. Change is coming. Change is being implemented. We are committed to coastal protection through the Coastal Protection Action Plan - a very comprehensive plan that is in the process of being implemented.

We know that there is a diversity of opinions on this. Our coastlines - people are passionate about that, and with that passion, there are a lot of different perspectives. I believe we have landed on an action plan that is comprehensive, that will set Nova Scotians up for success to make informed decisions about where not to build, and to also work with our municipalities in implementing this.

IAIN RANKIN: The issue with this is that it does not only harm the people who are going to build in areas that they should not build. The decision to let people build in unsafe areas will increase insurance rates for all Nova Scotians. The decision will actually prevent access to our coastlines, and we're going to start looking like places like California, with people building right up to the high-water mark.

He is referencing that there are differences of opinion. Surely the minister, who spent over \$100,000 on consultation, can table that consultation so that the House - the elected members - can review what Nova Scotians had to say before the session ends.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: That consultation we utilized in the development of this plan - the key conclusion from that consultation is that there is absolutely a diversity of opinion that exists in the province on how coastal protection should be implemented. It was a targeted consultation to 40,000 property owners. It didn't get the engagement that we were hoping for.

Certainly with a consultation - I have 32 other colleagues here who represent all of Nova Scotia, and they have certainly provided their feedback to me on how coastal protection should be implemented. I believe we are implementing a very strong plan, a commonsense plan - a plan that will serve Nova Scotians well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect on a new question.

### **NRR: BEAR HUNT DATA - PROVIDE**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, maybe the minister can table some of those conversations with his fellow members.

Opening up a hunt for bears or any species in the Spring or Summer, when no other hunting season exists, will result in a significant increase in the hunting effort for that species. The proposed new Spring hunting season will certainly result in a significant increase of dead bears, according to DNRR wildlife managers.

I'm not aware of any analysis pointing to an overpopulation of bears while I was minister. I'll ask the minister if he can provide any actual population data to justify increasing the harvesting of black bears, or any other information, especially with this going forward without any caps or quotas.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: This has been something that consecutive governments have been asked to look into. We committed that we would do a consultation over a period. That consultation is still ongoing - talking to some stakeholders and such.



I'm not aware of the statement that the member just made, but one thing I would like to clear up: In the proposal, there were not any more hunting tickets. There are only so many bear hunters in the province. It just gives them an option to hunt in the Spring or the Fall, if this were to go through.

The consultation is still going through. We're still listening, and that's what a government does: listen to Nova Scotians.

IAIN RANKIN: One of the issues here is that there's never been any hunting season in the Summer or the Spring for any species in Nova Scotia. One of the reasons that people don't venture into the woods in the Fall is because there's hunting going on. A whole new hunting season will displace Nova Scotians and tourists for many weeks.

I want to ask the minister if the department really believes that the population can withstand additional harvest. Will he consider extending the season slightly in the Fall, instead of opening it up for the Spring?

TORY RUSHTON: This is part of the conversation. We engage Nova Scotians to find out what their thoughts are on this, and their ideas. How can we improve the sport of hunting? That's something that Nova Scotians have traditionally done for hundreds of years. As we move forward, we want to make sure that sport's available to our sportsmen who are out in the rural communities.

Many also in the urban communities who go out in the rural communities support the economy, and also do the traditional things that we've done here in Nova Scotia. We're listening to Nova Scotians. The consultation is still ongoing, and I look forward to getting that summary from staff in time to come.

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

#### **ECC: COASTAL CONSULTATION INPUT - TABLE**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. The minister, in a wild leap of logic, recently explained that rather than look to the responses from his many public consultations on the Coastal Protection Act - the vast majority of which supported the Act - he instead interpreted that 39,000 people who didn't respond to his postcard campaign in December as indicating their disapproval. He talks about having 30 other colleagues in this House, but actually he has 54.

Can the minister prove he has nothing to hide and table Nova Scotia's input, including that of all the MLAs, to say that they wanted him to can the Coastal Protection Act?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I am very proud of this Premier. I'm very proud of the colleagues on the government side here who have been very helpful in the development of the Coastal Protection Action Plan. There is nothing to hide here. There is a diversity of opinion on coastal action. Certainly, on this side of the House - which represents all of Nova Scotia in its totality, all the regions - I've heard crystal clear from my colleagues, along through the consultation, listening to that consultation, that Nova Scotians want to be empowered. They want to be part of the process, and that's what we've delivered here: a commonsense plan. It's a practical plan that will protect the coastline by supporting informed decision-making, by supporting our municipalities, and of course, deploying resources immediately for coastal protection.

LISA LACHANCE: I'm a little bit confused because I'm pretty sure we were all elected on this side of the House too. We all collectively represent the views of Nova Scotians.

