



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane**

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### First Session

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2024**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**1:01 P.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER (Danielle Barkhouse): Order. There has been a topic for late debate submitted by the MLA for Colchester North:

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature condemn Nova Scotia MPs who choose the Liberal carbon tax increase over the interests of hardworking Nova Scotians.

We will now start the daily routine.

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

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**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

**GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, before I read my notice of motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, aujourd'hui que nous célébrons la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, j'ai l'honneur d'accueillir dans notre tribune l'ambassadeur de la France au Canada, son excellence Michel Miraillet; accompagné d'une délégation française, incluant le consul honorable Robert-Yves Mazerolle. À la France en notre histoire d'amitié avec la Nouvelle-Écosse, partageant des initiatives économiques, sociales, et culturelles, y compris l'annonce aujourd'hui d'un nouveau lycée, une école internationale française qui ouvrira ses portes à Halifax en septembre 2024, le neuvième au Canada, le premier en Atlantique, ce qui est un pont entre la Nouvelle-Écosse et la France. Alors, j'invite tous les députés de se joindre à moi pour accueillir son excellence et sa délégation ici aujourd'hui.

Today, as we celebrate International Francophonie Day, I am honoured to welcome to your gallery the Ambassador of France to Canada, His Excellency Michel Miraillet, along with a delegation from France. Also joining is Honorary Consul Robert-Yves Mazerolle. France has a long history of friendship with Nova Scotia, sharing ongoing economic, social, and cultural initiatives, including today's announcement of the new lycée, a French international school, which will open in Halifax in September 2024, the ninth in Canada, the first in Atlantic Canada. It is a bridge between our province and France. I invite all members to join me in welcoming the ambassador to the House today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: From the House, I'd like to welcome you to the Nova Scotia Legislature. I hope you enjoy your time here. Welcome.

The honourable Minister for Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

**RESOLUTION NO. 954**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, à une date ultérieure je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante :

Attendu que la France a développé une amitié importante avec la Nouvelle-Écosse, ce qui est démontré par plusieurs initiatives économiques, sociales, culturelles, et scientifiques dans notre province; et

Attendu que la relation avec le Consulat de la France à Halifax et à Moncton continue de se développer grâce aux projets de collaboration qui célèbrent la diversité et la vitalité de la culture française; et

Attendu que cette amitié se traduit par un engagement commun en faveur de la promotion de la langue française et par un partenariat dans le domaine de l'éducation visant à améliorer la qualité de notre enseignement en français;

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de cette chambre se joignent à moi pour souhaiter la bienvenue à son excellence Michel Miraillet, ambassadeur de la France au Canada à l'Assemblée législative et le remercier de visiter notre province et de continuer à renforcer l'amitié de longue date entre la Nouvelle-Écosse et la France.

Madame la présidente, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas France has developed a close friendship with Nova Scotia, as demonstrated through several economic, social, cultural, and scientific initiatives in our province; and

Whereas the relationship with the Consulate of France in Halifax and Moncton continues to grow through collaborative projects celebrating the diversity and vitality of French culture; and

Whereas this friendship includes a shared commitment to promote the French language in partnering on education to further improve the quality of our French-language education;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in welcoming His Excellency Michel Miraillet, French ambassador to Canada, and the French delegation to the Legislature, and thank them for visiting our province and for continuing to grow the longstanding friendship between Nova Scotia and France.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I beg leave to make a few more introductions.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

COLTON LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, encore une fois, nous célébrons la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. J'ai le plaisir d'accueillir dans notre tribune un certain nombre de fiers Acadiens et francophones qui représentent divers organismes dans nos communautés.

Again, Speaker, as we celebrate International Francophonie Day, I'm so pleased to have here in the gallery a number of proud Acadians and francophones representing various organizations in the community.

Je vais les nommer. J'espère que je n'en manque pas trop : Denise Comeau Desautels, présidente; ainsi que Emmanuel Nahimana, directeur général adjoint de la Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Michel Collette, directeur général, et Diane Racette, présidente du CSAP; Micheline Gélinas, directrice générale de la Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Trevor Murphy, président de la Fédération culturelle acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Nicole Dupuis, directrice générale de la Fédération des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Carolina Al Khouri Abboud, coordinatrice d'établissement et services à préserver pour l'Immigration francophone Nouvelle-Écosse; et Louise d'Entremont, coordinatrice de la région centrale pour le Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse.

Speaker, these are very important organizations that really help our Acadian and francophone community shine. I'm really happy to welcome them today to the House as we celebrate International Francophonie Day. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. We hope you enjoy your time here. Thank you for coming.



The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

**RESOLUTION NO. 955**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: It's just like Estimates.

Madame la Présidente, à une date ultérieure, je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante :

Attendu que la Journée internationale de la Francophonie est célébrée chaque année le 20 mars pour fêter et honorer le patrimoine, les cultures, et la diversité des 300 millions de francophones à travers le monde; et

Attendu que la langue française est parlée en Nouvelle-Écosse depuis le premier établissement du peuple acadien à Port-Royal en 1605, il y a plus de 400 ans; et

Attendu qu'aujourd'hui, près de 35 000 néo-écossais ont le français pour langue maternelle, et plus de 100 000 personnes parlent le français, y compris les Acadiens, les francophones et un nombre de plus en plus important de nouveaux arrivants qui s'installent en Nouvelle-Écosse.

Par conséquent, qu'il soit résolu que tous les membres de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi, à tous les Acadiens et à tous les francophones de la Nouvelle-Écosse pour souligner la Journée internationale de la Francophonie et pour rendre hommage à notre communauté prospère.

Madame la Présidente, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas International Francophonie Day is recognized each year on March 20th to celebrate and honour the heritage, cultures, and diversity of the 300 million French speakers around the world; and

Whereas the French language has been spoken in Nova Scotia for more than 400 years, since the first settlement of Acadians in Port-Royal in 1605; and

Whereas today about 35,000 Nova Scotians speak French as their first language and over 100,000 Nova Scotians speak French, including Acadians, francophones, and an increasing number of newcomers who make their home in Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me and all Acadians and francophones in Nova Scotia in recognizing International Francophonie Day and in honouring our thriving community.

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 Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Just before I make my notice of motion, I want to acknowledge the presence of several Special Olympians and their support team here with us today. I know Minister Masland will do a more formal introduction, but I just wanted to tell you myself how much we respect you and how proud we are of you. Thank you for your presence here today.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 956**

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

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia team has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication, sportsmanship, and talent in representing our province; and

Whereas the athletes, coaches, and supporters of the Special Olympics Nova Scotia team have tirelessly worked to promote inclusion, diversity, and equity within our community; and

Whereas the Special Olympics Nova Scotia team's outstanding achievements, most recently at the Special Olympics Canada Winter Games in Calgary, brought home 27 medals and also brought immense pride and honour to our province;

Therefore be it resolved that the Government of Nova Scotia officially recognizes and commends the Special Olympics Nova Scotia team for their remarkable accomplishments and their significant contributions to our province.

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. (Standing ovation)

The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 957**

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

Whereas Nowruz is celebrated by over 300 million people worldwide and begins with the Spring equinox that, in Nova Scotia, took place shortly after 12:00 a.m. this morning; and

Whereas Nowruz celebrates the first day of Spring and nature's renewal; and

Whereas Nowruz traditions and rituals promote harmony with nature and consideration, reconciliation, and cooperation among people;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing Nowruz and the importance of this time of year for many Nova Scotians and in wishing all those who celebrate it a happy Nowruz filled with joy, success, and good health.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 958**

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

Whereas the thousands of dedicated Nova Scotians who work as continuing care assistants have chosen to devote their careers to delivering care and compassion to our loved ones in communities and long-term care homes; and

Whereas these vital members of our province's health care team deserve opportunities to advance their careers within the continuing care sector; and

Whereas this January, 26 Nova Scotian CCAs received free support to begin their journey to become licensed practical nurses, a journey that will allow them to expand their professional abilities, provide more specialized care to our loved ones, and achieve personal success;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in acknowledging the compassion, dedication, and future success of these CCAs and all who work in continuing care.

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.

[1:15 p.m.]

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 437 - An Act to Reduce Power Bills and Improve Indoor Air Quality for Working Families. (Hon. Iain Rankin)**

**Bill No. 438 - An Act to Provide Free Testing of Well Water. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

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

### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Member for Queens.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KIM MASLAND: I always get so excited when I get to see faces from home come to visit us. Today I draw the members' attention to the East Gallery for me to introduce some amazing members of the Queens Special Olympics team: Matt Quinn, who is on the Team Nova Scotia games mission staff and is Special Olympics Director Of Sports And Programs; Susan Inglis and Earl Mielke, who are snowshoe coaches; Rebecca Delaney, who is a snowshoe athlete; Jillian Young, who is a snowshoe athlete; and Michael Moreau, a snowshoe athlete. Ben Theriau is our curler and Faron Theriau is joining him today, his dad.

I would ask you to all rise and please accept the warm welcome of the Legislature.  
(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for coming. Enjoy your time.

The honourable Member for Queens.

**QUEENS CO. ATHLETES: SPECIAL OLYMPICS - BEST WISHES**

HON. KIM MASLAND: We have good-looking people in Queens County. Amazing.

I rise today to wish to congratulate the Queens County athletes who performed so magnificently at the recent Special Olympics National Games in Calgary, namely Rebecca Delaney, Jillian Young, Michael Moreau, and Ben Theriau.

Earlier this season, I highlighted their participation in the Games and wished them the best of luck. They certainly delivered. I am so happy to announce that in snowshoeing, Rebecca won gold and silver medals, Jillian won silver and bronze, and Michael won silver. In curling, Ben brought home the silver medal. Even in the other events the athletes competed in, they performed exceptionally well.

I also pay tribute to the amazing coaches who so ably supported the athletes, in particular Susan Inglis, Earl Mielke, and Betty Ann Daury. You have made Queens County and Nova Scotia so proud. I hope you always know that I am truly your biggest fan.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Member for Yarmouth.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by many members who are here to celebrate and recognize International Francophonie Day. I would like each member to stand and be recognized as I state your name. We have Nicole Dupuis, executive director of the Fédération des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse, Suzanne Saulnier, Executive Director, le Centre d'appui à la petite enfance de la Nouvelle-Écosse; Carolina Al Khouri Abboud, Coordinator of Immigration Francophone Nouvelle-Écosse. Laurie Martine-Muranyi, Executive Director of Conseil jeunesse provincial de la Nouvelle-Écosse; and Elle Peters, President. We have Veronique Legault, Executive Director and Lucien Comeau de Regroupement des aînés es de la Nouvelle-Écosse. We also have with us from Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse Pierre Roisne, Executive Director, Louise d'Entremont, Carol-Ann Bilodeau, and Ann LeBlanc. Thank you all so much, and please accept the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome, and I hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable Leader for the Official Opposition.

**RÉSEAU SANTÉ: FRANCO. HEALTH CARE SVCS. - RECOG.**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Madame la présidente, aujourd'hui nous célébrons la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. Nous avons invité le Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse et ses partenaires car cette journée rappelle à toutes les Néo-Écossaises et tous les Néo-Écossais la nécessité pour nos communautés acadiennes et francophones d'avoir accès aux services de santé linguistiquement et culturellement adaptés.

Je tiens à reconnaître que la philosophie et le leadership du Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse sont un exemple de la manière dont le bien-être individuel et communautaire peut être amélioré en utilisant la pratique exemplaire du développement communautaire.

Bien que nous mettions en avant le Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse, c'est grâce à leurs efforts en tant que facilitateurs et facilitatrices que ces organisations se sont réunies en un corps collectif. Il est important de reconnaître la contribution de chacun et chacune à la promotion des soins de santé en français dans toute notre province.

Ensemble, ces organisations démontrent que l'amélioration des soins de santé nécessite un effort concerté. Nous reconnaissons que chacune de ces organisations contribue à l'amélioration de la santé et du bien-être de leur communauté ainsi que des résidents et résidentes acadiens et francophones vivant en Nouvelle-Écosse.

Je saisis cette occasion pour remercier chacun et chacune et souhaiter à votre groupe tous les succès alors que vous travaillez collectivement à améliorer l'accès aux services de santé culturellement et linguistiquement adaptés dans toute notre province pour nos communautés acadiennes et francophones.

Speaker, today we are recognizing International Francophonie Day. We invited Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse and their partner organizations because this day is a reminder to all Nova Scotians of a need by our Acadian and francophone communities to access linguistically and culturally appropriate health services in this province.

I want to acknowledge that the philosophy and leadership of Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse is a shining example of how individual and community wellness can be improved using the leading practice of community development. Although we are highlighting Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse, it is because of their efforts as a facilitator that these organizations have come together as a collective body. It's important that everyone's contributions are recognized in advancing French language health care services across our province.

Together, these organizations are demonstrating that making changes in health care requires a concerted effort. We recognize that each of these organizations is contributing to improvements in the health and well-being of their community and the Acadian

francophone residents living in Nova Scotia. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone and wish your group continued success as collectively you work at enhancing access to culturally and linguistically appropriate health care services throughout our province for our Acadian and francophone communities. Thank you so much.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I beg leave to make an introduction relative to my member statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us in the West Gallery today is Ms. Ida Nabasumba - you can rise - Dr. Marion Brown, Associate Dean of Health at Dalhousie University and professor in the School of Social Work, and Dr. Douglas Brown, retired orthopaedic surgeon.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island

**HFX. SEXUAL HEALTH CARE CLINIC: NEW MURAL - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: The Halifax Sexual Health Centre celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021 and has marked the occasion with a beautiful celebratory mural entitled *Connection* by Shannon Long and assisted by David Hamp-Gonsalves. The mural highlights not just the clinical aspects of sexual, reproductive and gender-affirming care but the joy and affirmation that comes from having your health needs met. It embraces Halifax Sexual Health Clinic principles of sex positivity, pro-choice, confidentiality, community-driven, youth-friendly, 2SLGBTQIA+-focused, and judgement-free.

The bureau is dedicated to Dr. Pam Brown, a founding physician of the Halifax Sexual Health Clinic. In 1973, the Family Planning Association of Nova Scotia opened a small clinic on Gottingen Street in an old bank vault, equipped with a phone line, a small office, committed volunteers, and two physicians. Pam was one of them.

The clinic evolved into the Planned Parenthood Metro Clinic and that is where Pam spent her committed and passionate career. When she retired at 75, the clinic had become the Halifax Sexual Health Centre. Dr. Brown passed away in 2020 at the age of 87.

The clinic is proud to finally highlight Dr. Brown's incredible influence on the organization that has become the Halifax Sexual Health Clinic.



I ask that we recognize Dr. Brown's passion for delivering inclusive and compassionate sexual health care and education.

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

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, before I read my member's statement, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

JOHN WHITE: Joining us today are a couple members of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality Rotary Clubs. In the East Gallery are Jason Doyle and Darlene Boone, representing members of the Sydney Sunrise Club, the Sydney Rotary Club, and the New Waterford Rotary Club. There isn't enough time in my member's statement to list the amount of amazing work they do, so I will list some of the members and organizations they work with. Before I do that, I will ask Jason and Darlene to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature on behalf of the CBRM Rotary Clubs.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for making the trip. I hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

#### **ROTARY CLUBS OF CBRM: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, Rotarians are guided by the principles of service. They aim to help those in need, develop young leaders, and promote community development with lasting change. The Rotary Clubs of CBRM have more than 100 years of service supporting local groups and enhancing our community while making a global impact.

Just a few of the local organizations they've worked with include: the Boys and Girls Clubs of Cape Breton; Big Brothers Big Sisters; Salvation Army; Hospice Cape Breton; Cape Breton Regional Hospital Foundation; NSCC Early Childhood Development Support Centre; Make-A-Wish Foundation; the Christmas Crew Society; Sydney Curling Club - Youth Program; breakfast programs and scholarships; Coal Town Trail Society; Camp Courage - the list goes on.

A partnership with the Rotary Clubs of CBRM has made possible bigger events such as the Sydney Rotary RibFest, which has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for health care and child poverty on the Island.

I ask all members of this House to join me in recognizing the amazing work of the Rotary Clubs of CBRM.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**INT'L FRANCOPHONIE DAY: CELEB. OF CULTURE - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Madame la présidente, à l'occasion de la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, je me joins aux francophones et francophiles de la Nouvelle-Écosse et partout au monde pour partager mon amour pour la langue française. À travers le Canada, les communautés francophones contribuent à la richesse de notre patrimoine culturel et de notre histoire. Et ici en Nouvelle-Écosse, les francophones et les Acadiens et les Acadiennes font partie intégrale de ce beau patrimoine.

Au-delà des arts et de la culture, ils contribuent aussi au développement économique de nos régions et à notre diversité. Aujourd'hui, pendant que nous célébrons ensemble, c'est aussi essentiel de se rappeler la responsabilité de tous nos gouvernements d'appuyer les communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire et de répondre à leurs besoins distincts. À tous mes concitoyens francophones et francophiles, bonne Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Speaker, on this International Francophonie Day, I am joining francophones et francophiles in Nova Scotia and around the world in celebrating my love for the French language. Across Canada Francophone communities contribute to the richness of our cultural heritage and our history. Here in Nova Scotia, Francophones and Acadians make up an integral part of that beautiful heritage.

Beyond just arts and culture, they contribute to the economic development of our regions and our diversity. Today as we all celebrate together, it is also important to remember the responsibility of all levels of government to support our official language minority communities, and to respond to their distinct needs. To all my francophone and francophile constituents, happy International Francophonie Day to everyone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**TENANTS RIGHTS: NEED TO SUPPORT - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, on February 27<sup>th</sup> I co-hosted a tenants' rights information session with Dalhousie Legal Aid and ACORN at the Dartmouth North Public Library. This was our second well-attended tenants' rights event since the Summer of 2023. At the event, Dalhousie Legal Aid community legal worker Mark Culligan presented some shocking but not surprising stats about eviction applications in Dartmouth North.

After FOIPOPing landlord eviction applications between 2018 and 2021, Dal Legal Aid sorted them by postal code. The B3A region, Dartmouth North, consistently had more eviction applications than any other. In 2018, B3A applications made up approximately 12 per cent of all eviction applications; in 2019, 16 per cent; in 2020, 17 per cent; and in 2021, 12.5 per cent. The next-highest percentages range from 5 to 7 per cent. Unfortunately, there's no way to tell how many of the evictions went through.

[1:30 p.m.]

In my office, we help many tenants fight unjust evictions, as does Nova Scotia Legal Aid. These numbers only confirm that this Legislature must do more to protect people in Dartmouth North and across the province from unjust evictions.

THE SPEAKER: I thank you, but before we go on, I ask that all members keep their statements to one minute so that everybody has the opportunity to speak.

The honourable member for Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley.

**NOWRUZ: PERSIAN & IRANIAN NEW YEAR - RECOG.**

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Nowruz, the Persian and Iranian New Year. This is a time-honoured celebration that symbolizes Spring's arrival and the natural world's rejuvenation.

In Nova Scotia, engaging in Nowruz festivities presents an opportunity to celebrate life, show reverence for nature, and strengthen community ties among diverse groups. Community organizations like the Iranian Cultural Society of Nova Scotia promote and celebrate Iranian culture while providing meaningful support to Iranian-Canadian communities across our province.

By immersing ourselves in the richness of this ancient tradition, we can forge enduring bonds and revel in the revitalization of life in harmonious co-existence with our environment.

I ask members of the Legislature to join me in wishing a blessed and beautiful Nowruz to all celebrants.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**HEALTH CARE GROUPS: FUNDING RECIPS. - CONGRATS.**

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, while government has a primary role to play in health care recruitment and retention efforts, there are important roles for our communities as well. To be successful, they must sell their area as a great place to live for health care professionals and their families, help them navigate barriers, and make them feel welcome, appreciated and supported.

When I learn of a new health care professional coming into the area, I know it's a result of an incredible amount of work behind the scenes by several people throughout Annapolis County. Today I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to learn that three groups in my constituency - Soldiers Memorial Hospital Foundation, the Village of

Lawrencetown, and the Town of Annapolis Royal - will receive funding through the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment Community Fund. This will help them support their health care recruitment and retention efforts.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating these three groups on being awarded this funding, and in thanking them for their commitment to improving health care in Annapolis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

**FIT IT FORWARD: FOOTWEAR PGM. - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: At the constituency office for Halifax Chebucto on Quinpool Road, we have many fascinating retail and hospitality sector neighbours, but none more oriented to the community and its development than the Quinpool footwear fixture Aerobics First.

Aerobics First operates a series of programs and initiatives that support marginalized and lower-income populations. Perhaps the most striking of these is Fit It Forward, a program through which customers are provided an opportunity to contribute and quality footwear is provided to people for better health, support, and dignity, with no money changing hands.

Fit It Forward works with frontline organizations that identify specific needs, and with the contributions of major footwear suppliers who make it possible for the program to operate at a considerable scale.

At the end of this month, Luke MacDonald, the author and guiding spirit of Fit It Forward and its range of related programs, will be retiring from Aerobics First, and from a career there that has modelled how a business can be both really in and really for the community they serve. Luke's work for the community and Aerobics First is deserving of every appreciation and every recognition of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

**DELOREY, KYLE: CONCERT PERF. - RECOG.**

HON. GREG MORROW: Speaker, on International Francophonie Day, I rise to acknowledge Kyle Delorey, a Grade 10 student at the newly renamed École Belle-Baie in Larrys River, Tor Bay region.

Kyle, who has been singing and playing guitar from a young age, was recently part of the CSAP's province-wide Concert of the Stars, where he showcased his musical talents to the crowd at Père-Maurice-LeBlanc Theatre in Tusket. Kyle performed *Le Pilier*, which

means “The Pillar.” The song, written by local Weldon Boudreau, is about local Acadian historian and Order of Nova Scotia recipient Jude Avery, who inspired her community to embrace their Acadian heritage. I was honoured to previously stand in this House to acknowledge Jude’s tremendous work.

Kyle’s fellow students back home watched him perform on a live feed to the school and cheered him on. It’s also worth noting that Kyle is only in his second year of French Immersion, and is already exceeding the expectations of his teachers with his grasp of his native language.

I ask the members of this House to join me in congratulating Kyle Delorey on his musical and educational achievements, and for working to keep his Acadian heritage alive for generations to come.

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

### **MACKAY, DR. ERIN: HEALTH PROM. - THANKS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I rise today to recognize Dr. Erin Mackay, the owner of Fairview Chiropractic and Massage. Dr. Mackay holds a Bachelor of Science from Acadia University and graduated from the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in 2001, where she was awarded the prestigious Herbert K. Lee Award for her outstanding academic, clinical, and altruistic achievements. With over two decades of experience, Dr. Mackay has dedicated herself to providing exceptional chiropractic care to her patients.

As the head of an all-female team of health care professionals, Dr. Mackay’s belief in holistic wellness and patient-centered treatment has been helping the residents of Fairview-Clayton Park since 2007. Outside the clinic, Dr. Mackay is an active member of our community, participating in running events across the Maritime provinces, and enjoying the beauty of the great outdoors with her loved ones, including the clinic puppy, Lennox, who joined the team in 2022.

I want to thank Erin and the staff at Fairview Chiropractic and Massage for their dedication to promoting health and vitality in our community, and for inspiring us all through their leadership and compassionate care.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **JUNO BLOCK PARTY: PERFORMERS - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Tomorrow night, March 21<sup>st</sup>, kicks off the JUNO Block Party down along the waterfront. For three electrifying nights, the first-ever JUNO Block Party will feature a diverse range of Canadian talent and emerging artists who will command the spotlight, and deliver unforgettable performances.

On Thursday night, it will kick off with a tribute to Mi'kmaw culture featuring City Natives, followed by North Preston's own Reeny Smith. Classified will do his "Welcome to the Maritimes" set featuring David Myles, JRDN, and O'Sound, along with other special guests celebrating his catalog of Canadian hits. It will close off with the international ambassador for DJ culture, Skratch Bastid.

I know this night will be an awesome experience and I can't wait to get my dance on. I hope that all members get a chance to get out and enjoy what the Junos have to offer.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

**LEBLANC, GABRIEL: FRENCH LANG. PROMOTION - RECOG.**

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Today I would like to recognize Gabriel LeBlanc of Isle Madame in Richmond County. Gabriel has been married to his wife, Cathy, for 52 years, and is the proud father of three and grandfather of three.

Gabriel has devoted over 35 years to education, and has been a lifelong defender and promoter of Acadian culture, language, and French language education. He is a long-time community volunteer and has served on many boards as a respected Acadian historian and genealogist.

Gabriel has authored three books as part of recording the history of Acadians: *Mon Isle Madame - une histoire acadienne*; *La tradition orale de mon Isle Madame*; and his most recent, *Les remèdes acadiens de mon Isle Madame*. Recently, I ran into Gabriel and he informed me that he is now working on his fourth book.

