



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We are going to begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction relative to a petition.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

LISA LACHANCE: The following folks are planning to be here today as basic income guarantee supporters. They're here. Amazing. I'd like to introduce Mandy Kay-Raining Bird, chair of Basic Income Nova Scotia; Colleen Dowe, Cumberland Community Health Board coordinator; Sarah Flemming, Colchester United Way; Amy Moonshadow, anti-poverty advocate; and Pierre Stevens, treasurer, Basic Income Nova Scotia. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition, the operative clause of which is:

We respectfully request that the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia form an all-party committee to study the implementation of a basic income guarantee in the province of Nova Scotia that reflects the principles laid out by Basic Income Nova Scotia, Coalition Canada Basic Income-revenu de base, and the Basic Income Canada Network.

I have affixed my signature as required.

THE SPEAKER: The petition has been tabled.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I would also like to table a petition, with the operative clause reading:

We respectfully request that the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia form an all-party committee to study the implementation of a basic income guarantee (BIG) in the Province of Nova Scotia that reflects the principles laid out by Basic Income Nova Scotia, Coalition Canada/basic income-revenu de base, and the Basic Income Canada Network.

There are many signatures, and I have affixed my own, as per the rules of the House.

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 Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

RESOLUTION NO. 949

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

Whereas on April 1st, Nova Scotians will pay over 23 cents in carbon taxes per litre at the gas pump, with a Liberal carbon tax increase of 3.3 cents per litre; and

Whereas the Progressive Conservative Party has always opposed the carbon tax, and all parties in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly have asked the federal Liberal government not to increase it further for the damage it is doing to our economy and for the hardship it is causing Nova Scotians; and

Whereas tomorrow in the House of Commons, Members of Parliament will vote on a motion calling on the Liberal government to immediately cancel the carbon tax hike;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature call on Nova Scotia MPs to vote in the best interests of Nova Scotians by standing up against an increase in the carbon tax.

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 Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 950

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

Whereas pharmacy professionals have been an incredibly important support to Nova Scotians and our health care system

through many of the challenges we've faced over the past few years; and

Whereas pharmacies do so much more than fill prescriptions and now deliver vaccines, provide primary care services, counsel patients, and prescribe medication for a range of common illnesses; and

Whereas pharmacies continue to play a growing role in our health care system, employing more than a thousand pharmacy professionals and supporting countless Nova Scotians across the province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in celebrating Pharmacy Appreciation Month, recognizing our pharmacy teams for the important role they play in our health care system and thanking them for their efforts.

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

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I beg leave to make some introductions.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

KENDRA COOMBES: In the gallery and overflow, we have a number of guests to watch the tabling of this important bill - Speaker, this bill is one for the books.

From the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the Federation of Labour, we have Mat Whynott and Danny Cavanagh. From NSGEU, we have Sandra Mullen, Tammy McGillis, Mary Otto, and John Lugas; and members of Unifor who are on strike in Eastern

Passage: Jennifer Murray, Shelley Amyotte, Shauna Wilcox, Patrick Murray, Shannon Sampson, Adam Slaunwhite, Michael MacMullin, Billy Conrad, Lisa Hale, Jessica Garrett, Matthew Blois, Timothy Rogers, Lucien Foote, Troy Smith, George Leaman, Christine Green, Michelle Sampson, Kelly LeBlanc, George Corbin, Shelley Smith, Peter Troop, Mikaela Flower, Darlene Holland, and many others.

I thank them all for their presence here in the gallery, and I hope they can receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit here.

Bill No. 435 - An Act to Amend Chapter 475 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Trade Union Act, Respecting Strike Integrity and Worker Protection. (Kendra Coombes)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, first may I make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I know this wonderful woman has already been introduced in the House, but I want to introduce her again and ask her to stand - Ms. Colleen Dowe from Cumberland North. I want to acknowledge her and the work of all of Cumberland Homelessness and Housing Support Association, sometimes known as Cornerstone. They have worked tirelessly in our community for opening a shelter and for those in need. Thank you so much. Please join me in thanking her. (Applause)

Bill No. 436 - An Act Respecting the Remuneration of Educational Assistants and Substitute Teachers. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RESOLUTION NO. 951

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

Whereas in October 2023, the government cut the amount of financial assistance available under the Heating Assistance Rebate

Program (HARP) from \$1,000 to \$600 while also cutting the income threshold for eligibility under the program by \$10,000 from \$85,000 to \$75,000; and

[1:15 p.m.]

Whereas in January 2024, the government cut eligibility for the \$400 financial assistance available under the Home Energy Assistance Top-up (HEAT) Fund from an annual basis to every second year, thereby rendering every beneficiary of the program in 2023 ineligible to receive the \$400 grant in 2024; and

Whereas these cutbacks have taken place at a time of intense cost of living pressure on precisely those most affected by the aggregate withdrawal of \$800 in annually available help with heating, a time of grocery price inflation averaging just below 10 per cent in the last two years, of average annual rent increases of 11 per cent, and of 14 per cent power increases in the last 12 months;

Therefore be it resolved that the House instructs the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to consider the untimely and damaging impact of these cutbacks in assistance with heating, and further instructs the committee to bring in a bill requiring the government to replace the financial support that has been withdrawn.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

RESOLUTION NO. 952

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

Whereas Two-Spirit is a pan-Indigenous term that was created in 1990 in Winnipeg to start the process of reclaiming nation- and culturally-specific terms of identity amongst Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, Two-Spirit resurgence being a part of a healing and decolonizing process, and is celebrated annually on the Spring equinox each year for the Two-Spirit Celebration and Awareness Day; and

Whereas an increase in Two-Spirit community visibility improves health outcomes of community members, and contributes to a society in which all individuals are valued and celebrated for their unique identities and contributions; and

Whereas the Government of Nova Scotia, and indeed all Nova Scotians, are treaty people committed to the implementation of the Peace and Friendship Treaties, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action, the 2S Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly directs the Standing Committee on Health, at the earliest opportunity, to summon witnesses and provide an examination of how the Government of Nova Scotia can better support Two-Spirit people in Mi'kma'ki, including recognizing Two-Spirit Awareness and Celebration on the Spring equinox of each year.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

Just a friendly reminder to our visitors in the gallery that there are to be no photos taken.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Before I begin, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

KIM MASLAND: In your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, I am honoured to introduce Abigail Smith, a talented young athlete from Queens County who has impressed us all with her skills and determination in the sport of judo. Abigail, I would ask that you and your father, Troy Smith, please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

SMITH, ABIGAIL: JUDO ACCOMPLISHMENTS - CONGRATS.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I rise today to congratulate Abigail Smith from Brooklyn on being selected to compete in judo for Team Canada at the 30th International Thuringia Cup in Germany. In addition to this impressive accomplishment, at the start of this year Abigail was selected to be one of 12 True Sport Ambassadors for Nova Scotia in 2024. I understand May is her month, so stay tuned and watch for Abigail.

Just 15 years of age, Abigail has already achieved so much in the sport of judo. She continues to train tirelessly to achieve her ultimate goal of one day representing Canada at the Olympic Games. Immensely talented and determined, she also carries out her own fundraising activities to finance her training and competing, receiving enthusiastic support within the local community.

Abigail recently posted that she lives in the best community in Nova Scotia. I say: Abigail, we are just so happy to have you. You are such an inspiration to young girls and to me. I am your biggest fan. I wish you all the best. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before I make my statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I believe we're joined in the gallery by members of the Wine Growers of Nova Scotia, Emma Cassidy and Justine Lalonde. I believe Haley Brown is also watching from home. I would ask the members provide those guests with the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

WINE GROWERS OF N.S.: CONTRIBS. TO ECON. - THANKS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, for 22 years, the Wine Growers of Nova Scotia have built awareness of the wines of Nova Scotia brands, serving as a voice for local wineries. They aim to work closely with all levels of government to grow the industry and expand market opportunities for Nova Scotia wines. Under the leadership of the current executive director, Haley Brown, Nova Scotia's wine sector has a strong advocate who strives to build excellence throughout every aspect of Nova Scotia's wine industry, as demonstrated particularly over these last few weeks. This important organization helps forge partnerships, attract investment, and catapults Nova Scotia wine onto the world stage where our locally grown and produced products have continuously won international awards.

Please join me in thanking the Wine Growers of Nova Scotia and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector who have ramped up our local economy with their efforts from one end of the province to the other. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We are also joined somewhere today by Geena Lockett, proprietor of Lockett Vineyards; as well as Steve Ells, the president of Grape Growers Nova Scotia; and Karl Coutinho of the Wine Producers of Nova Scotia. I would ask that the members give them the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

LUCKETT VINEYARDS: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - RECOG.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to recognize a cornerstone of Nova Scotia's wine and grape growing industries, Lockett Vineyards. In the year 2000, entrepreneur Pete Lockett bought 92 acres of land in the Gaspereau Valley. Everyone, of course, will know Pete Lockett from his segment on *Live at 5* and from Pete's Frootique, where he introduced Nova Scotians to a world of vegetable and fruit produce, and signed off with his signature catchphrase "toodle-dee doo." Pete and his team, like so many wine growers in our province, worked to overcome the climate challenges and develop their wine-making processes, and in 2010 opened the winery's cellar doors. The winery continues to serve Nova Scotians and tourists alike. It's a beloved destination for anyone looking to take in the best our province has to offer in food, drink, and beauty.

I would also like to recognize Geena Lockett, who has taken over management of the winery, and is part of the next generation of wine growers in Nova Scotia.

I ask the whole House to join me in recognizing Lockett Vineyards and all who contribute to this vital sector of our economy.

THE SPEAKER: Just a reminder to members to keep the chatter down, please. We also have the fans on, which is making it really difficult to hear. Please decrease the chatter.

The honourable member for Kings North.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

JOHN LOHR: Speaker, there are a number of winery owners and people in the industry who are my neighbours in Kings North and friends. I do want to introduce John Eikelenboom, the owner of 1365 Church Street Winery; John McLarty and Lisa Law, Planters Ridge Winery; Melanie Eelman, Beausoleil Winery; Anne-Marie Muttart, Edgemere Estates Farm. These are literally my neighbours.

I also want to introduce Steve Ells, president of the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia, a long-time friend. His father was MLA for Kings North in this Legislature, Glenn Ells. Also, I was privileged to be in business with his father in Kings Produce Ltd. and AgroKings Canada Ltd., which was a joint venture with the Republic of Cuba. So I have a very long association with Steve's family, which has been tremendously to my benefit. I appreciate them very much.

On behalf of the PC caucus, I want to say how much we appreciate the wine industry in Nova Scotia, the hard work that they do. We understand that they have been transformational in tourism in our province. Their efforts to create a unique culinary and wine experience is deeply appreciated by our caucus.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membourtau.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I also want to recognize that we have in the gallery today representatives from Planters Ridge in Port Williams: John McLarty, Lisa Law, and Wendy Collins. I ask you to rise and be recognized by the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

PLANTERS RIDGE WINERY: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - THANKS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We recognize Planters Ridge Winery, founded in 2010. John McLarty and Lisa Law left Ontario and planted roots in Nova Scotia when they bought a historic farmhouse in Port Williams and founded Planters Ridge Winery. They wasted no time planting their first grapes in 2011. Planters Ridge Winery opened its doors on June 27, 2014, and since then the winery has expanded to deliver locally grown and produced Nova Scotia wine.

Planters Ridge has become an award-winning winery and has accomplished some of its own personal goals, such as becoming the first vineyard in Nova Scotia to produce the Viognier grape - I hope I'm saying that right - which it successfully accomplished in 2018.

Join me in thanking Planters Ridge Winery and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector, who have ramped up our local economy with their efforts.

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

CN STRIKE: NEED FOR ANTI-SCAB LAWS - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, it has been 22 days since Autoport Workers' Unifor Local 100 went on strike. On Day 1 of the strike, CN Rail brought in scab workers. For 22 days, workers have faced disrespect and indignity as CN and Autoport use the courts and scab workers to try to break the spirit and resolve of their employees. Bringing in scab workers prolongs strikes and escalates tensions. This employer would rather union bust than negotiate fairly. This is precisely why anti-scab laws are needed.

We stand in solidarity with the striking workers at Autoport. CN Rail must end the use of scab labour and bargain in good faith. Solidarity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

JOHN LOHR: In the Speaker's Gallery, we have a remarkable young lady who is at the top of her field, both academically and athletically. Haley McDonald is the recipient of the Governor General's Medal as an academic all-Canadian, which is an incredible achievement. I will ask that Haley and her parents, Chris and Scott, stand and rise to accept the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House.

MCDONALD, HALEY: GG MEDAL RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I rise today to congratulate Haley McDonald of Port Williams, who has recently been honored with a Governor General's Medal for Academic and Sporting Excellence. Haley was one of eight honorees selected among 4,900 student athletes who achieved U SPORTS Academic All-Canadian status in the 2022-2023 season.

Haley is Acadia University's all-time leading scorer, the winner of the Atlantic University Sport Women's Basketball Most Valuable Player Award, and the James Bayer Memorial Scholarship Award. She was named first-team U SPORTS All-Canadian for her excellence on the court while maintaining a 4.08 grade point average as she completed her master's degree in sociology.

Haley is an exceptional role model for young athletes as the founder and director of Lights Out Elite Skills Basketball Camp for girls, Grades 4 to 12. Please join me today to congratulate Haley McDonald as a Top 8 Academic All-Canadian.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: I would like to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

TONY INCE: Joining us today in the Gallery are guests from Grape Escapes Nova Scotia Wine Tours. Please stand as I call your name: Colleen O'Reilly, Terri McCulloch, Randal Denison, John David Goosens, Susan Downey, and Alan Saunders.

I ask the House to greet them with a warm welcome, please. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

GRAPE ESCAPES: WINERY TOURS - RECOG.

HON. TONY INCE: Speaker, today I rise to recognize Grape Escapes, a locally owned business that offers tours to Nova Scotians and tourists alike to many of our beautiful wineries. You can hop into one of their vehicles in Halifax or in Wolfville to get the experience and knowledge from their local tour guides and safely enjoy some wine and delicious bites across various wineries they stop at.

Grape Escapes just recently had their 12th season in 2023, operating wine tours seven days a week, from May through October. Great Escapes makes the perfect tourist attraction to the Valley, but also serves many Nova Scotians who want to explore wineries in our province or celebrate life events such as birthdays and bachelorette parties. Because

of our wineries' tourism business, Grape Escapes thrives. It showcases all that Nova Scotia has to offer.

I'd like to thank Grape Escapes and the entire farm wine industry sector, which has ramped up our businesses in Nova Scotia.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead, please.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I rose earlier to recognize Pharmacy Appreciation Month and since we have so many guests today, I couldn't find the folks I was planning to introduce, so my sincere apologies.

In the gallery today we have representatives from the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia, and I don't want them to leave without accepting the warm welcome of the House. Laurie Deal is the chair of the board and a pharmacist - there you are. It's lovely to see you. Martha Lowe, communications manager for the Pharmacy Association - welcome - and also Kayla Biron, who is a pharmacy technician. Please give them a belated warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

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.