Despite this government's attempt to dismiss this Act as somebody in Halifax dictating to property owners across the province, rural communities continue to be some of the loudest proponents of the Act. Take the Premier's own backyard, for example, where Pictou County councillors are saying "Thanks but no thanks" to the government's map and app. They want the Coastal Protection Act proclaimed. When will this government listen to what Nova Scotians are actually saying?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Most certainly, in the development of this plan, we have listened to Nova Scotians. This plan very much is a reflection on a balanced approach that is required for coastal protection.

Currently, 13.1 per cent of Nova Scotia's coastline is already protected through our provincial parks, our wilderness areas, and our nature preserves. It's been indicated by the NDP that this is an ideological difference. I have to say, on this side of the House we don't adhere to ideology. We always focus on practical and realistic solutions for Nova Scotians. That is what we do on this side of the House: offer practical, realistic solutions to the challenges and opportunities that are faced by Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **DOJ: NDA LEGISLATION - IMPLEMENT**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I would add to that, Speaker, that the government on that side doesn't stand by coherent values, or principles, or a whole lot of other things as well - particularly on the NDA question. We've had the Premier stand up in this House and emphasize that he is a Progressive Conservative. Yet, as the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth has pointed out, one of the most conservative states in the United States, Utah - which is ranked the worst at women's equality - is moving forward on more progressive legislation to protect victims of sexual violence than this government.

My question to the Premier is: How can he stand by and watch a conservative state like Utah be more progressive than him on this question?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: As we've said before, we've heard from people that NDAs are a choice that is very important to them in a journey around post-sexual assault healing and recovery. It's not for us to decide what that journey is for an individual. While it may not be for some people - and I fully respect that - we need to make sure that we are open to providing choice for individuals.

We have to accompany people after this significant and serious event. We need to continue to listen to people who are affected by sexual assault - all voices. We need to move forward in a very considerate way. We have listened. We know that there has been a jurisdictional scan, and we will continue in this manner for now.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The government is giving me the unfortunate impression that they haven't taken the time to read the legislation that's been presented to the House - legislation that actually allows that choice but provides more power to the victim in dealing with a major power imbalance with people who do have money, power and positions of status.

My question to the Premier is: Has he read this legislation, and does he understand that this does do a better job at providing fair choice and protecting women who don't want to use NDAs as a choice as they move forward with their healing?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition was referring to bills on the Order Paper. I will give the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition a chance to stand in his place and rephrase.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I was speaking to the legislation in P.E.I. and Utah.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I have not read the legislation in Utah. I will say that. I have faith in the Minister of Justice. I have faith in the department. I know that this is an important issue. There is nobody shying away from that. The department has done an extensive jurisdictional scan. We have heard from a number of voices who have come forward on both sides of this issue. We will continue to assess it. We will continue to move forward. Again, we have to be very, very aware and careful, and we will continue to do that. Choice is essential. It is part of trauma-informed care. We will continue in this manner for the foreseeable future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**DFA: ELVER FISHERY ENFORCEMENT - IMPROVE**

RONNIE LEBLANC: In a letter dated February 15, the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture responded to the federal fisheries minister's proposal to close the 2024 commercial elver fishery, offering DNRR wildlife officers - who also have jurisdiction in inland waters - to assist DFO enforcement operations.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture provide the number of available wildlife officers available for these enforcement operations? Is he prepared to bring additional resources if necessary?

HON. KENT SMITH: Yes, we certainly have a full complement of conservation officers. I believe I read recently in a press release from the party opposite that there were only two conservation officers on the ground to help enforce. That's actually inaccurate. There are actually eight positions on the ground in the southwest Nova Scotia area.

I continue to have dialogue with my colleagues at the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables to make sure that the enforcement that we are responsible for is being looked after. The responsibility we have is to enforce the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act - not harvesting, not any other illegal activities such as the violence that the member has shared with me previously. We're going to continue to have dialogue with the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables and make sure we protect our most valuable industry.

RONNIE LEBLANC: In the two members we were referencing I think it was for Digby County, but it wasn't made clear.

Following last year's decision by the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to close the 2023 elver fishery, we were witness to rampant poaching, incidents of violence, and concerns by many communities over public safety. If the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans does not take the offer of the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, what is the plan of the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture in this government to protect public safety?

KENT SMITH: I will say I certainly appreciate the member for Clare keeping me informed on the activity that's taking place on the ground. It's been helpful for me to have that information to share with the team.

The plan is to continue to advocate to DFO to do the right thing, to continue to advocate to the RCMP to do the right thing, and to make sure that any public safety issues are addressed immediately by the RCMP.