In December 2022, Gabriel was a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal for all his hard work and dedication. On behalf of my constituency and all of us here, I'd ask everybody to stand and congratulate Gabriel on his great achievements. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

**SALTWIRE NETWORK: FINANCIAL ISSUES - RECOG.**

BRAEDON CLARK: Speaker, journalism is known as the first draft of history, so I rise today to express my concern regarding the ongoing financial issues affecting the SaltWire network.

Local journalism is an indispensable component of a healthy democratic culture and an informed citizenry. I know there are several members, including me, who are former journalists who I'm sure would agree with that.

Journalists afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. We, as politicians, must always accept the scrutiny that good journalism brings with it. Whether it's at Province House, municipal chambers across Nova Scotia, or anywhere else in our communities, the journalists of the SaltWire Network tell the stories that need to be told.

I hope these dedicated professionals get the chance to keep doing their essential work for many years to come.

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

**RESERVE MINES VFD: DISASTER PREV. - RECOG.**

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise to recognize the members of the Reserve Mines Volunteer Fire Department. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, Chief Binder took to Facebook to acknowledge the quick actions of department members. That evening, Captain Curtis Binder and Captain Ken Robinson found a broken propane line on a local establishment's tank and diverted what could have been a catastrophe.

Later in the day, a significant water problem on the fire hall property threatened the cancellation of New Waterford Boxing Club's big fight event. With the help of countless volunteers from their organization, Reserve Mines staff members - particularly Safety Officer Justin Turnbull, firefighter Shauntel Kelly, and Lieutenant Craig MacNeil - stayed outside all night and maintained several water pumps while the event inside went on flawlessly. A huge thanks to Ryan Boone for the fast response with heavy equipment. Chief Binder also thanked the public for their patience.

I want to thank the fantastic community that came together to support one another.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

**ISLAND TIES: DOCTOR RECRUITMENT - THANKS**

HON. BRIAN COMER: I would like to acknowledge a newly formed group that is working to help with doctor recruitment in Cape Breton.

Island Ties is one of these groups across Nova Scotia to receive funding from the Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment for their efforts in retention. The non-profit groups is recruiting doctors with teams in five main areas: welcoming, partner support, family life, real estate, and cultural integration. The goal is to help new doctors and their families develop connections within the community and help integrate them into their new home in Cape Breton.

The grassroots group is always looking for volunteers who are interested in joining their team. I encourage anyone interested in helping make Cape Breton a more welcoming and inclusive place for our health care professionals to check out Island Ties.

Thank you to everyone involved in this great organization and keep up the great work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**STEWART, RON: COMP. OF ORDER OF CANADA - CONGRATS.**

FRED TILLEY: Today I would like to honour the honourable Dr. Ron Stewart, who was recently promoted from Officer of the Order of Canada to Companion of the Order of Canada. This honour is designated to those who have made the highest contributions to Canada.

We all can remember Dr. Stewart as being known as the father of emergency medicine in Nova Scotia. As Nova Scotia Health Minister, he led the creation of the province's consolidated Emergency Health Services and the paramedic system. Dr. Stewart was the MLA for Cape Breton North. He was a great mentor to me and gave very freely of his time when I ran in 2006. I appreciated that very much.

I'd like to congratulate Dr. Stewart on this wonderful honour.

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

**LEONIDAS CHOCOLATES: OPENING - CONGRATS.**

LISA LACHANCE: Madame la présidente, aujourd'hui dans l'esprit de la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, je veux reconnaître l'ouverture d'une chocolaterie et café reconnue à l'internationale ici à Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. Une visite à la rue Brenton vous rendra à Leonidas, une entreprise belge internationale qui vend des chocolats gourmets, des pâtisseries, et un chocolat chaud superbe. Leonidas, nommé d'après leur fondateur il y a presque 150 ans, est un excellent exemple de ce qu'amène une espace comprenant la culture francophone. Chaque jour, le café est rempli de touristes, d'étudiants, et d'autres visiteurs. Au nom de l'Assemblée législative, je félicite l'équipe Leonidas pour leur nouveau petit coin de Belgique.

For International Francophonie Day, I'd like to recognize the opening of an internationally renowned chocolate shop and café in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. A trip to Brenton Street near my office will bring you to Leonidas, an international Belgian business selling gourmet chocolates, pastries, and an amazing cup of hot chocolate. Leonidas is named after their founder from almost 150 years ago. It's an amazing example of what a francophone cultural space can bring. Every day the café is full of tourists,



students and other visitors. Speaker, I ask that the House join me in congratulating Leonidas on opening their little taste of Belgium in Halifax.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

**MANIFOLD, PATRICK: FILM AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.**

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Patrick Manifold of Cumberland County on receiving a prestigious award at the 2023 Parrsboro Film Festival. Patrick's short film *What Goes Around Comes Around* was shown and awarded the grand prize in the category of The People's Choice Under Five Minutes. Patrick has had a goal of becoming an award-winning filmmaker for a long time. He achieved that in Parrsboro. Please join me in congratulating Patrick on his outstanding achievements. We wish him continued success in Cumberland County and all throughout Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**HUCHET, CÉLESTE: NEWSPAPER COLUMN - CONGRATS.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, récemment, Céleste Huchet a publié sa toute première chronique dans *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse*. Elle y interviewait ses grands-parents à propos de leur ferme équestre. Ce qui rend cette histoire unique, c'est que cette jeune journaliste est une élève de 4<sup>e</sup> année à l'École Joseph-Dugas. Céleste souhaitait créer un petit journal centré sur les bonnes nouvelles de son village de Comeauville. Grâce à l'encouragement de sa famille et de Natalie Robichaud, directrice générale de la Société acadienne de Clare, Céleste rédige maintenant une série de chroniques comprenant des photos et des vignettes de sa communauté ainsi que des entrevues avec les gens de la région. Je demande à tous les membres de se joindre à moi pour féliciter Céleste Huchet d'avoir publié sa première chronique dans un journal à un si jeune âge et pour remercier ceux et celles qui l'ont aidée à poursuivre ce rêve.

Speaker, Céleste Huchet recently had her first column published in *Le Courrier de la Nouvelle-Écosse*. In it, she interviewed her grandparents about their horse farm. What makes the story so unique is the fact that this young journalist is a Grade 4 student at École Joseph-Dugas. Céleste was inspired to start a small newspaper that focused on the good news in her village of Comeauville. With the encouragement of her family and Natalie Robichaud, the executive director of la Société acadienne de Clare, Céleste is writing a series of columns featuring photos and vignettes of her community and question-and-answer interviews with the people who live there. I ask that all members join me in congratulating Céleste Huchet on getting her first newspaper column published at such an early age and thanking those who helped her to pursue this dream.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I'd like to introduce Mr. Andrew MacKay of Fall River today. Andrew is a third-year political science student, and he's been shadowing and working with my legislative assistant, Alex Wilson. Andrew is pursuing a career in politics, and we wish him nothing but success. Please join me in welcoming Andrew today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. We hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

#### **MAGGIE'S PLACE: SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, today I rise to recognize Maggie's Place in Amherst for their efforts in supporting individuals and families impacted by sexual assault and family violence. Maggie's Place has been a strong advocate, providing support for those in need throughout all of Cumberland County. Through their comprehensive services, including family support, drop-ins and educational programs, Maggie's Place has empowered survivors and families to heal and rebuild their lives. I will continue to support Maggie's Place and the valuable work they do in our community, and I thank the great team, led by Sarah MacMaster, for their commitment to families throughout all of Cumberland County.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

#### **NOWRUZ: PERSIAN/IRANIAN NEW YEAR CELEB. - RECOG.**

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, "Nowruz" means "new day" in Persian, and it's a 3,000-year-old Spring festival celebrated around the world. Last night here on the waterfront in Halifax, the Persian community came together to celebrate the first festivity of the season of Nowruz, Chaharshanbe Suri, or Scarlet Wednesday. In the course of the evening, everybody had a chance to jump over the fire, cleansing themselves in the process for the new year. New Spring. New day. New year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are joined today by three amazing people from the Department of Health and Wellness who are visiting the Legislature for the very first time: Karina Scoggins and Sohna Drammeh are each completing work terms. Karina was a registered nurse for 10 years, and is now specializing in health law. Sohna is a recent SMU MBA graduate who is interested in health policy. Jolene Antle is a former CCA who is now a long-time civil servant at the Department of Health and Wellness. She took on important work in our response to COVID-19 and our interaction with the Legislature. She is now working with health professions.

I would ask all members of the House to join me in welcoming Karina, Sohna, and Jolene. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for coming. I hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

**AUSTIN, DEEDEE: MUSIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS - RECOG.**

HON. BRIAN WONG: Speaker, today I rise to recognize DeeDee Austin, a 17-year-old award-winning Indigenous singer-songwriter sensation here in Fall River. A member of the Abegweit First Nation, DeeDee sits on the 2024 Local JUNO Event Committee as a voice representing young, emerging and local artists.

Leading up to the JUNOS here in Halifax, DeeDee was also part of Road to the JUNOS, performing at the Marquee Ballroom. She is also set to perform at Nova Scotia Summer Fest in Antigonish this Summer, alongside Halifax legends Classified and Neon Dreams.

I would like to applaud DeeDee for her tremendous accomplishments and everything she has done for Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**DANNELLS, C./LATHAM, M.: AWD. RECIPS. - CONGRATS.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize Chad Dannells and Michael Latham, residents of Timberlea who did not finish high school. The two now share the Neil Hudson Award, which is offered each year by the Western Halifax Community Learning Network, after receiving their GED.

Dannells and Latham were nominated for the Paul Hudson Award by their instructor, Paul O'Flaherty, who said they showed immense courage when they returned to the classroom as adults. Dannells left high school at 17 and accepted the first job he found next door to his house in Timberlea, making donair meat. Now at 41, he has been

making donair meat ever since, and that is where he met Latham, who dropped out of school at 16.

It was Dannell's idea to go back to school for his GED, and he encouraged his friend Latham to join him. Paul O'Flaherty praised both award recipients for their commitment to others, to the program, and most of all to their own learning.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Chad Dannells and Michael Latham for their courage to return to the classroom and for their continued success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

#### **TAKE ACTION SOCIETY: GARDEN CREATION - RECOG.**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the children and the leaders of the Take Action Society garden group. In 2012, the Take Action Society - a community action group in North End Dartmouth - created a garden from an unused tennis court behind Harbour View Elementary School. The garden includes a teaching greenhouse and an outdoor classroom that can seat up to 150 people. Every year, students grow seeds in their classrooms, which they then transplant into the garden in the Spring. In the Summer months, families and children from the community help care for the garden and share in its harvest.

The garden also supplies food directly to the community through its Dirt to Door program and donations to the local food bank.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing these amazing young gardeners of the Take Action Society garden group and the Take Action Society as a whole. I cannot wait to see - and taste - what you grow this year.

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

#### **ARCHWAY COUNSELLING: 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIV. - CONGRATS.**

DAVE RITCEY: Speaker, I rise today to offer sincere congratulations to Archway Counselling Association of Truro on their incredible 40 years of service. For decades, Archway has been a beacon of hope and support for youth and families, providing invaluable counselling and workshops. Their dedication to nurturing mental health and strengthening relationships has positively impacted countless lives in our community.

Archway's unwavering commitment to promoting well-being and resilience embodies the true essence of compassion and empathy. I commend their enduring legacy

of service and applaud the profound difference they continue to make in the lives of those they serve.

Here's to celebrating 40 years of excellence, and to many more years of transformative care and support from Archway Counselling.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**BOUTILIER, DANIELLE: BREAST CANCER ADVOCACY - THANKS**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize Danielle Boutilier, whom I talked about before in this House.

She's a breast cancer survivor. She's been advocating for MSI to cover the cost of fat grafting, which is the process that helps with reconstructive surgery for breast cancer survivors. She's been saving money to have this procedure done, but last week she found out that MSI has decided to cover the procedure, which is great. (Applause)

I rise in my place to recognize the minister, who did exactly what I asked. She went back and talked to staff. I want to say thanks to all the staff in the Department of Health and Wellness. Most importantly, I want to thank Danielle for her advocacy. This is a process that none of us realized we didn't cover because the implants are covered, but this was never covered under MSI. This is going to save women thousands of dollars in getting this procedure done.

Danielle, I hope you're listening. I'm so proud of you. Again, thanks to everyone involved with this. This is a big step for women and it's going to save families a lot of money.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**GREEN, DAVE: YOUTH SPORTS EFFORTS - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dave Green. Dave is a registered massage therapist. He also has an amazing sports repertoire and has experienced them from working professionally with the Canadian lacrosse team, the Montreal Canadiens, and the Halifax Rainmen. Dave puts most of his time into coaching athletes of all intellectual and physical abilities in tennis, snowboarding, hockey, and basketball.

Founder of FUNSports - which stands for Funding Underprivileged Neighbourhoods with Safe Play Options equals Respect, Teamwork and Success - Dave has provided a safe, supportive place where youth can experience new sporting opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships, and develop confidence and skills for life. Dave is an inspiration and a motivator for others to give back to community.

I would like all members of this House to help me to recognize Dave Green for his dedication to keeping youth active, and exposing them to new sporting opportunities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

**BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF PRESTON: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Boys & Girls Club of Preston, which has been in operation since 1996. The club has served more than 6,000 children from the communities of Lake Echo, East Preston, North Preston, Cherry Brook, Lake Loon, Westphal, and surrounding areas.

The mission of the club is to provide a supportive environment while empowering the children. Members can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships, and develop confidence and life skills. The club provides before- and after-school programs, a March break program, a Summer day camp, and a Friday night youth drop-in, to name a few, while providing a safe place for all children.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to please join with me to acknowledge the Boys & Girls Club of Preston on the great work they are doing and will continue to do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KELLY REGAN: I would direct the members' attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined today by the honourable Margaret Miller. Members of this House will recognize Margaret as a former inmate here. (Laughter) She is also a former environment minister, who passed the Environmental Protection Act, and the new president of the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia. Welcome, Margaret. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Order. Welcome back. I hope you enjoy your time here.

The time allotted for Statements by Members has now ended. It is now 2:00 p.m. We will finish at 2:50 p.m.

[2:00 p.m.]

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **PREM.: PARAMEDIC RECRUITMENT - UPDATE**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Our ambulance system has gotten drastically worse under this government. The Auditor General has said it is in a critical state: "It is taking ambulances longer on average to respond to emergency urgent calls, putting Nova Scotians at risk." This Premier has spent \$464 million on a recruitment and retention plan to bring more health care professionals back and to keep them in our health care system, including paramedics. Could the Premier please update the House on what the net increase of paramedics has been over the last year?

THE PREMIER: Of course, they are huge investments in health care for sure, huge focus on health care. Obviously, that was necessary after eight years of neglect, where we inherited a health care system that was completely broken. The former Minister of Health will remember the state that he left the health care system in. Nova Scotians remember as well.

We have made a number of different financing - funding available for recruitment. The member is quoting a number that is the total number, but of course, that money only gets spent when somebody signs up. What I would say to the member is we're focused on recruitment, we're focused on retention. That's why we passed the Patient Access to Care Act. That bill passed through this Legislature, but that member is not listed on the recorded vote because he slipped out for that vote.

THE SPEAKER: I ask that the honourable Premier retract that last statement.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: I retract the statement. I refer Nova Scotians to the Hansard that noticed the recorded vote. (Interruptions)

ZACH CHURCHILL: The Premier didn't answer the question. I'll provide the answer for him. The answer is one - one net new paramedic to our system. The Premier wants to talk about how the health care system used to be. Well, I do remember it. I remember when off-load wait times, getting patients out of ambulances and into emergency departments, was 300 per cent less than it is now under this Premier.

I'll refer the Premier to a FOIPOP that our party put in. Ambulance off-load wait times exploded at Cape Breton Regional Hospital, up 300 per cent under the leadership of this Premier. I remember a time when the Premier said: "It's not bad luck that we can get a pizza faster than we can get an ambulance in this province."

My question is: How many pizzas does it take before we can get an ambulance now?

THE PREMIER: How many pizzas can you buy with a couple hundred thousand dollars of stolen taxpayer money that the Auditor General reported? I guess we could do the math, but the Liberal Party, according to the Auditor General, was so busy trying to conceal that theft in advance of an election - their efforts were all focused on concealing that theft, according to the Auditor General. The members will be very familiar with that.

What I would say to the member is a 15 per cent increase in paramedic training enrolment since we launched this tuition bursary. EHS has added an overall total of 99 new paramedics in 2023. The new transfer units have saved more than 155,000 hours. Imagine if that was done eight years ago.

THE SPEAKER: I know this is my first day here as a Speaker, but I ask that people respect others when they are responding or asking a question. I ask that you have your question out within the 45 seconds, and this goes for everyone in the room.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The Premier can brag about how many paramedics he's recruited. There's net one new paramedic in our system. We've had over 90 paramedics leave the system, and we're worried that because of this Premier's policies and only having one paramedic per ambulance, we're actually going to see more leave the system. We're actually hearing warnings from the P.E.I. paramedics union who warn against following Nova Scotia's lead, saying they could lose more paramedics as a result of this. I will table that.

We are seeing firefighters - volunteer firefighters - having to step in and do emergency visits and responses because we don't have paramedics on the scene, and the best the Premier can do is blame everybody else instead of taking responsibility himself.

When can the Premier actually take responsibility and ensure that there are more paramedics in our system that are net new?

THE PREMIER: The member - the former Health Minister - may not have respect for medical first responders. On this side of the House, we do. We will continue to work with health care professionals across the spectrum to improve the system. That positive change is coming. People are seeing that change. It's coming, for sure. There is absolutely work to be done, there is no question about that, but we will continue to invest in the health care system. We will continue to support those health care professionals across the



province, across the spectrum. We will continue to work on recruitment. We will continue to work on retention.

I would only ask the member if he would maybe work on his federal cousins and do something about the Liberal carbon tax which is going to remove so much money out of this province that could have been used to buy pizzas.

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

### **PREM.: FAMILY DOCTOR WAIT-LIST: ADDRESS**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: As of March 1<sup>st</sup>, over 156,000 Nova Scotians were on the wait-list for a family doctor. Month over month we continue to see this number grow and it is no wonder. There are 129 family doctor vacancies in the province. On top of this, nearly a quarter of family doctors are over the age of 60 and may be considering retirement in the coming year. People like Brenda MacDonald and her two sons have been on the wait-list for almost three years and don't know when they will get reliable and consistent care. How much longer will Brenda and her kids, along with hundreds of thousands of other Nova Scotians, have to wait for attachment to primary care?

THE PREMIER: Since 2021, since we formed government, we've hired an additional 195 family physicians, primary care providers in this province, and I would just like to remind the member and all Nova Scotians that of course we want people to have the consistent care of a family doctor or nurse practitioner, a primary care provider, but there are a number of avenues to access care that are working that are just what are needed for a number of Nova Scotians. The pharmacy clinics are an amazing thing - they're helping a lot of Nova Scotians. Virtual care is helping a lot of Nova Scotians. It's not for everything, but it is helping a lot of Nova Scotians. Mobile clinics, urgent treatment centres - there are a number of ways to access the care that is needed, and I encourage Nova Scotians to reach out and find those and use them, and even use the app too.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Last week the Minister of Health and Wellness said: "I think it's really important for people to understand that through the work we've done... people can expect a health home now." We agree that it is important for people to have health homes. We've been championing this kind of collaborative practice for years but it was disappointing to hear in Health Committee yesterday that there are no plans to expand the health homes this year and no timeline for increasing them. Can the Premier tell me: When will the nearly 160,000 Nova Scotians in need of attachment to primary care have attachment to primary care to a health home or to a doctor?

THE PREMIER: What I would say is that we now have a good understanding of that list. Of course, when we formed government, it was literally just an Excel spreadsheet with names. There are different reasons people are on the list. Some actually have a doctor,

but they don't like their doctor, or they're worried the doctor might retire, but they have access to care.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that everyone respect the person who has the floor. Right now the honourable Premier has the floor. The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: I recognize that there are people who need attachment, for sure. There are new access channels for sure. They are useful and they are helpful. I spoke to a doctor this morning who shared with me that some of their colleagues in their geographic catchment area are taking on patients. They called a number of people on the list. They were just fine. What I would say to the member is that we know there is work to be done in health care, but we also know that the list, which was initially designed for a purpose - to show if people have access to care - is probably a little bit outdated at this time, but we'll continue to work with Nova Scotians on that.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We believe that all people need attachment to primary care. In 2021, when this party was elected to fix health care, they described primary care as "either having a family physician (or a primary care provider), who is able to see them and provide timely access to the care they need," and that "telehealth or virtual care. . . is not a replacement for a primary care practitioner." More recently - in fact, just now - the Premier suggested that not everyone needs a doctor or attachment. Which is it? Is it an app-based chatbot and a patchwork of virtual care pilots or is it a health home and attachment to primary care? Can this Premier say with confidence that at some point in his mandate, 160,000 Nova Scotians who are waiting will actually be attached to primary care?

THE PREMIER: What I would say to the member is that what we're focused on is access to care, making sure that Nova Scotians can access the care they need when they need it and where they need it. That is the focus. For some Nova Scotians, that absolutely is - they need a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. For others, the virtual and the pharmacies are working just fine. They're telling us that. It's a little bit split on demographic, but not exclusively. Access to care is what our focus is. The improvements that have been made in the system are nationally leading. There are tons of experts who talk about Nova Scotia as the province leading the way. There is more work to be done. We will keep leading the way. We will not let the Opposition drag us backward. We're going forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **DHW: HEALTH CARE CRISIS - ACT**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, every statistic we look at that matters to people - how many people have a family doctor - has doubled. The Premier thought there was a crisis when less than 70,000 people didn't have a family doctor. There are now 153,000, and he thinks that's just fine, that that's moving forward. This government spent

\$464 million on a plan they said would bring back 2,000 nurses into our health care system. It brought back 148 and added one net new paramedic to the system when off-load wait times are exploding and ambulance wait times are becoming a problem in every single part of the province. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Does he think there's been a return on investment by spending \$464 million to only get one net new paramedic back into the system?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There has been an incredible investment, and I think that across the health care system and in the day-to-day interaction I have with health care workers, I believe that every cent we spend on their workplace, that we spend on Nova Scotians' health care, is an incredible return on investment. I'm very proud of the work that's happening in this province. There has been a 15 per cent increase in the enrolment for paramedics across this province. I will speak to the fact that in the member opposite's own riding, because of the investments we've made, ambulance off-load times have reduced from 60 minutes to 37 minutes to 27 minutes as a direct result of the team that works. Imagine, when they get the emergency room that that fella couldn't push across the line and our minister did, what they'll be able to do when they achieve that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I think we have an indication in this Chamber of why we are not getting to where we need to be in our health care system. The government's priorities are very clearly on display here in the Chamber: We're going to punch the Opposition instead of actually talking about the facts of our health care system. The Premier stands up and says, Well, don't you know I got a national headline? People are talking about me, people are talking about me.

What about the things that matter? How many people have a family doctor? How long our off-load wait times are - going up in almost every single region of this province exponentially. How many people are dying in our emergency rooms? That's going up as well. Do these statistics not matter to this Premier? Does he really think the health care system has gotten so much better that he can keep patting himself on the back?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: In fact, ambulance off-load times are improving across parts of this province. We know that there is a group of individuals who live near our larger regional emergency rooms, but we do see changes. We see them in Yarmouth; we see them at the Valley Regional; we see them at Colchester East Hants Health Centre. We know that Aberdeen Hospital and St. Martha's Regional Hospital meet their ambulance off-load times 90 per cent of the time. This is what happens when you invest in teams.

When you write a letter scolding health care workers, pounding your fists on a desk, and give them absolutely no way to improve their work, as the former Minister of Health and Wellness did, it doesn't help. When you invest across the system, from pre-hospital care to long-term care, and you mean what you say, you actually make a difference in the lives of Nova Scotians.

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

[2:15 p.m.]

**DHW: OFF-LOAD WAIT TIMES - EXPLAIN**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The off-load wait times are getting worse in the majority of places across the province. At South Shore Regional, we are up to two hours; 187 minutes at the Halifax Infirmary, more than three hours; 201 minutes, more than three hours, at the Cape Breton Regional; three hours at the Dartmouth General. It has exploded in Cape Breton by 300 per cent.

We need more than bombast from this government when it comes to improving our health care system. They ran and told Nova Scotians they were going to fix it. It's very clear, when you look at the things that matter, how many people have a family doctor; how long our wait times are to see specialists; how many people are perishing in our ERs because the system is not getting better.