I ask all members to extend a warm welcome to folks whom I don't see in the gallery, but I know they're somewhere in the People's House today and, hopefully, watching downstairs. I'd like to recognize some folks from Lightfoot & Wolfville: Michael Lightfoot, Rachel Lightfoot, Josh Horton, Chris Campbell, and Steve Lee.

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

L & W VINEYARDS: SOIL REGEN. EVENT - THANKS

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, one-third of the Earth's soils are degraded. Degraded soils have less life and structure to hold water and plants. They also lose their carbon content, which is emitted into the atmosphere as CO₂, worsening climate change.

There is lots that can be done to help our soils be healthier. This past July, Régénération Canada and the Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network worked with Lightfoot & Wolfville vineyards to host an innovative event on the principles of soil regeneration. Headline maker Josh Horton led the way through Lightfoot & Wolfville's certified organic and biodynamic vineyards. Making the connection between land and science, Dr. Victoria Lévesque from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada presented her research on organic input for regenerative vineyards and how it leads to better yields. Participants also enjoyed a meal by Lightfoot & Wolfville chefs Brittany Livingstone and Cael Harlow using ingredients produced right on the land.

I thank Lightfoot & Wolfville for hosting this important event.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request to revert to Government Notices of Motion, but as you all know, we can only do that with unanimous consent. Do we have consent to revert? It is agreed.

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, could I do an introduction first?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead, please.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I rise today to make an introduction to the three representatives from People First Nova Scotia, a self-advocacy group of members who have been labelled with an intellectual disability. Their vision is that all citizens have an opportunity to live equally in their communities.

I ask the gallery to recognize Leta Jarvis, a member of People First for over 25 years. Leta hosted the Rebuilding Hope conference last November, as Nova Scotians came together to learn about the remedy.

Jeannie Whidden is the vice president of People First Nova Scotia and has been a member for almost 20 years. Jeannie was part of the *Freedom Tour* Nova Scotia documentary and has helped set up several new chapters of People First. Cindy Carruthers, the Executive Director of People First Nova Scotia, is a champion of creating change in community.

People with disabilities in Nova Scotia, their families, caregivers, and advocates are at the heart of the transformation of the Disability Support Program in Nova Scotia as we move toward a truly inclusive Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

RESOLUTION NO. 953

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

Whereas People First supports individuals who have been labeled with an intellectual disability to speak for themselves, advocate for themselves, and make their own decisions; and

Whereas Nova Scotia is committed to the Human Rights Review and Remedy in transforming support for people with disabilities and moving toward truly inclusive communities across the province; and

Whereas people with disabilities in Nova Scotia will be empowered to make their own choices and decisions on the supports they need to live a good life in community and ultimately help us build more vibrant, diverse, and welcoming communities across Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House join me in congratulating Leta Jarvis, Jeannie Whidden, Cindy Carruthers, the Disability Rights Coalition, People First, and all people with disabilities in Nova Scotia on this much-deserved recognition, and be committed to doing our part to support the Remedy and help build a 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.

We're going back to member statements.

[STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS]

The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I beg leave to make an introduction. Today we are joined in the gallery by folks from Domaine de Grand Pré winery. I ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House when I call their names: Kyla Dunn; Lee Chipman; Nick Morris; Matthew Morris; Tanya McInnis; and Jim de Kock.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

GRAND PRÉ WINERY: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - THANKS

HON. KEITH IRVING: I rise today to recognize Domaine de Grand Pré winery. In 1994, Hanspeter Stutz saw a vision and the potential that Nova Scotia had to offer, and came from Switzerland to take on the Domaine de Grand Pré Winery.

The oldest farm winery in all of Atlantic Canada, Grand Pré has paved the way for stimulating the local economy and the wine sector in the Annapolis Valley and throughout Nova Scotia. Grand Pré prides itself on making wine that is made from 100 per cent Nova Scotia-grown grapes and fruit, and their efforts are recognized through numerous provincial, national, and international awards and accolades they've received over the years.

The Stutz family, including Hanspeter's wife Anna, son Jürg, and daughter Beatrice have continued to grow and expand their business over the years. I can't wait to see what they do next.

Speaker, join me in thanking Domaine de Grand Pré winery and the entire Nova Scotia wine sector that has ramped up our local economy with their efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

PRAC. ENERGY MVT. CTR.: AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: While the Practice Energy Movement Centre is located in Dartmouth South, one of the co-owners, Laura Kieley, lives in Dartmouth North. Thus, I feel qualified to make this statement.

Recently, the Practice, co-owned by Amy Tattrie, was awarded the Canadian Choice Award for Best Yoga Studio in Dartmouth. The Canadian Choice Award recognizes small and medium-sized businesses that are at the heart and soul of this country's business community.

Located along the shore of Lake Banook, the Practice aims to create space for community, movement, and stillness through yoga, cathartic cardio, and meditation. Just over a year ago, members of our very own NDP caucus and staff attended a yoga class at the Practice in support of the YWCA.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Laura, Amy, and the Practice team on receiving this great honour and thank them for keeping Dartmouth and we in the NDP caucus moving and mindful.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, before I read my member statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

CHRIS PALMER: In the East Gallery today, I'm very honoured as the MLA for Kings West to have four guests who've come from CFB Greenwood today to help mark the celebration of the hundredth year of the Royal Canadian Air Force this year. As I call their names, I'd like to ask them all to stand: Colonel Jeff Davis, base commander for CFB Greenwood; Corporal Sarah Ruff; Lieutenant Sophia King; and Acting Base Warrant Officer Steve Bates.

Any of us who represent a military community in our constituency knows the wonderful contribution that our military makes in our communities, and how much they give to the social fabric of our area. They are the best of us, Speaker, and I'd like to ask all members of the House to give my guests a warm welcome today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

RCAF: 100TH ANNIV. - RECOG.

CHRIS PALMER: April 1, 2024 marks 100 years of service for the Royal Canadian Air Force as a distinct military element. The centennial milestone places the RCAF in a unique position to honour its distinct heritage, recognize its tremendous people, and generate excitement for its bright future. I am honoured to represent a constituency with an RCAF base, 14 Wing Greenwood.

The RCAF's legacy is woven into the fabric of Nova Scotia, and 14 Wing Greenwood serves as a testament to its enduring impact. The personnel stationed in Greenwood exemplify the values of courage, integrity, and excellence.

As we reflect on the past century, this is an opportunity to look forward to the future with optimism and resolve. This year, 14 Wing Greenwood will be hosting many celebratory events, including the return of the amazing Air Show Atlantic.

I ask all members of this House to join me in celebrating 100 years of the RCAF and thank all those who serve. May we continue to uphold its legacy with pride and dedication for years to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, I beg leave to make a couple of brief introductions before my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead.

CARMAN KERR: In the West Gallery, I'd like to introduce - he's previously been introduced - Karl Coutinho, president of Avondale Sky Winery, and also chair of the Nova Scotia Wine Growers board.

Beside him, I'd like to introduce Keltie MacNeill of Benjamin Bridge, one of my favourite people on the planet. I think my wife knows that.

Welcome to you both in the House. I encourage everyone to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Annapolis.

AVONDALE SKY WINERY: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - THANKS

CARMAN KERR: I rise today to recognize Avondale Sky Winery & Restaurant. In 2019, the Coutinho family bought Avondale Sky Winery, and have continued the mission to keep the winery local, sustainable, and flourishing. Avondale Sky harvests every grape in the vineyard by hand, and their wine is 100 per cent local. The winery has won multiple awards, including the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Excellence in Nova Scotia Wines, and we're all very proud of them for making award-winning wine with their 100 per cent Nova Scotia-grown grapes.

Speaker, join me in thanking Avondale Sky Winery and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector, and welcome to many of whom are here today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

CN STRIKE: NEED FOR ANTI-SCAB LAWS - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, workers in our province deserve protections. As we speak, CN auto workers are on strike. Unifor Local 100 are asking for good jobs and fair pay. The House of Commons recently passed a bill through second reading to prevent the use of scab labour during strike action and labour disputes. Other jurisdictions across our country have a form of anti-scab legislation, and Nova Scotians deserve the same protections.

Anti-scab legislation is a smart move, and one that all parties should get behind. Do it for every person who put their ballot in for you - all of our constituents, all Nova Scotians.

I would ask all members to join me in solidarity with our workers on the line and on the job. Our workers in this province deserve protections in solidarity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I beg leave to make a quick introduction not related to my member statement.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I do want to quickly draw the members' attention to the, I believe, West Gallery - or East Gallery? The East Gallery. Joining us today is my mom, Odette, who decided to take in some of the goings-on here at the Legislature. Always happy to have her here. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Nice to see you. Welcome.

The honourable member for Argyle.

KIDZACT: DANCE INSTRUCTION - RECOG.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I rise today to recognize a local non-profit dance organization, Kidzact. Kidzact was formed in 2006 by dance instructor Deanna McCarron, who wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people through music, song and dance. It has since grown to over 300 members aged from 3 to 18 who learn dances like hip hop, acrobatics, breakdance and dancercise for tots.

In its new studio location in Tusket, an empty space was converted into a small café, the Dancing Bean Café, that provides a welcoming place for kids to hang out and for parents to visit while their kids dance.

Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating and commending Kidzact members on their dedication to dance. Treasure the camaraderie, embrace the memories and continue to wow audiences with your energetic performances.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please, go ahead.

IAIN RANKIN: We have several guests today from Lightfoot & Wolfville Vineyards, who were recognized. I'd like to recognize them again. I believe some of them are in the gallery. We have Michael Lightfoot, Rachel Lightfoot, Josh Horton, Chris Campbell and Steve Lee. If you could all rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Nice to have you here.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

L & W VINEYARDS: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - THANKS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize Lightfoot & Wolfville Vineyards, which is owned and operated by co-founders Jocelyn and Michael Lightfoot. Michael is a seventh-generation Annapolis Valley farmer and part of the third generation to farm the land where the winery sits today, a beautiful property in Wolfville.

Jocelyn is a certified sommelier, and a number of their children have worked in the business. The Lightfoots began planting grapevines for wine production in 2009, and the first wines in their Lightfoot & Wolfville label were released in 2015, with the winery hospitality facility opening its doors to the public in 2017.

The Lightfoot family has farmed in the Annapolis Valley for eight generations and has put their blood, sweat, and tears into the land that is now a successful and award-winning winery. Speaker, join me in thanking Lightfoot & Wolfville Vineyards and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector, who have ramped up our local economy with their efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

O'REGAN'S BMW WORKERS: NEW CONTRACT - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: I'd like to mark the achievement of the first collective agreement by the mechanics, service technicians, services support, and parts staff at O'Regan's BMW on Kempt Road in Halifax, making them the first unionized service centre at a Halifax-area car dealership.

The 22 members of Unifor Local 4005 at O'Regan's ratified a three-year contract in January, a contract that moves top-rate technicians from \$28 to \$34.50 an hour and provides 2.5 per cent increases in all job classifications in years two and three of the contract. The new collective agreement also provides for paid sick days, RRSP matching and 11 paid holidays.

A first collective agreement is always a milestone for a new union, and this is particularly true when it's the first union in a new sector. The members of Unifor Local 4005 at O'Regan's BMW deserve every credit for what they have accomplished.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

MACLELLAN, T. & D.: DIST. 33 WINERY - CONGRATS.

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to recognize Tami and Duane Maclellan and congratulate them on opening District 33 Winery, a 14-acre vineyard and tasting room, located in the picturesque Jordan Bay in my county.

District 33 Winery first produced their wine and cider this past summer to amazing reviews and were nominated by the Shelburne Area Chamber of Commerce for the Rising Star Award. Although in September, Hurricane Lee wreaked havoc on the grapevines, that didn't stop them; production continues. Their L'Acadie Blanc was chosen as the official wine for the annual Nova Scotia Lobster Crawl 2024. I respectfully ask all members join me in wishing them every success in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I beg leave to make an introduction before my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, of course.

KELLY REGAN: Today in the gallery we have several members of the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia, and I would ask the guests to rise. Some have been previously introduced - surprise, surprise - but I ask them to please rise to receive the warm welcome of the House. Please welcome Steve Ells, Melanie Eelman, Anne-Marie Muttart, Naeem Khan, and Vanessa Lentz. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

GRAPE GROWERS ASSOC. OF N.S.: CONTRIB. - THANKS

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, for 35 years, the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia has provided education, training, and research to help grow the best quality grapes possible here in Nova Scotia. With more than 100 members, the association has been instrumental in the success and growth of the grape-growing and winemaking industry in our province. Their work on a strategic vision for the industry led to 20 wineries and 1,000 acres of vines under cultivation by 2020.

Members of the Grape Growers Association have allowed the industry to flourish and have expanded the market for wine made from good quality Nova Scotia grapes. I'm very fond of their products.

I ask all members of this House to join me in thanking the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector, who have ramped up our local economy with their efforts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

CLARKE, RUSSELL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I ask that after I read my member statement, members may join me for a moment of silence.

Today, I rise to honour the life of veteran Russell Clarke of Amherst. Mr. Clarke, who would have turned 100 today, passed away last Wednesday. In his youth, Russell Clarke served with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders militia. When he turned 18 in 1942, he joined the Royal Canadian Artillery and went overseas on July 20, 1943.

Gunner Clarke was posted to Bramshaw, England, and on D-Day he was assigned to traffic control and there watched the first casualties come back across the Channel. He later served on the Dutch-German border, where he aided in stockpiling ammunition for the push against the Rhine River.

After the war, he became a lieutenant with the militia in his hometown of Amherst and was always proud to participate in Remembrance Day ceremonies and countless other local events.

Plans were under way to hold a 100th birthday celebration for Mr. Clarke in Amherst this past Saturday, but unfortunately he passed away before that could take place.

Please join me in extending condolences to Russell Clarke's family and in honouring the life of this true Canadian hero.

THE SPEAKER: Please stand for a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

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

TOMPKINS SCHOOL CHOIR: SHARING TALENT - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise to recognize the Tompkins Memorial Elementary school choir under the creative guidance of their teacher, Nancy White. I have been privileged to watch this beautiful choir for two years at Remembrance Day services at Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 78.

Listening to the Tompkins school choir is an experience. The thought and care put into their performance of each song is what makes this choir a true experience. Their rendition of “Highway of Heroes” by The Trews will leave you in a sea of tears. Trust me, I know.

I want to thank Nancy White and the Tompkins school choir for sharing their time, talent, and love of performing with us. I look forward to hearing them again soon. Speaker, it should be said that they are elementary students, and their voices are beautiful. Again, I just want to recognize them in this House.

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

TONEY, MORGAN: JUNO AWD. NOM. - RECOG.

HON. KEITH BAIN: Speaker, as the 53rd annual JUNO Awards approach, anticipation builds, especially for Cape Breton’s own Morgan Toney. Morgan and his Mi’kmaw/Celtic folk-fusion fiddle EP *Resilience* have been nominated for the Traditional Roots Album of the Year at the JUNO Awards this weekend here in Halifax.