I did recently have a meeting with the Fisheries and Oceans Canada regional manager. He has expressed an interest to up the number of officers they have on the ground, and we'll support that however we can.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**DOJ: NDA MISUSE - BAN**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today it's a very emotional time in here and the Minister for the Status of Women referred to my comments earlier as being passionate, and, yes, Speaker, I am very passionate about this topic about the misuse of NDAs. I've known too many victims and I'll remind this House that there's a notice of motion on the Order Paper to remove me, simply because last April I chose to debate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The member can't acknowledge that there's a notice of motion on the floor. Just a friendly reminder.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'll just say again that this is an issue I am very passionate about and speak the truth on. I know there are members opposite - in the party opposite - who support changing legislation.

My question to the Premier is: This is a perfect day to change legislation or give people the opportunity. Will he allow the legislation to be tabled and allow a free vote here in this Legislature, with members of his own party?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I think it's really important, as we sit and debate and talk about this important issue, that there are many truths on the floor of this Legislature. There are undoubtedly people in this Legislature or in the gallery who have either been assaulted or had someone in their life that they care dearly about assaulted. I think we need to remember that.

I think as we move forward that when I talk about trauma-informed choice, it is essential that people have the opportunity to define their own journey when they have had an incredibly traumatic event happen to them, where there was no choice, and this is an opportunity to give people some agency over their future.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Once again, I'll pose the question to the Premier: Will he put this legislation here, in this House, around changing the misuse of NDAs? That's what we are talking about. There is currently misuse of NDAs in this

province. NDAs are being used to silence victims of sexual assault and lift up and empower perpetrators of sexual assault in this province. It's wrong.

Will the Premier have the courage to allow his own members to have a free vote on this issue? We know that there are members being silenced in his own party who support the changes in this legislation.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask the member for Cumberland North to stand in her place. It's unparliamentary to indicate that someone is silencing someone in this Chamber.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'll retract those statements. Maybe I'll rephrase that. We are aware because . . .

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

The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: I beg leave to make an introduction.

In the East Gallery, I have a couple of constituents from Richmond who made the trek here this morning, bright and early to get here for Question Period. Barry Landry, who would certainly be well known to members here on our side. Barry is probably known back home as my right arm, and I certainly really appreciate all that Barry does for me. Paul Landry is another constituent. I grew up just down the street from Paul, great friends with his daughter Janelle, and I just really appreciate the support that you provide. Thank you for being here with us today.

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

The honourable member for Halifax Armdale on a point of order.

ALI DUALE: Yes, I do have a point of order. Since I joined this House, I've been observing and reflecting myself on why I made this choice to represent my constituents and to make an impact for this province in my own ability.

My point of order is: The member for Cumberland North had the opportunity to speak, to make her member statement, and she was standing and waiting to be given permission to speak. Unfortunately, as I observed, the Speaker of the House took the time to use her own time and make a statement . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. First of all, I'm going to say this: There was a lot going on in the Chamber at the time. I wanted to make sure before Question Period that I had a moment to say a few words. I also want to remind that I do my best during statements to ensure that everyone gets at least one chance to give a member statement. Often, many members get two opportunities before any get one.

There was nothing that I did earlier that did not recognize anyone who was standing. There was a situation taking place at that moment that I was dealing with. Are there any further comments?

ALI DUALE: We all know what fairness is. We all know what justice is. I do have great respect for your leadership and the role you play in this House, and I will be your soldier to follow your leadership. At the same time, I do have the courage and I do have the ability, from time to time, if I see anything that is unfair to a member of this Legislature. Specifically, we have only one member who is Independent in this House.

We're all adults, and we see how we treat each other. I will remind the members of this House, we were all elected in our constituencies, and we all have a fair share. Because of that reason, I felt it was unjust, unfair, that the member for Cumberland North was standing and waiting to be given an opportunity to make her member statement and was not allowed and the time was run purposely.

THE SPEAKER: Order. With regard to the member for Halifax Armdale, it is unparliamentary to question the impartiality of the Speaker. If you wish to do that, you may do so by making a Notice of Motion. Right now, I would kindly ask that you stand in your place and you retract those comments.

ALI DUALE: With your kindness, could you please tell me what words I have to retract?

THE SPEAKER: I would like the member to retract the comments that basically indicated that the Speaker was intentionally running out the clock to avoid recognizing the member from Cumberland North. I need you to retract that statement.

For the record, if anybody wants to go back into Hansard, there are many times that I recognized the member from Cumberland North twice during statements before any other member gets one statement in. I am doing my very best to ensure that everybody gets at least one statement in.

I kindly ask the member to stand in his place and retract that I was, again, trying to run out the clock to avoid acknowledging any member, but in this case, that the member from Halifax Armdale feels that I was trying to run out the clock to avoid recognizing the member from Cumberland North. Go ahead.

ALI DUALE: I retract my “purposely ignore.”