My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: Will the minister please explain the value for investment that we're getting on the cheques that he's signing for our health care system?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I would like to take a moment to talk about some of the initiatives that we are implementing in order to reduce ambulance off-load times. I do want to challenge the member opposite . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I apologize, can you please stop the clock? I ask that all members are to stay off their phones during this time. It is disrespectful to all the members who sit here and worked very hard to sit here.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As the former Health Minister will know, we need to have innovative solutions, so we have introduced the EMR, which is an emergency medical responder. This individual - this regulated health care professional - will work in the emergency rooms to support off-load times to support our paramedics in returning to those calls that are out in the community. I know that this group of individuals - whom the member opposite and former Minister of Health and Wellness is so negative about - will have an incredible impact in our health care system and be an incredible colleague to our paramedics.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We are seeing ambulance wait times go up. We are seeing off-load wait times for getting patients off ambulances and into our emergency rooms go up. We lost over 90 paramedics in the last year. Related to the new program that the

government is talking about, we're hearing from paramedics that more might leave as a result of this, because they'll be overburdened on their ambulances. In fact, P.E.I. paramedics are warning against following Nova Scotia's lead to their own Premier. They're telling Premier Dennis King, Do not follow the lead of Nova Scotia in this effort to address ambulance wait times, because it will see more paramedics leave the system. My question to the minister: Is this not something that the minister is concerned about?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Perhaps if the former Minister of Health and Wellness and the current Leader of the Opposition is so interested in P.E.I., perhaps he'd like to work there. But what I would like to say is that this medical responder role is an incredible opportunity for our paramedics. It's an incredible opportunity for our emergency health care system.

If paramedics were to work in other jurisdictions across this country, they would work with emergency medical responders. These are caring individuals who work in communities, who have skills. Their training will mirror the first three months of paramedicine training. We have faith in this.

We have incredible former paramedics working as a regulator in the Department of Health and Wellness, as well as Dr. Andrew Travers, helping us navigate the system. When you listen and respect and hear paramedics, you can impact the system, and the former Minister of Health and Wellness never did that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **DHW: FAMILY PRACTICE WAIT-LIST INCREASE - EXPLAIN**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This government can continue to point the finger, but I'll remind the House of the statistics before this government took over: 70,000 people, not even, without a family doctor; wait times to get patients off ambulances into the emergency rooms in some areas were three times less than they are now; lower wait times to see specialists; fewer people dying in our emergency rooms during the height of the pandemic.

If this government wants to just keep pointing out how bad things used to be, I really think they need to start paying attention to the facts and not how they feel about things in this Chamber. The government is investing in things like mobile clinics, urgent clinics. These things are band-aids that don't actually help people who don't have a family doctor.

My question to the minister is: Why are they giving up on the family practice model?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I think the former Minister of Health and Wellness said a lot right there. There were certainly no ideas. There was nothing that came

out of that former ministry under his direction, or previous health ministers, that helped us move the health care system forward. I lived it. You can say what you want about . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order, minister. Can you please stop the clock? Thank you. Order. This is my third time, I think, that I've asked everyone to respect the person who has the floor.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We have absolutely not given up on attaching patients. We have worked very hard. We have an incredible contract for our primary care providers, our physicians, that not only incents access but also incents attachment. We know, as an example, that we have 65 physicians who engaged with the Department of Health and Wellness and with Nova Scotia Health Authority to take the highest-risk people off the list. We are constantly monitoring that list. We are constantly attaching individuals. We had a physician hotline that took 15,000 people off the list as a result of the work on that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: There are now 163,000 people without a family doctor. In fact, a number of the initiatives that this government's moving forward with are pulling doctors out of family medicine. The mobile clinics that are there to help people without a family doctor, doctors make more money going in those. I'm talking to doctors who say they're going to leave their family practice to go work in the mobile clinics. How ironic is that? How problematic is that? That's the problem when you have a government that's focused on headlines and band-aids, and not dealing with some of the root causes in the system of all the problems we're facing.

One of the root causes is attachment to family doctors. Why is this government allowing the Need a Family Practice list to blow up under their watch?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As we know, part of the growth that we're seeing in the list - 35 per cent of people who identify on that list say that they are new to the area, and 25 per cent of people say that their physician has closed their practice because they've left. The majority of those are because of retirements.

In the former government, there was absolutely no investment in medical seats, no investment in resident seats, there was no investment in the primary care attachment, and we had a policy where you had to leave your practice behind. There was a very strict and rigid physician replacement plan that didn't allow physicians to transition in and transition out. We have worked so hard with physicians to find out what the barriers were, and how we can improve not only access, but attachment.

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

**OAMH: MENTAL HEALTH CARE SUPPORTS - INVEST**

LISA LACHANCE: Twenty of the 48 inpatient mental health beds at the Abbie J. Lane Memorial Building are currently unusable due to a water leak. This has disrupted the care of 20 patients, and substantially cut the overall number of mental health and addictions in-patient beds across the province. I'll table that. As of now, there is no timeline for repairs, and the number of closed beds may indeed grow.

What is this government doing to ensure that the closure of 20 beds, and maybe more, will not worsen wait times for essential emergency in-patient mental health services?

HON. BRIAN COMER: It's certainly a situation that I'm well aware of. The clinical team really worked hard to find folks in-patient beds across the province who needed them. A very thoughtful discharge plan and community-based treatment was also put in place for those who required it.

LISA LACHANCE: The incident at Abbie J. Lane Memorial has meant that Nova Scotians are having to travel further distances from their homes to receive specialized mental health care, or maybe not access specialized mental health care at all. The loss of 20 beds is significant, but it should not result in a more stressful series of event to find spaces for those who need them. When is this government going to invest in mental health care to the extent that beds and supports are locally available when they are needed?

BRIAN COMER: Certainly, in that situation, the staff was working very hard to make the necessary repairs. That being said, the acute mental health day hospital here in the Central Zone, the Centre for Psychological Health, the Recovery Support Centre in Dartmouth, have really added increased services, many of which are low barriers for Nova Scotians here in the Central Zone. I know crews are certainly working hard to get those in-patient units back to operation as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**ECC: COASTAL PROTECTION ACT - PROCLAIM**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: We had a chance to ask the minister many questions about the Coastal Protection Act, and we did in Budget Estimates as well. However, we don't seem to be able to get a consistent reason as to why this government has scrapped the creation of a coastal protection zone that is based on science. Instead, he continues to use the excuse that personal property owners can make that decision themselves. Yet there's no mention of any organization that supports this shift to instead spend millions of dollars on another app. Does the minister really believe that \$3 million for another app, plus another \$45,000 for a mailout, and now a radio campaign trying to justify the decision, will actually prevent people from building right up to the high-water mark, or does this government not care at all where people build?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, when that minister was over here, they did nothing for coastal protection. We're the first government . . . (interruptions). We are the first government . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Please stop the clock. Order. Please.

I am going to actually start calling people out by name the next round because this is now my fourth time. Again, although it's my first day, I've been sitting here for a while. This is a lack of respect for colleagues.

The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: We are the first government in Nova Scotia to take coastal protection action. We have put forward a plan that will set Nova Scotians up for success. This is a plan that supports informed decision-making. We trust Nova Scotians. The Opposition may not, but on this side of the House, we trust Nova Scotians to do what's right for the coastline.

IAIN RANKIN: On this side of the House, we want to protect the coastline. On that side of the House, they want to unregulate the coastline. Under the tenure of the last government, we protected close to 200,000 hectares of land conservation - much of that along the coastline where some of the most sensitive land exists in this province.

Instead of legislating the Coastal Protection Act through regulations, they are going with an app. An app will not replace a regulated coastline. It will do nothing to prevent people from building where they will harm the environment, put themselves in danger, and block public access to our coastline. Will the government do the right thing, as they did with reversing their terrible decision with the wine sector, and reverse this decision and proclaim the Act?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: We have a strong Coastal Protection Action Plan for Nova Scotians. It will support informed decision-making. It will support our municipalities, and it deploys immediately resources for coastal protection.

I still haven't gotten a response to my question to that member: When he was Premier, why didn't he proclaim the Act? But I think I have a theory as to why. I've read some Auditor General reports, and I get the sense they were distracted by other things. In other words, I've understood from that report: concealing taxpayer money.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.



**ECC: COASTAL PROT. CONSULTANTS - REVEAL**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Here's the first answer today: the regulations weren't ready. It's the same reason why they didn't proclaim the Act in 2022 and they went for more changes in 2023.

[2:30 p.m.]

I have received many emails from my own constituents and Nova Scotians in the last month who are perplexed by this government's decision to reverse course on this. As one of my constituents said to me, what she does with her coastline in Bayside directly impacts all her neighbours as well. This issue is no different than septic approval, so I wonder if they are now going to start to take away septic approvals with property owners to allow them to figure it out. Maybe straight pipes are going to start going again into nearby rivers.

This is not just about the naysayers, which we are obviously being called. This is about what every MLA said in the House in 2019 when this Act was supported unanimously. All the emails I am getting are certainly unanimous in support of the Act.

My question to the Minister of Environment is: Since the minister won't release any of the findings of the consultation - talk about concealment - will he at least name any organization, any professional group, engineers, municipalities that said they do not want regulations in place and proclamation of this Act?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: There is a diversity of opinion on how coastal protection should unravel. We have put forward a balanced plan - a plan that very much respects property rights, and very much empowers coastal property owners to make an informed decision about their property. Municipalities are responsible for zoning. We need them to be a key player in zoning for coastal protection. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and I will continue our work with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities to ensure that this plan delivers strong coastal protection for Nova Scotians.

IAIN RANKIN: The constituents in Bayside spoke to me about the fear they have of this government walking back, and this piecemeal approach that we used to have in this province. The reasons that he just gave were actually the whole reason why we needed a consistent approach across the province based on science. The coastline property owners said to me that the decision not to proclaim the Act benefits only those who want to make bad decisions building right on the coastline. My question to the Minister of Environment is: Who benefits from not preventing people from building on the high-water mark, on wetlands, on or near saltwater marshes and blocking the assets from the public?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I do want to address this a little bit too. The reality is that we have 300 years of building on the coastline - in some cases below water level in my community. How can we tell a town that you can't build when you are already being protected by a dike? The reality is we are going to protect some areas; we are going to defend in some areas; and we are going to retreat in some areas. That is a very granular decision. I will remind the member that we are protecting the coastline. We protected Owl's Nest; we made it a provincial park instead of a golf course.

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

### **ECC: COASTAL PROT. CONSULTATIONS - RELEASE**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, in the last few weeks I've heard from many constituents in my riding who can't make sense of this government's decision to walk back on their promise to protect our coastline. As one of my constituents told me, they were hopeful that this government would continue the work started in 2019, listen to Nova Scotians, and follow through on proclaiming and regulating the Coastal Protection Act. Now they have lost hope in this government to take the issue of protecting our valuable coastline. My question to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change is: What does he have to say to my constituents and all Nova Scotians who have lost hope because of this government's poor decision to walk back on the Coastal Protection Act?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I want you to assure your residents that Nova Scotia is a leader on climate action. We are the only province in Confederation with legislated climate change targets - the Environment Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act - which is better than a Liberal carbon tax. We have Nova Scotia's climate change plan, which is better than a carbon tax. We have the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, which is better than a carbon tax. We have the Coastal Action Plan, which is better than a Liberal carbon tax.

PATRICIA ARAB: Our entire caucus has heard from concerned citizens who have a right to be worried. This government has thrown away all of the science, the evidence, and the years of work to get the Coastal Protection Act right, thrown it out the window for reasons that they won't share. One of my constituents actually attended all three consultation meetings - three rounds of consultation - and asked if the government had released the consultation yet.

My question to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: When will he release the Coastal Protection Act consultations?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: There is a diversity of opinions on this. What we've done is we have selected an approach that is balanced, an approach that will protect our coastline through informed decision-making, through supporting our municipalities, through alignment of resources. This is a plan that is going to be of great benefit to Nova Scotians.

I respect all the differences of opinion that are out there. We're not going backwards, we're going forward, and this coastal protection action plan is a key point, a key plank, in our overall climate response.

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

### **ECC: SCRAPPING COASTAL PROT. ACT - EXPLAIN**

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Coastal homeowners have seen first-hand the impacts of climate change: increasing sea levels, erosion and storm surges. What many coastal homeowners haven't seen, however, is the Minister's survey sent out last Fall asking for, once again, input on the 2019 Coastal Protection Act. The Minister spent roughly \$145,000 on the mail-out surveys, and I'll table that.

Some coastal property owners are now questioning what that money actually was used for because they certainly did not receive the survey, and neither did their neighbours. Was the decision to scrap the Coastal Protection Act based on a highly questionable public consultation process or was it something else?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: All consultations are one tool that's utilized to solicit and get the feedback of Nova Scotians. There are also many other tools that are utilized: listening to MLAs in this Chamber, listening to government MLAs on this side. There is a diversity of opinions out there. That was a targeted consultation enacted in the Fall of last year that helped us develop this plan. So, look, I think Nova Scotians have been clear. They want coastal protection, and that's exactly what we delivered in this action plan.

LISA LACHANCE: The number of citizens expressing frustration over this government's refusal to proclaim the Coastal Protection Act continues to mount, and for good reason. Even though many did not receive the survey, Kate Sherren, an Environmental Studies professor at Dalhousie University, said that decisions can be reliably made based on the sample size. Sherren said that this government's recent reasoning amounts to, and I quote, "100 per cent spin," and that, "the idea that then you would discard what is pretty good data for the benefit of those that didn't answer the survey is just simply not best practice." I'll table that.

Why is this government trying to spin this very clear public opinion data supporting the Coastal Protection Act?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Most certainly, there are a lot of perspectives on this. I've seen and heard a lot of perspectives. Speaker, what I haven't seen from the NDP, though, is a clear signal to Nova Scotians that they are against the Liberal carbon tax and that they are calling for a repeal of the Liberal carbon tax because in this province we don't need a

carbon tax - a Liberal carbon tax. We have the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. We have the coastal protection action plan. We have the risk assessment. We have the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund. All of that is better than a Liberal carbon tax.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

### **ECC: COASTAL PROTECTION ACT - IMPLEMENT**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I don't know what this government would do if they didn't have the chance to talk about the Liberal carbon tax and actually had to talk about their performance. This government has referenced a few times that the decision to scrap the Coastal Protection Act was so people in Halifax aren't making decisions about people's property, but we know that this is not the case.

I'm hearing from concerned constituents and residents from Cape Breton on this government's decision to scrap the Coastal Protection Act. Cape Bretoners went through one of the worst snowstorms on record this year, and we saw first-hand the effects of climate change. Not protecting our coastline with the Coastal Protection Act is a mistake. The executive director of ACAP Cape Breton said the government's move leaves a lot of shoreline areas, especially in heavily coasted Cape Breton, to fend for themselves. I'll table that. My question to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: Why is he leaving the heavily coasted Cape Breton Island to fend for itself?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Nothing is being scrapped here. We're moving forward with a balanced, comprehensive plan that will support all Nova Scotians from Yarmouth all the way up to Inverness. Absolutely, in the last year and a half for Nova Scotians, extreme weather events have been eye-opening. They've impacted our communities enormously, whether it's flooding, whether it's wildfires, or whether it's the intense storms that happened in Cape Breton this Winter. I want Nova Scotians to know - the government wants Nova Scotians to know - that we stand with them. That is why we've brought forward a strong action plan to protect the coastline.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm shocked - I never heard "carbon tax" in that response. Speaker, an app and a map are not going to be able to support every single municipality on the Island while protecting the coastline. What would protect heavily coasted Cape Breton? The Coastal Protection Act. However, this government is going to hurt Cape Breton, whose residents rely on our coastline to do many of the things, including fishing and tourism operators. My question to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change: Why has this government decided to put Cape Breton Island at a disadvantage by not enacting and enforcing the Coastal Protection Act?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: For almost three years as minister, I've been saying that climate action is an all-hands-on-deck approach. What that means is it requires all levels

of government, all Nova Scotians, to work together for climate action, and that includes coastal protection. Our duty as government is to get the information to people so that they don't build in hazardous areas. We know from the Nova Scotia climate change risk assessment that coastal erosion, flooding - inland flooding, the coastal flooding - wildfires - we know extreme weather events are going to be challenging as we move forward. That's why this government is committed to working with Nova Scotians at the municipal level and at the community level. That's our job: to make sure they have the information to make the most informed decision. We trust Nova Scotians, Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

### **ECC: COASTAL PROTECTION - ADDRESS**

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, it's no secret that Cape Breton Island is a special place that welcomes thousands of tourists because of our beautiful coastlines. Our tourism industry relies on our coastlines, and they are frustrated by this government's inaction. The tourism industry of Nova Scotia has been an advocate for protecting the coast as our tourism's greatest asset. I'll table that document.

I'll repeat the question from the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia, which I've tabled. "A reversal on this decision needs to take place - the majority of Nova Scotian's want this; municipal governments want this; the environment needs this. Why is government not listening?"

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, we all agree in the House that we need coastal action, we need coastal protection, and that's what we've delivered here. There are many tools that government can utilize. When that party was in power, they chose not to legislate their climate change goals. We did. On this side of the House, we have decided to put a balanced, comprehensive plan forward that will collaborate and support our municipalities who are responsible for the zoning. They have the expertise and the knowledge required to deliver this, and where they need support, the Province of Nova Scotia will step up.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and I have already had productive meetings with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. We look forward to continuing that consultation with them and that co-operation with them to enact this coastal protection action plan.

FRED TILLEY: Tourism matters to the economic prosperity of this province. It's shameful that our most valuable asset, our coastline, is not being protected by this government. It will hurt our tourism industry and our tourism operators, and the Association is telling us so. Does the Minister of Environment and Climate Change not see that if we don't protect our coastline, our most valuable tourism asset, it will affect the entire tourism economy?

TIM HALMAN: As a government, we absolutely cherish and respect the role of tourism and the incredible economic development that comes with that. That's why when people visit Nova Scotia, they know they are visiting a jurisdiction that is a leader on climate action. Twenty-eight goals legislated to guide us to 2030. We have the first Nova Scotia climate change plan since 2009. When those two parties were in power, I don't recall a climate change plan that came from those previous governments. Now we have a balanced, comprehensive coastal protection action plan that will serve and benefit Nova Scotians very well.

[2:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Cumberland North.

### **DPW: CULVERT REPAIRS - COMMIT**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Public Works. I've been contacted by numerous residents who live in Tidnish and on the Amherst Shore over the last 48 hours regarding a closure of Route No. 366. That road runs from East Amherst through to Port Howe, and it's busy year-round, but especially during the Summer months.

A large culvert near Tidnish was previously identified for repair. However, with recent high-tide damage, the need is urgent. My office was told that there would be a closure of the road to all but local traffic until Summer. Local citizens are very upset, and actually threatening to do the work themselves. To add to this level of urgency, this route is the alternate evacuation route in the event of flooding of the Chignecto Isthmus. Can the minister commit to ensuring there is special approval so the repairs to this culvert can be done immediately?

HON. KIM MASLAND: I was made aware of this culvert failure late Sunday evening by Department of Public Works staff. This is a very, very large culvert. This is a 10-foot box culvert. It's not as if it's a little tiny small culvert that you can go in and just completely change overnight. This was slated for repair in the Summer. This will take extensive time to fix.

In the meantime, my deputy minister just had a conversation with the mayor this morning about the repairs that are required. As soon as we can get in there to shorten and have a better detour, one that's 11 kilometres, I will get in there and put some extra gravel on that road so that people can access that through local traffic.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The people of the area want to see immediate response. That road is the evacuation route in the event that there is critical infrastructure damage at the Chignecto Isthmus, so knowing that that alternative route is also not

available, not only to the people of Cumberland North but to all Nova Scotians, is a very big concern.

The fact that the local gravel roads - or gravel-less roads, I should say - are impassible due to lack of gravel and mud is also a concern. In fact, Minister, a local area farmer recently had to cancel a horse show this weekend, losing money, because of the unsafe road conditions.

Can the minister please tell the House why roads in Cumberland North are not being properly maintained and adequately taken care of?

KIM MASLAND: I certainly understand the concerns of residents who live in the area. Sadly, I cannot go in and replace a 10-foot box culvert overnight. It's impossible. This is a very large job. I've committed to that as soon as we can get on the gravel roads. Roads are closed right now. We have a Spring thaw. As soon as we can get in there and we can put gravel on the road, we've committed to do that.

Eleven kilometres of gravel we're going to put on this road so that local residents can use it. This government has tripled our gravel road program. We've had the largest capital program that we've ever had in this province. We have tripled our bridge infrastructure program. To say that we're not investing in roads in this province, that's so wrong.

THE PREMIER: When we were in Question Period I referred to the recorded vote record for the Patient Access to Care Act. I didn't have it to hand out at that time, but I'd like to table that. For the benefit of the House, this is the recorded vote from the Patient Access to Care Act and it will show who was here and who was not. I will table that for the benefit of the House.

THE SPEAKER: I ask that the honourable Premier table that tomorrow.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition on an introduction.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the attention of the House to the West Gallery, where we are joined by two great friends, Shannon and Ben MacLean from Pictou County, who have joined us here to watch Question Period and today's proceedings. If they could receive the warm welcome of the House, it would be greatly appreciated.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. I hope you enjoyed Question Period, as everyone else did, and I hope you have a wonderful time.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I also want to table the budget documents from the previous government which show, contrary to what the Minister of Health and Wellness said . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: No. Order. You cannot table that at this time. I ask you to table it tomorrow, please.

As it is Opposition Day, the honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

### **OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Would you please call Private Members' Public Bills for Second Reading.

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

SUSAN LEBLANC: Would you please call Bill No. 422.

#### **Bill No. 422 - Finance Act (amended).**

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

LISA LACHANCE: I am pleased to rise today to speak to this bill, which I think raises one of the key issues that we are grappling with this session in the Legislature.

The Houston government has spent over \$2.6 billion.

THE SPEAKER: I will ask you to retract that and rephrase it.

LISA LACHANCE: I retract the use of a name.

The current government has spent over \$2.6 billion of Nova Scotians' money. To check process, do I move the bill now?

All right, \$2.6 billion of Nova Scotia's public money, above and beyond what was budgeted in the last two fiscal years. We have had some time to explore this issue with the minister in Estimates. We've had some time to explore this issue with departmental staff at Public Accounts Committee today and, of course, we have a detailed exploration of some of the spending that was provided by the Auditor General. I think that it is probably useful at this point to clarify that we are 100 per cent supportive of government's ability to respond in an emergency.



Government needs to be able to respond within hours to natural or humanitarian disasters, there is no question about that. In fact, we would probably agree that sometimes government needs to provide funding mid-year to make sure that they are achieving their mandate and financing essential services, getting things started. That, I think we would agree with, but we are concerned now, and we are concerned now for some really good reasons.

First of all, the proportion of budget spent as extra budgetary spending spent after the budget is passed in this Legislature has grown from about 4.2 per cent to just over 10 per cent. It's a larger proportional amount, and since our budget has grown, it's actually a larger actual amount as well.

The type of spending examined in particular by the Office of the Auditor General in their report hasn't been urgent. Not very much of it has been urgent. We see cases where perhaps the argument was a need to seed something, a need to confirm an intention, or a need to let a partner or stakeholder organization know that government was serious and that they're in, but it definitely didn't need to send out the full amount of funding. Those are some of the things that the Auditor General reviewed.

The Auditor General examined 11 programs funded outside of the budget process, selected at random, and that was 17 per cent of the more than \$2 billion that's been put out the door in additional appropriations. One hundred per cent of the funds that the Auditor General examined were distributed in ways that raise concerns.

There wasn't any disbursement found by the Auditor General that was done according to the standards that I think we all agreed to. In some cases, there was a clear goal stated, but in most cases, there was just no paperwork. We heard today from the Deputy Minister of Finance and Treasury Board in Public Accounts Committee that sometimes there are conversations and decisions are made based on conversations. I think we should be deeply concerned about this.

We can use an analogy from our own lives. Thinking about things like home repairs, if I need my roof fixed - I do need my roof fixed. I've made that clear. I'm hoping my roof gets fixed really soon. We've talked to a few people who have given us some estimates, because, of course, we want to know how much it's going to cost. Then we've also asked them what the result will be. I'm not going to commit to a major home repair without knowing what the deal is in terms of the timeline, what the budget is going to be, and what I can expect for the outcome.

Yes, I have conversations - what I want is those conversations to be put in writing, so I have a legally obligatory agreement for the money that I'm investing. I do not think it is too much to ask the government of Nova Scotia to do the very same thing every time it spends Nova Scotian money, especially with the huge amounts of money that go out the door.

Two of the investments that were randomly selected by the Auditor General went to EfficiencyOne, which we probably all agree is a key component of our action on climate change, in terms of supporting folks to increase efficiency, lower power bills, and lead us to a greener economy.

The amount of money that was provided - a year-end amount was provided in 2022 of \$50 million. Then in 2023, an additional \$140 million was provided to EfficiencyOne. By December 2023, not even the full amount from 2022 had been spent. In this case - trusted partner, important program - we, as government, could have done other things with that money, such as health care or education, while our partner organization had sufficient funds to achieve their mandate. For some reason, that's not what we did here.