Morgan, as a fiddler and singer, has a unique blend of Celtic, folk, and Mi’kmaw melodies that he dubs “Mikmatic.” The 24-year-old Morgan who hails from Wagmatcook First Nation is not only a musician, but is a cultural ambassador as well.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join me in recognizing Morgan Toney, and to wish him well at this weekend’s JUNO Awards and continued success in the future.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I beg leave to make an introduction before my member’s statement.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

LORELEI NICOLL: Today, on behalf of the Lost Bell Estate Winery, we have Jill Delaney with us in the East Gallery. I ask Jill to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

LOST BELL ESTATE WINERY: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - THANKS

LORELEI NICOLL: Lost Bell Estate Winery is one of Nova Scotia's newest wineries, built on the land and legacy of Sainte-Famille Wines, the third-oldest vineyard in Nova Scotia.

I'm proud to say that Sainte-Famille was also led by Suzanne Corkum, Nova Scotia's first female winemaker. As general manager, Jill Delaney and the team at Lost Bell are writing the next chapter of this vineyard and carrying on the legacy of this historic business. Jill and her colleagues Tony Barkhouse and Glenn Fraser are working to launch a new winery experience with a tasting room that will showcase their delicious wines.

Please join me in thanking Lost Bell Estate Winery and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector, who have tremendously ramped up our local economy with their efforts.

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

WABANAKI 2S ALLIANCE: REG'L GATHERING - THANKS

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to honour the Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance.

The Wabanaki Two-Spirit Alliance is a group of Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqiyik, Passamaquoddy, Abenaki, Penobscot, Innu, Inuit, and Métis of Labrador First Nations two-spirit people. It includes volunteers, researchers, academics, knowledge-holders, youth, and elder Wabanaki two-spirits and allies.

Their mission is to represent the emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical well-being and interests of two-spirit and Indigenous LGBTQ+ individuals and groups in Wabanaki Territory. That includes Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I., Newfoundland and Labrador, the Gaspé region of Quebec, and Maine. It is based on beliefs and values in the framework within the peace and friendship treaty.

On March 13th and 14th, the alliance hosted a regional gathering of 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations in Halifax to take collective stock of where we are and where we need to get to. Over 60 people attended from about 40 organizations.

Speaker, I would like to thank the leaders, elders, staff, and volunteers who helped pull together this historic gathering that will surely have long-term positive outcomes in Mi'kma'ki.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

DURNING, ROWAN: SKIING ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.

TOM TAGGART: I rise today with great pride to commend the exceptional talent and hard work of Rowan Durning of Spencer's Point.

Rowan recently showcased his incredible freestyle skiing skills at the Canada Cup in Sun Peaks, Kamloops, where he astounded audiences with his skill in the freestyle Big Air events, securing a well-deserved silver medal.

Not stopping there, Rowan also impressed in the Slopestyle event, earning himself a bronze medal. On February 28th, Sport Nova Scotia named Rowan the Cleve's Source for Sports January Athlete of the Month, Senior Male.

The community of Colchester North is bursting with admiration for Rowan's achievements, and we eagerly anticipate cheering him on in his future endeavors on the slopes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West:

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I beg leave to make an introduction before my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Today in the gallery, we have a few representatives from Benjamin Bridge winery. I'll ask that they stand as I read their names.

We have Heather Smith, Keltie MacNeill, Éric Ferrado, Marie-Eve Joshua and Ashley McConnell-Gordon. I would ask for the House to give them a warm welcome, please. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

BENJ. BRIDGE WINERY: CONTRIB. TO ECON. - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to recognize Benjamin Bridge Winery. Benjamin Bridge was founded in 1999 by Gerry McConnell and his late wife, Dara Gordon, who shared a passion for contributing to a sustainable rural Nova Scotia.

Benjamin Bridge is Canada's most acclaimed sparkling wine house, nestled in Nova Scotia's picturesque Gaspereau Valley, known for their iconic Nova 7, my favourite wine. Gerry and Dara's twin daughters, Ashley and Devon, now lead the small family-like team and continue the vision started by their parents 25 years ago.

Please join me in thanking Benjamin Bridge Winery and the entire Nova Scotia farm wine sector, who have ramped up our local economy with their efforts.

[2:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time is now almost 2:01 p.m. We will begin Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We will finish with a few minutes or a few seconds extra at the end.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: PAUSE ON WINE INDUSTRY PLAN - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, it took three weeks of sustained pressure inside this House and without for the Premier to actually finally meet with the grape growers and local wine producers of Nova Scotia. We know, however, based on freedom of information requests, that the Premier had met with the two commercial bottlers many times since 2022. Why did it take three weeks of public pressure and bad headlines for the Premier to do the right thing - meet with our local fine representatives and agree to pause this dangerous plan that he had in place that could have jeopardized them all?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): We're big fans of the industry, for sure - supporters of the industry over the years. It brings incredible potential to grow that industry. I'm pleased that we had a productive meeting last night. I know leading up to that, the ministers had been meeting with the group. I was happy to be able to meet with them last night.

I think the reality is that there's so much potential for the province in that industry but in so many other industries. We need to grow the economy of the province. That's all we're trying to do. I hope the member doesn't take offense at trying to grow the economy of the province. That's what we're trying to do. We don't always get it right, but when we don't, we try to fix it. We'll do that here too as well.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, it's very clear that you don't grow the economy by putting \$250 million of our economy in farm wines in jeopardy. That's not how you grow

the economy. That's how you kill our rural economy. The fact is that the Premier met with commercial bottlers two years ago. It took sustained pressure from this Chamber and from the industry representatives who didn't take this issue lying down - and I'm proud of them for not doing that - for him to actually meet with them and agree to pause this.

Why did it take so long for the Premier to realize how important this sector is and that his plans could have jeopardized the whole thing?

THE PREMIER: I certainly don't want to give the member the impression that he had any impact on this decision. He certainly did not. We have been supporters of this industry for quite some time.

I think that there's agreement that there are different sectors to the industry. They can co-exist. We need to get that right. There's a desire from stakeholders across the spectrum to grow the industry. I share that desire. We'll get the right path forward. I'm confident of that. That's what we all want. We all want better things for Nova Scotia. We grow incredible grapes here. The potential for the industry is not just potential - it's being realized. We're seeing it in increasing sales. We'll continue to look for ways to make sure that we do what's right by all Nova Scotians.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm certainly not taking credit for this. What happened is very obvious: The Premier got caught doing the wrong thing for the wrong reasons, and he didn't have a leg to stand on. First this was a trade issue; now it's an economic development issue. There has been no evidence produced that either of those things had anything to do with this change.

The Premier says he's pausing the subsidy to commercial bottlers that are importing juice to compete with local wine growers, but we have heard from the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board that the government has dished out money to commercial wine bottlers already.

Could the Premier please confirm if that has happened - if this program, in fact, hasn't been paused - and how much money has been provided to commercial bottlers in the form of subsidies?

THE PREMIER: The program has been in place since January. There are multiple programs. They all initiated at the same time. We're going to work to make sure we get it right. We have agreed to that. We're working that in good faith. We're sincere. We want to grow the sector.

The member should just be careful with his phrases. "Getting caught" is something that happened with the member with the Auditor General's report on the theft of public money - that the Auditor General was very clear - that the Liberal Party tried to conceal until after an election.

We're not caught on anything. We're acknowledging that there's a way to maybe get this a little better. We're committed to doing that, and we will make sure that happens.

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

PREM.: AUTOPORT WORKERS STRIKE - ADDRESS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, let's talk about the economy. Workers in our province have our backs day in and day out. Unfortunately, their employers don't always have their backs. Look at the Autoport workers, for instance. Less than eight hours into failed conciliation leading to the now 21-day strike at the Autoport in Eastern Passage, the employer brought in scab labour. Because our province does not prohibit the use of scabs, the Autoport workers - everyday Nova Scotians being slammed by the cost of living and wages that don't keep up - are now negotiating for a fair deal in a weakened position.

Is this what the Premier meant by a "Better Pay Cheque Guarantee"?

THE PREMIER: I want to recognize what an incredibly difficult situation the labour dispute is. Three weeks is an awfully long time. They are everyday Nova Scotians. In fact, I had a chance to share with some of them today that that's where my grandfather spent his career - at the Autoport. I lost my grandfather at work one day. He suffered a heart attack in the lunchroom there. It's a small province. It's a small world. I have a lot of emotions around the Autoport, and I have great respect for the people who work at the Autoport, and the incredible services they provide.

I'm hopeful that this can be resolved at the table and people can get back to work.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm glad to hear that, because the Premier has an important role he could play here. Jess, a worker at the Autoport, wrote:

Imagine reaching out to your company and asking for a fair and equal contract for all employees, a fair and equal chance at getting back to living without the fear of losing it all if there's just one unexpected bill or emergency. Imagine being told you don't deserve it. Imagine watching scab workers come within hours of going on strike and trying to replace you and the job you've been doing for years.

I'll table that.

Will the Premier use the legislative tools available to ensure that workers like Jess actually have a shot at negotiating a fair deal?

THE PREMIER: Obviously those are difficult things to hear from somebody like Jess, who just wants to get up, go to work, and provide for their family with an honest day's work. Those are difficult things to hear, for sure. I think everyone in this Chamber would feel those emotions and have empathy for the situation. We're hopeful that this can be resolved at the table, and people can get back to work and get going again. That's where these situations can be resolved: at the bargaining table.

We believe in the collective bargaining process. I think we've shown that when we've been involved as the employer in a few situations - tough, difficult negotiations. I believe in the collective bargaining process, and I support that process.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: It's widely recognized, including by all parties at the federal level, that the collective bargaining process is strengthened by banning scab labour. That is the role the Premier could play here.

Two weeks ago, Unifor - representing the 240 striking workers - wrote to the Premier urging him to address the issue of scab labour and calling on the provincial government to recognize that workers in Nova Scotia deserve the ability to collectively bargain fair contracts that help support them and their families, free from the threat posed by the employer's use of scabs, which only drags out strikes and worsens an already difficult situation. Unifor requested a meeting with the Premier to discuss this, but such a meeting still has not taken place.

As the Premier said yesterday in Estimates, there are times when the Premier's presence matters. Will the Premier commit to meeting with the union representing the Autoport workers?

THE PREMIER: I know the minister is keeping a close eye on this file and will be committing to supporting the collective bargaining process. I'm hopeful that there can be a resolution at the table. That's where these things are resolved. We hope that's the case in this situation as well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

FTB.: FOREIGN GRAPE JUICE PROGRAM - STOP

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I'm concerned about the Premier's pause on this program to subsidize the importation of foreign grape juice to compete with our own wine sector. He is doing this pause after potentially millions of dollars have already been given out by the Treasury to commercial bottlers.

My question to the Premier is: Will he not only pause this program, will he end it so that taxpayers' money is not used to import cheap, foreign-produced juice to compete with our own locally grown grape and farm wine sector?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: As everybody is well aware, we had a good meeting yesterday evening with the entire wine sector, and the member is correct. There has been a move to pause the support for commercial wines, but I would point out to the member that it was in 2015 that his own government started a support program for companies that are commercially bottling wine in this province. I would point that out to the member that it obviously was not such a bad idea under his own government.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Does the minister remember hearing the outcry from the industry that that decision could have been catastrophic to them? Does the minister remember that? No, he doesn't, because we have actually grown the farm wine sector. We've grown the farm wine sector up to \$250 million from one end of the province to the other.

The government is saying they are going to pause this program. They are not saying they're going to end it. That's my concern. I am worried that this is just another ploy to get this out of the headlines so they can get back to work and have the meetings that they had with the commercial bottlers, as they began two years ago.

My question to the Premier is: Will the Premier commit to ensuring that taxpayers' dollars are not used to subsidize the importation of cheap juice to compete with our locally grown and produced products that are award-winning across the globe?

ALLAN MACMASTER: The member can question our sincerity if he wishes. That is his right to do, but I would also remind him, once again, the charge he has just made against us was a policy his own government put in, to use his words: to subsidize foreign grape juice coming into the province.

One of the questions I had asked at one point was: Why is the differential the way it is between commercial bottlers and farm wineries in this province? There wasn't a clear answer. Maybe the member opposite can tell us why they put the amount they did in for commercial bottlers in this province back in 2015.

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

FTB: WINE POLICY CHANGE - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I love how the story keeps changing with this government. First they are doing it because it's a trade issue. Then it's economic development and to pursue all the opportunities you have for economic development. Now the minister says it's because of the Liberal Party that they decided to do this. My question to the minister: Can he actually get his stories straight for once on this issue, please?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: This is Question Period. I'd like the member to answer one of my questions. It was his own government that started this policy for

commercial bottlers in 2015. Yes, it is a trade issue. Yes, it is an issue of economic development, but there is no question that this really did start as a trade issue.

Australia made a complaint. We have to change what's in place because it is not compliant. We didn't come up with that. That was a trade deal that was arranged far away from this Legislature by the Government of Canada with other countries when there was a free trade agreement signed.

ZACH CHURCHILL: In not one case in every other jurisdiction that was implicated in this did those provinces say: We are going to subsidize the importation of juice to compete against our own - not in one case. They didn't do it because that's not the trade issue. They didn't do it because there are not economic development opportunities in doing that. The real economic development opportunities are in the agriculture side of the sector, where money is put in the ground, where capital is built, and where here in Nova Scotia we have a sector worth \$250 million that employs 1,100 people from one end of the province to the other.

Does the minister understand the significance of that sector, and will he commit to not using more taxpayers' dollars to subsidize the importation of cheap, foreign juice to compete against our own, which the sector has said his program would have been catastrophic to them?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, I don't know why he is running down a sector of the Nova Scotia wine economy that his own government supported in 2015, being the commercial wine sector. I will tell the member that not only I but a number of my colleagues who have these wineries in their constituencies greatly value the contribution they make in the local economy and in the provincial economy as a whole. There's no question about that.

I remain an optimist. We had a meeting a few minutes ago with some representatives from the farms and grape growers. My hope is that when we get to the end of June, we have something that satisfies compliance for Australia and is something that everyone feels good about.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

FTB: WINE SECTOR ASSOCIATIONS - CONSULT

HON. KELLY REGAN: The infusion of taxpayers' money into the commercial Wine Sector Support Program would have had catastrophic effects on our Nova Scotia farm wineries. At a bare minimum, this government should have consulted with the two associations - the grape growers and the wine growers that actually represent this industry. But instead of working with the sector, this government just notified them within 72 hours about this augmentation to the program. My question to the minister is: Why didn't the

Minister of Finance and Treasury Board at least do the bare minimum and consult with the two associations?

[2:15 p.m.]

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: This has been a long process. It actually started almost four years ago. We're getting to the end of that four-year period, which is why we have the deadline at the end of June where we must have a system in place that is trade-compliant. This has been going on for a long time. There's been a lot of consultation. We still have until the end of June. Once again, I would say that I remain an optimist. I am hopeful that the industry as a whole will feel good about what's in place by the end of June.