[11:00 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The point of order is dismissed, and we will now call on the honourable Government House Leader.

### GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Poverty is a political choice created by a government’s policy decisions and approach to social welfare and refusal to fix inadequate social programs to bring families and individuals above the poverty line.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia, the child poverty rates are: in Queens, 28.5 per cent; Cumberland, 26 per cent; Annapolis, 26 per cent; the federal riding of Sydney-Victoria is 29.1 per cent; Scotchtown, the community from which I come, 43.8 per cent, which is a 49 per cent increase in child poverty rates since last year.

Seniors’ poverty in Nova Scotia is at 91.1 per cent, which means one in ten seniors in Nova Scotia are living in poverty. As inequalities continue to rise, more Nova Scotians will need more money for their basic needs. Not having enough money to cover those basic needs leaves many Nova Scotians to have increased anxiety, illness, social isolation, leading to a greater need for services, including emergency room and mental health care, which are already stretched way too thin with too-long wait times and too many long lineups.

As Nova Scotians see the rising cost of groceries, especially healthy food, it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to afford groceries. Instead, Nova Scotians are forced to make hard decisions like buying food with less nutritional value because it’s cheaper, skipping meals. We have seniors becoming sick from not eating proper nutritional foods.

People are making the choice of whether to eat, skip meals, take their medications, or heat their homes. This is the Nova Scotia we woke up to this morning. This budget doesn’t acknowledge this indecent fact. Things such as removing the grocery tax would



help keep a little bit more money in people's pockets at the grocery store and allow them to buy more with \$100 than walking out with just one bag of groceries.

Instead, this government's continued response to food security is food banks, yet again. The government's only response to food insecurity for the past few years has been to rely on the non-profit sector to do the work government still needs to do. Food bank usage is continuing to grow, and more and more Nova Scotians are becoming reliant on food banks because they cannot afford to buy their groceries at a grocery store. They can no longer afford to heat their homes - so they are putting the heat on just enough that the pipes don't freeze, because if the pipes freeze, they have another mess on their hands - or pay their rent or mortgages.

Food banks want to be put out of the food business because they know - because if they are put out of their own business, that means people are no longer in need of their services, that they are no longer hungry and they can actually afford their groceries. However, due to government's inaction, they are forced to stay open because they know the only way so many of their community members will eat is if they get groceries at the food bank; except for persons with disabilities, who will be getting an important \$300 a month increase, bringing their total income to 59 per cent of the country's official poverty line.

Income assistance rates in Nova Scotia were not raised by a single cent this year, like the year before that and the year before that. According to the CCPA - Nova Scotia, the \$300 per month increase in the form of the disability supplement for those on income assistance who have a disability is needed. They remain in deep poverty with the \$300. They continue to remain in deep poverty.

The CCPA - Nova Scotia recommended adjusting the low base amount to inflation. That would have been a step in the right direction, but still insufficient. Individuals who don't own their own home, individuals experiencing homelessness, are only entitled to \$380 a month. That is hundreds of dollars less than is required for food and shelter. How can people receiving \$380 a month seek long-term homes, especially with sky-high rents? Income assistance rates are a political decision.

The Premier and the Cabinet have decided on the rates and have chosen to give people without a disability in our province not a single cent, despite years of high inflation. The income assistance rates last increased in May 2021; yet according to Statistics Canada data, the overall inflation in Nova Scotia has increased about 13 per cent with food increasing by, I think it was 21 per cent, and shelter costs about 19 per cent. This Progressive Conservative government's failure to raise rates except for people with disabilities means this government has effectively chosen to significantly increase the food and housing insecurity of low-income Nova Scotians.

According to the CCPA - Nova Scotia, the budget does not include anything new to adjust child poverty, despite the government's claims. In the CCPA - Nova Scotia's response to the budget, it is noted: "In the last two years, the annual payment for families at the lowest income level has increased by \$600 per child to \$1,525," and phases out when a family's adjusted yearly net income becomes even a dollar more than \$34,000. This did little to help lift families with children out of poverty when you consider that a single parent with one child on income assistance lives at \$15,350 below the poverty line. Small, incremental increases make little difference.

Funding a school lunch program is extremely important. That is why we in the NDP have advocated for a school food program for years. However, it does not address food insecurity or child poverty. It is a stopgap and a public service that recognizes the need to ensure children are well-nourished when they learn and helps families not have to prepare lunches, particularly women, as my colleague pointed out. It should be a part of the public education system anyway.

Yet this program that the government has brought forward to us, we thought it was going to be universal. But it doesn't meet the definition, because the definition of a universal program means non-targeted with no eligible criteria needed. That's the definition of universal. When you look at this program for the school food program, there are criteria involved. It's targeted. It does not meet the universal definition.