[3:00 p.m.]

I'm also concerned by the money that was sent to universities - Cape Breton University, StFX, and Saint Mary's University - for a health-related study program. They didn't need to send all that money in March 2023. For instance, \$58.9 million was sent to CBU in March 2023; none of it has been spent as of December 2023. Will it be spent over the coming years? Totally. However, why is it sitting in someone else's bank account, earning interest, when we have unmet needs among Nova Scotians?

We can plan for a medical school at CBU, and we can keep better control of our money. These things are not exclusive. Things like the \$37.4 million that was sent to StFX - same situation. None of it had been spent by December 2023. I also want to point out that those four disbursements to universities that totalled more than \$100 million all happened in March. The universities clearly did not need the money in March 2023. They didn't spend any of it, and some of it hasn't been spent yet and we're in budget season. That could have easily been part of the decision-making that was put forward by government to say, We are making investments. I don't even understand why that decision was made. It would have been so easy to say, We're making investments in advanced education and health care, and here they are as part of the budget cycle. Instead, we rushed money out the door.

Like I said in Public Accounts Committee, I was used to March Madness being about markers, and office chairs, and paper supplies, not about hundreds of millions of dollars out the door before the end of the fiscal year. Surely the government could have found other things to spend their money on.

To continue on the Auditor General report, 17 per cent of the \$2.6 billion that went out the door in the last couple of years in extraordinary spending, none of which we were given a chance to examine here. I think that raises serious questions about the remainder of the \$2.6 billion that went out the door, and the controls that are in place to monitor its expenditure and its results - which, I would say at this point I don't know that there are any because there certainly aren't any in the sample. I think it should give us pause and concern for the overall spending envelope of government.

I am married to a lifelong public servant. I have been a public servant at two levels of government. I respect the public service, but the public service needs to provide what it needs in order to exercise due diligence. This means that things that are conversations amongst leaders need to be put through policy and process, and to be examined as decisions of government.

Our legislation wants to address some of these concerns. We think that the bill we're proposing will update the Finance Act to respond to the Auditor General's recommendation - the second time they've made this recommendation - to ensure public funds are spent appropriately and responsibly. The Finance Act would be reformed to ensure that over-budget spending is reviewed and approved by the Legislative Assembly. Starting this fiscal year, it would require the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to table any out-of-budget spending on the first House sitting after the end of the fiscal year.

This report would then be referred to the Committee of the Whole House, which would trigger the start of a process of a meaningful dialogue on the matter. This is not a radical proposal - in fact, Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada that does not require over-budget spending to be tabled in the Legislature when the Legislature is in session. We would simply be putting ourselves in line with the rest of Canada and providing Nova Scotians with a degree of transparency and accountability citizens in other provinces enjoy.

We currently have a strong need for a reform to the Finance Act to ensure that over-budget spending is reviewed and approved by the Legislative Assembly, and we look forward to hearing from other members on this bill.

I would like to move second reading of Bill No. 422.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I'm pleased to rise to speak to this bill, Bill No. 122. We have a very similar piece of legislation before the House as well.

At the root of this bill is really an issue of transparency, governance, oversight, and responsible fiscal management, which I've spoken about in this House quite a bit this session. Let's back up a little bit and think about how government works, how government develops, and takes taxpayers' money and develops plans and programs to spend taxpayers' dollars. At the root of it is what we do here each March or April, and that is go through Budget Estimates and spend 80 hours reviewing the Estimates for Nova Scotia's government to spend taxpayers' money. Estimates are a plan. It is telling Nova Scotians what the government is planning to do in the next fiscal year with taxpayers' money. It's a very public and transparent process bringing those Estimates to the floor of the House, which we debate for 80 hours.

We all know that nothing changes in a majority government, but as Opposition we do get to try to root through, really try to understand the intent and what the government is trying to achieve in the budget.

If you think about it, everything the government does has to get approval of this Legislature. We sit here and approve the resolutions - I forget the wording of them, but they read the resolution at the beginning and the conclusion of each department's budget, authorizing the Lieutenant Governor, with the approval of this House, to allow the government to disburse funds. That's the root of how we are taking taxpayers' money: determining what we're going to do with it and then the government implementing their plan.

It's important that when you are dealing with taxpayers' money, you do have a plan. It's important for Nova Scotians to know what their government is doing and it's important for the Opposition to be able to probe and understand what the plan is. It also allows the civil service to ramp up their capability if they need additional staff, to start up an additional program, get all the checks and balances in place so that money is spent prudently and wisely.

It also allows the private sector to plan and position themselves for potential work, particularly on capital projects. I think the best example of that is how road builders pay very close attention to what the capital plan is for the government and what is planned to be spent each fiscal year with respect to capital. That allows them to position equipment and personnel and be able to meet the needs of the government with respect to its capital plan, both in roads but also in terms of capital infrastructure of buildings, schools, hospitals, et cetera. That whole system is set up to ensure that money is well-spent, prudently spent, and that there is sufficient planning to ensure that we are getting value for money.

What has been happening with this government is the abuse or misuse of parts of the Finance Act. And in the March Madness of the new additional funding, they have spent money and thrown money out the door to various organizations without the legislative approval of this House. In fact, the Finance Act is very, very clear: "An additional appropriation must not be requested and may not be made for any new program or activity that has not previously been included in Estimates in the fiscal year."

So additional appropriation is permitted for additional monies needed to complete an existing program or an existing project. That seems fair and reasonable. We hear about it a lot in the government in terms of utilization. And certainly, some of the additional appropriations by this government are utilization - that's the term the Department of Finance and Treasury Board uses - but in terms of oversubscribing to programs like income assistance, et cetera. Those are open-ended, and sometimes the estimates are too low, and government needs to provide additional appropriations. That's what that section of the Act is for. There's also the ability for special warrants with respect to emergencies - forest fires. That article is urgently and immediately required for the public good.

Where this government has gotten completely off track is the abuse of additional appropriations and doing all of that spending out of the view of the public and out of the view of this Legislature. This bill and our bill are trying to at least get this information back to the floor of the Legislature to MLAs to ensure that new ideas and new funding are appropriately, prudently, and fiscally responsibly spent.

I think we've seen the outcome of when the government doesn't follow its own Finance Act. As my colleague indicated, the Auditor General has taken a very detailed look at about a quarter of the spending in the year before last, in which this government expended \$1.7 billion, or 10 per cent of the budget of the government - of taxpayers' dollars - outside the approval of this Legislature. As my colleague from Halifax Citadel-Sable Island indicated, this did not have any approvals of this House and did not go through normal procedures that are normal with any government in this country.

The Auditor General's investigation of the significant \$1.7 billion showed us what can happen when a government races money out the door in a March Madness to the tune of hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. The report is scathing. The government should be embarrassed and should immediately tell Nova Scotians that they are going to work in a more fiscally responsible way. The key message is from the Auditor General: The over-budget spending process is not accountable or transparent to the Legislature and follows an expedited process.

The Auditor General investigated 11 projects. None of the 11 projects, or spending of \$633 million, had any urgency. Not only did that spending not follow the legislation with respect to additional appropriations, but it did not follow the legislation with respect to special warrants. The spending - really, I think Nova Scotians have to ask: Why would the government be so irresponsible to put out hundreds of millions of dollars and spend it with no plans, no paperwork, and in some cases, no projects? What was the motivation?

The only conclusion that I've come to - and I would suggest Nova Scotians may want to ask their MLAs the question, Why all of this additional year-end spending? - is that the government was focused on a political message of running deficits. And try as hard as they could to run a deficit, the money just kept coming in, and they did end up with a small surplus.

That is the wrong reason to spend taxpayers' money, and the Auditor General has pointed out that this government has foregone millions of dollars of interest by taking money not approved by this Legislature; not approved with proper documentation at Executive Council, as indicated by the Auditor General; not approved with acceptable plans; not approved with budgets; and spent that money and got it out the door.

So what should have or could have happened when the government was getting this windfall? They should have said, Okay, we've got a plan to spend this additional money,

so put it into next year's budget and organizations will be able to ramp up, staff up, get value for money, and spend that money wisely.

A great example is Efficiency Nova Scotia. No one is challenging the intent of the work of Efficiency Nova Scotia or the respect we have for the work of Efficiency Nova Scotia, but when they have \$100 million of taxpayers' money in their bank account, why would we give Efficiency Nova Scotia \$140 million to sit in their bank account for a year? It makes absolutely no sense, if a government is caring about the fiscal health of the province.

[3:15 p.m.]

What is the damage of keeping the \$140 million and letting it fall to a surplus, like other provinces have done? Other provinces have gotten similar windfalls with respect to increased equalization and federal transfers and a better economy. You let the surplus fall to pay down some debt, which opens up debt room for the big projects that this government is trying to execute in the coming years.

Shovelling all the money out the door, trying to create deficits and add to debt, making that as large as you can, and then turning around and needing money to build billions of dollars of infrastructure is simply fiscally irresponsible.

This is important reading for Nova Scotians, particularly Nova Scotians who care about their taxpayers' money. They should take a look at the Auditor General's report. We in this Legislature need to be doing our job of reviewing the spending, of analyzing the plans, ensuring the government is ready to spend windfall profits by proper planning, proper staffing, proper program development, ensuring that their partners have the capabilities to actually receive \$100 million and spend it.

This bill - and a similar bill that we have brought forward - begins to bring forward that transparency and ensure that we are doing our duty as legislators to ensure that the taxpayers' money is used thoughtfully, prudently, and responsibly. That's why I would urge the House to support a bill such as this, or bring in your own bill, but let's end the fiscally irresponsible March Madness spending that has no accountability or transparency to Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for West Hants.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I'm happy to rise today to speak briefly on Bill No.422, an Act to Amend Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2010, the Finance Act, respecting accountable appropriations.

While we understand that the position of the Opposition is simple and that they don't feel the legislation in place is adequately transparent, I find it highly ironic that it is

the NDP tabling this legislation and calling it today for Second Reading, because it was reminding them that it was their government in 2010 that made these changes in the first place. It may come as a surprise, but today during our Public Accounts Committee meeting with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, we heard in detail how very transparent the process that is already in place is and how it is serving Nova Scotia in multiple ways.

As you know, we are facing generational challenges on many files, challenges that were heavily impacted by 12 years of neglect, stagnant investments, and low spending for planning. It found us in this place where we are today. At a time when government is very committed and building Nova Scotia up, is it really a time to add more red tape to the process?

Our government was elected to govern this province, and the transparency we have in place has been used by many governments - in fact, the former Liberal government. I find it ironic that, after eight years of their not changing the process, it seemed to work quite fine for them.

The Opposition talks about this transparency being an issue. All amounts disbursed by government beyond this are presented in the Budget Estimates and are transparent and tabled in the Legislature, as well as the financial forecast updates and our Public Accounts records. We have made more information about our spending decisions available to media and to the Opposition. They are posted online, and we are accountable to Nova Scotians through those ways and in this Legislature.

What will this change accomplish? When the polar vortex affected many grape growers - we talked about the wine industry in detail for the past few weeks - there was a \$15 million investment given to Horticulture Nova Scotia to put some confidence and certainty into these farmers who were affected. The member for Kings South's community, in particular - this \$15 million investment went to Horticulture Nova Scotia to work with industry to make sure they felt supported during a time of uncertainty and a very demanding climate impact on them.

We immediately assured that the impact that this - that would help our government - would help with this process better if we had convened the Chamber and debated whether this was necessary to support our agriculture folks. You asked me to ask my farmers this question. I don't feel they would not feel the confidence in their government to even hesitate to act and be nimble when they're asking for us to help and support them. We do have a budgeting process in place, and Opposition can have their say on priority spending at a time we make priorities clear. We have taken action, and we will continue to take action.

We often talk about affordability in this Chamber and how we can help Nova Scotians. The affordability - what I'm hearing in my office all the time is not, Please cut

back the amount you give EfficiencyOne so I don't have any money left to get my generator or my heat pump. What I do hear is people wanting to make that change to cleaner energy by giving the \$140 million top-up to EfficiencyOne to help individuals in my constituency get off oil heat or help them lessen their use of oil heat.

This was one of the programs that went through one of our additional appropriations. With that additional appropriation, we were able to help 13,500 low-income households and more than 30,000 middle-income households make this transition. This funding will be spent over a four-year period so that, over the course of the four years when more and more individuals are willing to make that change, the money is in the hands of EfficiencyOne, a very reputable not-for-profit operator that can manage this money and is accountable to the department for the funding.

We talked quite a bit today about recruiting doctors and growing our health care base. There are many individuals who need help. I would beg to say that the additional appropriation of \$13.9 million to Acadia University to help them establish and build on a satellite nursing school that was set up in the Annapolis Valley - to think that we can train more nurses at home in the Annapolis Valley where they live, we will be building a stand-alone university. That money is given to Acadia University so they can work at building this with the confidence to know that government supports them as they are supporting us in trying to get more nurses into the workforce.

Additionally, \$58.9 million was given to Cape Breton University. I would like to think that Cape Breton Islanders would be very happy to think that this campus will train 30 new doctors every year. This additional appropriation and collaboration with Dalhousie University's Faculty of Medicine - this investment also includes \$49 million for the medical sciences building and related infrastructure. This is very important. It's attracting individuals to be able to train in their home community, where they then will be able to carry on a practice at home with the constituents whom they've grown with, whom they've gone to school with, in their own community.

I think this investment - if I asked constituents in there, if I represented them, I would think that they would welcome the investments in Cape Breton University. It's a top, reputable university. Cape Breton would also be able to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Faculty of Medicine to establish this new medical campus.

We also talk about the \$50 million to EfficiencyOne to address energy poverty. We talk about energy poverty here in the Chamber as well, Speaker. The goal for this program was to invest in aging buildings so that they can increase their efficiency so that we are reducing our carbon footprint. The programs are helping low-income homeowners and renters save over \$260 million on their energy bills. Twenty-five per cent of Nova Scotia's greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to energy efficiency programs.



When we do a quarterly forecast update, any additional appropriations that are made are posted on the internet. The media are invited to the technical briefings under strict and most efficient criticism of the media. Ministers often take questions at these technical briefings, and Opposition are also presented and able to make comments and understand better what the appropriations were and what they were set up and instructed to do.

Government needs to act. We are elected to act and be responsive to the needs of Nova Scotians. We need to make sure that the revenue is there so that we can make the health care transformation that we were elected to do. We campaigned that we would be spending money and investing in Nova Scotians. After eight years of neglect, it was a breath of fresh air to see a government that actually had faith in our health care professionals, that is trying to build up our health care professionals, trying to build up and empower our paramedics, to add to the workforce, to make them feel appreciated.

[3:30 p.m.]

Our extra appropriations in housing infrastructure - I can speak to extra appropriations there that benefited my community for infrastructure projects that the municipality had on their books. We don't want to hold municipalities back, so when the need arose to meet infrastructure demands to keep up to the housing demands, they have to go in a balanced approach. You cannot keep on building up the housing that we need - the Opposition does not deny that we need - without making extra investments as necessary to make sure that we're giving the municipalities what they need.

In our short time as government, we've had three extreme weather events - tragic ones, indeed. In particular, in my community that was hit so hard, do you think that the people impacted by the flood in my community - when the MLA from Kings South asked me to ask my constituents - should government not have reacted? Should we have waited longer to help those victims who were displaced from the floods? I would like to think they actually felt that we didn't move fast enough.

We had that funding in place in a matter of days and, as we agiled and went through the process of the disaster financial relief, it came to light - and the Minister of Agriculture has been a strong advocate and support for my community - that farmers were not necessarily fitting their criteria. His department heard from agriculture that some things were not being covered by the set parameters of disaster financial, so they came out with an extra appropriation of the Season Response Program.

My inbox blew up. Ninety-seven agricultural farmers in my community are benefiting from this program that was a response to the need that we heard. We are a government that listens.

Nothing has changed. We follow the same legislative process that the NDP followed, that they had enacted in 2010. We are following the same process that the Liberal

government followed for the past eight years. They didn't seem to have a problem with that process then and had ample opportunity to change that process at that time if they saw fit.

The goal of this is not - so many notes here. What is the message that we are trying to send to Nova Scotians? We are trying to send Nova Scotians the message that we are a responsive government. We tabled a budget that we are in the midst of going through, a very important budget, but we do a quarterly forecast for a reason. If we see things come up within that budget time frame that could be well-invested into things that can stand in the future, like these stand-alone medical schools, a stand-alone nursing school - we have these investments in our community and our youth, and it's inspiring to hear people say, Wow, I didn't know Acadia University is going to be a place where I could take my nursing degree. I don't want to come in to Dalhousie University; I don't want to come into the city. I want to be home in my community so that I can work in my community, I can continue to contribute in my community. These are very critical investments.

Also, I don't believe the individuals who are benefiting from the \$7 million that was an extra appropriation - Oxford Community Centre Association for community fund. This is going to mean that the community in Oxford will have a walking track, a gymnasium, a meeting space, a community room, child care, a library, commercial rental spaces, and a full-service kitchen. I can't understand how that is not an important investment. I can understand how that \$7 million, invested in that community, is going to mean a lot to that community. Speaker, I would say that if we were to ask that community how they feel about that, I would say they are pretty happy about that investment.

I do believe that our government will continue to work and be responsive. We are going to keep our heads down and work. We are a government that rolls our sleeves up, gets the job done, and we will continue to do that. If tabling with the Clerks when the House is not in session is still tabling, the information is there.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to speak for a couple of moments on this bill. I do want to thank my colleagues from around the room who have contributed to this debate and just make a few comments about this amendment to the Finance Act.

The member opposite in the PC caucus talked about her government being a breath of fresh air. Do you know what I think would be a breath of fresh air, Speaker? When a caucus that is in opposition and has a bunch of things to say about something, and then when they get into government, does the stuff they said they were going to do, as opposed to doing the opposite.

I'll give you an example. When that government was in Opposition, all they talked about was transparency. Look, I was no fan of the government of the day. As you know, I

was also in Opposition. I had lots of things to say. But boy oh boy, the one thing I was looking forward to was better transparency and accountability for the people of this province when that government was elected, and that has not happened. It has not happened.

When the member across talks about all of the spending and all of the people who, because of this bill, would not have received the excellent investment, it's just simply untrue. It's a misunderstanding of this bill, so I just want to set the record straight.

All that this bill would do is amend the Finance Act so that there was a measure of public accountability - more than there is now - when there are additional appropriations. It says nothing about how much to spend in additional appropriations. It says nothing about where to spend that money. It says nothing about emergency situations. It says nothing about the rink down the road, or the wildfire, or the flood, or the brand new nursing school.

What it says is: Let's just bring us together and have one little bit of accountability. Explain to us - not even before the spending happens, Speaker. Go ahead. Spend it. Get rid of it. Put it out the door. Make sure that those emergencies have the funding that they need, and the people dealing with them have the funding that they need. Just at some point, bring us back together and let us vote on those appropriations. That's all it says. Lots of other provinces do it.

I just want to say one other thing about the fact that this is an amendment to a bill that came in, or amendments to a bill that was amended in 2010 when the NDP was in government. It's true. We're not hiding that fact. The Auditor General has pointed out that since the NDP was in government, the additional appropriations have gone up and up and up, and auditors general after the NDP and during the NDP government didn't have any problems with the way it was happening, because it wasn't that much money. But in the last several years, the amount of money that has been spent in additional appropriations has become shocking - shockingly large. So the Auditor General in her role is saying, I think this is getting out of hand now, and we should change it.

That's what we're trying to do here. We're trying to accept a recommendation of the Auditor General, who was appointed to keep us in line and accountable to the people of Nova Scotia.

I think I won't say too much more because I know we want to get on with talking about some other bills. But I just want to say, to close - and the Auditor General pointed this out - that the refusal to submit hundreds of millions of dollars to legislative oversight has led to bad value for Nova Scotians. Not in all of the spending that's happened, but certainly we've seen other Auditor General reports that have talked about bad value for money, or decisions made without even knowing what the value for money is. We still don't know, with a lot of spending this government has done, whether it's good value or bad value, because (a) we don't know about it, and (b) the jury's out.

With those few words, Speaker, I'd like to thank my colleagues for the scintillating - is that the right word? - debate, and move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 422.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 422.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 434.

**Bill No. 434 - Coastal Protection Act (amended).**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I'm pleased to move second reading, and to speak to Bill No. 434.

What I have here is an Act. Its title is: An Act to Amend Chapter 3 of the Acts of 2019, the Coastal Protection Act Respecting Regulations. It's an Act that was introduced here earlier this week by the leader of our party.

Here I have another Act. This is the original 2019 Coastal Protection Act, which is mirrored in the new NDP Act that we're debating now in every respect but one: that the NDP 2024 version, which we're debating now, of the Coastal Protection Act, contains a provision that the Act cannot be left unproclaimed, and must come into effect this June. I will table these.

Both of them, I want to say in tabling them, importantly should be recognized as what they are. They are acts for this House. That is, they're mechanisms by which governments or governments in waiting set out how they would respond to the most serious challenges that are before those they serve, with legislation that would regulate, shape and govern how we live together and with one another, and with the environment. That is what an Act is. That's what makes it a matter of such significance and importance.

Now, I want to present something else and table it. What I want to present now is not an Act. What I want to present and table now is, rather, a bookmark. Now, this bookmark has a title: "Our coast. Our future." This marvelous tome of a bookmark was published this month by the Government of Nova Scotia. This bookmark, which I'm also going to table, is being distributed in tandem with a large print pamphlet entitled *Safeguarding Your Coastal Property*, which the government calls a guide.

Speaker, this is the government which took the Coastal Protection Act - of which we in Nova Scotia were so proud, and which every MLA in the province was glad to stand and support when it was passed here in 2019, and which made us the only province in Canada with an Environmental Protection Act specifically focused on the protection of the coast - this is the government that took that Act, the 2019 Coastal Protection Act, and diminished it, and shrank it, and watered it down to a bookmark.

I want to be clear that this abandonment of the Coastal Protection Act, its diminishment by the government from a bill to a bookmark, is a tale of Progressive Conservative backtracking, bailing and betrayal. It's a tale of backtracking, bailing, and betrayal out of which the government has demonstrated themselves to be people whose word is not worth the bookmark on which it's printed. One's word makes a difference.

So on September 29, 2022, the Environment Minister says, "the long-awaited Coastal Protection Act is months away from coming into force." He told reporters that "the regulations are almost complete, and the plan is to have them before Cabinet early in the new year." He said "it's his goal to have the law enacted in the first half of 2023."

It was not long, however, before the people of the province learned that this was not a commitment that they could take to the bank. In March 2023, having earlier committed to proclaiming the Act in the first part of that year, the minister announced that despite the fact that two extensive public consultations had already been completed, the minister announced that the government would be pressing pause on the Coastal Protection Act in favour of an additional round of consultation.

Then last June, the minister announced that the commitment to a first half of 2023 proclamation deadline had been abandoned, and the matter was now without a timeline. Then by the end of last Summer, in August, the minister announced that the government was no longer committed to proclaiming the Act before the end of their mandate in 2025, and that the regulations for the Coastal Protection Act would be delayed until at least that time.

Then in January this year, the minister reiterated that the Act would not come into effect until after the next election. Then, on the eve of the opening of this session of the House, on February 26<sup>th</sup>, the government announced that the Coastal Protection Act was no more - that the government would not proclaim it; that the government would not enact it as they had committed. Let's be clear - no Act. There would be no regulations. That is to say that there would be no law, but rather in the place of an Act and regulations and law, there would be a plan. There would be a guide. Let's be clear: There would be nothing left of the Coastal Protection Act but a bookmark.

I want to say it does not improve public confidence in the integrity of public office when a government crosses the line to a place where it is untroubled by the abandonment of its commitments, nor is the outcome of this often something that's very pretty. It was,

in my own view, rather unseemly and even oddly pathetic to watch the Minister of Environment and Climate Change attempt to argue that the poor response rate on his final Coastal Protection Act survey somehow corroborated his judgement that coastal protection regulation is not something that the Nova Scotia public wants.

In the biblical tradition, there is a saying that true coins can be told from false ones by the ring. The minister's ring here is hollow - empty - as befits a contortion of logic being summoned in support of something that is simply silly.

[3:45 p.m.]

Speaking of the integrity of democratic institutions, I think there are a great many people who have heard this sad story of the Coastal Protection Act that went through first, second, and third readings in the House of Assembly; that was passed unanimously by every party in the House; that received Royal Assent from the Lieutenant Governor and then did not become law because the government said, in effect, "No, we don't want to do that." There are a great many people who, hearing this, very reasonably have said, "Can they actually get away with that?" The highly unsatisfactory answer is that in Nova Scotia, yes - legally at least - they can.