KELLY REGAN: It's very clear that this government consulted with the two commercial bottlers well in advance. I'll ask the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board again: Why didn't he extend the same courtesy to the representatives of the grape and wine growers?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I know there have been all kinds of meetings and phone calls with department staff - not only from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, but from the Ministry of Agriculture. I know we've been working with the wine industry in the province. The polar vortex funding was a significant investment to help them deal with the weather impacts they've had to deal with. We know that grapes in the ground - vines in the ground that grow the grapes that are needed to make Nova Scotia wine - it takes time, it takes a lot of investment. There's been all kinds of consultation in the past. We have all kinds we can point to, and I want to point to the fact that there will be lots more coming before the end of June.

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

FTB: COMMERCIAL BOTTLERS PAYMENT - DIVULGE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Yesterday in Estimates, the Premier acknowledged that the commercial wine bottling program had already begun, and then spent the better part of two hours avoiding having to disclose when the cheques were cut for bottling companies and how much has been paid out. Now the program has been paused, but Nova Scotia's farm wineries, grape growers, and the taxpayers footing the bill still deserve to know: How much have we paid to the two commercial bottlers who are eligible for the program?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: They're certainly fair questions. I would advise the members to remember that this whole issue started with a trade complaint, and because there were margins at the NSLC that gave a preference to Nova Scotia wines. The sales of those wines have an impact on trade, so I would ask the members to be understanding of that point, because it's one that certainly is the basis for which supports can be offered to the wine sector.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Nothing in the trade decision talked about money to commercial bottlers, which is what I am asking about. That is not an answer.

With a mixture of agricultural and business skills, local farm wineries have grown the wine sector in this province exponentially. Instead of recognizing this, the Premier diminished the incredible growth of the local wine sector in recent years by telling them to just ramp it up. This is after, of course, the government quietly supported their friends at Devonian Coast. We have that price tag with \$250,000 of our money to implement a commercial bottling program and an undisclosed sum on a commercial bottling program.

Investments in our farm wine sector doesn't need to be a matter of trade compliance. Agricultural subsidies are not the matter of trade disputes. Can the Premier tell us if he intends to introduce what the farm wineries have been asking for: support for growing grapes through the Department of Agriculture?

ALLAN MACMASTER: There are definitely fine points to the trade laws that we are working within. There's no question that it has been established that certain trade supports are compliant. I will say that as long as the support is compliant, it does not matter from which government department that the support comes from.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

FTB: COMMERCIAL BOTTLERS SUBSIDY - EXPLAIN

HON. KEITH IRVING: We've heard from this government - on this commercial bottlers program - about trade and a lot about economic development. They move back and forth. We don't know where they're at from one day to the other. So let's move trade over here. Let's just talk about economic development. The minister talks about the commercial bottlers getting support. Yes, they got the support of 120 per cent markup instead of 140 per cent markup, where our farm wineries were 43 per cent. So a small benefit to the commercial bottlers. The question is: Do they even need it?

My question to the Minister: Why do the commercial bottlers need a subsidy?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Once again, that would be a great question for his own former government, because it was they who put it in place. I would recommend he contact some of his former colleagues and find out why that happened.

These are questions that will be answered as part of what happens between now and the end of June, because, as was stated earlier today, out of the meeting last night, the support for commercial wineries has been paused. We're going to have more conversations with the entire industry to come to something that we hope will be, by the end of June, something that is trade-compliant and something that people feel comfortable with.

KEITH IRVING: Clearly the minister decided to bring in a program and gave equal benefits to those two aspects of the sector. Let's talk about what a competent government would do when they're investing taxpayers' money in economic development.

Millions of dollars of taxpayers' money will be used to subsidize an industry. Where is the economic analysis? A competent government would do an economic analysis. How many jobs are going to be created? What are the spinoffs? What's the growth in GDP? What are the rural jobs created? Farm wineries have that economic study. They've presented it: \$250,000 of economic development and 1,100 jobs.

Could the minister please table the economic analysis that will guide the government's decision with respect to commercial bottlers, and if he does not have that, will he present that before any decisions are made?

ALLAN MACMASTER: When I asked the question of the department, there was no economic analysis for why the member's own former government put in place the level of support they did for commercial wineries in this province back in 2015. I can tell the member that there's a significant amount of product on shelves at the NSLC that is not bottled in this province, and behind this thinking of supporting the commercial bottlers was an effort to try to bring some of that business into Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

DOA: AGRIC. SUBSIDY FOR WINERIES - PROVIDE

CARMAN KERR: As Agriculture Critic and Valley-based MLA, I'm certainly proud to welcome Avondale Sky and Karl Coutinho to the gallery today. Avondale Sky is known for harvesting all their grapes by hand. Their products and wines are a hundred per cent local. Businesses like Avondale Sky are important to the tourism, economic development, and of course the agriculture industry in the Annapolis Valley region. B.C. and Ontario provide agriculture subsidies through the Department of Agriculture to support local wineries. Why has the Minister of Agriculture refused to provide an agriculture subsidy to Nova Scotia's farm wineries?

HON. GREG MORROW: We've invested millions of dollars through the last number of years in our farm winery sector. You look at the polar vortex funding - \$15 million that came out very quickly. Not all of it for farm wineries, but the majority of that money will go toward them.

We have a regular agricultural program agreement with the federal government - the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, SCAP. Wineries can apply for funding under that program. We had response following Hurricane Fiona. There was that extension support through Perennia. We're talking about the Nova Scotia Quality Wine Standards Certification Program, polar vortex funding, which I mentioned. As well, part of our

transition out of the Emerging Wine Regions Policy is green box funding - a wine and grape industry development program that we're developing with industry that will support industry going forward.

CARMAN KERR: The grape-growing and wine sectors are thriving and successful because of the blood, sweat, and tears of all these people in the gallery here today. Surely the minister understands the importance of supporting these industries. When is the last time the Minister of Agriculture toured a Nova Scotia farm winery to understand the decades of hard work that go into these businesses and producing wines of this calibre?

GREG MORROW: I can't recall the last time I actually toured a winery, but you don't have to be on a winery to understand the importance of what farm wineries bring to our province and our economy. We have those conversations regularly. As recently as a half hour ago we had that. We understand about the importance that these businesses provide to our rural economies. That's why we're listening, that's why we paused the program, and that's why we'll continue to work with them going forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

DED: JOB LOSSES FROM NEW WINE POLICY - CONSIDER

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, one of the success stories of economic development in the previous government was the thriving wine sector. We had many wineries growing, and even new ones. Lightfoot & Wolfville Vineyards was one that opened in 2017, with visitors coming, and Nova Scotians, and even offering wedding services. To be able to meet the growing demand of its patrons, Lightfoot & Wolfville has expanded to over 100 employees - and that's just one Nova Scotia farm winery. We know there are at least 1,100 jobs provided by this sector, paying \$2.5 million in wages.

My question to the Minister of Economic Development: Did her department evaluate just how many jobs could have been lost as a result of the commercial wine support program?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Relative to a question that was just asked of my honourable colleague the Minister of Agriculture, I was sitting there saying: Ha ha, I know when I was last in wine country, because last Summer I took the opportunity along with my husband and had an extraordinary day and learned so much about this industry and the award-winning wines that we have produced.

We absolutely understand the value, and that's why in my department we continue to work with individual businesses in programs like the Innovation Rebate Program and the Export Development Program - again, millions more dollars that we invest in this very important industry.

IAIN RANKIN: I want to thank the minister for the answer, but the question is: Was there any specific involvement with the department that is tasked with growing the economy in Nova Scotia with this type of support program for commercial bottlers? Lightfoot & Wolfville Vineyards has invested \$15 million in the Nova Scotia wine farm industry. The economic spinoff that is generated from these businesses can't be understated.

[2:30 p.m.]

My question to the Minister of Economic Development: Given that there was just a decision to pause this program, will she ensure that her department fully participates in any future wine support program - this one, or any modification of a new commercial development program?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: It is true that this is an important sector of this economy, but to answer, largely the discussions in and around this particular issue have been led by my colleagues, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and the Minister of Agriculture. I have been briefed at all points.

In terms of the work of the Department of Economic Development and our agency, Invest Nova Scotia, we work one-on-one with businesses on their unique opportunities for growth and, of course, the conditions for business success in Nova Scotia. Again, particular programs have been well used: the Export Development Program and the Innovation Rebate Program.

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

LSI: SCAB LABOUR - BAN

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration. The House of Commons recently passed a bill through second reading, with all-party support, to prevent the use of scab labour during strike action and labour disputes in federally regulated industries. Workers in British Columbia and Quebec are already afforded this protection.

My question to the minister is: Don't Nova Scotia workers deserve the same protections too?

HON. JILL BALSER: In recognizing that there isn't at this point in time legislation for Nova Scotians in this particular space, I really appreciate the member bringing it forward. Knowing that there is a bill that the member made sure was on my desk to take into consideration, I know that as minister, when something is brought forward I want to be able to take it forward to my team to make sure that we're looking at how this is going to impact workers and employers across this province in a variety of different sectors. We

want to make sure that if anything is interrupting conciliation services, we take it into consideration and advisement.

KENDRA COOMBES: I look forward to seeing a bill from the government side come forward. It makes sense why other jurisdictions are passing such legislation. Anti-scab policy leads to shorter strikes and better deals being reached at the bargaining table. In contrast, strikes involving scabs have lasted six times longer. The best route forward seems obvious. My question to the minister is: Would the minister agree that restricting scab labour is simply common sense?

JILL BALSER: I know we are going to have another conversation and more to come as we look at this piece of legislation that's been brought forward. Again, as Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration, I want to make sure that conciliation and mediation services are available to anyone in their time of need. Of course, going to the negotiation table is where those resolutions need to be resolved. Making sure that we take this into consideration, we do a jurisdictional scan to see what other provinces have in place, look at that legislation that the federal government has put forward. That's all part of the work to come there, and we are committed to looking at it.

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

DOA: WINE SECTOR HANDLING - EXPLAIN

LORELEI NICOLL: Earlier today I was proud to announce Lost Bell Winery is one of Nova Scotia's newest wineries, built on the land and legacy of Sainte-Famille Wines, the third-oldest vineyard in Nova Scotia. Lost Bell Winery is an up-and-coming business planning to open a tasting room, as I said earlier, and a new winery experience. They would add more jobs with this, more tourism opportunities, and put more money back into the local economy; however, this government's handling of the wine sector has put the potential opportunities of new businesses at risk.

My question to the Minister of Economic Development is: How can anyone have confidence in this government to starting and growing a wine business in Nova Scotia?

HON. GREG MORROW: I would respond to that by saying that as a government, we've been there to support the industry through the phaseout of the Emerging Wine Regions Policy, through the polar vortex, through our new agricultural programming that we have coming, and through this program as well, Speaker.

We've listened to industry, we've worked with them, we've kept the lines of communication open. I like to think I have a good relationship with Karl Coutinho, who's here today, with the wine growers, and Steve Ells with the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia. As well, their importance is impressed upon me not just by folks like Karl and Steve, but by our colleagues on the government side. I think of the member for Kings

North, the members for Hants West, Kings West. Lots of support for this industry within our government and we'll continue to support the industry going forward.

LORELEI NICOLL: We heard earlier that this government might not always get it right, but it's obvious that the Nova Scotia wine industry has gotten it right. This government promised the Nova Scotia Loyal program, but it's not working with and for the local wineries across Nova Scotia. We want to encourage more Nova Scotians to build businesses in Nova Scotia, including new wineries, but Lost Bell Winery is going to deal with more hurdles and challenges due to the government's mishandling of the wine sector.

My question to the Minister of Economic Development is: How will this government ensure that their decision-making, carried out without proper due diligence, will not negatively impact new business from emerging in Nova Scotia?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: My department and our colleagues across government work every day with businesses from all sorts of sectors. We created Invest Nova Scotia with the specific purpose of creating a one stop for that first call, whether you're starting a business, whether you're growing a business, whether you're looking at new opportunities. Again, I'll point to the opportunities within our specific agency of Invest Nova Scotia, like the Export Development Program, which several wineries have taken the opportunity to use. The Innovation Rebate Program - we're supporting McConnell Gordon Estates Limited, which we know as Benjamin Bridge, to make a major capital investment to increase . . .

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

DOA: WINE SECTOR - ELEVATE

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, Benjamin Bridge's Nova 7 is the perfect example of how our Nova Scotia farm wine can put our province on the map. This trail-blazing blend has captivated the palates of people all over the world. Nova Scotia has a unique terroir that has immense potential. In order for Nova Scotia wine to reach its full potential, the government needs to step up to support the sector, not punish our farm wineries for their successes. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: Does the minister not see the value in elevating our local wine sector?

HON. GREG MORROW: Yes, we absolutely do see the value in improving our sector. We've invested through the last five years \$4.9 million just to the grape industry - \$8 million including the farm loans. If you want to talk specifically about wineries, we talk about the \$15 million for the polar vortex, a \$22 million investment in the wine sector through the last five years - as well, \$5 million for the Nova Scotia Farm Loan Board for a total of \$27 million in investment for the last five years. Not all are our government, but a lot of that money in the last three years.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, our farm wineries need to feel valued for the hard work they put in day after day, year after year, and generation after generation. The minister would know how they feel if he just listened to them and answered their many questions and many emails they've put to the department. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: Moving forward, do you pledge that you will actually consult with the sector before you make these decisions?

GREG MORROW: As I mentioned earlier: lots of conversation with the sector, our own wine growers, Steve Ells, and the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia. Again, our colleagues in caucus here are great representatives of agriculture and farm wineries. I mentioned a few of them earlier.

Will we consult? Yes, we're going to consult. We said that 45 minutes ago. We're going to keep working with the farm winery sector going forward. We listened. We paused this program. As the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said, we have until June to put a final bow on it, and that's what we'll do. We'll keep working with people until then.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DOA: WINERIES DECISION - EXPLAIN

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, in 2010, John McLarty and Lisa Law left Ontario and planted roots in Nova Scotia, where they bought a historic farmhouse in Port Williams and founded Planters Ridge winery. Our unique landscape has clearly been successful in attracting vintners from across the country and the world, and it will continue to ramp up our potential even more, repurposing old farmhouses and farmland to become farm wineries. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: Did he not see how this government's decision could scare off future farm wineries from starting up in Nova Scotia?

HON. GREG MORROW: I had a chance to speak with John and meet John. I know the member for Kings North is a good friend and knows him very well. He certainly impressed upon me what they've put into their business, and we certainly appreciate that. We don't want anyone to feel like we're trying to work against them. That is why we sat down with industry. We committed to taking a pause and will work with them for the next few months to get this right and go forward.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I know there is a lot of back and forth going on today, but when I hear the minister met with them 45 minutes ago, why today? Why couldn't the minister meet with them before, when the minister was in the media saying that this was the right program for everyone and everybody could ramp up? Meeting with them today? The minister should have met with them long ago.

The government has no plan to grow the economy, no plan to help people who own businesses here already, no farm succession planning, no plan to encourage more people to start up businesses that will help grow the economy right across the province. Instead, they continue to hurt one of the most important sectors by choosing not to support farm wineries in Nova Scotia. My question to the Minister of Agriculture is: How can business owners from out of province be confident that they can successfully start an agriculture business in Nova Scotia?