Many assume that working full-time is a pathway out of poverty, but many Nova Scotians who work at around a minimum wage face a different reality. Finally, after a long wait, Nova Scotians will reach \$15.50 an hour on April 1<sup>st</sup>. However, research has shown - and our caucus has advocated - that a living wage should be, at this point in time, at the highest, \$26.50 per hour, and \$22.85 at the lowest. We are well, well far away from that.

So many Nova Scotians identify as working poor. They go to work, but do not make enough money to live. They struggle to pay the bills, put food on the table, heat their homes, and pay rents or mortgages. I know Nova Scotians who work yet they live in their cars, in tents, on people's couches. I know Nova Scotians who work but can't afford their medications.

If Nova Scotians had enough money, they would not be forced to choose between food, heat, medication, housing - basic needs. People must be able to afford these basic needs, and people in Nova Scotia need a living wage. Everyone deserves a roof over their head, and no one should wake up with frost on them in Nova Scotia. No one should live in their tents or in their cars or on the streets.

Like the last government, this government likes to praise the rent supplement, but they only work when there are places to rent. There are no places that are affordable to rent. I went for a tour of my own constituency, and I found nothing, nothing less than \$1,200 a month, and yet the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing tells me the

median, I think, is \$680. We need to improve our provincial housing stock. We need to flip our provincial housing stock faster. We need deeply affordable housing from the non-profits and co-op housing.

We need to eliminate poverty in Nova Scotia. We have a road map. We've put it on the Order Paper. It's there. So, we need to implement a plan. We need to significantly improve income support to lift families with children out of poverty, fundamentally transform the child welfare and social assistance systems that do not work for people in need, remove barriers, and expand access to universal public services.

Establish conditions for decent work and decent pay, and quality of life and quality job creation. We need to protect people's rights to housing and food. We need to address racism in all forms of discrimination as root causes of poverty, including child poverty. We need to decolonize systems and end poverty for First Nations children.

We need a provincial seniors income benefit program. We're one of only a few provinces that don't have it. Seven fifty, but you have to apply; \$750, but you have to have certain criteria and show receipts. In other provinces, that is not the case. You don't have to show receipts but you've got to apply - \$750, but you have to have certain criteria and show receipts. In other provinces, that is not the case - you don't have to show receipts, it comes automatically. The \$750 - great, good, it helps people, but they do better in other provinces.

With the time that I have remaining - we need to do better in this province to end poverty. We need to stop patting ourselves on the back because we did little increments, and start doing the big, revolutionary things that need to be done here in this province to end child poverty and poverty in this province once and for all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I have just a few thoughts before we head into Budget Estimates about the budget, and what we've been seeing here in the Chamber over the last little while.

Last July, in a number of communities around our province, we were visited by extraordinary rains. I know my community was not the only one that was affected by that. We very nearly had loss of life. We had considerable property damage.

The people in those areas, in my area, are still dealing with that property damage. People who applied to the provincial Disaster Financial Assistance Program - primarily funded by the federal government - most of them have had their assessors through, and some of them have received small cheques toward their damage. But they don't really know what they're getting, and it's really difficult for them to move on. We are here, seven

months later, and a lot of those folks are stuck in limbo. They're out a lot of money from their pocket and they're waiting.

One of the reasons why we all come together, we're governed collectively, is that we are stronger together. We're better off when we all pull together. When I look at some of what I see happening now, it doesn't feel like that's happening.

[11:15 a.m.]

Those folks are still waiting to know what's happening with their lives. I have people in my riding who are paying two mortgages, two sets of insurance. They have gone through their savings. In some cases, they don't have a line of credit that they can go to, and they just don't know what to do.

Their predicament there is so similar to what we see in various sectors right now. My colleague from the NDP just made a passionate cry for more funding for people who are living in poverty. I echo that, but there are also folks who were just making it who aren't making it anymore.

The move to abandon the Coastal Protection Act has implications all across this province. I had people reaching out to me in shock after the government did that. They couldn't believe they would do that. They asked, Did they not see what happened in Bedford on July 21<sup>st</sup>? Did they not see how much water there was? Do they think this is an isolated incident?

Sometimes I think when people say a once-in-a-thousand-years flood, they think it's not going to happen for another thousand years. It's actually about probabilities. It's a one in a thousand chance that this would happen again.

We used to get the once-in-a-hundred-years storms - only now we're getting them every five to ten years. We know these things are going to happen again, and people feel like they've been abandoned.

Coastal property owners - boy, wait until you see the effect of this, because we're all interconnected. People are right next door. If your neighbour decides to do something with their coastline, you're going to be affected by it. Saying there's an app, and municipalities that have indicated previously that they don't have the capacity to do this - there will be no protection for property owners along the coastline. I don't know who this benefits. I don't know how the minister thinks he has the ability to know that if you didn't hear from people - when you said that we're going to do X action, and you didn't hear from people, therefore they were against it - usually that's not what happens.