Most people are not aware that there is a final step to a bill becoming law - proclamation by the Cabinet - and that some bills like the Coastal Protection Act have clauses written into them that forestall proclamation until the completion of regulations, thus enabling a government that wants to keep a bill that has been passed by the people's representatives indefinitely from being enacted into law. This is exactly what the government has done with the Coastal Protection Act.

The effect of the bill that we are debating now - the 2024 NDP Coastal Protection Act as it's before us - is that it would remove that provision from the 2019 bill, thereby making it impossible to nullify in coastal protection what has been passed by a majority of the people's representatives in the province.

Climate change and coastal protection are not matters that call for a bookmark. They are matters that call out for a bill. Hurricanes, fire, floods, drought, sea levels set to rise three feet before this century's conclusion, an utterly coastal province which is fundamentally connected - as Marla MacLeod of the Ecology Action Centre put it at the EAC's demonstration against delays in this legislation last Fall - an utterly coastal province whose survival, she said, is "fundamentally connected to the survival of critical ecosystems like wetlands, old growth forests, and dunes. We must protect what is left of these living systems because they are what protect us."

The 2019 passage of the Coastal Protection Act embodied a recognition that these are matters of such significance to the people of Nova Scotia that they cannot be left to the vagaries of private property developers and owners. The 2019 passage, unanimously, of

the Coastal Protection Act embodied a recognition that these are matters of such significance to the people of Nova Scotia that they cannot be left to the inevitably uneven capacities of various municipalities. The 2019 passage of the Coastal Protection Act embodied a recognition that these are matters of such significance to the people of our province that they must rather be dealt with at the level of the politics of the people of the province. So the legislation that is before us would return coastal protection in Nova Scotia from the status of a bookmark to a status of a bill here in the House of Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the member for Timberlea-Prospect, I ask the member for Halifax Chebucto to retract the statement in regard to being a “hollow minister.” I feel it was unparliamentary to be attacking someone’s character. So, if you could please retract that and rephrase it, that would be lovely.

AN HON. MEMBER: He didn’t say that.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I can’t give you the chapter and verse, but I think it is the case that the phrase “true coins can be told from false ones” is from the Bible.

THE SPEAKER: That is not what I am speaking about. I’m asking you to retract your statement that is suggesting that the minister is hollow. If you would like to quote the Bible, or verses, for your whole 15 minutes, please do so, but please do not attack the character of any individual in this room. It doesn’t matter who they are. I ask you to please retract that statement.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I have the statement, I think as exact, here. I’m quite certain I have not said that the minister was hollow. I believe what I have said, certainly what I intended to say, is that the ring of the minister’s statement is hollow. Is that also out of order?

THE SPEAKER: By stating that you technically have retracted your statement because you are rephrasing it and phrasing it at the point where the ring - excuse me. (Interruption) I’m sitting up here, paying close attention. I had a two-minute conversation with the Clerk. What I’m hearing is that you are retracting that statement, and I’m going to recognize you for you to repeat that you are retracting the statement of calling the minister “hollow.”

The honourable minister for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, before I speak, would you wish to consult with the Clerk more?

THE SPEAKER: I am going to consult Hansard, although the member has stated that is not what he said, and this will be dealt with at a later date.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I'm happy to put my support behind this bill. It mirrors a bill that, as the member for Halifax Chebucto rightly pointed out, was originally presented by the Liberal government in 2019. Subsequently, just last Fall, I presented a similar bill that put the provision in to enact the bill with the actual date. I think it was January that just passed. This is another opportunity for the government to rethink their misguided decision to scrap a bill that was once supported by all members of this House - all three parties. That doesn't always happen with bills that are brought forward to the House, especially when it has to do with regulating private land and protecting the environment.

I'm really saddened to see the work of so many Nova Scotians who have really poured their passion, their heart, and their training into developing the regulations for the bill. I'm thinking of John Somers, who was solely dedicated to this when he was under the employment of - going back to when I was Environment Minister in 2017, when we launched consultations to look at how we'd present the bill that was presented by my former colleague Margaret Miller. After that, we looked to develop regulations through former minister Gordon Wilson and then, before the current government, my colleague from Kings South.

There are a lot of people from a leadership position - even before we were in government, the Ecology Action Centre and academics were talking about the need to protect our coastline. Nancy Anningson comes to mind for the work she was doing. I believe she's still with the EAC. Those are the people I'm thinking with that - I believe discredits a lot of the work they did, all the LiDAR work, and all the research with academics to look at how we would designate a coastal protection zone in our province, where the science says it is more sensitive to erosion and to sea level rise.

It's great that we're past the point to debate that climate change is happening. I certainly hear from the party opposite more often that they believe in climate change. That didn't seem to be the case when I first entered this Chamber, but I'm not going to exaggerate that point. What I will say is that this is a bad choice for the government to make, for many reasons. First, it will impact the environment. I think that's the primary reason.

Most members ought to recognize that often - not always but often - the most sensitive ecosystems we have in our province are within proximity of the coastline and of the actual coastal protection zone we are trying to identify here. We are talking about habitat for species at risk - salt marshes, dunes - and we all represent areas that, if they're not on the coastline, are within an hour of a coastline. That's what makes Nova Scotia so special: roughly 13,000 kilometres of area that is mostly privately owned.



I hear different arguments about downloading to the municipalities. That seems to be one argument. The other argument is that property owners know their property best. That was in the introduction of the minister's statement in Estimates. If that is really the case, then, as I said in Question Period, why bother with permitting for septic systems? Why bother with permitting for even the building itself? The reason why we do that is because governments have an obligation - an actual judicial responsibility - to the collective, to the neighbours, and to the neighbours' neighbours.

[4:00 p.m.]

We are here to represent the public good, not to represent a landowner who wants to subvert the value of a property at the expense of others. It's the same concept. I mean, that's what we are doing in this House, isn't it? Creating laws against smoking in bars, and things like that, that impact our neighbours? That is the first reason why I am against scrapping the Act in favour of this bill. I favour a regulated coastline that protects the coastline. The government, with this action, favours an unregulated coastline.

The second reason is the safety of those who are going to continue to build on the coastline. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing referenced this today in Question Period. We already have buildings going up right up to the high-water mark. Isn't that the point that we want to stop people from making these decisions? Yes, there are some educational tools that the government is trying to mitigate the damage with: bookmarks, radio ads, social media. They are certainly using government resources to get the word out, and some of that is good information. But as the experts have said when the decision was made: The first step is prevention; the second step is education.

We had all kinds of opportunities and regulations to allow flexibility, to allow for professionals, surveyors, engineers to look at the actual circumstances on the ground and make an exception, if it is safe, for someone to build. The Province is now saying to property owners that they know themselves what to do on their property better than an engineer, better than a climate scientist who have studied this their whole life. We are talking about decades of work looking at our coastline in this province.

As experts have pointed out when this Act passed, some of the work that was going on in municipalities to look at bylaws for setbacks, horizontal and vertical, stopped because they said finally the Province is taking a leadership role and having consistency so that some of these, especially small municipalities that don't have lots of planning staff like HRM, who don't have engineers on their staff to figure out where to set those setbacks - that is why 13 municipalities alone have written letters specifically. We are not talking about downtown Halifax. We are talking about Bridgewater, Clarks Harbour, Digby, Kentville, Lunenburg, Chester, Kings County, Trenton, West Hants, Queens County, Pictou County, and probably more. That is what I'm aware of.

Virtually all the associations that have a stake in the future of our province, whether it is the environment, planning, economic development, like the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia, have said this is a poor decision and to proclaim the Act. The government still has time to either pass this bill or simply put the regulations forward that are ready to go. Have the exemptions - people have their permits already. There is a reasonable, pragmatic way to approach this.

Third reason: public access. Allowing people to build right up to the high-water mark is simply taking away access that people - Nova Scotians and our tourists - have a right to. We're not only talking about recreation. We are talking about our economic interests, fishing, agriculture, forestry, our traditional sectors that we should all be supporting. Because in Nova Scotia we have a tremendous percentage of private land. Three-quarters of our land is private, but even higher - 85 or 90 per cent of those 13,000 kilometres - of the coastline of our province is in private hands.

By not proclaiming this Act with regulations, the government is saying: If your municipality isn't enacting a bylaw, you have free rein to build whatever you want. There are municipalities that don't have a lot of planning around this. That's why our government brought in minimum planning standards, so that people can't just build hotels or slaughterhouses or whatever they want, commercial enterprises in residential areas and so on. Things that may harm the environment, that may harm their neighbours. That is the fourth reason that I am against taking away this Act and not proclaiming it. It's the impact of your neighbours. There are so many opportunities in this bill to make it flexible to enact.

The fifth reason was the economy. This will hurt our economy. It will hurt our tourism sector, our traditional sectors. It gives inconsistency across the province. It will actually drive up insurance rates for our businesses, small businesses. It will drive up insurance rates for our residential communities. We're seeing year after year - almost annually now - a disaster in our province that's related to climate: hurricanes, forest fires. In fact, even when I was Minister of Environment and Climate Change, we didn't have something that was called the hurricane season. We had hurricanes come, but now it's every year. We're going into hurricane season.

The sixth reason I'm against scrapping the Act - and in favour of this Act - is the cost to government. This is the reason why - I recall this - former Premier Stephen McNeil was supportive of this Act. He saw the climate disaster funding that we were spending. Within the first year or so of government, we were seeing droughts in the South Shore simultaneously with floods up in Cape Breton. Government had to be there to support. Of course we were there to support - providing water, working with the Emergency Management Office, working with municipal governments.

By not proclaiming the Act, they are driving up the cost. I couldn't get an estimate from the Department of Environment and Climate Change on what the cost is for things like dealing with polar vortex. The Minister of Agriculture talked about many examples -

fires. Municipal costs are going to be going up because of this. Federal government costs are going to be going up because of this.

Our coastline needs to be able to adapt and be resilient, not allow for unprecedented building of armour stone for multi-millionaires across the whole province. This has happened in other jurisdictions. Our coastline is not for those specific private landowners. They have a right to build in a safe area, with setbacks that are based on science that we can all agree on, and not the laissez-faire approach that we've seen - which I think has elements of an ideology that's on the opposite side of the House - to leave them alone.

In fact, that's what the minister said when he conducted a deeply flawed public engagement process where he thought that a lack of participation equalled a lack of interest. That flies in the face of fundamental public engagement practices. I don't buy it, and if the minister really believes that to be the case, he still has time before the House session ends to show the House what people actually had to say.

We've asked for disclosure of what has been revealed in consultation. We've yet to hear about any organization that wanted this to happen. The only people he has said that he has had discussions with who had challenges or problems with defining and regulating the coastline are government members. I haven't heard any of the government members speak to why they're against protecting the coastline, but here's an opportunity. We have a bill before the House where they can rise in their place and have the courage to say why the conservative, laissez-faire approach is better in tackling the climate crisis and our coastline, as opposed to having responsibility, taking leadership, and actually doing something that fights the climate crisis, that keeps people safe, that keeps insurance rates from continuing to climb, that protects the public purse and all three orders of government and that respects the work of climate scientists, Indigenous leaders, and everyone who was involved over the last few years - if not decades - on this critical landmark piece of legislation that, at the time, had all-party support.

Again, I support the bill. I look forward to my colleagues telling me their thoughts.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, we have received the wording from Hansard. It is here that you were not calling the minister - you were calling his words - hollow, empty, and whatnot. Therefore the matter is ended.

The honourable member for Richmond.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: I'm pleased to stand here today and say a few words with respect to Bill No. 434, the Coastal Protection Act. Like Nova Scotians, our government loves our coast and is committed to protecting it, and that is exactly what we are doing. Contrary to the narrative that some are putting forth, we have not abandoned coastal protection. We are moving forward with a strong, well-researched plan - *The Future of Nova Scotia's Coastline: A plan to protect people, homes and nature from climate*

*change* - that will protect our coastline and will change how and where we build along the coast. The how may have changed, but the goal remains the same.

Nova Scotia is a coastal province, and our government, like all Nova Scotians, cares deeply about our coast. Like many of you here, I grew up in rural Nova Scotia, in a community that was and is still very much connected to the coast. I'm a 16<sup>th</sup>-generation Acadian here in Nova Scotia, and my ancestors have been living by the coast for that many years. I have very fond memories of my childhood with respect to living by the coast and swimming at the beaches - Dundee, Pondville, and even down in Inverness. Great beaches. We were cod jigging in Bras d'Or Lake or taking part in events in our provincial parks, which are all coastal parks in Richmond County.

Certainly, fishing has been a way of life for centuries in our communities. Our communities were and continue to be built along the coast because of that connection to the water. We all want our beaches, dunes, coastal trails, and coastlines to be protected. They are all invaluable parts of our province's natural and cultural heritage and contribute so much to our quality of life and well-being.

The change in climate means, however, that we need to rethink how and where we live and build along the coast. Nova Scotians know this. They have lived by the ocean for generations. Coastal property owners and coastal municipalities know the local landscape and their properties best. We know that Nova Scotians care about their communities, their properties, and the province and will do the right thing when they have the right information and are empowered, trusted, and accountable for their actions.

Nova Scotians have a personal stake to do this right. They have a personal stake to protect their homes and their investments. Our municipal leadership is key. They know their communities best and how to move forward with working with residents through zoning, bylaws, and building permits.

As a former councillor for the Town of Port Hawkesbury and as former chair of the Eastern District Planning Commission, I have a bit of insight into the skills and expertise that lie within our planning commission to help deal with coastal protection, and the role that municipal planning strategies and zoning bylaws have in the development of our rural coastal communities.

Municipalities have long been leaders in climate change adaptation and mitigation and are the level of government with existing jurisdiction for building. Our plan leverages their expertise and existing jurisdictional authorities. For example, municipalities have jurisdiction over the processes that regulate building and community planning. These include land use planning and zoning and the building permit process.

The Province will work hand-in-hand with municipalities every step of the way. The Province will continue to support municipalities by investing more in flood-line

mapping programs to provide property owners and municipalities with information on flooding risks. We launched the climate plan for Nova Scotia. We've allocated \$8.6 million for flood-line mapping. The Department of Environment and Climate Change is working on a province-wide erosion risk assessment that municipalities can use in their zoning and planning work.

[4:15 p.m.]

This past year, the Department of Environment and Climate Change also hired a flood management and adaptation lead to help communities and municipalities adapt to climate change, and it's now in the process of hiring a stormwater engineer to further support municipalities and communities in their work to adapt to climate change and to create climate-resilient communities.

There are examples of municipalities leading the way in coastal protection in Nova Scotia already, Speaker. The Municipality of the County of Guysborough is an example of amazing municipal leadership in Nova Scotia. They feel they are ahead of the game when it comes to protecting the hundreds of kilometres of coastline within their jurisdiction. Guysborough has had a climate adaptation plan in place for at least eight years, including a focus on coastal protection.

Speaker, our plan also empowers coastal property owners to make more informed decisions about their properties. We are giving them the tools and resources to help them make those informed decisions to safeguard their properties from erosion, flooding, and rising sea levels.

Not every coastal property will be impacted in the same way by climate change. There are many variables that come into play, such as soil type, elevation, and location of the property. These new tools and resources will help people know what their potential risks are. The online mapping tool is a great example of a resource that will help people make informed decisions on what is best for their investment well into the future.

Our plan also considers existing homes and their property owners' needs. Our plan is meant to help all coastal property owners, not just people who are building. Speaker, private homes and cottages do not exist in isolation; they are part of the community. The reality is that municipalities have jurisdiction on how communities are planned and zoned, and for building permits. Our plan calls on municipalities to integrate new data and tools into how coastal communities are planned, zoned, and built, with climate resilience top of mind. I would ask that all Nova Scotians read the plan with an open mind.

Our government knows that Nova Scotians are concerned about climate change and are feeling its impacts. MLAs are also people, and we are equally concerned about climate change and how it's impacting our communities and where we live. That is why we've been taking strong, quick action to help Nova Scotians adapt to its impacts. For example,

we developed Nova Scotia's first fully funded climate plan, which has 68 actions to grow the clean economy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support coastal protection, and transition to renewable energy that helps Nova Scotians save on their energy bills and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

We legislated greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets to be at least 53 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050. We legislated a goal to transition away from fossil fuel-generated electricity to clean, renewable energy and have implemented the out-based pricing system to hold the electricity sector and large industry accountable for reducing their emissions.

Together these policies will reduce electricity sector emissions by 85 per cent to 90 per cent by 2030. Once the Clean Power Plan is fully implemented, Nova Scotia will be a North American leader in emissions reduction from the electricity sector.

We legislated a target to protect 20 per cent of our province's land and water by 2030. We completed the largest-ever procurement for renewable energy in the province, resulting in five wind projects that when completed will result in 70 per cent of our electricity coming from renewable resources. Now we have a coastal plan to address specific concerns related to the impact of climate change on our coast.

Speaker, there are many ways we can protect Nova Scotia's coastlines; legislation is not the only approach. We are confident that our plan will empower action, the action that is needed. We also believe that Nova Scotians with the right information will make the right decisions. We also believe that the response to climate change will be most effective when everyone has accountability and plays a role in responding to the challenge. Together, all Nova Scotians have a role to address climate change and build green, climate-resilient communities where everyone has the best chance to achieve their full potential. That includes our coastal communities.

Our government believes that rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to legislation, the best and most effective way to protect our coast and the homes and communities along it is to work with Nova Scotians - property owners, communities, and municipalities - to determine what is best for each unique part of our coastline.

As I said earlier, coastal property owners in municipalities know their communities best, and their leadership will be most effective in making sure our coastline is safeguarded from climate change. As Nova Scotians, our government shares the sense of personal responsibility and collective pride in doing what is right, whether it's protecting the coastline or supporting a neighbour.

With the short time I have left, I want to quickly talk about the interactions I've had over the past two-plus years with respect to coastal protection in Nova Scotia. Richmond County is likely one of the municipalities that's most surrounded by water. We are

connected to the Bras d'Or Lakes to the west, and to the Atlantic Ocean to the east and south.

As I said previously, our ancestors have been living here on the coast for centuries, with a connection to the water being a key driver for their way of life. Fishing has been a staple in the growth of our communities for centuries, and for the last number of years the water has been an important connection for industry in the Strait of Canso and Point Tupper in particular. The water is likely to be an important connection in our region for the green hydrogen sector that we are seeing being developed here in our region.

In saying all that, my experience as a rural coastal MLA with respect to coastal protection has been quite different from what we've heard from the Opposition, and maybe in the media. Many of the communities in Richmond are right on the coast. In my riding of Richmond, I did not hear anything about coastal protection on the campaign trail. It was not something that was top of mind with residents, many of whom live or own property right on the coast.

As a new MLA, I did not know anything about the Coastal Protection Act until a few months into our first year in government. It started with just a few phone calls from several residents expressing their concern. They had just heard about a law that we, as government, were bringing forward that would impact their ability to build on their property that they shared, and they were never consulted on that law.

When I dug a bit deeper, I reviewed the bill and looked at the proposed regulations, and while I understand the thoughts behind the bill - and I will say, there were some very good points to the bill in proposed regulations - it also seemed a bit heavy-handed. It was obvious it had the potential to impact many coastal landowners, many of whom were completely unaware of these potential changes coming to them.

I started to receive multiple calls from concerned residents about the Coastal Protection Act. At first, I was unsure about where these were coming from. I came to find out that we had an individual in the community who, through their professional work, was being informed about the Act and the proposed regulations and was informing residents in the area with whom they interacted about these proposed regulations and how they could impact coastal property owners.

This was the first time that these residents and coastal property owners had heard about the Act, and yet they were the ones who would be most impacted by these decisions. Imagine working hard to set yourself up financially to be able to buy a piece of land, and then to finally build on that piece of property on the water that you purchased, only to find out that your property may no longer be suited to build on, and that it may be useless to you, and worse yet, you're not able to sell it because it's no longer valuable in the eyes of everyone else.

All this came through - through no fault of their own - based on an Act that, for some, would come into effect well after you purchased and owned the piece of land. Residents were very concerned, and they were only hearing about this law two to three years after it was passed, and after apparent in-depth consultation had happened across the province. By the way, that happened during COVID and online, and which they knew nothing about.

People were concerned - kind of similar to the Biodiversity Act that was not enacted - that this was about Halifax telling rural Nova Scotians what they could do with their property. When I would further engage with people who were reaching out with concerns about the Act and proposed regulations, the message that I heard most often was: I'm all for protecting our beautiful coastline here in Nova Scotia, but it's also very important for me as an owner of a coastal property to have some say in how and where I can build on my land.

Many also agreed that having access to information like the online mapping tool would be very helpful in them making better informed decisions about where to build on their land. For many, they have been living on or near the coast for many years and have seen the coastal changes that are happening. They want to make the right decisions with respect to where they build, to protect their investment, and to live in a way that supports our coastlines for generations to come.

I can honestly say that I have received dozens of calls and emails from residents and property owners in Richmond County. I can confidently say that I have not had one person in Richmond County reach out to me to encourage me to support enacting the Coastal Protection Act.

I know what I'm stating here seems to be opposite of what we're hearing from the Opposition. I want to make sure that people know that there are differences of opinion and that our plan aims to find that strong balance that I believe people want. People who have lived on the coast all their lives want to ensure that our coastlines are there for future generations to enjoy.

With that, Speaker, I'll have a seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I listened with interest to the comments of my colleagues. I want to just take a few moments and speak to this bill.

I want to address, in particular, the comments that we heard from the member for Richmond. I don't know if the member is aware, or if he made his constituents aware, but the Coastal Protection Act is enabling legislation. All of the contents of what property owners would, in fact, be able to do would be created by regulation. The idea that this Act



itself was somehow going to create a huge burden, I think, is actually a failure in communication by the PC government to the people of Nova Scotia.

I think that it's really important that we understand that this Act includes measures that protect all Nova Scotians from the impact of climate change. I would say that people didn't hear about this on the campaign trail because the bill had passed. Nobody thought it was an issue because it was a piece of legislation that had passed, which is why we introduced another piece of legislation saying that if you pass a bill, you actually have to proclaim it or you have to bring it back and repeal it. You can't just pass a bill and then sit on it forever. This isn't the only bill that's happened to, of course.

It is compelling, what the member has brought forward, but I also think that it's very clear from what we've heard from government members - and also what we've heard from the radio ads that have started airing - that government believes that this is an issue for coastal property owners. We believe that this is an issue for all Nova Scotians. I think if you call this an issue for coastal property owners, you deny the coastal character of our entire province.

You shouldn't only care about the coast, or be able to understand the coast, or be able to advocate for coastal protection, if you own a piece of property on the coast. I think that notion is anathema to most Nova Scotians. I don't think most Nova Scotians think that way. I'm not saying the member said that. I'm saying that this is my characterization of what I hear from government - that this is an issue for coastal property owners.

The radio ad says, "We have created guidelines for coastal property owners." What we are saying is, in the words of my colleague, the member for Timberlea-Prospect: This is an issue for our neighbours, and our neighbour's neighbours, and our neighbour's neighbour's neighbours, and anyone who identifies as a Nova Scotian. All Nova Scotians identify as coastal people.

I just want to highlight most of what has already been said. I think that the issue is that we see the government's decision not to pass this bill as an abdication of responsibility. This is no longer coastal protection. It's coastal suggestion. We think that coastal suggestion is insufficient.

This, as has been said, is why we are here. We are here to pass laws for the public good. That is what Joseph Howe brought into this building and into that room next door to us. That is what we are here to uphold: the public good. The protection of our coast - which we no longer have through a failure to pass this Act - is absolutely, 100 per cent a piece of legislation that is in the public good. Now we no longer have it.

Aside from what we just heard from the member for Richmond, until today I actually hadn't heard a government member or anyone give any example - other than an allusion to government members - of someone who had said: We don't want this passed.

We have that now in the record today, but I would also like to add into the record the reaction to the government's decision not to pass the bill that was originally introduced: The EAC calls the Nova Scotia government's coastal plan "a failure of leadership"; Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities wants province to explain new plan; Something Rotten in the Province of Nova Scotia; Government Business - The Halman Theorem; Commentary - 'Underwriting' coastal protection; Thinking Out Loud with Sheldon MacLeod: Coastal protection by "instinct and better judgment"; Voice of the People - Nova Scotia Government gets an F on coastal protection; Is Nova Scotia's Coastline About to Change Forever?; Nova Scotia Government Downloads Coastal Management; and Pictou County expresses disappointment in scrapping of Coastal Protection Act.

[4:30 p.m.]

We have already talked about the clever way we have interpreted the survey results: Nova Scotia Environment minister says silence on Coastal Protection Act survey speaks volumes - I will leave that for people to understand; The Houston government thinks we can use an app to ward off storm damage and sea level rise individually. We can't; Nova Scotia's Coastal Protection Act dead in the water; Residents dealing with erosion react to N.S. abandonment of Coastal Protection Act; New N.S. act shifts responsibility to homeowners, municipalities; Property owners, researcher critical of N.S. approach to coastal protection; Coastal Protection Act set adrift by Tories; Government Business - Slapstick Consultation; Commentary - Urging Coastal Rethink; and Coastal Protection Act meets Hogan Court.