GREG MORROW: A lot to unpack there. How can someone be confident? I just made a list of investments that we've made as a government in the sector in the last number of years. We've listened. It's not just about investing, it's also about listening, and we've done that. It didn't just happen today. We've been talking to industry for the last number of months - the last number of years. But on this specific subject, in the last number of months that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and I have met with them, there has been an open dialogue. Karl Coutinho from Wine Growers Nova Scotia and Steve Ells from the Grape Growers Association of Nova Scotia know they can call, they can text any time, and I will have a conversation with them.

This all started with a deal that the previous government gave this industry, and we are cleaning up that mess. We are doing it in health care, we are doing it in housing. We are doing it in education, we are doing it in public works, and we will do it in agriculture. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MAH: HOUSING BARRIERS - REMOVE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Despite the fact that it is illegal for landlords to deny someone's rental application because they have children, in reality this happens all of the time.

One of these parents is Alexis Dingwell, who has applied for hundreds of rental units in her budget but has been denied because she has a young child. She has been on the public housing wait-list for years and was recently denied a rent supplement because she doesn't have a new lease. In the meantime, she and her son are living in a room in a house with 10 people.

My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: What does the minister have to say to families across the province who are facing increased barriers to housing under this government's watch?

HON. JOHN LOHR: The reality is we are very aware of the housing situation across the province. We did a massive study on housing. We know that there is an issue in every part of the province. Every community is growing in our time, and we know that the housing crisis is there. That's why we are making a historic investment in public housing to build 247 new units in public housing. We have an action for housing plan, which will include \$1.7 billion spending over the next five years. We recognize the depth of the crisis. We recognize that we need to do many different things on many different fronts to make housing more affordable for Nova Scotians, and we are working hard on that.

SUZY HANSEN: Working hard doesn't get her son out of living in a home with 10 people.

Private market housing is not the solution. This government continues to subsidize private developments, but our vacancy rate remains at 1 per cent, and rents continue to rise. I don't know about you, but the numbers don't work out for me. The Human Rights Act is meant to protect families in these situations, but it is failing without an adequate supply of truly affordable housing. We need more public and non-profit housing, and we need it faster to ensure that families like these don't have to experience the extreme stress of not having adequate housing.

To Alexis and other families to whom this occurs across the province, private rentals are not the solution. My question to the Minister is: When will this government substantially invest in truly affordable housing?

JOHN LOHR: What I can tell you is that we are investing in affordable housing across the spectrum. In fact, we've invested a significant amount of money in the North End Community Health Association over the last couple of years in a number of different projects - some right in your own constituency, I would say to the member.

So we're lifting the boat of community housing across the province and not-for-profit housing, co-op housing. We've done that really because it was a recommendation of the Affordable Housing Commission's report, which came out in May of 2021. We recognize that, we've made a substantial investment in community housing, and we will continue to invest.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

CCTH: WINE BOTTLERS SUPPORT - EXPLAIN

HON. TONY INCE: This government's ill-thought-out commercial wine support program wouldn't have just hurt the wine industry - it would have jeopardized our tourism businesses like Grape Escapes. Each year, thousands of visitors flock to the Annapolis Valley to visit our beautiful vineyards and drink our delicious wines, safely transported by tourism companies like Grape Escapes. Without the hundreds of thousands of visitors to

our wine region each year, this company would simply not exist. My question is to the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage: Is your department aware of the number of businesses that exist solely because of the success of the farm wine industry?

[2:45 p.m.]

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Personally, I sure do. I've been to some of those wineries in the Valley in the past. I was actually going to take my family down there last Summer, but we couldn't find a way to make it happen. I've been to them before, and I actually hope to visit them come the end of June, and my hope is that they're going to be happy with what's in place for the entire wine industry in this province.

TONY INCE: A hundred and fifty thousand tourists come to Nova Scotia annually to experience the rich and unique wine experiences our province has to offer. In more than 40 years since the farm wineries have built a successful wine industry in Nova Scotia, producers have worked hard to overcome the negative stigma of poor-quality grape juice that they've been fighting against. Subsidizing this could reverse the momentum that this industry has worked so hard to build. My question to the minister: Are you concerned that your support for the commercial bottling industry could negatively impact Nova Scotia's reputation of very good wine?

ALLAN MACMASTER: We would never want that to happen. There's no question, people coming to the province want authentic experiences, the kind of experiences that only Nova Scotia wineries can offer to somebody who's coming and visiting and wanting to have, quite literally, a taste of Nova Scotia. We are fully supportive of them. I also want to say this: I'm also Minister responsible for the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation, and as I recall, the consumption of alcohol, as a rule, is going down, but Nova Scotia wine sales are strong. And I do believe it's because it's rooted in that authentic experience. We want that to continue, for sure.

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

DOA: WINE SECTOR - INVEST

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Blomidon Estate Winery is home to some of Nova Scotia's oldest vines, with planting dating back to 1986. Blomidon is one of several wineries in Nova Scotia that produces 100 per cent Nova Scotian-grown grapes and wines, including the 100 per cent Nova Scotian Tidal Bay. Officially launched in June 2012, Tidal Bay is the first wine appellation for Nova Scotia, and a one-of-a-kind for North America. There are now 14 different types of Tidal Bay.

The industry is just getting started. The Minister has referenced supports in reaction to issues faced by the industry, but my question for the Minister of Agriculture is: Why doesn't he see the value of investing in this sector and putting Nova Scotia on the map?

HON. GREG MORROW: We absolutely do see the value in this sector. We've talked about investments. I'd like to talk about the Nova Scotia Wine Authority. That's legislation that we brought in. It was my first piece of legislation - \$1.5 million to establish that. The questions around the percentage of grapes - we believe in Nova Scotia grapes, and we want to see as much Nova Scotia grapes in our wine as possible. The Nova Scotia Wine Authority will do that. It will allow customers, allow consumers, to know exactly how much is in their bottles.

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

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

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

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'd like to speak to the Budget and the Budget Estimates. First, I'd like to thank all the courageous women, brave women who shared their stories with me about the Find It Early Act, what I have been speaking about and what I have learned so much about in the last year. Many of the women came to the Legislature on March 6th. There were so many of them that a large group had to watch from the lobby.

I want to thank Dr. Paola Marcato, Ph.D. professor of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, Atlantic Region, and Endowed Chair in Breast Cancer Research. Also Cheryl Coffin, who was so brave to agree to share her story of interval cancer that was missed on a regular mammogram. Both of them joined me at a press conference and I was so delighted to have them.

I am humbled, really, to stand here on their behalf, as well as nearly half of the Nova Scotian women who have dense breasts. Almost 50 per cent of women in Nova Scotia

have dense breasts and I wish I knew this and how important this information is. I am trying my hardest to educate all men and women, because all the men in this House have daughters, sisters, and mothers whom they should care about and listen to this information that I had to learn the hard way, unfortunately.

The stories are what give me the strength to fight for additional screening. Cancer in women with dense breasts is often discovered when a woman feels a lump after a normal mammogram and that's exactly what happened to me. I've had my mammograms for 10 years because my mother was diagnosed with early breast cancer in her 70s, so both my sister and I were eligible to have mammograms. I think I started in my early 50s. My mammograms were always clear. In 2019 and 2020, I did get information about dense breasts but honestly, I didn't understand what it really meant, the risk I was under.

In 2022, I had a lump in the same breast and I went to the doctor. It took me about a month before I really took it seriously. She sent me for my mammogram and ultrasound, and all came out clear. That was February 2022. I was very happy and as usual - a clear mammogram.

Not even six months later I had another lump on the same breast, so I said: Oh, I am sure it is negative - if the first one was negative, this will be negative. I think it took me about three or four months before I really spoke to the doctor and then she sent me for a mammogram and ultrasound. I remember clearly that it was March 6th. It's funny that it was March 6th again that I did the press conference - it wasn't on purpose, but on March 6th I was going to speak at an International Women's Day event. I was putting my boots on and my family doctor called me and said, Rafah, unfortunately the results of your mammogram have come back and you have a 95 per cent chance of malignancy in that lump.

I was shaken, but I ignored it and went to speak at the event, until I got home to realize what that meant. He said, "You need to go have a biopsy as soon as possible."

"As soon as possible" took about two weeks. I had my biopsy, but the result of the biopsy took about three to four weeks, and that was an excruciating time. It took so long for me to get the result of what I had. I knew I had a high risk of 95 per cent, but what type of cancer? What do I have? I had no idea.

That phone call changed my life beyond what I can honestly describe to anybody - all the appointments, all the decisions I had to make, what is right, what surgery I should have, how long. I do clearly remember May 2nd. It was my 61st birthday. I was on my bed, crying and begging for the surgery - because after the biopsy, that lump that had been the size of a nail had become this size in less than two months. I was very concerned - very worried - because now the lump was four or five times the size, and I could feel it. I needed it out.

It took until May 12th. My surgery was supposed to be in June, but somebody cancelled, and I was rushed in. It took almost three months to have an operation after my biopsy. I'm told that the maximum I would have had to wait in Ontario was two to three weeks. It was three months here. These are all the little things that went wrong. As I learned with this diagnosis, it's the delays and the lack of communication sometimes, that we don't understand what is going on. Despite this, I love the staff. They are so overrun. They don't have time to call you back, to educate you, or to do things. I met some of the most beautiful nurses and doctors, but they couldn't get me in any earlier. They couldn't get my biopsy any earlier. What used to take two weeks in pathology is now taking three months, guys. Remember that. Just remember that. This is what I'm told.

Finding a lump after a clear mammogram is called interval cancer. That word I didn't understand, but that's interval cancer. That's what I'm trying to really impress - or make you understand. Fifty per cent of women have dense breasts. Did you know that? Half of us here have dense breasts. Half of the women in Nova Scotia have dense breasts - C or D. Having dense breasts increases the risk of interval cancer. Interval cancer, as I said, is when the mammogram says you're clear but it's not really true, because the machine can't see the lump. The tissue of dense breasts and the tumour show up as white - very similar - so they get missed.

That's exactly what happened to me. If my cancer was found in February 2022, I would not have had a mastectomy. I would not have to have had chemotherapy. What I'm astonished at is how many women I've met in the last year have my story but a lot worse. Some of them have had 10, 15 chemotherapy sessions - Stage 4. I was the lucky one, really - that I ended up with four sessions of chemo instead of 10. The hell that I went through - I cannot imagine that we are allowing that when we know we can help to find it early.

On top of that, it makes economic sense. It is less expensive for the government to find it early and not put us through the hell. This should be in the budget, and we need to speak up. I'm speaking to every woman because they're just as ignorant as I was about dense breasts. I didn't understand what dense breasts meant. The high risk - 40 per cent of mammograms, if you have dense breasts, can miss the tumour. That's really scary. The numbers that are there how, many women - 70 women showed up that day. I don't know who they are. I spoke to maybe 10 or 15 of them, but 70 showed up because they understand. They've gone through what I've gone through. I had many costs for MRIs, and I will end with that.

I also wanted to share with you that Nova Scotia has been a leader in many screening practices, but not this one. We have self-referral for mammograms at age 40. Only four other provinces have that. Self-referral continues after the age of 74. Not all provinces have that. We have annual screening for women ages 40 to 49. We have many things that have helped find cancer early. But this one? The one essential practice for the 50 per cent of women is missing. Please go home and ask your wives, your sisters, your

daughters if they know what their density is, and inform them. Inform them that they should ask questions. I wish I knew that in 2022. I would have asked the question.

[3:00 p.m.]

The lady who came to the press conference said that. She said she went to her doctor, whom she had a wonderful relationship with, and asked her. Dense breasts is telling me that I'm high-risk, so what are you going to do for me? She said that unfortunately in Nova Scotia, we are denied anything that we ask for. We're denied ultrasound. We're denied MRI. We're denied everything.

Listen to this, guys. I'm a cancer survivor, and I have the other breast, and I can't have an ultrasound or an MRI, but my sister, who hasn't gone through cancer, in Ontario, gets an abbreviated MRI. Just imagine that. Imagine the women in Nova Scotia, the disadvantage of 50 per cent of the women in Nova Scotia compared to the women in Ontario or B.C. We need to wake up and have all women understand that. I would have probably flown to Toronto. My family are there. I would have done an extra MRI. I would have paid for it if that's what it meant, but I didn't understand the risk that I was under.

I would have saved the government - I was Stage 2, so I estimated my mastectomy as \$50,000 to \$60,000. My four sessions of chemo, which is very little, were at least \$100,000. What is B.C. doing right now? They have added a technology to the same mammogram called contrast-enhanced mammography. That machine is \$100,000. Just my chemo would have covered that. It would have given so many women an opportunity not to have to go through the hell that I went through.

I want to save my daughters, your daughters, and your sisters. I want you to educate them. Please follow me on Facebook. I'm putting all the information that I have been blessed - I have been working with Dense Breasts Canada, who educated me about this risk and why Nova Scotia needs to do this for the women here. We are making a mistake in not offering and catching it early, and saving money but saving quality of life.

I have met with at least three women who are not working. They're government workers. They've gone through the hell I went through and worse - three years without work. Cheryl, who was at the press conference, works part-time because she can. Literally, if I do six hours, I go home and crash. I cycled 30 kilometres to 60 kilometres, and now as I go up the stairs at the Legislature, I have to stop and take a break before I can make it all the way up. That is not the quality of life that I ever imagined. If I could have stopped that, I would have done whatever I could, but I didn't understand. I want you to understand, and help me, please.

Let me just tell you a few things as well. Women with dense breasts are not considered high-risk in Nova Scotia and they do not qualify. Nova Scotia considers Category D an elevated risk, but they do not include Category C. The majority of women

who have dense breasts have Category C - the majority of them. Only 10 per cent of them have Category D, which is the highest density, but the majority and the 10 or 12 women whom I have met with are all Category C. Dense breasts increase the risk of interval cancers. In fact, we are the only province that denies women ultrasound, MRI, even with a family doctor requisition. (Interruption) Oh my God, am I? Sorry, I could speak for a day. I'm always terrified to get up and speak. (Interruption) I will. I'm not finished. I'm just going to give you some figures to make this make sense to you. (Interruption) I have lots. To be continued. It will be a pleasure to educate you all. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: To my colleague, I thank her for that information, and it has me very much concerned about my own density. I will be getting that checked, and I want to thank her for bringing this issue to the floor.

Speaker, I rise today to discuss various funding issues facing municipalities. Ta-da: it is my annual municipal funding speech. I've spoken many times on this topic because it is an important issue and it deserves attention. As a former councillor, and now the NDP spokesperson for the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, I often witnessed municipal units fighting for scraps of money due to lack of funding.

Municipal units frequently compete over these small pots, because the large pot of cash under the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant - better known as equalization - has stayed the same since 1995. In the first year of this government, I was excited. I believed we were moving in the right direction to provide more funding for municipal units. I was ecstatic. The Municipal Capacity Grant got a raise. Unfortunately, that excitement was short-lived - last year, and then in 2023 with the new MOU.

With this new MOU, the ability to see that Municipal Capacity Grant increase this year has been thwarted. On November 9, 2023, during third reading of the municipal MOU, the minister disrespected the residents of the CBRM by calling them a distraction. The level of disrespect the Progressive Conservative government has shown the residents of my community has been shameful.