We have, in the past, had people ringing this Legislature to protest. We knew what they thought. They were not being quiet. They were not in favour. People come out when

they're not in favour. It's a new gymnastic, pretzel-twisty flight of fancy to suggest that we didn't hear from people, so therefore they were against it. Trust me - if people are against what you're doing, you're going to hear about it.

Over the next while, I suspect members' offices will be deluged by concern about that move. Maybe they've made the calculation, and they don't care about that.

I can tell you what our offices are being deluged about this week in the House, and that is power rates. People have been getting their power bills, and they're shocked - massive increases over what they paid last year. We have grave concerns about legislation before this House that is going to impact that. How do we think we're not going to have to pay for a grid that exists? Is it just going to magically get transferred? It doesn't work that way.

When we look at who is being helped and who is not being helped, it's of concern. It was not that long ago that Nova Scotia was in the situation - in the 1990s - where the Province was dangerously close to not meeting payroll. We have to be careful about what we spend. It's important to spend it on good things, and it's important to help people.

We have to make choices, we would think, so it's important that when we're doing things, we keep an eye in the public purse. We recently had instances pointed out by the Auditor General that indicate that due diligence was not taken with the public purse: inappropriate use of alternative procurement practices to accelerate the development of transitional care facilities. Those are important. I don't think anyone in here would say that we shouldn't have them. Perhaps maybe some would, but I think it's good that we have transitional care facilities. Is it appropriate to throw out the rules of procurement to ensure we receive value for money? Was that the right thing to do? According to the Auditor General, it was not. It was very clear that it was not.

I could do chapter and verse on all the things that went down there. We appear to have paid for advisory services twice. We have oversight within Build Nova Scotia, then you hire another company to provide oversight too, yet nobody picked up on the fact that all of this stuff is not how it's supposed to be done.

Because a facility was bought that was not appropriate to the needs of the health care system, it's a massive renovation. I can tell you, being on the Treasury and Policy Board, the one thing we heard over and over as we were working on the Halifax Infirmary project - which was announced by this government, or reannounced, and then delayed, and now has been reannounced and shifted over to the Department of Health and Wellness, which is the department that oversaw Hogan Court, which boggles the mind, that, hey, in reward for doing such a bad job, we're going to give you an even bigger project, and it's going to be under your purview. That's awesome.

Nova Scotians worked really hard to ensure that we could get back to a balanced position so that we were in a much better position net-debt-to-GDP than we had been in the past. That's all gone out the window. I'm not saying we shouldn't be spending money, but we have to make sure we're spending money properly.

RBC put out their thoughts on this latest budget, and it's titled "Nova Scotia Budget 2024: More investment in healthcare at the expense of fiscal health." My concern is that we're spending a lot of money in important areas; we're spending a lot of money without due diligence, without proper oversight. Then there are other areas that are being completely ignored. We don't have enough lab technicians. We don't have enough people to do the tests. We can ramp up all the tests we want in preventive health - which is the best spending in health, because we catch problems before they become big problems in people's health, or we get people in better positions - but we don't have enough people working in labs to do tests. We don't have enough technologists to run the tests.

We can have all the doctors and all the nurses in the world, but if we don't have people throughout the system - it's not just doctors and nurses in isolation. There are all those supporting players in the cast and crew who are so important to our health care system. There doesn't seem to be investment over there. We may need more seats here for lab technicians. Where's the money for that? There's nothing.

Although I will say that there was the budget speech, and then there's all the other stuff that was announced outside of it. Who knows? Before the end of the month, maybe they will actually announce that they have seats here in the province for that. I don't know. We'll see, because apparently, "It's not in the budget" doesn't mean it's not in the budget. We might just spend another billion dollars and do that outside of the budget.

I am concerned - this is what it says in that RBC report:

. . . against the backdrop of Nova Scotia's soaring population growth (3.2% from mid-2022 to mid-2023) and two years of above-target inflation, the province has only ramped up nominal per capita health spending by just almost 2% over two years. Adjusting for inflation, health sector spending per person has outright declined.

While we're all clapping here for increased health spending, if you actually sit down and look at it - what it is per capita - when you take into account inflation, actual health care spending per person has outright declined. That, to me, is a concern. It's a concern to me when we look at our debt, and - I'm just trying to look at the camera here - we were going down, down, down, and there we go, back up we go. That's a concern for us too.