That is a good place for me to segue into what will be my final comment on this. This is really an issue where, once again, we have a huge number of people who are in favour of this bill. We have a bill that passed with all-party support, and we have government reversing decision with almost no explanation, other than a few anecdotal items that have been offered to us today in response to our Opposition bill.

Who is the government listening to, and who are they making decisions for? It's not all the residents, and it's not the municipalities. The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg is a great example of a municipality that wanted this legislation, pushed for it, and when it didn't come, did the work themselves. They were about to pass the Coastal Protection Act measures municipally when this came up. Interestingly, their numbers are different than the numbers in this coastal action plan, and those numbers are now being called into question.

That leads me to the final question, which is: Where is this government getting its scientific data? We do not have the underlying data. We know that when we go through the government's own web site, sea levels are rising in Nova Scotia and many coastal areas are experiencing flooding from storm surges. Why is this government's data so different than the data from the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg? They are transparent about their data set. Can this government do the same?

We are in an entire legislative process that is shrouded in mystery. We have bills that are passed with all-party support that don't get passed. We have the Premier promising tons of legislation on the Friday before March break, and we have three pieces, one of which is actually 15, but you know. I can't really figure out what we are doing here. We want the government to pass this bill. This is why we are bringing it again. We need to take the guesswork out of coastal protection. We need coastal protection, not coastal suggestion.

Everyone has spoken to this so loudly. Of course there will be some dissenting voices, but this isn't about individual property owners. This is about all Nova Scotians. This is about our children's right to be able to access the coast of our province and about protecting it for future generations. We give this government a failing grade on their coastal action plan in terms of having done that.

I hope, for the future of our province and the future of our coasts, that this government will change their approach. With that I move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 434.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 343.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable New Democratic Party House Leader.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 144.

**Bill No. 144 - Non-disclosure Agreements Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'd like to move second reading of Bill No. 144. It's Groundhog Day in here today. This is a piece of legislation and a policy direction that we, in the NDP, have been fighting for for years in this Legislature and that we will continue to fight for because we believe that it is so important.

Most of what we have to say has been said but I'm not sure anyone is listening so we're going to say it again. The legislation that we have brought forward today is based on model legislation. It has been in force in P.E.I., it is in force in some version in 17 states, it was passed federally in Ireland, and we think it's a bill whose time has come here in Nova Scotia.

In almost every case, when this bill has passed through a legislature, it is as a result of public outcry when abuse is discovered. We've had that public outcry here, but we have

not passed the bill. A Canada-wide petition to restrict NDAs has surpassed 15,000 signatures. I'll table that. The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour and its member unions, which represent 70,000 workers across the province, recently voted in favour of actively pushing this government to pass legislation to restrict the use of NDAs.

The Canadian Bar Association passed a resolution, with 94 per cent of lawyers supporting, to push for NDAs to be banned in cases of abuse, harassment, and discrimination. Once again, we're seeing widespread public support for this bill, and once again we are seeing a government saying no. Both Acadia University and the University of King's College have signed pledges to stop using non-disclosure agreements in their universities and in decisions.

Julie Macfarlane, the co-founder of Can't Buy My Silence, has recently said: "If they don't want to pass it, explain to us, why not?" This is the question that we are here to ask today. This is why we brought this forward for debate – why not? The answer of, Some people told us it's not good, is not a good enough reason. The government has repeatedly defended doing nothing with little evidence to support this approach. The government has continuously left us with more questions than answers. This government has delayed acting to stop the trauma that is being inflicted upon mostly women. Now it seems that this government is altogether denying women, gender-diverse people, and all victims the solution that would stop this trauma from occurring.

The longer this discussion drags on, the clearer it becomes that this government is unwilling to do what is needed. This is their playbook, filled with quiet decisions and backroom deals and what they perceive as the path of least resistance. We have seen the things that come out of this playbook - the bad development deals and the waste of government money, with little oversight.

We've done our best to hold this government accountable for things. We've done our best to advocate on behalf of Nova Scotians who deserve better and our work on NDAs and their misuse in this province is no different. NDAs suppress information. When they are misused, the suppression of information is a common tactic. This is also a tactic that has been used by this government. Just because this government prefers to suppress information doesn't mean that we stop asking questions about it.

The misuse of NDAs should not be a political issue. The government should not be applying this playbook to this matter. Today and yesterday, as we talk about inaction on legislating the misuse of non-disclosure agreements, we can see the outer limit of how bad that is.

Again, I want to remind people that our bill regulates the misuse of non-disclosure agreements. That's because non-disclosure agreements were developed for trade secrets - trade secrets like those in the government's wine policy, perhaps. They are now routinely used to cover up incidents of sometimes-criminal wrongdoing, including sexual assault,

sexual harassment, and abuse. They are used all the time. By definition, every day that the government chooses not to legislate - chooses to be behind the times, chooses to go slower and not faster, to be a follower and not a leader - the more people are being abused, the more people are being doubly traumatized and unable to speak about it. For that, this government should be ashamed.

Speaker, I'm tired of no answers. I'm tired of, Some people disagree. I'm tired of telling victims that this government doesn't support them. That is why we are asking this government to finally address this issue and pass this bill.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I stand today, obviously, to speak in support of this bill. We've spoken about it many times. I've looked across the room. No one seems to pay attention. But we'll go at it again, and I thank the NDP for bringing it forward.

The public has been favourable in the support for this bill. Advocates who have been victims or work with victims first-hand know that this is the right thing to do. This bill eliminates a power dynamic that has harmed predominantly women for decades.

If you took a room full of women and you asked each one of them, Have you ever been sexually assaulted or harassed in the workplace?, I bet you would be shocked to find out just how many of us have. I have experienced it myself. NDAs have been used in sexual assault cases to hold up powerful men who have money and status and want to protect themselves and their image instead of being held accountable for committing serious criminal offences that cause unimaginable trauma for victims.

I want to talk about this government's narrative, that this is about choice, and actually read Subsection 5(2) of this bill: "A party responsible or person who committed or who is alleged to have committed harassment or discrimination may only enter into a non-disclosure agreement with a relevant person in accordance with this Section if such an agreement is the expressed wish and preference of the relevant person concerned." What the heck was that?

I'll repeat it. "A party responsible or person who committed or who is alleged to have committed harassment or discrimination may only enter into a non-disclosure agreement with a relevant person in accordance with this Section if such an agreement is the expressed wish and preference of the relevant person concerned."

The bill literally gives choice to the victims. It's concerning that the government members don't seem to understand that. Currently, victims are forced into signing NDAs and are not given a choice because of the patriarchal power dynamics that are long-standing and entrenched in our society.

By allowing perpetrators to use NDAs in sexual assault cases, we are actually limiting the choice for victims, which I think is the key to highlight here. As mentioned by the NDP, our neighbours in P.E.I. have done this. Utah has done this. And as I highlighted in Question Period already, they have the worst record in the United States on gender equity and quality of life for women, yet they did it.

The fact that we're not moving forward is shameful - and that's the word that was used earlier as well - and wrong, and I'm disappointed in this government's inability to recognize the importance of banning NDAs in sexual assault cases. Why won't this government accept the need to look at it?

[4:45 p.m.]

I have comments here from Can't Buy My Silence. She sat down earlier with this government when it was first elected, with the then-Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act and her team. She was assured that the minister and her team thought that this was a great bill. They wanted to bring it forward. It was brought to the Cabinet table, and she was informed at that table that they were told that it was going to proceed. I'll table that. A trauma therapist with Avalon Centre said that by their nature, it's impossible to track the use of non-disclosure agreements in sexual assault cases, but based on her work, it was "happening a lot." That's her quote.

She said that given the recent events like the Hockey Canada scandal, which show the potential harm of NDAs, the government needs to "sit right now," act faster, and reflect on its actions. "Their lack of action is creating a situation where there's a continuation of violence happening in our province."

I have stood and been with elected men in rooms where I've heard them get up and say many times: Of course this is not right. I have a wife. I have daughters. This needs to change. It's for their very daughters and their granddaughters and for generations to come that we need to do this. As the NDP mentioned earlier - I heard the Minister of Justice get up and he said: There are some situations where they're needed. We need NDAs sometimes. Please explain when. Please explain why you won't do it. If we're all here in a leadership role to educate each and every resident of Nova Scotia, why aren't you forthcoming with the very information we're asking you to give us as to why you won't restrict NDAs?

I met yesterday - I was invited to Cole Harbour District High School to talk to young women who are interested in going into politics. I'm really glad that I went in with a clear frame of mind, that I didn't have this particular subject on my mind, because I don't think I would have been as positive as I was.

It's heartbreaking to look at young women who want to change the world, but I stand in this room and I look at people who don't want to change the world when it comes

to NDAs. We have educators in this room. Many of them refer their young students to me to encourage them to build a better world. I did it wholeheartedly, yet it's very difficult to sit in this room with the same educators who are not wanting to educate our youth, especially our daughters, on NDAs.

The universities were mentioned. Acadia University is doing it. They see it in their day-to-day. Naturally, they're going to be doing something about it. Why are we turning a blind eye to the fact that our daughters, our children, are being exposed to sexual harassment, exploitation, everything, and yet they don't feel that they have a voice? When I stand here as a woman who has a voice in a leadership role, I'm going to use it as a means to make it heard. When I came here, I had hoped that every woman in this room would gather collectively on causes that have been going on for generations and actually work towards something that will impact each and every woman.

It's been a difficult day, Speaker, and I understand your frustrations as well; but I didn't come here into this House to basically just sit here and forget about the greater good and forget about women's rights. I will not remain silent, and even though I'm an MLA, you can't buy my silence. I stand with every woman because I remember the trauma that I went through. I was fortunate I had the support.

When they started talking about NDAs, I remembered walking into my boss's office and I said: Thank God I wasn't asked to sign an NDA. You can't silence something that's not right. It's just not right. Some people think that we're bringing this forward because it's political or there's some other motivation. I am not motivated by anything other than giving women a voice.

"Cape Breton political scientist backs movement to ban certain non-disclosure agreements: 'Politically and ethically it would be prudent.'" I'll table that as well. So yes, we are here in a political arena, but we are responsible to respond to the needs of our residents, to all Nova Scotians. Tonight, I am going to look at my daughter straight in the face and tell her how proudly I represented her and every woman in Nova Scotia saying this.

A few minutes left. I have great respect for the Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act. I hope that together we can actually do something collectively, regardless of political stripe, and pass this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I want to start at the outset to provide some clarity about what we're talking about, because I think that in the dialogue around this, we're missing the things that we're in agreement on, and I think those are some really fundamental principles and really important principles.

I want to be really clear: We in this room are all in agreement that we need to support survivors of sexual harassment and discrimination with sensitivity and respect. There is no disagreement on that point. We in this room agree that non-disclosure agreements should not be used as a means to silence victims. There is no disagreement on that point, either.

That's why we have programs to address these issues. That's why the Department of Justice's Independent Legal Advice Program provides survivors of sexual assault, including people impacted by human trafficking, the opportunity to access independent legal advice for free. That is why the Sexual Offence Legal Representation program offered through the DOJ ensures victims have their own independent legal advice and representation in court cases where an accused is requesting access to the victim's personal records.

That is why we have the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program across Nova Scotia now, to provide victims of sexual assault immediate response, trauma-informed care, and support them in their recovery. That is why we have curriculum and resources and a focus on the inclusion of these issues in education. It is because we are in agreement with those principles.

The question is not whether we support victims of sexual harassment and discrimination. The question is not whether we are in agreement on that. The question is: How do we do that? That's really what we're debating here. I think that's really important. It seems to me that the government is being painted as not in support of sexual assault survivors and sexual harassment survivors. That's just not true.

We disagree on how. I want to talk for a little bit about how because that's what this bill is about. I want to say again, and this has been mentioned a few times in the House, that P.E.I. remains the only jurisdiction in Canada that has enacted the kind of legislation that the Opposition is calling for us to enact right now. It is not the majority.

In fact, the Manitoba Law Reform Commission considered this and they recommended against this type of legislation because it could reduce the ability of survivors to settle matters outside of court. It could also force survivors into pathways that they're not interested in. I offer that because I think those are important things to consider as we consider the important question of how we appropriately support sexual assault and harassment survivors.

The question of how: The reality is that this is a complex issue. It impacts people at times when they are most vulnerable and when they are most in need of supports that are thoughtfully constructed and trauma-informed.

There are a couple of things I want to discuss today. Before I get into them, I just want to say this. Whenever we undertake discussions in this Chamber, it is important that



we understand and have an awareness that we all come in with different lenses. We all come in with different life and professional experiences through which we view the issues that we discuss.

We all wear these lenses. I think that's a great thing. It's important that we have a diversity of perspectives and experiences, in this House particularly. That helps us understand issues as thoroughly as possible and understand the variety and diverse perspectives that exist.

I will also say that it's not just our obligation to advocate for others who have the same lens that we do. It is our obligation to work to see beyond our own individual perspectives and to understand the variety of perspectives that not only are shared through the lenses through which we view things in this House, but across Nova Scotia and folks who aren't necessarily in this House. I think that's really important in all discussions, and I think it's particularly important in this discussion.

I will say that I have my own personal and life experiences. I'm not going to talk about them right here and right now. I also have professional experiences that relate to this issue. I am going to talk about those.

Before I get to those, I will say this about voices. We just heard the member opposite say that she's proud to have stood and represented every woman in Nova Scotia using her voice. I need to observe in relation to this issue that we are hearing a lot about victims who are concerned about NDAs and who regret NDAs. That's important. It's important that we understand those perspectives.

We should not expect the victims who choose to take the benefit of NDAs to self-identify and make their case. By virtue of the fact that they have chosen that path, they want the silence. They want the confidentiality. They want the anonymity. We have to make sure that our eyes and ears are open to those perspectives as well.

That is a group of people who have chosen to be silent and sought legal protection to enforce that silence. It is incumbent on us to be aware of that perspective and to not let other perspectives override our understanding and appreciation of what NDAs may mean to those people.

I do want to offer my thoughts, as I said, from a professional perspective. In my experience as a professional, there are sort of two realms that touch on this issue. I am a lawyer and as a lawyer, I have professional experience with NDAs, advising on NDAs, and working with clients who have NDAs.

More broadly, as a lawyer, and this is the piece that I want to talk about - and I'm surprised we haven't really heard about it in this Chamber in relation to this discussion - I also have experience working within the Code of Professional Conduct, because lawyers

have ethical obligations that directly impact their ability and their approach to NDAs. I want to make sure that we in this Chamber understand that, because that's part of the landscape in which NDAs are used. That's one piece of my professional experience.

[5:00 p.m.]

The other piece of my professional experience arises as a result of my work with the Victorian Order of Nurses - with VON Canada. With VON, I was actually the architect of their Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program. Nova Scotia, for some time under the prior government, struggled to achieve coverage across the province for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program, and I commend the prior government for introducing this program and for working to expand it. But there was a time when certain areas in the province were having difficulty getting coverage. That was in Colchester, Cumberland, and Musquodoboit. And so, in my role with VON, I constructed their Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program, and we were successful in building a program that expanded sexual assault nurse examiner services fully across the province, enabling every Nova Scotian across the province to receive access to and coverage of that program.

As a result of that work, I needed to understand, and was very grateful to understand and learn about what trauma-informed care is, because that is one of the fundamental tenets of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program. I appreciated Minister Thompson's comments in the House recently about that, and I want to spend a little additional time talking about that, because it's really important that we do understand what trauma-informed service is, and how that should inform our consideration and discussion about handling NDAs in the context of sexual harassment. I'm going to take a few minutes just to talk about that.

Trauma-informed care - trauma-informed services: First, what is trauma? Trauma results from experiences that overwhelm a person's capacity to cope, and it can result from all sorts of things. We hear about it in the context of war, violence, sudden loss. We also understand that trauma can arise as a result of sexual violence or sexual harassment.

It's also important to understand that the vast majority of sexual assaults in Canada are not reported to police and may never even enter this realm of NDAs, because people do not report. During consultations for creating Nova Scotia's strategy for diminishing sexual violence, it was noted that the reason for that is that victims often experience re-traumatization when they seek supports in the aftermath of the assault. We need to understand that dynamic when we're considering any sort of intervention that impacts a potential path for people after the experience of sexual assault or harassment. We need to understand how that trauma may inform how they perceive their experience and the choices they may wish to make in respect of that.

The last thing I'll say about trauma is that it affects each person differently. That's important to understand as well, because we've heard directly from people in this House

about their experience and their desires around trauma, and those are valid and important to hear, but they cannot be used to characterize everybody's experience of trauma. We need to have our eyes and ears and hearts open to people who may have a different experience and may wish to see different things.

That's what trauma is. Well, what is trauma-informed practice? As always, I realize I'm talking far too long, so I'm going to move a little faster.

Trauma-informed practice: It's not about treating trauma. Trauma-informed practice or care is not about the direct treatment of the traumatic issue. Instead, it's about creating safety and trustworthiness in the course of health and social care interactions, or really in the course of any interventions or supports that are offered to a person after experiencing trauma.

There are six principles that underpin trauma-informed practice. They include trauma awareness; safety and trustworthiness; strength-based skill building and empowerment; recognition of cultural, historical, and gender issues; promotion of service user and peer involvement; and - this is the one I want to speak of - the last one is opportunities for choice. Choice is a really important element of trauma-informed practice. Trauma-informed services foster a sense of efficacy. They foster a sense of agency. They allow for self-determination and dignity, and they are offered in a way that people can make decisions about their needs at a pace that feels safe to them. When Minister Thompson or others speak about trauma-informed care and trauma-informed practice, that is one of the principles that underpins it.

We are talking about a piece of legislation that has an impact on choices that are available to survivors of sexual harassment. In light of that fact, we must be informed about and understand the importance of choice in responding to someone who has experienced trauma.

I'll take just a minute and talk about the question of choice. We heard the member opposite reference one of the sections of the proposed Non-disclosure Agreements Act to say that it gives choice to victims. Granted, I see that in this Act, there remains choice within this Act, but there are also limitations, so it's not as much choice as a person currently has.

In what way might a person's choice be restricted? Well, I see a provision in the proposed Act that a non-disclosure agreement might be allowed provided it is of a set determination - a set and limited duration. That is one way in which a person's choice is limited. The one that concerns me particularly is that an agreement that is created if this Act were to be passed cannot adversely affect the health or safety of a third party or the public interest.

I have great pause there. This is one that makes me really wonder, because I

question who determines what is in the public interest. If I, as a survivor, want something to be quiet that involves me and it might also impact the public interest, where am I left as a survivor and how is that trauma-informed?

I raise it not to determine one way or another whether it's right, but I wanted to highlight it because it raises significant questions for me, and I want to be sure that our minds are drawn to that when we're considering the question of whether we restrict survivors' ability and choice in relation to NDAs.

I have only a few seconds left so I will say in relation to my experience as a lawyer that lawyers do operate under a code of conduct. We have an ethical obligation far beyond our responsibility to the client we are representing in that moment. That ethical obligation requires us to act honourably and with integrity, requires us to consider a variety of things beyond the person who is right in front of us.

I am very appreciative of the opportunity we've had to talk about this incredibly important issue. I can say we will continue to support survivors.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I don't think anybody really wants to clap after that. I just want everybody to take a deep breath and think about what was being said. On one note, we heard: We are all in agreement, we agree, we have agreed. Agreement means everybody agrees to the same thing.

I don't understand this whole process. Then on another note, we're debating an issue that we all agree on. Why are we debating it? Just take a deep breath and bring down the trauma, because the conversation that was just given was extremely traumatizing.

All right. I want to say, last week the Premier told this House that: "Nobody wants to see non-disclosure agreements used to silence victims." Once again, agreement, right? Nobody wants to see that. This is from the Premier: "We believe survivors should have the option to make an informed choice on whether to sign an NDA." We agree, once again, no debate. Which is why we tabled this bill nearly two years ago, to make sure that survivors are able to make informed choices and are protected from potential silencing or coercion. Victims and survivors should be able to choose the processes and methods of resolutions they want.

We talked about choice. We talked about all these things. What I took from the clarity that was given by the Minister of Education on our bill that was put forward by the NDP - the clarity was not clear, because what we heard was that it was missing things. We're all in agreement to support survivors. We want to help. This is what I got. We want to help, but we don't want to legislate. We want to help, but we don't want to legislate.

I'm going to be very clear: what I heard was that this government wants actions to happen to sexual assault victims. They're not going to help you stop it. They have programs in place to help you when it happens and give you trauma-informed care after the fact, when you can't talk about it because you can't heal. I know everybody heard me when I was in here talking in Supply about NDAs and the effects thereof.

I know we only have a few minutes, but I need everyone to open their listening ears, because it's really important. If we all agree, then there should be no discussion. If we all agree, there should be no debate. What I hear is that someone doesn't agree. That's what I hear. Because if you agreed, we'd have a piece of legislation, whether it be from this side or the other, right?

I'm confused. We're talking about clarity here, but it's not clear. I can tell you what's clear on my end, from the bill that we put forward that's very, very clear. There seems to be some fundamental misunderstanding in this House about what this bill actually does. I want to use my little bit of time to remind everyone in here - women, men, non-binary, everyone in this room - who and what we're talking about. This is not some abstract idea. These kinds of agreements are commonplace in settlement cases of harassment and discrimination. It's happening all the time. The minister spoke about their previous experience. It's happening all the time.

This is not a ban. This is not removing choice and options from survivors. Let's get it straight: This is not removing any of that stuff. This bill would preserve - does anybody know what "preserve" means? It means preserving the situation. It will preserve actual choice, which means the person could actually speak about it and preserve their right to have a say and not be silenced. Allowing NDAs to be used only where survivors of harassment and discrimination are able to obtain independent legal advice - not everybody has that same privilege. We have programs in place, but not everybody can afford a program. Not everybody can afford legal advice. Not everybody can wait months and months and months - years, even - to have legal representation.

Where there's been no coercion - let me go back. In allowing NDAs to be used only where survivors of harassment or discrimination are able to obtain independent legal advice, where there's been no coercion - none - where there's no health or safety risk - so let's not go from trauma, let's not have trauma, because despite the Premier's assertions, people often lack this choice right now.

When NDAs are used in this current harmful way, victims are often silenced and lose their rights - lose their right to speak about their experience to friends, to family, even therapists. Victims often feel discouraged from reporting a crime. NDAs can negatively impact the health and healing process of victims by denying them the ability to talk about their trauma. I agree with the member opposite, but I'm not going to be silenced, not ever. I don't give two whoas about who thinks they can say what to me. I will not be silenced, and I will keep talking about this until we do the right thing and pass legislation.

NDA's can negatively impact the health and healing process of victims by denying them the ability to talk about their trauma. There's a compelling public safety argument for restricting NDA use currently. They're used to suppress information and create a culture of silence. As lawyer Ron Pink stated, these things are signed for one purpose: to protect the male harasser. One purpose. The male harasser then goes and does it again and again. And he can continue to do it, because he can buy his way out. That's what's going on.

I hope it's crystal clear. I hope everybody understands exactly what this bill is being put forward to do. I'm saying this in a tone of urgency because it's been two years that we've put forward a bill that you've had lots of time to look at, lots of time to do research, lots of time to get the data, lots of time to have all this information that everybody seems to need. But then you don't want to act on it.

[5:15 p.m.]

This bill is based on a model legislation that was passed in P.E.I. in 2021 with all-party support. We heard around here just a little bit earlier we're all in agreement. We're all in agreement, so what's stopping us?

All parties worked together to enact that law in the best interest of people, and I'm going to stress that: in the best interest of people. I wish we would actually come together and have conversations about the best interest of people, because we can agree, but actions speak louder than words, and if we're not going to move on them, it shows people that their interest is not your interest.

We were initially optimistic that this bill or similar legislation would receive the same kind of all-party support. This government was initially interested in tabling similar legislation as in P.E.I. The same old words that keep being thrown around: jurisdictional scans. Got to do a jurisdictional scan. What are you scanning? What are you using scanned information for if you're not going to do anything with it? That's why the flip-flop on this issue has been particularly disappointing, because we know that there was movement, that it was going to happen, and then all of a sudden, out of nowhere - we all agree, but we're going to put some supports and services in place for trauma-informed care, and people have choices. That's not an agreement. That's not a piece of legislation.

In the two years since this bill was first tabled, there has been nationwide movement on this issue. We've seen similar bills tabled in other provinces now. Local universities have taken a stand. Labour leaders, legal professionals. How many more folks and examples do you need? I thought we were the first at stuff. I thought we were happy to be trend-setters, and we're the first, and this is us. Can somebody please put forward a bill on banning the misuse of NDAs? Because we would gladly amend it. No, I'm just joking. We would gladly support it.