What frustrates me is that many of the recommendations provided - after months of work, negotiations, surveys, and eventually the recommendations from the service exchange, renegotiation, and Municipal Government Act review through the service exchange agreements - had no follow-through. Well, no real follow-through.

The minister and the Premier ignored most of the proposals in the SERMGAR report. One noticeable thing about the MOU was that it did not include increasing the Municipal Financial Capacity funding. This amount has been stagnant for years, and the

PC government, and some CBRM MLAs on the government side, campaigned to increase the Municipal Financial Funding Capacity grant. They campaigned untemporarily on doubling the grant.

In fact, it was one of the first things this minister announced in his role. He stated: “Municipal services are incredibly important to the everyday lives of everyone in our province and over time, these services have become more expensive to deliver.” I quite rightly agree. They have. It is unfathomable that not only did the doubling not continue, but no new funds are even added to the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant.

Instead, the existing pot of money was reworked and redistributed to let the minister pick the winners and the losers. The losers would include the Cape Breton Regional Municipality and the residents of the CBRM, who, under the new proposed formula, will receive less money than they have in the past.

Now the Province has agreed to top them up, but only to their previous total, and only for five years. During my November 9th speech, I believe I called that “PC math.” Kind of off. The CBRM is not alone in this. There are 17 municipalities that are expected to receive less funding under this new formula. In a time when everything is rising, this government decided to keep the 1995 money and redistribute it. PC math. They’re not great at calculations.

The federal equalization transfer to the Province significantly increased, though. Thank you to the feds. Nova Scotia will receive about \$3.3 billion in federal equalization payments. That’s 17 per cent more than the previous year. So you see, the feds have recognized that we have an issue here in our taxes. They’ve realized that we need a comparable tax rate with comparable services. They recognize that, so they increased it by 17 per cent, yet the provincial transfers to the municipalities like the CBRM will continue to remain frozen in 1995 dollars. Not great calculations there - not really recognizing that things are getting more expensive. This has created situations where municipal staff spend much more of their time chasing various streams of money, writing grants and other proposals, when other important work must be done.

Municipalities are required to balance this budget - you know this, I know this - which, due to a lack of revenue, often needs more revenue to avoid budget shortfalls. This lack of funding limits the municipal unit’s choice to improve their communities. Municipal units want to avoid raising property taxes. They want to avoid raising their rates, because the rates are too high and not comparable to the services provided.

Yet the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing suggested that the municipal units should and could increase their tax rates. I think it was 18 per cent, is what the minister said. They could increase their tax rates by 18 per cent. He also suggested that, with the Province taking corrections and housing off the books for the municipal units, that the municipal units could just keep the tax rate as is, and not lower the tax rate to reflect the

fact that they no longer collect housing and corrections. That's an ethical issue, as far as I'm concerned.

But the lack of funding means that municipalities cannot properly improve infrastructure - roads, water, sewer - and it has created an inability for municipal governments to build more sidewalks, especially in our rural areas. It has created an inability for municipal units to afford to expand municipal water into rural areas. The lack of revenue means municipal units cannot provide more accessible recreation indoor and outdoor facilities.

The lack of revenue makes it difficult for smaller, economically challenged areas to retain their younger population and recruit and retain newcomers to these areas. We've seen them leave; they've come, and they leave. Why? Because the services they want are not there.

Speaker, residents are entitled to comparable services at comparable tax rates. Some residents in municipal units would agree that the services residents receive differ from the tax rates they pay. Over the years, there have been disagreements on the appropriate level of funding. Still, what people can agree on is that municipal units need to receive more equalization funding that would enable municipal units to provide comparable services at comparable tax rates.

Municipal units need financial help. Instead, this government's answer has been to make more municipal units share the same 1995 dollars. The Progressive Conservative government should have increased the amount of money allocated to the equalization fund, not made it harder on municipal units. Despite the government continuing to change the name of the equalization fund, the government can change it all it wants. The fact of the matter is it's another budget year that has come before this Legislature and municipal funding has remained frozen.

In contrast, the mandatory education transfers from municipal units to the provinces will continue to rise. I was happy in the last session to see the issue of compulsory payments being addressed with the provincial government taking responsibility for housing and corrections, a good start. What would have been a better start would have been to take responsibility for corrections, housing, and the biggest ticket item, education, because we know that education is going to continue to rise.

The Nova Scotians for Equalization Fairness group has requested accountability and transparency of the government's federal equalization funding. Of the 23.1 per cent or so generated out of the municipal units to provide comparable services at comparable tax rates, this group is looking for, from the minister, to know and see where the federal government's equalization money is being allocated. Before 2013, this was readily available to residents. After 2013, it was no longer.

[3:15 p.m.]

As I've said many times, what the CBRM's special and unique circumstance is is that we were forced to amalgamate. When we were forced to amalgamate, the debt we incurred from that amalgamation was never forgiven. We are still holding on to that debt from the forced amalgamation. There was no forgiveness of that debt, so we walk around with it. Now, under the memorandum of understanding, there is still nothing in there to account for the CBRM's uniqueness in the debt that they hold because of forced amalgamation. Instead, now what they are going to have to contend with - what I, as a resident, my neighbours, my community members - we are all collectively going to have to contend with the fact that the CBRM is going to receive less money under the MOU, and where is that going to leave our taxes?

Is the CBRM going to have to make the choice at some point, if they haven't this year - they haven't this year, but at some point, are they going to have to make the unfortunate decision to have to raise taxes in order to deal with the shortfall that this government has provided them? Or are they going to try to keep their taxes low, or lower, and have to lose out on services?

This funding agreement was a slap in the face to my community. The way the minister discussed it was a slap in the face to my community - the disrespect that was shown. In closing, we need a substantive budget line on the equalization funding for municipalities. And we need the SERMGAR, Service Exchange Renegotiation and Municipal Government Act Review, report to be used.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I do feel the need to correct the facts a little bit for the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier on the MOU, which was a subject of debate here last sitting. I will tell her that a March 6th CBC article, which I will table as soon as the Legislative Library prints it and sends it to me, indicated that CBRM was reducing its taxes to its citizens because of the changes in the MOU related to corrections and net operating losses for housing.

The very thing that we said they could choose to do, they chose to do. And actually, I'm very appreciative of the mayor, Amanda McDougall, and her colleagues for giving us credit. This was something that enabled them to reduce taxes. So in reality, the renegotiation of the 1995 memorandum of understanding is a historic moment for us. It represents a very different point of view.

In 1995, that agreement that was struck had a very balanced focus to it: you put in this money, we put in this much money, bottom line is zero. We didn't take that point of view. We renegotiated the MOU, which included us not only keeping the Municipal

Financial Capacity Grant the same, but also putting approximately another \$50 million into our municipalities across the province, for which we received in the last sitting approximately 35 absolute, unconditional letters of support, for which we continue to get appreciation as a government.

The reality is nobody knows exactly what five years from now - or now four years from now - the relative strengths and weaknesses of our municipalities will be. CBRM is growing. Our other municipalities are growing. The Municipal Financial Capacity Grant is based on a very complicated formula which belongs to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. It's been there for more than 10 years.

We didn't change the formula. At the request of their renegotiation committee, the formula was unfrozen, which changed the numbers for CBRM a little bit, and for several of our other municipalities. We said we would put an extra \$3 million in, which the member did reference, to hold those numbers the same for five years. Five years from now, we don't know. Obviously, all of our municipalities are growing and are getting stronger tax bases.

It was a historic renegotiation. It has enabled all of our municipalities to do things like reduce taxes, or spend more on services, or be a little bit financially healthier. Certainly, we're very pleased to see CBRM reduce their taxes. That was their choice. We always said that.

I must disagree with the member's statements. As a government, we've been very good with CBRM. As the member knows, we've put in a medical school in CBRM - unprecedented to have a medical school in another part of the province. And that will reap benefits for hundreds of years to come, I believe, when we start to see doctors and nurses come from CBRM.

Cape Breton University is actually helping Acadia University - in my community, in my area - with their school of nursing, in helping them go through that process of accreditation. We deeply appreciate Cape Breton University's role there, but our government is enabling this. We're putting this forward. We're changing the landscape of Nova Scotia. We're changing the landscape of Nova Scotia. We're changing the landscape of Cape Breton Regional Municipality. We're investing in other areas. We're investing in Tartan Downs, as the member knows. We're investing in hospital infrastructure in CBRM. I don't think we have to be ashamed of our role in CBRM. We are proud of it. It is turning out as we said. We said that the renegotiation of the MOU would enable CBRM - if CBRM so chose - to reduce taxes, which they did. It creates a stronger municipality in CBRM. There's no doubt about that.

Every one of the other 48 municipalities are stronger, too, because of that renegotiated MOU, which took 27 years to do - going back to 1995 to 2023. I have to do my math pretty quickly here - that sounds like 28 years to me. Maybe 28 years from now, that will get renegotiated again. I don't know. That's a legacy for my department and for

all the people who worked on it, from the Mayor of the Municipality of Cumberland, Murray Scott, and Carolyn Bolivar-Getson and all of the people from the NSF and from AMANS and from my department. All of those people put in real hard work of attending those meetings - a whole year's worth of meetings or more - and put in the effort in that. We're not taking a second seat to anybody here in Municipal Affairs and Housing on how we're treating our municipalities. We have been very, very generous to them as a government. We have been very good to them. We will continue to do so.

As the member knows, we're working hard to bring in and enable a code of conduct for our municipalities as well - another incredibly important thing. We're working hard for our municipalities. We want to see them succeed and grow. I just want to set the record straight that we have been very good to CBRM, very good to every one of our municipalities. That's reflected in that tax break to the citizens of CBRM, which was announced on March 6th. With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I wanted to stand today and speak about the budget for a few moments, but on a different topic, where I believe the Province of Nova Scotia and the Maritime region can be more if we focus on removing interprovincial trade barriers. Cumberland North, Cumberland County, and all the northern regions border New Brunswick, and it is only 40 minutes from Prince Edward Island. It provides a unique perspective of Nova Scotia, the Maritimes, and our position in the country.

The people of Cumberland are strong. We have a rich history that has long experienced conflict. The French and the British fought over the border area for years, and we all know too well about the expulsion of the Acadians from Beaubassin.

Cumberland has experienced wars. Cumberland has led Confederation - and also fought fervently against it. We all know the history between Sir Charles Tupper and Joseph Howe over the pros and cons of Confederation. Tupper wanted a national railroad across what is now Canada, and Howe wanted to increase trade with our natural and historical trade partners - the New England states. We know what happened. Howe lost his fight. Tupper won, leading to Confederation in 1867.

A short 157 years ago, in 1867, when the east joined the west, we created the country of Canada. Many believe the Maritime region has seen a steady decline in political influence and relative economic status since that time. In 1892, the Maritimes lost four seats in the House of Commons, followed by another four seats a decade later. In 1873 the Maritimes had 43 federal seats, and by 1966 we were down to 25, meaning as the total number of national seats increased, Maritime representation decreased. In 1873, the Maritimes had 43 of 206 federal seats. By 1966 the Maritimes had 25 of 264 seats. Today, the Maritimes have only 25 of the 338 seats, an overall decrease from the original 21 per cent of the total seats federally to now 7.4 per cent.

[3:30 p.m.]

The Maritimes are rich in history, diverse in culture, and have all the components needed for a wealthy, robust region. Last year I attended the Atlantic Economic Forum at StFX University, hosted at the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government. I repeatedly heard business leaders and former political leaders - like a former premier, Frank McKenna - talk about the single biggest factor inhibiting Atlantic economic growth being interprovincial barriers. Now is the time for the Maritime provinces to look at these interprovincial barriers, capitalize the economic potential of our region, and take back our political strength.

The Maritime provinces form a natural region, with a close affinity to the ocean, which all but surrounds us. Since Confederation, we have seen a decline in our economic prosperity, having the weakest economies in the country and some of the largest interprovincial barriers. It is interesting to comment on this as we celebrate the life of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who led the free trade movement.

I'd like to quote from a document that I will table. It says:

Since Canada's free trade agreement with the United States (U.S.) in 1989, Canadian authorities have implemented free trade agreements with 44 countries. Meanwhile, progress in liberalizing internal trade has been slow and, in many cases, international free trade agreements allowed foreign companies better access to Canada than Canadian companies.

Nova Scotia has nearly 40 non-geographic trade barriers, one of the highest provinces. Nova Scotia increased their non-geographic trade barriers from 1997 to 2015 by 2.1 per cent. We should be decreasing them, not increasing them.

In Cumberland County, we have a first-hand view of these barriers. I see it clearly, as MLA for the area, and I work closely with MLA Megan Mitton, next door in Westmorland County, New Brunswick. We work together on many issues that affect all our constituents despite being in different provinces. The pandemic was the most recent example.

I'll also highlight a few other things that I'm living with, some of my constituents are working with, every day. Tim Rose moved from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia, brought his trucking company with him, and married a wonderful local girl. He is very frustrated because a tow truck that is licensed and can work in New Brunswick is not allowed to be licensed here in Nova Scotia - different rules with an interprovincial barrier inhibiting economic growth and inhibiting his business. That's just one of many examples.

In health care, a pharmacy clinic does not follow the Canada Health Act, only allowing Nova Scotia patients access to the clinic. Anyone living outside of Nova Scotia must pay. There has also been some movement on an Atlantic licence for physicians, but if you speak to physicians who have tried to do that, they tell you that the bureaucracy is still there. There's just a reduction in the fee. They still must go through all the paperwork in each of the four Atlantic provinces to get licensed. There should be one Atlantic licensure body.

There are also inspection laws through the Department of Environment and Climate Change that prohibit meat from crossing borders. There are economic barriers for wine sales and other barriers, just to name a few.

There's overwhelming public support to make internal free trade in Canada. Surveys from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business show that most Canadian firms - 87 per cent - believe that provincial and territorial premiers should commit to reducing internal trade barriers. Nine in 10 small businesses, including several industry associations, think that all firms should have open access to markets throughout Canada.

There's precedence. In Australia in 1993, there was a move to remove regulatory barriers to the free flow of goods and labour between Australian states and territories. This brought about a more efficient economy, strengthening competition in many industries and benefiting consumers with lower prices and more choices for goods. Australian courts have often applied Section 92 of the Australian constitution, which is similar to Canada's Section 121 in our Constitution Act. The Constitution's internal free trade provision prohibits both interprovincial tariffs as well as non-tariff trade barriers.

Today I wanted to highlight the challenges and the interprovincial barriers that affect our economy. It affects us directly in Cumberland North and Cumberland County. I see it as a real barrier to prosperity for the entire Maritime region.

In the past, there's been a movement for Maritime unity, or Maritime coalition, where the Maritime provinces work together, not only to remove barriers, but to work together as local governments, so that maybe once again we can return to a strong economic and prosperous region for all of Canada. It's time for the Maritimes to move forward, remove all barriers, and strengthen as a region.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

We will now dissolve into Supply, and we will take a brief recess while the committee is set up.

[3:43 p.m. The House resolved itself into Committee of the Whole House on Supply with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[7:53 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. I call the House back to order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on Supply reports:

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Bill No. 419.