It's important to spend money, it's important to spend it wisely, and it's important to spend it on the things that it needs to be spent on. I am concerned about what we're seeing in this budget.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Before I get into the budget, I'd like to take a chance on this International Women's Day to stand in my place and be on the record and say how honoured and blessed I am to have some amazing women in my family. I want to just quickly run down my daughters - my oldest daughter, Rachel, who is in her third year at Atlantic Veterinary College. She was denied three times - she couldn't get in. On her fourth attempt, she got into veterinary college, two years ago. She's a hard worker, she's intelligent, she's very persistent - I think like her old man.

[11:30 a.m.]

My second daughter, Molly has a Screen Arts Degree from NSCC. She went to Ottawa to work for three years, and now she's back home going to St. Mary's University, taking a psychology and social work program. She's hilarious, she's funny, she's very dependable, and she's a very loving daughter.

My third daughter, Emma, is a strong woman who, at the age of 17, got pregnant. And you know what, Speaker? She has been an amazing person, and has grown, and I can't be more proud of the woman she has become in raising her two sons and now her third, coming in September. I'm very proud of her.

My youngest daughter, Chloe, who graduated from high school this year, is a born leader. She's a great athlete. I've discussed her many times here. I've called her a "clutch," I've called her "the cannon." She's a leader, she's a very intelligent person, and I'm looking forward to all the things she's going to accomplish.

Last but not least is Mrs. Palmer, whom I am so blessed - boy, she puts up with an awful lot. She is someone who is very loyal, she's been with me through so many of my adventures, whether it's music, my own business, and in this crazy journey I'm on now.

I do want to recognize these amazing women in my life and my constituency assistants, Susie and Lisa back in my office, and all my colleagues here. So just a shout-out to all the women so I am on the record, and thank you to all of you.

I want to have a chance to chat about the budget for a few minutes. I know that in this House we hear so many people standing up and taking credit for having this in the budget and that in the budget. We've all been advocates for a long time, but really, the tack I want to take in my presentation here briefly is not to take credit or to stand and say that I'm glad this is done because I did this for so long. I want to speak about the real heroes

and the real people behind this budget. I want to speak about the community leaders, the community advocates in Kings West, whose hard work is paying off as we put this budget out. I'm so glad to highlight a few of them in this chat.

In September 2022, I was fortunate to have the Minister of Health and Wellness in Kings West for a little visit. We had an opportunity to sit and speak with advocates and some parents of children and juveniles with diabetes. The minister and me met in my office with Jenni Osborne, we met with Joel Hirtle, we met with Heather Burton. These are parents who have been dealing with an awful lot through the years. They've seen the stresses and the things they've had to go through with children with diabetes. They were talking about the need to have insulin pumps and monitoring, and what could we do? How could we make things a little bit better for families like theirs?

Their work continues. Even though we might have been a little bit disappointed and never made the cut in last year's budget, it was such an honour - probably the best day of my career as an MLA - to hear that announcement that we were making \$7.2 million in the diabetic care for the people of Nova Scotia.

Joel and his wife, Alicia, and their sons Logan and Blake - Logan has diabetes - for the last few years they've been organizing an annual walk for diabetes, raising money and awareness for young children with diabetes. I have been pleased to celebrate and attend some of their fundraisers they've had. I had a guest in the House, you may remember, Leila Dieter, who was in the House a year ago, and her mother and father, Peter and Marlee. Leila is such a strong young woman, who has been advocating for young people. She's gone to Ottawa and has done so many presentations before parliamentarians.

It's work like that, those people who I am here to highlight today. Those people - thank you. Anyone who took the diabetic finger prick challenge - that was one of the biggest eye-openers I had when I did that, and by 2:00 p.m. my finger was purple and swollen. I couldn't imagine having to go through that. Again, I am just so proud of being in a government that made the investment in diabetic care for families all across this province.

We've talked a lot about the food program here and I want to talk about the Kings County Community Food Council that has been working for a lot of years to get to this point. In the various meetings I've had with them, they've been lobbying the federal government, they've been working with provincial MLAs to advocate for a provincial food program in schools. It was another proud day when we were able to announce the \$18.8 million for a universal school program for Primary to Grade 5 in this province.

The Kings County Community Food Council - with Sarah Mullen, Heather Morris, Don Hare, and Becca Green-LaPierre - I just want to read from an email that they sent me once, and if I have to table this, I will. Speaker, please let me know:



We cannot wait for a federal investment in school food programs. We urge you, as our elected representative, to advocate for increased provincial funding dedicated to improving school food programs. This investment should focus on enhancing the quality and variety of food options offered in schools and ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Again, what an honour to let them know that, based on their hard work, we did not wait for the federal government to act. We did it on our own.

There is a program at a Berwick School, a food program that has been under way for a few years and it's a bit of a model, I think, for the provincial strategy. It really involves community. It involves parents, it involves the teachers there, and they have a program of food at lunch, a hot meal program, which is pay-if-you-can, but if you can't, it's okay. There's no stigma for any of those underprivileged children.