I'm just in a moment right now because it's frustrating listening to agree, agree -

but then we don't want to do nothing. How much more information do we need? How much more information do we need to make an informed decision? We get bills on our laps the day before we have to pass it, and we're expected to do so without any debate. Here we've had two years or more to really digest the information and really look at it, and even put forward amendments if you wanted to. We were open to suggestions.

At the end of the day, I hear crickets. I hear nothing. We talked about this during International Women's Day, how much we love and support and we're here for the women. A lot of stuff has been said and nothing's been moved on. There's no action. I know that the Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act, her heart is in it, and I appreciate that. I'm hoping that maybe we can have a conversation about how we can work together to make sure that people's voices aren't silenced.

This is what's happening. I clarified everything. It was given full agreement by everyone here in this room. All three parties - four parties. We're all here saying these are things that we need to move on and let's examine that. I'm hoping that moving forward - because we will continue to do this work, we'll continue to fight for those whose voices aren't feeling like they're being heard - I'm hoping that we can have a conversation on how we can move this envelope and do what's best for all people in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I stand today to speak to Bill No. 144 and unequivocally support this bill to change the laws that allow the misuse of NDAs in cases of sexual assault, harassment, violence, and battery.

Victims and family members of sexual assault have visited this Legislature in support of Bill No. 144. Despite this, the Premier continues to refuse to change the law here in Nova Scotia. On International Women's Day, Erin Casey and Wendy Carroll visited us here in the Legislature. They filed HR complaints against the former president of UPEI and lived with the impacts of serious workplace misconduct at UPEI. They understand as individuals the harms from being silenced, and also how it was dealt with at an institutional level.

They won an apology from UPEI and were partially released from their NDA. They say it is not a political issue but a public good issue and a gender-equity issue: "An apology is a very powerful thing," they shared with CBC, "and from a healing perspective, it has allowed them to move on with their lives.

They are disappointed with the Nova Scotia government's decision. Their decision prevents us from understanding how common this kind of misconduct is. When we can't see what's happening, we can't see or fix the problem.

Non-disclosure agreements and their misuse in cases of sexual assault is a topic that

is not going away here in Nova Scotia until the laws are changed. There are many examples, including Hockey Canada, that have been in the media recently about their use of NDAs.

While Hockey Canada has faced intense public backlash, they aren't the only ones covering up alleged abuses. What many don't realize is that the same pattern is playing out again and again in hundreds of workplaces, clubs, and institutions across Canada, largely because of the prolific use of NDAs. I'll table that document.

Recently, *Forbes* magazine printed an article, and it says: "When NDAs were exposed as a tool for sexual predators to hide their behaviour during the #MeToo movement, there were urgent calls to eliminate their use in cases of sexual misconduct. Now, almost five years later, these confidentiality agreements are still silencing victims in most states." I'll table that.

Here we have Can't Buy My Silence, as well as Lift Our Voices, working to try to change legislation across the world. The week before last in Question Period, I suggested that the Premier here in Nova Scotia allow a free vote for the government MLAs. We know how all of the Opposition MLAs are going to vote on this matter.

I asked for the Premier to allow a free vote. Will the Premier allow a free vote today? Will all MLAs stand up for what is right and refuse to be whipped? It is interesting how party politics and the culture of whipping MLA votes actually ties into this culture of silencing victims of sexual assault. It's all part of a larger culture of misogyny, power, money, and ego. It all comes at the expense of doing what is right.

Last week, the kind Minister responsible for the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act called me "passionate" on this topic - and I am. I make no apologies for that. As a nurse, as an employer, as a woman, and now as an MLA, I am all too aware of the impacts of sexual harassment, assault, violence, and battery. The effects that they have on the victim's lives forever are fear, shame, embarrassment, and depression. It is paralyzing for these victims.

Last week, the Premier of Nova Scotia in Question Period said: "It's a serious topic. It's not one to be bandied around on the floor of the Legislature." He's so wrong. It is exactly why we are here in this Legislature - to make changes to laws that don't work for the people of Nova Scotia. In this case, and in many cases, it is the women of this province - sisters, daughters, friends.

He also shared that people have told him they have entered into NDAs, and they need to keep them. I don't know if the Premier realizes that, in and of itself, is actually a violation of an NDA. Doesn't that speak to the misuse of NDAs? The fact that people are telling him they have entered them is actually a violation of what he is trying to defend.

Our role as legislators is to make new laws for Nova Scotia and amend existing



laws when we know they are causing harm in their current state. We know that NDAs are being used to silence victims of sexual assault, and we know that perpetrators are being empowered by using money and their power to continue the pattern of causing harm to victims.

The government's inaction on this topic suggests that they are protecting someone. In fact, Ron Pink spoke to this last year, and I'll table the CBC article. One of the quotes in it is: "I can't imagine who the justice minister is protecting. He's protecting somebody, but certainly not the women of this province."

Last April, I tabled a document. It was a white paper by Equal Voice Canada. It is a paper that speaks to sexual harassment in legislatures across this country, and also in political parties. I'll table that document when I'm through.

Last April, here in the House, I spoke about an incident involving the PC Party. Looking back on this very stressful situation, I wonder how much the Premier knew at that time. Where are the findings of that private investigation? What are the findings? Is he protecting someone?

We know from the parents that there were NDAs signed. Where did the money come from for those NDAs? There are many questions that should be asked and answered. Wasn't the life of this young woman worth more than the brand of a political party?

The first time I met a victim who had entered into an NDA was back in the early 2000s. It was a perpetrator who was a doctor in our area. He went on to victimize numerous women, and he is a monster. He shamed his victims and convinced them that no one would believe them if they went to police, and eventually, when one did, the public persecution they went through caused more damage than the sexual assault itself. It takes a great deal of courage to speak up and to speak out about the damage of sexual assault, and the fact is some people cannot. They rely on us here as their elected representatives to be that voice for them.

We hold out hope for change to make the lives of people better. This Legislature should stand for truth. This Legislature should stand for justice. This Legislature should stand for honesty. Honesty has gotten me into trouble sometimes, because maybe I'm a little too honest. But if we do not reflect these ideals in this Chamber, in our work, what hope does society have? We make the laws of the land. We set the bar. We set the standard. The inaction on the misuse of NDAs in cases of sexual assault is unconscionable.

The power lies within these walls. The power lies within each one of us. Let's do the right thing today and pass this bill to protect the victims of sexual assault in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I wish I had a bit more time to be able to speak to this issue. I first want to say that supporting survivors of sexual assault and discrimination with sensitivity and respect is incredibly important. I believe there is power in choice, especially when you're facing an impossible situation.

While an NDA may not be the choice of every individual, it is still a choice. The Department of Justice's Independent Legal Advice Program provides survivors of sexual violence, including people impacted by human trafficking, the opportunity to access free independent legal advice. The sexual offense legal representation program offered through the Department of Justice ensures that victims have their own independent legal advice and representation in court cases where an accused is requesting access to a victim's personal record.

A sexual assault is an incredibly traumatic event. I have worked with a number of survivors over the course of my career. Providing trauma-informed care after such an event is incredibly important. One of the tenets of trauma-informed care is to ensure that people have choice - not the choice of the person providing the care, but the choice of the individual receiving it.

It is important that we continue to provide information and options, and we will continue to do that. It is not for us or anyone else to decide what the path forward ought to be when someone is on a journey of healing.

P.E.I. remains the only jurisdiction in Canada . . .

[5:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. We have now reached the moment of interruption. The topic for adjournment debate was submitted by the honourable member for Colchester North and reads as follows:

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature condemn Nova Scotia MPs who choose the Liberal carbon tax increase over the interests of hard-working Nova Scotians.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

## **MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)**

THE SPEAKER: The honorable member for Colchester North.

**N.S. MLAs: N.S. MPs SUPPORTING CARBON TAX INCREASE - CONDEMN**

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, I'm happy to stand today to address an issue that is a serious concern to Nova Scotians: the impact of the carbon tax on our rural communities.

I am grateful that both Opposition parties in this Legislature have finally - and I say finally - written to the federal government to criticize this punitive tax. I guess they must have gone out and actually spoken with some of the members of their community to find out how upset they really are.

The federal Liberals claim that this tax is to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I can assure you, the consequences we are seeing from this terrible and incredibly punitive tax are increasingly devastating for Nova Scotians.

Let's talk about just a few of the ways our residents are being hurt by this. Let's start with the increased cost of living. The carbon tax has led to higher prices on essential items - certainly to people in rural Nova Scotia - such as gasoline, diesel, and home heating fuel. For rural residents who often rely on personal vehicles and an oil-based heating system, these price hikes are felt in their wallet every day. Families are forced to spend more of their hard-earned income to cover the most basic of necessities, leaving very little for other essential expenses.

The impact of this Liberal carbon tax is not equal. I can assure you, the daily life of the hard-working people in this province is very different from that of the people who live in downtown Montreal, Ottawa, or Toronto.

Rural Nova Scotians face unique challenges. Our communities are spread out, and public transportation alternatives or options are very limited. Unlike urban centres where alternatives like mass transit, bicycling, or carpooling may be doable, rural residents often have no choice but to drive longer distances.

The carbon tax has a tremendous impact on them as they bear the brunt of increased fuel costs without any other choice in transportation. We also need to think about the economic strain on our local businesses. Our small businesses - the lifeblood of rural Nova Scotia - are also feeling the pinch. Higher transportation costs lead to increased prices for goods and services, with local farmers, fishers, and craftspeople struggling to maintain their livelihoods while navigating the complexities of the carbon tax.

We risk losing the very essence of our rural communities - their resilience, heritage, and close-knit spirit. Yes, the federal government promises rebates to offset the impact of the carbon tax, but let's be honest, these rebates are a temporary band-aid. They don't address the long-term challenges faced by our rural people.

Let's be honest. If you live and work on a farm, work in construction, or have a

small landscaping business and have to drive a pickup truck, the money you get out of these rebates doesn't even come close to covering the increased costs of gas prices.

We need a better approach to helping our environment than this punitive tax. Instead of imposing a blanket carbon tax, let's explore targeted solutions. Let's invest in rural infrastructure such as efficient public transportation, renewable energy projects, and other community-based projects. We must encourage innovation and support local businesses in adopting sustainable practices.

Let's empower our rural communities to lead the way toward a greener future. We must strike a balance between environmental stewardship and the well-being of our rural neighbours. Let's advocate for policies that recognize the unique challenges faced by those outside our bustling cities.

The federal Minister of Environment, Steven Guilbeault, has commented that we should offer a solution. We have offered a solution, a very comprehensive one that Minister Halman presented to him, but apparently Mr. Guilbeault believes that he knows this province better than Minister Halman does. (Interruption) Got it. I apologize - than the Minister of Environment and Climate Change does.

Every member of this House voted yesterday to encourage the Liberal members of Parliament to vote against the Liberal carbon tax; but Mr. Guilbeault, who lives in Montreal, thinks that he knows our province and what we need better than we do. Can you imagine that?

Speaker, we never really got it. They never really got it. They are clearly out of touch with the hardships that this punitive carbon tax has created for residents of our rural communities - residents who cannot walk or take transit to work, to the grocery store, to a doctor's appointment. For too many people, the cost of taking their children to their hockey games or classrooms or other community events has become too expensive. It's impossible to overstate just how harsh these penalties are becoming. Right now, the carbon pricing plan is set at \$65 a tonne. As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, it will be \$80 a tonne and will continue to rise annually by \$15 until it reaches - if you can imagine - \$170 a tonne by 2030. People already cannot afford these penalties. Imagine what this issue is going to look like in six years, when the pricing plan more than doubles from today. How will we ever expect to empower Nova Scotians with better housing, better health care, inflation relief, when the federal government is taking more and more money out of our pockets every day?

To conclude, today in the House of Commons in Ottawa, rather than pausing the carbon tax hike - something that all parties in this House have called for - today in Ottawa, we saw all Liberal MPs - Kody Blois, you imagine, he's supposed to be a farmer; Kody Blois, MP Battiste, MP Metlege Diab, MP Fillmore, MP Fisher, Minister Fraser, MP Kelloway, and Darrell Samson all stood with their party and against Nova Scotians to continue with this carbon tax.

We really don't need to say much more. For me, that really says it all. I implore everyone in this House, of all parties, to please talk to their federal MPs and beg them to, at the very least, pause this latest - I guess you'd say, well I have said many times - punitive tax that is so damaging to the people of Nova Scotia at a time when everyone in this House for the past three or four weeks has talked every day about the challenges we face with respect to the cost of living, food security, and that kind of thing. At a time like this, they kind of just boldly go because the Prime Minister decreed it, and clearly his caucus members don't have the courage to stand against it in support of their fellow Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'm very excited to talk about this today, actually, because I think in the two and a half years since I have been elected to this Chamber, there's no issue that I have come across that has been more tainted by misinformation and politics and silliness than this issue of the carbon tax. I'm going to spend the next nine minutes and thirty-eight seconds explaining the timeline and the facts that got us to this point because I think it's really important.

First point: the member for Colchester North started his address by saying: Finally, opposition members have come to their senses and opposed the punitive carbon tax. That's just not true. Eight years ago, September 25, 2016 - I have an article here I'll table - the headline says, "Nova Scotia Premier McNeil" - who was a Liberal - "opposed to federal carbon price plan." Also, October 4, 2016, "Nova Scotia 'will not be implementing a carbon tax,' McNeil says."

I don't think any party in this Legislature has been more consistent - persistent - over the last eight years in opposition to a carbon tax than the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, and that's just the record. That is the record that we have here and I'm proud to table that, because I think it's really important.

Just to talk about the timeline of where we've been in the last few years, the first time this came forward - and the members of the government decided they would squeeze us on a surprise motion about the carbon tax - they brought it forward expecting that we would vote against, and we voted in favour, which I think they were surprised by. The reason I know they were surprised by it is because they put out a press release at the same time saying we had voted against it, from the caucus office.

They were so certain that they were going to own the Liberals at that moment. That was just a thrilling moment for them, that they actually had to then say, Oops, sorry. They pulled one on us and they actually voted not the way we expected they would. That was the first time this came up. The first time this came up there was just deliberate misinformation put out by the government caucus office on a vote on this issue. That was number one.

The second time that this came forward over the last couple of years in a big, big way was, of course, during a by-election that we had in Preston. The government decided to run that election on the issue of the carbon tax and decided to use tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars on an advertising campaign through Communications Nova Scotia, that they had to also pull back because our party rightfully said, This is wrong. You can't have partisan advertising during an election campaign, a by-election campaign.

The government had to put their tail between their legs again and pull those ads, and the taxpayer of Nova Scotia paid tens of thousands of dollars for anti-carbon tax messaging in a provincial by-election about a federal issue. Now tell me how that makes any sense. It doesn't. As the member for Colchester North stated, not just former leaders of the party - Premier McNeil and others - the current Leader of the Opposition has written to the Prime Minister asking him to forestall the increase in the carbon tax that is scheduled for 10 days from now, on April 1<sup>st</sup>. That is, again, our position and our record on this.

Finally, the other thing that's really, really important here, is what was happening on carbon pricing while the previous government was in power. We had, as of 2019, a cap and trade system, which worked really well. The average increase on gas under the cap and trade system was one cent - a penny. They don't have pennies anymore, but that's what it was - a penny. Now, under the current government, we saw a 14-cent increase when the carbon price went into effect.

I'm sure members opposite will say, Well, yes, the federal government dictated it to us. There was nothing we could do. Our hands were tied. Well, there was something. They could have negotiated a better deal. What happened was there was a September 2022 deadline to have a proposal in front of the federal government for something other than the carbon tax, and with less than two weeks to go, the government called a press conference to talk about their better-than-a-carbon-tax plan, which was nothing. It was legislation that had already been passed.

Thank you. Thank you to the minister. That's what it was. It was - I believe the member for Timberlea-Prospect was there that day. I was reading his quotes earlier. He was right, it was a PowerPoint presentation of things that had already happened. It was going to be rejected. That was obvious. It was not a good faith effort to avoid a carbon tax. That is not what it was. It was a slap-dash, put it together at the last minute, it's going to get turned down, the carbon tax will come into effect, and then our master plan can go into effect where we can say "the Liberal carbon tax" 3,762 times over the next 24 months, puff out our chests and feel good about it. I think that's what the strategy was.

We're seeing it every day. We are seeing it every single day. We have to sit here in Question Period, in Estimates, in anything where members have a microphone, ministers have a microphone in front of them that's turned on, or members, and we get to watch them twist themselves into pretzels to figure out how to say Liberal carbon tax. How do we shoehorn that in when we're talking about coastal protection, when we're talking about the

AG's report, when we're talking about housing? How can we shoehorn in the Liberal carbon tax? How do we get those key messages? How do we get those talking points in there?

[5:45 p.m.]

I get it. I'm a communicator. I'm a messenger by inclination, by trade. I understand the politics of it, but the reason why it's so frustrating to me in particular is that it's not based on facts. The members opposite scream about the Liberal carbon tax, and as I've said at the beginning here, the Nova Scotia Liberal Party has been opposed to a carbon tax for at least seven and a half years and has never changed their position on that once in that period of time. So to argue otherwise is incredibly frustrating, and I think doesn't do justice to an issue that's really, really important - that we all agree is important. The issue of climate and how we deal with that is obviously a critical one.

The other part about it that is really frustrating to me is that no matter where you look at surveys, people don't like politicians. They don't like governments. They don't like the nature of politics today. It doesn't matter what province you're looking at. It doesn't matter if you're looking at the U.S., or Europe, or anywhere else: approval ratings, trust in government, trust in institutions is going down, down, down over the last 20 or 30 years. And one of the reasons why is because of silliness like this. This is why.

The government, as I've said earlier, has a quest to own the Liberals on the carbon tax, and so they will manufacture things. They will say things that don't make any sense. They will try to be as artful as possible, and it's just not based on reality. I think most people watching it look at that and think, What is going on? Why are we talking about this in this way? Why? One side is saying everyone's opposed to it, and the other side's saying, Well no, actually, we're not. Who do I trust? I'm just going to turn it off, because this is so silly. That's what happens when we get into these kinds of ridiculous back-and-forths where we issue pre-manufactured press releases on false information, on things that did not happen. Why would people trust us? Why would people believe what we say when that is the behaviour that we are modelling for Nova Scotians?

The main point I wanted to make here today is that the issue of the carbon tax and our party's position on it has been clear as day since at least 2016. It has certainly been clear since 2021. For the government to try to argue otherwise is simply incorrect, and I think they on the government side owe it to Nova Scotians to be transparent about that. We have nothing to defend ourselves on this point. I think we've been very clear. We've been very upfront about it. I've just laid out how the carbon pricing system was much, much better under our previous Liberal government, and rather than blaming everyone else, I wish the government would get down to work and try to find a better solution, but that would have been better done 18 to 24 months ago.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I can't say that I'm pleased to stand and say a few words to this motion, because I have to say that I find the wording of this motion extremely offensive. I'm not a Liberal, I'm a New Democrat, but I would never stand up and condemn an individual - which was actually the wording of this motion, as well as the fabric of the speech that we heard from the government - because we're not here to talk about individuals. We're not here to condemn individuals; we're here to discuss policy. We're here to not impugn the reputation of individuals, yet in this motion, in this debate, and every time we stand up and say anything that the government is uncomfortable about, this is the Tories' favourite political partisan ploy: What about the carbon tax? If it weren't so tiresome, it would be entertaining.

I want to say that we are here to talk about policy. Yes, Nova Scotians are facing huge cost of living challenges. Yes, we have been talking about that day in and day out because that is what we hear about from our constituents. And yet we see so little action from this government to address it. For every time that this government says, "Liberal carbon tax," referencing a federal issue - I would say we hear that seven times as many times as we hear one constructive policy piece that actually addresses the challenges that Nova Scotians are facing.

The member opposite talked about what we could do. We could have efficient public transit. That would help people get out and reduce their carbon footprint. It would, but we don't because this government has not brought it in. We could have renewable energy. It would, but we don't because this government has not acted quickly enough. The big renewable energy projects we see right now are clearing forests and building wind capacity for a green hydrogen plan that is decades away, if it ever comes to pass.

We could empower rural communities; the government certainly isn't doing that. That's what we spent this afternoon talking about. They have abandoned rural coastal communities by not passing the Coastal Protection Act. We hear all the time that the detrimental impact of the carbon tax on rural communities is that people are forced to drive - they don't have any other options. That's true, and that's true in large part because this government has not created those options for people.

Last, as always, the member opposite raised the issue of targeted solutions. Let's talk about the targeted solutions. The Heating Assistance Rebate Program is a targeted solution; this government cut that program this year. The HEAT program from the Salvation Army - that's a targeted solution; this government cut that solution. Income assistance, that's a targeted solution, and yet the majority of income assistance recipients yet again, in real dollars, are falling farther and farther below the massive spot below the poverty line that they are already at.

It's a little bit difficult to sit here and hear this government rage against a federal policy that I guess I'll reiterate is their fault for not negotiating with the federal government when that was on the table. The previous government at least went to the table and had a



conversation. This government stomped their feet and went home. Now we have the carbon pricing that is the federal backstop and that's what we're left with. That is the legacy of this government and I want that to be very clear.

You know what would really help us? You could lower our energy bills. You know how we could lower our energy bills? By reducing demand. This government could massively increase funding to reduce the demand on electricity to lower our bills, so that we use less electricity.

The Canada Greener Homes grant. You want to get mad at the federal government? Let's get mad at them for cancelling the Canada Greener Homes grant. I'd be mad at them about that. We could step into that gap. We could be leaders in demand-side management of energy and we could lower people's bills. This government is not doing that.

Instead of taking the action that we need on our climate, this government wants to yell at Ottawa. Do we think that the carbon tax increase on April 1<sup>st</sup> needs to be paused? Yes, we have been clear about that. Again today, a perfect example, that this government - their new favourite tactic is to bring in a notice of motion with no notice, in their wording, and force everyone to either vote for it or disagree. Although it was imperfect, we did support the motion that was brought in to pause the carbon tax.

What does the Minister of Environment and Climate Change do today in debate? Stand up and talk about how the Opposition supports the federal carbon tax, on the same day that the Opposition voted for their motion. It's a partisan political ploy. It's cynical, it reduces the public's trust in this place . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: It reduces the public trust in this place.

I want to close again by saying that this government - which brings a motion to condemn individual politicians in a time of deepening partisanship, in a time when it is harder and harder to do this work, in a time when this government does us no favours in terms of having a real democratic process in this House - is offensive and it's wrong. I don't even know what else to say about it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I just figured I'd correct a couple of issues. My colleague mentioned the last election and signs. Well, at least we took the signs down. When Elections Nova Scotia had a problem with the Liberal signs, they just said: Not going to do anything about it. The cap and trade that my honourable member was talking about, he wasn't at Public Accounts at the time, but they came in and said: Our province cannot use cap and trade. There's next to no cap and trades. From my understanding, Quebec had

to partner with California. I'll get back to my speech, but I figured I'd correct just a couple errors.

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, Nova Scotians will start fuelling their cars and we'll be paying 3.3 cents more per litre. That's all in carbon tax at the pumps, meaning Nova Scotians will be paying 17.6 in carbon tax on every litre that they buy. This is unfair and misguided. When the federal Liberal carbon tax was announced, we were also told the money would all be returned. Then it was changed so that now 90 per cent will be returned and 10 is for programming. Then rural Nova Scotia areas would get a 10 per cent bump. Well, in my math, that's 110 per cent, but the federal Liberals said "It's tax neutral."

I have a mostly rural area, and Rawdon, which most people would be amazed that they figured that they were metropolitan. Well, it's rural Nova Scotia. They had to fight to get their 10 per cent back. The last thing that Nova Scotians need is more taxes, and we have steps to preserve our planet for the future. However, the federal carbon tax is not the way to accomplish the goals of reducing emissions and increasing renewable energies, and it's not in the best interest for Nova Scotians. The only thing that it brings is more money out of the pockets to pay an unnecessary carbon tax.

In addition to higher taxes at the pump, April 1<sup>st</sup> also means the cost of transportation. Every single product Nova Scotia buys - at the store they buy - is going to go up. The price they pay at the cash register is going to go up. There are some exceptions for agricultural operations. Everybody knows that, but the trucks and the rail that have to get it from the farm to the store have to pay it. When they pay \$50, \$100 onto it, the consumer is paying \$75, \$125.

In 2025 when the pause for heating and fuel for Nova Scotia has come off, can you imagine what it's going to cost for people to fill up their oil tank? It doesn't have to be this way. Nova Scotians have a path to reduce emissions and exceed renewable targets. It was and is a plan that does more for the environment. Nova Scotia is a proven leader in stepping up to protect the province. We have the second-highest reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the country, and we've done this without a carbon tax and will continue to. We stand firm that a strong and effective response to climate change does not require a tax.