Bill No. 419 - Financial Measures (2024) Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.
(Applause)

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: That was exuberant. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 419 be now read a second time.

Our government is making important investments in health care, housing, and affordability. That includes tax relief for Nova Scotians. This bill is a key part of our government's budget for 2024-2025: indexing personal income tax brackets and non-refundable tax credits, which are the basic personal amount; spousal amount; the dependent amount; the infirm dependent amount; and the age amount.

In the Fall of each year, the annual adjustment will be determined based on the provincial consumer price index from Statistics Canada. The new rate will be communicated to Nova Scotians, and then CRA and employers will adjust the tax they deduct from the source. As of January 1, 2025, a person's paycheque will reflect the indexation of brackets and credits. Less money coming off paycheques and more money landing in people's pockets.

Nova Scotians have been asking for tax relief, and these changes mean they will pay less income tax every year this is in place. It is going to grow every year - this tax relief. We expect it to grow to an estimated \$160 million per year by 2028. This bill

advances priorities like housing. We are extending the Executive Panel on Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality for two additional years, and amending the Municipal Government Act to support housing development across the province by cutting red tape, and streamlining the process of getting new housing approved.

These amendments include enabling electronic submission of planning documents, allowing development officers to approve non-substantive development agreement amendments and municipal councils to provisionally approve a development agreement, and permitting councils to sell or lease property below market value for any purpose deemed beneficial by council such as housing development. This bill will also create a new pathway for villages to request a name change and establish a framework for municipalities to create codes of conduct for mayors, wardens, and councillors where none currently exist. This bill includes amendments to other legislation that have budget, financial, or governance implications. I would like to go over those for the benefit of members.

Nova Scotians rely on professional accountants to help them manage important financial matters. They want to know they are getting qualified, professional services under a regulated system so that they are protected. We are updating rules for chartered professional accountants working in Nova Scotia. Amendments to the Chartered Professional Accountants Act will ensure only chartered professional accountants can perform compilation engagements and will require out-of-province accountants who wish to provide accounting services in Nova Scotia remotely to be registered with the provincial regulating body. This provides greater protection for Nova Scotians using these services.

This bill adds protections for Nova Scotians using credit products - like credit cards and loans - with variable interest rates. Changes to the Consumer Protection Act will mean lenders like credit unions, retail companies, financial companies, and vehicle dealerships can offer lower interest rates immediately instead of waiting 30 days. This allows them to be more responsive when the prime interest rate changes - similar to larger financial institutions which are regulated by the federal government - and requiring them to disclose annual interest rate to consumers. These changes also align Nova Scotia with information disclosure requirements found under similar consumer protection legislation in Canada.

Our fisheries are important to our economy, and illegal actors should face serious consequences. We've heard concerns about illegal activity, and we are taking action. This bill increases maximum fines to deter illegal activity in the fisheries sector to \$1 million from \$100,000 for the first offence, and up to \$2 million for subsequent offences. Increasing the potential maximum fine amounts is a deterrent to illegal activity.

Authority for gaming control falls solely under the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. Updates are required to keep our legislation current with today's structure and operations. The Gaming Control Act will be updated to remove outdated references.

Gypsum is a mineral found in many items we use every day. Following a review,

the current approach to calculating provincial royalties from gypsum mining were deemed excessively detailed. Amendments to the Gypsum Mining Income Tax Act will move the royalty calculation for mineral and non-minerals to a simpler calculation and capture those changes under regulations. We're making this change so that royalty amounts for gypsum can be more responsive to market trends. I am pleased to support the honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables who is consulting with stakeholders to develop a new royalty regime for this sector.

[8:00 p.m.]

We live in an age when citizens expect fast, easy ways to do things. This bill will modernize the toll system on the Macdonald and MacKay Bridges. Amendments will allow Halifax Harbour Bridges to go entirely electronic. This will lead to removal of toll plazas and allow for a cashless system. This is a faster and easier way to deliver this service to Nova Scotians. Options will remain for Nova Scotians without methods to pay electronically.

Highway No. 104 is an important corridor in and out of the province. This highway must be maintained to a high standard for personal and commercial travel. This bill broadens the mandate of the Highway No. 104 Western Alignment Corporation to allow for streamlined management of highway infrastructure, and to include other 100-series highways across the province to allow excess toll revenue collected by the corporation to be allocated to other highways if it is not spent on Highway No. 104.

Other amendments to the Income Tax Act extend the life of business tax credits that help drive the economy by five more years. These include the Innovation Equity Tax Credit, the Digital Animation Tax Credit, the Digital Media Tax Credit, and the Venture Capital Tax Credit. Today's bill also gives the minister the ability to add occupations to our More Opportunity for Skilled Trades tax rebate program for young workers in in-demand occupations.

Invest Nova Scotia works to drive economic growth, attract new investment, and expand our economy. We want businesses to invest and grow here, and we want to make it easier than ever for them to work with government. Invest Nova Scotia is delivering on that mandate. The Invest Nova Scotia Act is being amended to update definitions and remove references to outdated regulations.

Peggy's Cove is one of Nova Scotia's iconic attractions. The Province and residents representing the area work together to preserve the unique scenic beauty, character, and atmosphere of the area for the enjoyment of both residents and visitors. This bill updates the Peggy's Cove Commission Act to ensure that the Commission can carry on its business if there is a vacant position. This will ensure continuity in the work to preserve the unique beauty, character and atmosphere of Peggy's Cove for residents and visitors.

Every Nova Scotian wants peace of mind in their retirement years, and pension plans are a reliable source of income for many. Under some circumstances, it may be possible to withdraw or transfer pension funds instead of being transferred to a locked-in account. Amendments to the Pension Benefits Act update the pension fund unlocking rules to apply to people with short life expectancy or non-residents of Canada.

Our government's steadfast priority to fix health care means looking for new ways to tackle old problems. Giving people access to their own electronic health records - in their control, right in the palm of their hands - will help Nova Scotians make informed decisions about their own health and navigate the health care system faster and more conveniently. Amendments to the Personal Health Information Act will require health providers to provide records so that Nova Scotians can view their health information through the YourHealthNS app. We always keep the protection of Nova Scotians' personal and private health information as a top priority in any circumstance.

This bill creates two pieces of legislation. Our government is introducing protections for firefighters in our communities. The new Professional Firefighters Volunteer Act will protect them when duty calls. It will prohibit organizations from refusing to employ volunteer firefighters, and from penalizing or otherwise disciplining a professional firefighter because they work as a volunteer firefighter.

Last year's wildfires taught us that we need to be able to use all the resources at our disposal to fight forest fires. We are also laying the foundation for Nova Scotia's first Office for Children and Youth. We need to ensure the rights and well-being of children and youth are protected. This office will help to do just that. The creation of this office was a commitment of the honourable Premier, and will be one of the legacies of the restorative inquiry into the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children.

Speaker, I look forward to debate on the provisions in this bill, and I actually look forward to debate. I'm sorry, I got caught up in my lines here. With that, I look forward to the comments of the members opposite. There are a lot of items in this bill, and we look forward to hearing people's thoughts on it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I'm pleased to rise on Bill No. 419, the Financial Measures (2024) Act, second reading. I want to begin by making a few comments with respect to this bill being an omnibus bill. I think in my 11 years here, I've never seen such a piece of legislation cross the floor of this House. It actually touches on 15 pieces of legislation and creates two new ones. It's only the third piece of legislation that this government has introduced in this House. Although the Premier has promised more legislation during this sitting which, according to him, is supposed to go on for another two or three months, in the last week we've not seen any new legislation. It appears there is a clear intention to limit debate in this House by creating an omnibus bill for the first time in recent memory.

It's 39 pages long.

I stand here today as the finance critic, but most of this legislation doesn't involve finance. Maybe I'm hoping that the ministers responsible for parts of this bill will get up and speak to their elements of this bill. I have a count now of probably eight departments, eight ministers responsible for elements of this bill, and I think Nova Scotians deserve to hear from the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, who was very proud of the clause in this bill just presented here today for second reading.

Why should Nova Scotians be concerned about an omnibus bill? Most Nova Scotians wouldn't understand that phrase, an omnibus bill, but I think they get the idea here that government is putting 15 pieces of legislation in one bill and creating two new ones.

Practice in this Legislature has been that when you bring in new legislation, the minister gets up, introduces their new piece of legislation, and we debate that in the House. In my time here, governments bring in and this Legislature would pass 17, 25 pieces of legislation, we would go through all the steps, we would go through Law Amendments, and we would carefully examine each one of those pieces of legislation on behalf of Nova Scotians.

Now today, here, this government clearly has an ulterior motive. There is no need to create an omnibus bill. I looked to do a little bit of research on omnibus bills, and the pros and cons. Most of the pros that were listed were in the context of the U.S. government. The pros of omnibus bills are a sign where parties from opposite sides of the House in the U.S. can find some sort of compromise to slip into an omnibus bill something for my riding from the democratic minority to get a bill through when the Republicans have control. It's used in the U.S. to create compromise.

That's clearly not what is happening here. We know we have a majority government. The Canadian parliamentary system is quite different than the U.S. The advantages of creating compromise are not part of what's happening here.

Why is this happening? Nova Scotians need to ask why this is happening. Clearly this government has shown a track record - and this reinforces it - that they want to be in and out of this House as quickly as possible. I think the intention of this government was to finish this week. Three pieces of legislation, 10 days of Estimates, drop the budget . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. I'll just remind the honourable member that we're speaking to the bill. The word "insinuating" - I would ask that you retract the word "insinuating," then continue on.

The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I retract that wording.

The government has a track record of very short sittings. They seem to be getting shorter and shorter. This use of an omnibus bill reinforces the desire that this government does not want to be in the People's House debating legislation.

Instead of having, let's say, 17 pieces of legislation in here, and the two that have been passed, there would have been about 19 pieces of legislation that would have moved through this House in any normal sitting. This government has decided to make that three. Shortening the session eliminates Question Period. Shortening the session by using an omnibus bill limits questions to the Premier.

[8:15 p.m.]

Should Nova Scotians be concerned that we in this House are not giving due consideration to the ideas of this government - the 17 ideas - by having individual pieces of legislation to debate in this House? To have those ministers - the eight ministers whom I've identified who are associated with this Act, and I'm not sure that I completely got them all because the minister keyed me into some departments that are involved in this: the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board on the FMA; the Ministers of Service Nova Scotia, Transportation, and Fisheries and Aquaculture; there are long sections of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; and the Ministers of Community Services, Natural Resources, and Economic Development. I'm not even sure that I got through the whole list.

I'm hoping, during the various stages of this debate, that all those ministers will get on their feet and give their views of their piece of this legislation. I think it's reasonable for Nova Scotians to expect their Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture to talk about the fines that he is increasing and why he's doing that with his expertise.

I just spent time with the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board in Estimates. He went out of his way to decline to answer some of my questions during Estimates because he is the Minister of Finance and not the minister responsible for health infrastructure. He said I would be better placed to ask my questions of the appropriate ministers. I think it's important that we hear from those ministers on this bill.

The other concerning element of an omnibus bill - with 17 pieces of legislation touched - is that it prevents us, as legislators, from voting for one and not the other. So, on behalf of the citizens of Kings South, if I want to vote for higher fines on fisheries or for the ability for firefighters to fight fires, but at the same time I am unhappy with elements of the budget, I must vote against things I believe in and that I want to vote yes on. Each House member's voice gets silenced by an omnibus bill. You get one vote on 17 pieces of legislation.

I think it's really important for us, as legislators, to think about what we are doing in this House when we are silencing our ability for ourselves - every one of us - on behalf of our constituents, to be able to say to them, "I supported this because of that, and I voted against this because of that." With an omnibus bill, Nova Scotians get less from their MLAs - 55 members of this House. Nova Scotians are getting less from every one of us because we cannot stand and vote for this and against this because this government has chosen, for their own political expediency, to continue the practice of increasingly shorter sessions in this Legislature.

I think that's sad, concerning, and not giving Nova Scotians the respect their voice deserves. It's a very disappointing piece of legislation, clearly for political - I will try not to impute - intent. What I can say - as I have said - is that we are silencing the voices of Nova Scotians with an omnibus bill.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the financial elements in this. I won't go on at too much length because it is second reading, and we do need to hear from Nova Scotians. Certainly, one of the negatives of an omnibus bill is it is titled the Financial Measures (2024) Act. I don't know that a firefighter in Cape Breton is going to know what this is about because it is called the Financial Measures (2024) Act.

Let's talk a little bit about bracket creep. We've talked about it. We introduced a bill on it. We're happy that the government is including ending bracket creep with this legislation. We're the only province - the last province - to end bracket creep, an important thing to do. Thank the government for bringing that in the legislation.

What I do take issue with is the government's position, its spin, that this is the biggest tax break in history. This is not a tax break. I asked the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board in estimates whether he agreed with this statement: If we end bracket creep, in real, inflation-adjusted dollars after they pay their tax, Nova Scotians will have no more money to spend than they did before bracket creep. He did not answer yes or no. He got into a confusing discussion about higher wages and inflation.

Let's be crystal clear. Bracket creep is not a tax cut, a tax break. It's removing the hidden tax increase that has been part of our tax system for far too long. It is not a break for Nova Scotians. It is simply being fair and honest with Nova Scotians, and not taking more tax by inflation to the government's advantage and to the taxpayer's disadvantage.

This is not the biggest tax break in the history of Nova Scotia. I've spoken about this. It doesn't take place until 2025, \$13.4 million on - I don't have the number now - I think it is \$4.2 billion in personal taxes. We have advocated for some tax relief, and this is not tax relief. Surely in the windfall amounts of equalization and federal transfers, and an economy doing better and taking in \$2 billion from Nova Scotia taxpayers - \$2 billion more the government is taking in from Nova Scotia taxpayers than they did three years ago - and the best tax relief is to remove \$13.4 million of a hidden tax increase next year.

I don't know anyone in this House - except maybe one - who would say this is the biggest tax break in the history of the province. It simply is not. It simply is not a big tax break for Nova Scotians.

Let's do a couple of comments. I think there are six parts, elements, of this bill that are related to finance. I don't have too much to say on them, but I do want to comment briefly. The Chartered Professional Accountants Act amendments, on first blush, look like some housekeeping and updating of standards. I think the ones who are best-positioned to comment on this would be the chartered professional accountants. I'm hoping we will hear from them at the Law Amendments Committee.

The second item is the Consumer Protection Act amendments to align with other consumer protection legislation in Canada. It sounds like a housekeeping item, and I can't see that there would be many problems with that.

The Gaming Control Act Amendment - again, minor, but it is significant. It's to align legislation with this government's desire to eliminate boards. In 2022, this government eliminated the board of directors for the Gaming Control Act, as they have done in so many parts of government, and we have taken issue with most of them. Right now, I don't know the functioning of the Gaming Control Act board and how serious this is, but it is a standard practice of this government to remove boards, and get them out of the way so decisions can be made in ministers' offices. Certainly, we have some questions with many of those decisions that are being made.

Then there is the Gypsum Mining Act. The Income Tax Act - maybe more of an issue with Natural Resources, but it's probably associated with finance. I think the ability to amend royalties is long overdue. Again, we might want to hear from the Mining Association on that, and hopefully we will hear from them during the Law Amendments Committee.