I'm proud to be representing in their community a program that is already doing the kinds of things that we want to implement in our universal program. I was at a - they call it the Annual Harvest Dinner, a fundraiser for the school program, and we want to continue to work with those communities that are already doing great things. At that fundraiser for the food program, they raised over \$52,000 for their food program. Those are the kinds of communities that we want to partner with as we roll that out.

One of the other privileges I have is representing the Town of Berwick, the great councillors there, and the CAO, Jen Boyd. We've been able to work with them and I'm happy to announce that there's \$1.4 million of infrastructure spending going to happen there for their wastewater treatment plan. That is going to help the Town of Berwick build the capacity and the infrastructure as they build their community and as they build the number of people wanting to come there. We're getting stuff done.

I just wanted to highlight that, because the overall project to be completed in three phases, it aims to upgrade the Berwick wastewater treatment plant to improve treatment at the existing loading scenario, as well as the 20-year design horizon for the Town of Berwick. So, we're planning for the long-term, and I'm very happy to see that that was in our budget as well.

I have another constituent named Daisy Dwyer. Let me tell you about Daisy. Daisy is an advocate for mental health awareness and mental health services, addictions counselling. She is in the Kingston Greenwood Mental Health Association. It's advocacy like Daisy's that has helped formulate initiatives like the Community Wellness framework, that Brian Comer - oh sorry, Speaker - Minister of Addictions and Mental Health, was with me . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. I'd just ask that the member retract.

CHRIS PALMER: I retract.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Thank you, Speaker. I was pleased to have the Minister of Additions and Mental Health with me to meet Daisy and to understand that it's her advocacy and the work that she does that helps inform the department in the programs when they come out with investments in mental health services for individuals.

Of course, the MOST program, investments in Red Seal certification, apprenticeship programs. I think of business owners in my community like Craig, Paul Parsons, Scott Peckford. I had the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration with me at a town hall with a bunch of builders and business owners. Their input, their work, and their ideas help formulate apprenticeship program enhancements and how we can invest in that. This is a thing that the business community is asking for and our government is responding in investing.

The last thing I'd like to say is I hear in this House, we hear different people talking about investment, tax savings. We all want those things. There's no doubt about it. We hear maybe one party giving a huge laundry list of things. I would shudder to think how big a deficit would be if the NDP ever formed office. It would be a huge deficit and I just can't imagine.

AN HON. MEMBER: Never make that mistake again.

CHRIS PALMER: We heard one of our colleagues on the Liberal caucus yesterday making points about investments the previous government made. There's no doubt all governments make big investments, and it's up to the next government to continue or not continue those programs. We've continued a lot of those programs.

I'd like to say that the comment about being the best PC government in history, well, we've had some pretty good PC governments. Robert Stanfield, John Buchanan, John Hamm, the member for Pictou East. We've had some pretty good - I understand a lot of things have been - we balance the books, and of course everyone wants to have good financial responsibility.

The people of Nova Scotia spoke loud and clear when they elected this government. They wanted a government that had a responsible, balanced approach. We had to catch up in investments in health care and long-term care. The things that were really important to Nova Scotians, we had to catch up, and that's what we've done. We've had a very balanced approach in how we've made investments in these key areas I've been discussing, and we've done some things with tax relief to make life more affordable for Nova Scotians.

I'll just conclude with a couple other thoughts here. There's no doubt about it, what we hear from the other side - and I understand, we want to help Nova Scotians, we want to help them achieve, not just to survive and to sustain a minimum level of living. We're looking to help Nova Scotians thrive.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, that's right.

CHRIS PALMER: We're looking to lift Nova Scotians up. We believe in the potential of Nova Scotia.

AN HON. MEMBER: I believe.

CHRIS PALMER: We believe that they're more than just living and sustaining. We believe that Nova Scotians have all the tools, and we just want to help them so that they can use those tools . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: To thrive.

CHRIS PALMER: . . .to become bigger and to thrive in this province. That's the difference on this side of the House from that side of the House.

Speaker, I'm not a betting man. I'm not a gambler, really. The best gamble I made was marrying my wife 30 years ago. I got a lot of rewards from that. (Interruption) You might say she lost. I don't know. But I am willing to bet - and I'm one who will stand by the Premier and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and this amazing team over here - I'm willing to bet on the people of Nova Scotia that we can move this province forward, and we can do it faster and we can do it better.

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

[11:45 a.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[3:57 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young 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 some progress, and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: That concludes government business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Monday, March 18<sup>th</sup> between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. Business will include Committee of the Whole House on Supply and Committee of the Whole House on Bills and Second Reading of Bill No. 419.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that we do now rise to meet again on March 18<sup>th</sup> between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 3:58 p.m.]