Nova Scotia has a strong plan to address climate change and is not depending on taxing hard-working people at a time when affordability is a concern. We have legislated greenhouse gas reduction targets and have a path to get there, and in fact, have one of the largest GHG reduction targets in the country. Nova Scotia is a leader in reducing emissions, second only to New Brunswick. Nova Scotia's 2022 GHG emissions are 35.2 per cent below the 2005 levels. Our 2030 target is 53 per cent below the 2005 targets.

We're exceeding our targets to move to renewable energy. We are helping more people every day move to solar and heat pumps. We're ramping up wind energy. We, and Nova Scotians, are doing all of this, and more, without a harmful carbon tax. Nova Scotians

and the government are proud of our proven leadership in stepping up to protect the province and environment and all that we hold dear.

[6:00 p.m.]

We'll continue to demonstrate what true climate leadership looks like, as opposed to just taxing people. Nova Scotians don't need a carbon tax, because we're taking bold, decisive action to address the climate change. The evidence is clear in Nova Scotia. The Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act is better than a carbon tax. Our climate plan is better than a carbon tax. Our coastal protection action plan is better than a carbon tax. The Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund is better than a carbon tax. The clean energy plan is better than a carbon tax. The approval of 10 onshore wind farms is better than a carbon tax. Developing a green hydrogen sector is better than a carbon tax. The development of offshore wind and green hydrogen is better than a carbon tax.

Speaker, I could spend about another 20 minutes, but I've got one second, so...

THE SPEAKER: Order.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Thank you, Speaker. (Laughter)

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

### **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 Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: I'm pleased to rise once again in my annual tradition and

present the rainbow budget for 2024-25. I know it's been a long day, perhaps a long week. Let's all take a deep breath. If I could, I'd release some rainbow balloons and we could all have a change of perspective.

I really want to talk about the challenges facing the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Nova Scotia, and what this community needs more than ever before. I hope that we're thinking together as a community of MLAs, lawmakers, and advocates for people in our community. We need to be working together toward queer and trans folks' shared goals.

More importantly, we need to set an example. This government loves to talk about innovation and new apps and going like hell, and I would be so bold as to suggest that now is the time for us as a Legislature to go like hell for the safety of our queer and trans friends, neighbours, and family.

When I was first elected, I started hosting an almost-monthly queer forum to offer one way for people and organizations across Nova Scotia to connect. People would come together from Sydney to Yarmouth and all points in between. It only further clarified that we don't have a lot of channels for queer folks to work together and engage with our politicians and our bureaucracy.

Over the past couple of years, I'd like to thank folks from the Department of Health and Wellness, Vital Statistics, Justice, the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives, CCTH - and I'm really fearful that I'm forgetting a couple of departments - for coming and hosting community consultations with a group of people. Folks look forward to those sessions. They feel they're really important, because - I think we know this - sometimes, often, the work that we do here, the work that is ongoing in government, is not always in the public eye, and people don't know how to access the opportunities to engage and be consulted.

It's important not only to think about diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, to not only pay lip service, but to take concrete actions to achieve these goals. There are so many key issues that we, as leaders and policy-makers, need to keep in mind, and I would argue that the interconnectedness of these issues is the key to success in social, environmental, economic, and other goals.

We as the government of Nova Scotia are seen as all but silent on issues and concerns for the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Nova Scotia. Neither of the other political parties in this Legislature have sought to mainstream or operationalize consideration of the issues facing the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Nova Scotia. When I worked in the Nova Scotia Public Service as gender identity and gender expression were being added to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Code, the government of the day recognized the need to build and have the policy capacity to keep up. This need still persists.

Like I said, I've been honoured to have representatives from across government

come to speak to the queer forum, but again, there's no vehicle for folks to connect within government.

Of course, the queer community has lots of reasons to celebrate. There's a long list of formal legal and policy measures of equality that we have fought for and gained. As I have shared before when I've talked about history and the present day in the Nova Scotia Legislature, I make sure to emphasize that we didn't just all show up one day at Pride together - we had to fight, step by step, for everything that we have access to now, and we will continue to fight.

Legal protections remain a critical starting point and 2SLGBTQIA+ Nova Scotians, as a rainbow of communities, continues to model solidarity and principles of respect and inclusion as we demand equity in justice. Our capacity to embrace diversity and to expand ideas about how to be human, and to look critically at our experience of a society continues to grow.

In all of our diversity, we have demonstrated our community's capacity to fight for safety and justice for everyone - youth, seniors, refugees, folks with disabilities, incarcerated folks, and the list goes on. We have been on the front lines of this and other struggles, teaching others how to move forward with love and justice at the heart of our efforts. We know that everyone is out there working in their corner of the world.

Last year, for instance, the Citadel High School Gender and Sexuality Alliance shared the results of a research project they had undertaken to understand the use of and barriers to gender-neutral bathrooms at their school. They surveyed 200 students and conducted interviews, and have articulated the results, implications, and what is needed to the school administration, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, and also to their MLA.

Recently, after writing the minister and receiving no response, I understood from the minister in Estimates that, in fact, there seems to be the start of some means to address this issue. That's a great sign. Again, making these efforts visible, being able to talk about them, also models for other Regional Centres for Education.

We know we are supported by allies. A queer and trans ally organized a space for trans- and gender-diverse grief at the Glitter Bean Cafe a couple of weeks ago, following the devastating and untimely death of a trans high school student in the U.S. Also recently, the Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance hosted 60 people - 40 organizations from across the region - to have a chance to collectively identify priorities and plan for our shared and collective future.

We are in a period of rising hate against our communities - hate and blatant misinformation that is getting infused into political rhetoric. We see it from federal leaders and provincial leaders, even the province next door. This affects us all and discrimination

gives way to more discrimination. I think some leaders are simply looking for a scapegoat, a way to gather people. Queer and trans hate casts a broad net to include and be related to anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, and more. This highlights the importance of us as a community, but also us as a government, of nurturing support and alliances amongst the broader human rights movement to defend the rights of all. Part of our job as elected legislators is to do that.

The government needs to back our human rights defenders. We need to give communities the resources they need to pool collective power and allow each other time and space to heal and sustain our activism. Those working in increasingly hostile climates face harassment and intimidation, and sometimes even physical attacks, all aimed at silencing them.

One of the things I think is really important to stress is that I am reasonably sure that people in this Legislature always are aware of the rising tide of hate that folks face. One of the things that I am really always concerned about, and why I start with some of the good stuff and some of the queer joy, is the effect that this has in particular on young people.

We've already discussed in this session that in the most recent student success survey, 51 per cent of 2SLGBTQIA+ students reported having experienced homophobia or transphobia at school - at the place where they are supposed to be safely able to concentrate and benefit from their education. I think if we look at the Point-in-Time survey, for instance, the most recent one for Halifax, in terms of homelessness, we can see the long-term effects of institutions like schools, institutions of care, like families and child welfare, that aren't able to support 2SLGBTQIA+ youth well enough. It has long-term social and economic impacts for young people, but also for all of us.

Now is the time to step up. I've shared this sort of informally at a couple of committee meetings that even I, as an out, queer MLA, have had my house identified and egged. I've had the head of security into my house to do a security audit and recommend various upgrades to ensure the security of my home and my family.

If I post things on social media such as, "Next Wednesday, Trans Week of Visibility/Trans Day of Visibility flag raising. Noon. Be here," for instance, last year that post got picked up by Halifax Noise, which was fabulous, of course. That's a way to reach lots of people. But I kid you not that in four hours, there were hundreds of negative, violent comments on that. I'm not telling you that to try to be a hero here. It is what it is, but it's simply unacceptable. The intent is to silence us. The intent is to shame us, and the intent is to roll back our rights.

This Progressive Conservative government has demonstrated what I would consider soft support for 2SLGBTQIA+ equality. When push has come to shove - like on a day when a wave of transphobia, hate and disregard for children's rights descended on

downtown of Halifax last June, including outside this House - we had strong statements of support from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and from the Premier. But this needs to be ongoing. Our community has, as I said, recently seen a number of provincial leaders, as well as a federal leader, attack our communities and essentially support the type of rising hate that we face in our schools, in our streets, and in our places of work.

We need the government to step forward. I have invited the Progressive Conservative caucus on a couple of occasions to indicate their strong support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and that is important. It's important. I know how important it is for young people and for everybody in this province to hear directly from their Premier, from their leader, that he has their back, and we're not seeing that. The community sees this as silence. I am ready to stand behind and applaud the government when they come forward, but it simply has not been enough. If public opinion is hostile towards queer people, governments have a responsibility to raise awareness of diversity and respect for all persons' sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. They also have the duty to condemn violations of 2SLGBTQIA+ people's human rights.

In terms of policy, I have asked and challenged this government to appoint a minister responsible for 2SLGBTQIA+ issues. That position remains unfilled. I've asked the Liberal caucus to appoint an official spokesperson who has this in their role, and that is unfilled. The Nova Scotia NDP has long had an official 2SLGBTQIA+ spokesperson, and I thank the member for Dartmouth North, who stood in this role before me and did a fabulous job.

When I was elected, I also started advocating for a 2SLGBTQIA+ action plan. That work is under way, and we did have a chance to hear from the team who is going to be leading the consultations. But in a government that "goes like hell," queer stuff seems to be super-slow, and we need to accelerate this work. We need better health outcomes. We need this government to commit to WPATH's Standards of Care, Version 8. Again, this is going very slowly for a government that's taking quick action on health care.

I had a chance to ask again about accountability and transparency with prideHealth last night in Estimates. There was some funding allocated publicly to prideHealth last year. It was applauded by the community, but those positions haven't been filled. The person running prideHealth has said that it's not clear when they will see the funding.

[6:15 p.m.]

We have a lack of meaningful access to sexual health services, and this further drives health inequity. We need to allocate specific funding towards services that tend to the mental health needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ people, with a specific focus on expanding services beyond major urban centres. Multiple layers of minority stress for queer and trans people of colour result in anxiety, depression, suicide ideation and decreased satisfaction with life.

We want to move forward. We want our province to thrive. So we need to be doing everything we can to identify and address inequity and prejudice. We are still waiting on the results from the revision of the Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students. In Estimates, I was also pleased to learn from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development that the provisions that enshrine the right of students to use their correct names and pronouns in school will continue.

I talked about economic development as being another area where we need to be looking at equity issues. The recent YWCA Halifax's report on sexual harassment in skilled trades only underscores this. There are labour shortages in skilled trades. We want more women and gender-diverse folks to feel welcome to join those trades, and they need to be safe to do so.

In closing, I would say that we have to listen to our queer and trans community. We can work across party lines because my community is right . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The member's time has elapsed.

The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I just want to get up and say a few words regarding the budget. Certainly, we all know that budgets are about priorities. I'll leave the dollars and cents to my colleague, the member for Northside-Westmount. For me, it's about looking at what the priorities of this government are by where they're allocating their money.

As with any budget, there are good things. I'm very happy to see the coverage for the glucose monitors. A lot of my constituents have been calling the office. It's something that is very important to them. Having an aging population, a lot of people are diabetic and are struggling to make ends meet. We're certainly happy to see that.

The end of bracket creep - I know we have tabled a number of bills on this side of the House on that issue and certainly have been advocating for it. We are the last Province in the country to stop bracket creep. That certainly will be a help to taxpayers.

The school lunch program is huge for us. I know that the member for Sydney-Membertou, every chance he has - as well as others, to be fair, across the aisle and everywhere - has been advocating for that. I think that's a huge one for our communities. My daughter is a schoolteacher, and I can certainly say that for kids to be able to learn and be comfortable and really thrive, they need to have the nutrition they need. That's certainly huge.

Where I would like to focus, maybe where I would like to see more in this budget, is around my critic role. Since I have been in my seat, I have been advocating for fisheries and rural communities. The Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture and I have had a few



conversations. I have to admit that we agree on a lot of things, but there are things that I would like to see move forward, certainly around the issue of illegal fisheries. It's creating a lot of anxiety for many fishers and fishery organizations across the province. We see a lot more of that, I would say, in the southern end. I know, Speaker, that's an issue for you in your riding as well. It's something that even with municipal councillors, we have had those discussions and talked about it.

I'll agree with the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture - but I don't want to agree too much - that DFO has not done their job. I'll say it flat-out: They have basically taken a hands-off approach when it came to the illegal lobster fishery. In my opinion, they haven't really enforced their own policies and applied the law as I think they should. We have seen that with the closure of the elver fishery. As a caucus, we put out a letter opposing that decision.

I know my colleague from Annapolis said that this is going to have severe ramifications for his community, especially around economic development. The whole idea of closing that fishery is essentially punishing those who are doing it legally and I believe opening the door for an illegal fishery to run rampant across the province.

I know the Department of Fisheries and Oceans had a release out two days ago - I believe there were 26 arrests. They have seized some vehicles. I am happy to see that, honestly. We need more enforcement, but the reality is that there are hundreds of people - from what I'm hearing - on our rivers across the province basically taking advantage. It's a quick way to make some money.

There are two sides to the equation. There's the illegal fishery side, but there's a reason the illegal fishery has tended to be in our end of the province - you can have the fishery, but you've got to have a market.

There are a lot of things we can't do around the anxieties. The province isn't responsible for the illegal fishing. They can advocate and they can lobby. We're prepared to do that as well. If you look at lobster, it's cyclical, so there is always that aspect you have to keep in mind. Climate change is having an impact on the lobster stocks and other seafood, to be honest, because as the waters warm, we are going to see migration of different species. That's something I know the associations are concerned about and they're really taking a hard look at it.

To be fair, there's a lot of effort put into the fishery. When I started many years ago, we did have wooden lobster traps at that time, my first year. You would go out after a storm, and they were all broken apart. You would spend two days fixing them. Now there are bigger vessels, better equipment, better traps, and better ropes - I mean, you can go out two or three days at a time. I was fortunate enough to go out on Dumping Day. I went for three days, actually, and you get a sense of what's going on, on the ground.

One thing we and the province can do, I believe, is on the market side. We have a regulation in the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act that basically says that licensed buyers in Nova Scotia can't buy seafood from a non-recognized licence - lobster or whatever it may be. A DFO-recognized licence must be issued by the federal government through the DFO, and buyers have to buy from recognized - it is illegal to buy from just anybody. New Brunswick doesn't have that, from what I'm hearing from different organizations.

One place I'd like to see more advocacy and more work by the government and the minister - I know I've asked that question in the House before - is to have a more Atlantic approach to dealing with the illegal sale of lobster. I say lobster, but it is happening with the elvers as well right now.

In Saulnierville or anywhere, it's easy to put on board a truck and go to New Brunswick and sell your product. In some cases, you just cross the Bay of Fundy by boat and go sell it there. If we had a more even approach to enforcement across all provincial jurisdictions, I think that would be of great help.

The other area I would have liked to have seen - and I know two years ago, enforcement was under the Department of Environment and Climate Change. It got transferred to the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. The enforcement of that specific requirement, that you can't buy seafood products from an unauthorized licensee from DFO, was moved to the enforcement division of the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. I hope to have some questions during Estimates for the minister, so if I get something not exactly 100 per cent right, I hope he has an opportunity to correct me.

When you look at the Enforcement Division - and I know the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture did mention there are eight enforcement officers that deal with this issue - but when you go to the Nova Scotia website, Enforcement Division, Authority and Legislation, it says, "Conservation Officers authority is derived from appointments under specific legislation", and it names all the legislation here, so I don't even know if I have time to name them all, to be honest, but I'll name a few:

- Beaches Act
- Crown Lands Act
- Fish Harvester Organizations Support Act
- Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act
- Federal Fisheries Act
- Mineral Resources Act
- Trails Act
- Off-Highway Vehicles Act

That's probably half of them. The fishery is a very important industry for rural communities (inaudible), so what I'd like to see is dedicated enforcement officers that deal only with the fishery, because it's difficult. I say this defending those enforcement officers. They have a lot of responsibility and they're not always focused on that exact time. I've been told you can call - if you suspect, you can report through a 1-800 number, but that's more reactive than proactive.

I know in District 34, the lobster industry is a \$300-million-plus industry. You're talking about over a billion dollars for the Province, so I would like to see more investment when it comes to the enforcement on that side. Even during what I'd call the difficult time in 2020, when we had hundreds of officers in our area, we had conflict on the water. It was during COVID times. I know some of these officers were pulled to the New Brunswick border to do some work there.

Eight officers for the entire province to try to enforce, monitor, even audit some of the industry to make sure that product isn't slipping through the cracks. The elver fishery - in fairness, yes, they're fishing illegally, but the fact that it's shipped to China tells me that there must be a way to enforce or monitor or assure that they can be caught before it gets there. It's not like they're selling it locally or to neighbours. This is serious business - it's shipped to China.

There must be a way for enforcement officers to follow the product, to do audits, to assure that buyers are not indulging in illegal activity. I know a lot of buyers, and I have to say this is not an accusation. They're important to our communities, they're important to the industry. They've really worked hard to build on that community, build on the fishery, raise the price, bring up the price, but at the same time, somehow, some way, these seafood products are being sold to the market.

Again, my big ask is that the government look at the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, to look at a better way to really focus in on the buyers' side - the market side - because without a market illegal activity doesn't become as attractive. The easier it is to sell, the more attractive it is. I think that's where the Province could have an impact on the challenges that I know we're facing in our community, and I know other communities are facing.

When you go out to the wharf or different places across the province, there's a lot of anxiety around the fishery. I think we all have a responsibility, especially rural MLAs and MLAs across the province, because we know that it's the resource sector that is really keeping the economy going. We really owe it to them - I mean, it's generational. Lobster fishing, scallops, herring, whatever it is - we all know people who earn their living through the fishery, and we have to assure above all else that we protect that industry.

With that, I'll take my seat, and I'm sure we'll have some good discussion with the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

[6:30 p.m.]

FRED TILLEY: I'll do my best to follow that great speech from my colleague from Clare. I haven't met many people more passionate about their role than the MLA for Clare, so congratulations on delivering that.

I would like to speak about a few things affecting my community. One of the big ones - we all talk about affordability, and it's a big issue, and I'll get to that in a moment, but what I'd like to speak about is the status of health care in Cape Breton right now, especially with respect to wait times at the emergency room. I've been following the daily wait times from the app and the site, and CBRM is consistently hours longer wait time at CBRM. I understand CBRM has a bigger population, but something needs to be done to figure out what the roadblock is into creating a more efficient system for seeing patients.

I've experienced this myself at the regional hospital over the past year with my own situation in the Summer, waiting seven hours for a very critical health issue. I've witnessed it with other members of my family, waiting hours and hours, requiring emergency surgery. I've witnessed it with people in my constituency who come in and talk about how people are afraid to go to the ER at the regional hospital because of the length of time they have to wait. They can't get in to the urgent care. They get referred from the pharmacy because their case is not one that the pharmacy can take.

I spoke with some folks at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, and they said, Fred, right now you wouldn't believe it. Anything at all we ask for, the answer is yes. That's great that we're spending all this money to answer requests, but we need to do this strategically. We need to work, and I'd be happy to give my two cents from a person who experienced it multiple times. There's got to be a way to streamline the system so that we can have people seen faster in the ER. That's one of my big concerns: the wait times at the ER, at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital. We need to do more, we need to do better, and we need to fix that so that people can be seen in a timely fashion before it's too late for them. That's a big one for me.

While I'm on the topic of health, like my colleague, I want to talk about some positive stuff. That was the funding of glucose monitors that the government put into place a few weeks ago. I think that's a fantastic first step in helping to treat those with diabetes, and it's a great preventive step, because if people know where their blood sugar is at all times, they are better able to self-treat. That's going to help with my other issue at the emergency room, because there are going to be fewer visits, fewer requirements, and less drain on the system. It's going to help a lot of Nova Scotians.

There are multiple people in my constituency who have advocated to me with regards to continuous glucose monitoring over my three years - or almost three years - in

office. One young man was very tenacious. I met with him on numerous occasions. He brought the machines over to show me and to talk about the health benefits. Little did I know that I'd be wearing one myself, which I am today. Mine isn't funded because I am not at the point where I require insulin.

I would like to see this government take it a step further and look at those who don't require insulin, because at some point they may, and this would be a great preventive tool that people could use to help manage their blood sugar in a way that doesn't require further costs on the health care system and further detriment to themselves.

I think we've taken it a step further. After the analysis comes through and we see the benefits, I would like to see that program expanded to non-insulin-dependent diabetics.

Now I want to spend the last half of my time - that went so fast, you don't realize how fast 15 minutes is - talking about affordability and the issues affecting the constituents of Northside-Westmount. I want to start off with our senior population.

Our senior population is struggling every day, and it's getting worse. They are struggling to make ends meet. They are struggling to put food on the table. They are struggling to stay in their homes. A couple things this government did this year really made it much harder for seniors to stay in their homes. By not indexing the Seniors Care Grant - it has been at \$37,500 since its inception - a slight increase in OAS pensions last year for a couple hundred dollars put many seniors out of reach for that benefit.

I see them in my office. They come in to fill out the form - and we do fill out a lot of forms - we look, and we find out, Oh my goodness. You're not eligible by a couple of hundred dollars. By our not indexing that income threshold, seniors lose out on \$750 when they might have picked up \$300 from their OAS, so the net effect for them is minus \$450.

Speaker, \$450 doesn't - when you think about that, it's not a lot of money, but it is a lot of money. We are only giving \$150 to Community Services recipients. So to take \$450 out of the pocket of a senior, that's a significant amount of heating oil; it's a significant amount of snow removal. Add that to the fact that we had record snowfalls and record costs this year to remove that snow for many seniors - they're really struggling, really struggling to make ends meet.

Many seniors were not eligible for the Seniors Care Grant. Add that to the fact that the HEAT Fund was changed - at the last minute, I will note. We found out that morning that the HEAT Fund was dropping, that if you got it last year, you were not eligible for it this year. So there was another \$400 that many seniors and others - because that one's not age-related - in our community were looking forward to, to get oil in their tank so that they could stay warm for the month of February. That didn't happen.

And we didn't stop there. We cut - not we, the government - cut the Heating

Assistance Rebate Program from \$1,000 down to \$600. Another \$400. So \$400 from HARP, \$400 from the HEAT Fund, and \$750 from the Senior Care Grant. Now we're talking a lot of money at a fixed income budget for heating oil. We're talking a full tank or more of oil. Not only did we cut the amount from \$1,000 to \$600, but the eligibility went down by \$10,000. A family the previous year making \$85,000 got \$1,000. This year, a family making \$85,000 got zero, so you cut \$1,000 from their budget. And a family making \$75,000 or less got \$600.

We can see how we negatively affected many seniors in the community, many vulnerable people in our community. And we also affected a lot of the working people in our community who are working day to day, living paycheque to paycheque, by cutting that HARP rebate. We really stuck it to them. We stuck it to them because we said, Last year you got it, so in your mind, rightly or wrongly, you're thinking, I got it last year, I'm going to get it this year. It's \$1,000 from last year; I can budget that so that I know I'll have the \$1,000 this year. It will almost fill my tank, get me through a month and a half. But no, we hit the people right in the pocketbook.

We could do better, and we should do better, and we should really think about next Winter, with a fixed election date of July 2025, so we know we'll be going to the polls a year from this July. Let's hope that the government increases those amounts next Winter for people.

I'll end off with a little positivity as well, because I'm a believer that you criticize but you also have to give credit where credit's due. And I want to give credit to the government for indexing the income tax brackets. I think that was the right thing to do. Whether it took a couple of years or not, it doesn't matter - it's now done for 2025. Those folks won't have that hidden tax, as my colleague rightly describes it. People will then not fall further behind as they get those cost of living raises from their employer. They won't be pushed into that next tax bracket, so good on the government for doing that.

A couple of great things. But a couple of things that could have happened are: We could've taken a look at the HST. A cut of 2 per cent to the HST would go a long way for Nova Scotians in helping to improve our economy, helping to get things moving. Looking at the Motive Fuel Tax, looking at charging HST on things. We hear this government talk about the Liberal carbon tax? Well, they're benefiting from the HST on top of it. Removing the HST off that tax, removing the Motive Fuel Tax, are ways - we've just seen it happen, I think, in Manitoba - ways that this government could put more money in the hands of Nova Scotians.

All in all, Speaker, I'll leave it there for tonight, and I thank you for your time.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

We'll have a short - short - recess while the committee sets up.

[6:52 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse in the Chair.]

[10:56 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Danielle Barkhouse resumed the Chair.]

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

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

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on March 21<sup>st</sup> between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. Government business will include Committee of the Whole House on Supply, Committee of the Whole House on Bills, and Second Reading for Bill No. 419.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that we do now rise to meet again tomorrow, March 20<sup>th</sup>, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until tomorrow.

[The House rose at 10:57 p.m.]