Finally, the changes to the Income Tax Act are, in essence, the indexation with respect to bracket creep, and other surtaxes and thresholds. This is welcome news for Nova Scotians, but clearly not the biggest tax break in Nova Scotia's history. It's not just me saying that. It is the Taxpayers Federation, and it's the Fraser Institute. Anybody in the financial world recognizes it for what it is, and it's not a tax break.

With those few comments, I look forward to hearing from folks at the Law Amendments Committee. I look forward to hearing from the ministers responsible for portions of this act, and I will now take my place.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I am happy to rise and start the debate on the Financial Measures Act as tabled. We share concerns about this omnibus bill that has 15

pieces of legislation and the creation of two new acts - neither of which have major financial implications, puzzlingly. I think I would have to agree that this bill that came out when it was tabled is evidently an attempt to rush debate on several different issues that have no financial implications and that go across a range of departments.

I think it will limit public understanding of what's in this bill, and there are some really important pieces in here. It will limit the ability of stakeholders to respond. For instance, a lot of stakeholders who are concerned about personal health information, and how it is kept and accessed by the government, might not recognize that they should be concerned when they see an Act Respecting Certain Financial and Other Government Measures.

[8:30 p.m.]

We are starting to hear concerns from physicians about the changes recommended in the Personal Health Information Act. I certainly hope that we have the chance - at least in the Law Amendments Committee and in these Chambers - to hear from folks and get an explanation about why this change when we are not sure the health regulators are in support and people are concerned.

One of the pieces that we are pleased to see moving forward - although why as Schedule B in the Financial Measures (2024) Act is a question to me - we're glad to see the government finally moving forward on an Office for Children and Youth. It's long overdue. It's the result of decades of advocacy and, as well, part of filling the recommendations from the 2019 Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children Restorative Inquiry. Yet it's buried in Schedule B of the Financial Measures (2024) Act and again, people who are working with children and youth, working in terms of child rights, might not know that this Act pertains to them - although we are doing our best to get the word out. This starts the process, but there is not enough here.

There's no timeline for the actual implementation of even these actions in terms of identifying a commissioner. There's no budget for the office, and there's nothing on the actual structure.

I think this piece is really important, and that is actually giving the focus of my comments tonight, and maybe into tomorrow. It is about why we need a commissioner for children and youth in Nova Scotia and how that should be structured.

I think it's important to start by asking ourselves: What do we know about children in Nova Scotia? Many of us know children in Nova Scotia, but we also need to look at some of the aggregate data that we have available to us. The *2023 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia* from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives highlights that in the previous year the child poverty rate in Nova Scotia increased by 11.4 per cent. This was a record-setting, single-year increase, and it results in more than 35,000

children - or one in five children - in Nova Scotia, living in poverty. Nova Scotia's child poverty rate is the fourth-highest in Canada and the highest in Atlantic Canada. We often like to try to be leaders in Atlantic Canada. This is a list that we need to move to the bottom of.

I was looking at the *One Chance to Be a Child* report, which I will also take some time to go through. When that was published in 2022 - really the research started in 2018, but there was a pandemic and people were busy - at that time we were talking about one in five children living in food insecure households, but in this 2023 report we are looking at more than one in four children living in food-insecure households.

We know from reports of folks working on the front lines at food banks, the increasing number of children that they see coming, seeking food with their families. The other thing about child poverty is it's something that the government can do something about. So we can actually say no child in Nova Scotia should live in poverty, and we can identify some actions to fix that. It takes quite a sophisticated analysis to understand what the end result is of having children growing up without their rights to safe housing, right to food, right to education, right to a healthy environment, all their rights being violated. The cost now is exorbitant, but it only increases. It only compounds when people don't have what they need to flourish and to develop.

Like I said, there are lots of things we could choose to do today if we had, say, a separate bill on ending child poverty. Maybe then you could put the Act respecting the commission as part of that. That might have been a good fit.

Time and time again, folks who spent the time looking up the data, understanding the stories of Nova Scotians and followed this for decades, are pretty clear on a couple of steps. One is to implement a poverty reduction plan for Nova Scotia and end child poverty by 2026. We could do it. We are literally sitting in this building, choosing not to do it. We could establish a Child and Youth Commission immediately, significantly improve income support to lift families with children out of poverty, fundamentally transform the child welfare and social assistance system, remove barriers and expand access to universal public services, protect children's rights to housing, address racism, decolonize systems, and there are others. That's one expert and one group that's been advocating for the creation of a commission.

One of the challenges that we have had in Nova Scotia is that we haven't actually had a good amount of data on how children and youth are doing. A major initiative was launched through the IWK - with Dr. Strang involved and with folks at the Healthy Populations Institute at Dalhousie, as well as partners from Indigenous communities, African Nova Scotian communities, and youth themselves - to gather what we have in terms of understanding what's happening with children and youth in Nova Scotia and to understand, as it says, "One Chance to be a Child - A Data Profile to Inform a Better Future for Children and Youth Well-Being in Nova Scotia."

As I gathered this information for today, one of the things I reflected on is that we started this in 2018 and we're still using this as our basis today. The rest of the kids who were a little bit younger in 2018 and now they're a little bit older. There are kids who were teenagers and are now adults and we've missed our chance along the way to make their lives better.

The *One Chance to Be a Child* data profile tried to answer a number of questions about the experience of children and youth in Nova Scotia: Are we secure? Are we learning? Are we healthy? Are we happy? Are we connected to the environment? Do we belong? Are we protected?

The questions were guided by use of Canada's Index of Child and Youth Well-Being, which was also a process that I was involved in. Again, it brought together youth, youth advocates, youth service providers, researchers, and government officials to really understand.

Of course, we want all children and youth to have the best possible start. We want all children and youth to have their rights fully recognized, both for their experience each and every day, and for their future, and for our future.

We need to know how folks are doing, and so the information in *One Chance to Be a Child* was gathered from provincial, national, and international surveys, and as well was then contextualized working with, as I said, Indigenous communities, African Nova Scotian communities, and youth themselves. It was really grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which I also think is really important to understand in the context of establishing a commissioner for children and youth in Nova Scotia. This is really the basis.

This was ratified by Canada in 1991, really as a result of recognizing that children around the world were not achieving the outcomes that we wanted; were not having access to safe housing, safe food, and safe schools. They weren't developing in the way that would both ensure that they are respected fully as individuals at that time but also become the population of the future in the best and strongest way that they can be.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains a number of articles around different areas of children's rights including an adequate standard of living in Article No. 27, access to education in Article No. 28, and opportunities for play, leisure, and rest in Article No. 31, just to refer to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are also some other key pieces that I think should be guiding all of the work that we undertake in this House because this, I feel, is the most important work that we could do.

In the preamble for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it does include recalling and linking back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the United Nations has proclaimed that ". . . childhood is entitled to special care and assistance." I

think that we can all agree with that.

There are some key principles:

States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status

and "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of" such status.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also takes as one of its guiding principles the best interests of the child, so determining the best interests of the child is a primary consideration, and reminds institutions, services, and facilities of States Parties "responsible for the care or protection of children" - that's us - "shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health," and other areas.

Then another key article is Article 12, which guarantees children and youth the right to participate in decisions that affect them. That's also been an important part of the work around *One Chance to be a Child* and should also underpin the work of the independent Office for Children and Youth.

Article 12 reads: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." and "For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative . . . in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law."

I think it's important that we ground ourselves in these pieces. Yes, it's a document, and it's a convention, but it really articulates what we want for children and what we need to be working toward.

In the *One Chance to be a Child* recommendations section, they reaffirm the principles guiding the work from the CRC, including non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and the views of the child. The recommendations focus on what this group - it's an extensive, long list of authors and collaborators, and I suggest people check out the report themselves - but the two recommendations about what we view to be the most urgent threats to children and youth

while being in Nova Scotia are poverty and systemic racism and discrimination. We've already had a walk-through of some of the poverty statistics that let us know that, in fact, children are not doing okay in Nova Scotia.

Here are some of their recommendations. "(1) Listen to children and youth, consider their rights, and focus on their best interests when making decisions." I think what we can ask ourselves here is: Are we focusing on children and youth? Are we making decisions in their best interests?

The *One Chance to be a Child* report also called for the creation of an independent office for children and youth rights. They say, "We recommend that the provincial government in Nova Scotia take clear action to fully realize Article 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding appropriate measures needed to fully implement the breadth of unique children's rights."

"Action 7: Enact legislation to establish an independent body dedicated to children and youth rights." That's what we hope is happening with the Independent Office for Children and Youth.

As I noted, children and youth were part of the process of developing the *One Chance to be a Child* report and the recommendations throughout the process. Having worked for years with children in situations and projects that seek to realize their rights, I can tell you that, almost universally, young people prioritize the idea of having an independent body within their province - and within Canada, as well - that is looking out for them and that is looking out for their peers. They know - it resonates with them that they are holders of rights but that their rights are not always realized.

I'll just read you a couple highlights from the One Chance to be a Child Youth Forum. I'm not using this as a prop, I swear, but it's really beautiful. You should all go have a look at it on the website.

Here are some summary notes. Here are some of the issues that really stood out to the young people: poverty, bigotry, health care issues, mental health stuff, bullying, housing, high-risk behaviour, and accessibility. They tried to answer some of the questions in terms of what their values are around social justice, honesty, kindness. They tried to answer the questions - are we connected? People reflected that they're not taken seriously, that vaping isn't being dealt with amongst young people. Are we secure? They reflected that poverty and the racialized economy were huge barriers.

They also identified some of the things that would make an ideal province. This is interesting, I think, for all of us, when we think about the budget before us, as well as establishing a commissioner for children and youth in Nova Scotia. Some of the things that they talked about were more physical activity in schools; better and affordable education; addressing bullying; practical skills taught in schools; focussing on the future, not the past;

education demystified; de-stigmatizing substances; making it harder for kids to buy drugs, alcohol, and nicotine; harm reduction; access to mental health services; clean energy; wildlife protection; housing solved - that's a big expectation of these young people, that we should be trying to fill; healthy ecosystem; and there were more.

[8:45 p.m.]

I think from this exercise and from the youth who were engaged throughout the development of the *Once Chance to be a Child* report, they actually did a lot of thinking about what is necessary to consider in terms of the establishment of a child and youth commission in Nova Scotia.

Some of the things that they recognized were that children and youth in Nova Scotia need independent specialized representation to promote the implementation of protection of their unique rights and interests as a matter of fostering their well-being. They identified the high-level principles that represent a vision for how the Nova Scotia children and youth commission or commissioner could provide independent human rights representation for children and youth in the province.

Here are some of the things that they identified that in fact are not articulated in the Act establishing the office and thus not contained in Schedule B of the FMA: have an independent, legislated mandate - here was a great opportunity - to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of all children and youth in Nova Scotia. The mandate must serve all children and youth, not just those interacting with systems of care, and be explicitly race-based, as informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the United Nations convention on the rights of people with disabilities. It should be established in keeping with foundational norms for human rights institutions for children. By doing so, children and youth in Nova Scotia would enjoy the full breadth of the representation provided by similar entities internationally and in other parts of Canada.

In fact, we don't have to guess what these norms are. This is the great part about setting up the office for children and youth. It's that we know advocates who have thought a lot about it. We have data. We know that there are young people across Canada and across Nova Scotia who thought lots and lots about what this role should look like. We also have models in many - almost all - provinces across Canada as well as at the national level in jurisdictions in the U.K. and Belgium.

In particular, some of the norms include the general comment No. 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations human rights principles relating to the status of national institutions, otherwise known as the Paris principles, which are the international minimum standards required for effective and credible protection and promotion of human rights. They provide critical guidance on mandate, recommended activities, resources needed, and accessibility to children and

youth required to establish effective independent human rights representation for children and youth.

This is one piece that is actually quite concerning not to see in Schedule B and not to see outlined here: that a child and youth commission or commissioner needs to be independent of government. It needs to direct its own agenda and establish priorities and activities that best serve children and young people within the bounds of legislation. This independence means the commission should be adequately funded and given sufficient infrastructure to carry out duties.

What I would also say is that across the country, there are also really strong best practices about how to engage young people in the identification of the priorities for the commissioner, and how to engage young people throughout the research, representation, and consideration of the issues that an office or commission looks at.

There are so many things that an Office for Children and Youth could do. Some of these are proactive. Some of these educate, provide outreach, and raise awareness amongst children, youth, families, professionals, and the wider public about the best interest and rights of children and youth. This means that members of the office might give presentations, plan conferences, collaborate or initiate research initiatives, support practice networks within professional groups or within communities, develop rights awareness campaigns, or even help design education curricula around children's rights.

That piece is really important. In the work that I have done over the years in children's rights and engaging young people, young people are well aware of the world they live in. They're well aware of the experiences that they're having, their families are having. They're really able to reflect on what's working and what's not working. They are the people living with experience, but they often don't even know that they have rights.

The first thing that an office can do is to develop education curricula around children's rights, and to share that and let children know that they have a body in the Province of Nova Scotia on their side.

You might wonder what happens now for children and youth in Nova Scotia. Currently in Nova Scotia, children who access or are involved in special systems of care - the child welfare system, who are in detention, or advocating for other rights when they're seeking services - could access services through the Office of the Ombudsman, but it's only in the interaction between that child and their individual circumstance. When there are young people who are detained, for instance, they are able to reach out to the Ombudsman's Office to make sure that they have everything from access to education, access to being outside. I know that children and youth have contacted the Ombudsman's Office because they have not been given a toothbrush, so to ask that they be provided with a toothbrush. But an office can go further than that.

I've worked with advocate's offices across the country - Nunavut, the Yukon, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, P.E.I., and New Brunswick - on various different issues, and seeing how powerful their work can be. For instance, in Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan advocate for children and youth undertook a youth engagement and a community engagement process where they visited all of the Northern Saskatchewan First Nations communities - because of the crisis around youth suicide in those communities - to really understand from young people what was creating this crisis. What were the barriers to them feeling safe? What were the barriers to accessing care? What ideas do they have and do their communities have for strengthening their experience? They engaged over 1,000 young people across Northern Saskatchewan, and then with young people, presented their report to government. They presented their report nationally. They presented their report internationally to talk about what they had learned, and to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Another example would be in New Brunswick. It's now the Office of Children, Youth, and Seniors, but again, has a standing youth advisory structure that advises on the work undertaken by the office.

I think we are running to the end of our hours for tonight's debate. I will move to adjourn debate on the Financial Measures (2024) Act second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 419.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Speaker. That concludes government business for the day.

I move that the House do now rise to meet again on March 20th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Tomorrow is Opposition Day, so I will turn it over to my honourable colleague, the Opposition House Leader, to call business.

After Opposition Business, we will move into Committee of the Whole House on Supply, Committee of the Whole House on Bills, and second reading of the Financial Measures Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, following daily business and Question Period, the bills that will be called are Bill Nos. 422, 434, and 144.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that we do now rise to meet again tomorrow, March 20th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until tomorrow.

[The House rose at 8:56 p.m.]