



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:02 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Danielle Barkhouse, Lisa Lachance, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We will now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 959

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

Whereas the United Nations has designated March 21st as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to honour the memory of the victims of the Sharpeville Massacre and to reaffirm our collective commitment to combat racial discrimination in all its forms; and

Whereas the theme for the 2024 International Day, a decade of recognition, justice and development, aligns with the ongoing International Decade for People of African Descent, highlighting the global commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of people of African descent; and

Whereas despite progress in combatting racism and racial discrimination, people of African descent continue to face systemic inequalities and injustice that undermine their human rights, dignity, and opportunities for development;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the Legislative Assembly reaffirm their dedication to advance recognition, justice, and development for people of African descent in Nova Scotia through dedicated policies, programs, and initiatives that address the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination, and by fostering an inclusive society that values the contribution and respects the rights of all of its members.

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 Advanced Education and L'nu Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 960

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

Whereas Mi'kmaw elder Joe B. Marshall of Eskasoni, who passed away on January 19th, was a loyal son, father, brother, husband, and trusted friend, as well as a Royal Canadian Air Force veteran, educator, athlete, and lawyer who dedicated his life to advancing the rights of Mi'kmaw people; and

Whereas Elder Marshall was a founding member of the Union of Nova Scotia Indians, now known as the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, who made significant contributions to the union over the years, serving as Senior Mi'kmaw Advisor for KMK, and the Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative from 2004 until his retirement in 2021; and

Whereas Elder Marshall was a residential school survivor who was committed to preserving and promoting Mi'kmaw language and culture and was named to both the Order of Nova Scotia and the Order of Canada, and in 2013 was acknowledged as the Role Model of the Year by students at Allison Bernard Memorial High School - what he considered to be his highest honour;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in honouring the life and legacy of Elder Joe B. Marshall, and acknowledge his lifetime of service to advance the rights of the Mi'kmaw people and protect Mi'kmaw language and culture.

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 Seniors and Long-term Care.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, in the East Gallery today, we have four amazing guests who are here representing the new CAPABLE program, which is a first in Canada. This program is now available to seniors in Spryfield, Herring Cove, Clayton Park West, downtown Halifax, Kings County, and the communities of Cherry Brook, Lake Loon, North Preston, East Preston, and the surrounding areas.

With us today we have two seniors who are among the first to benefit from this first-in-Canada program. We have also a member of the CAPABLE team, the team of RNs, occupational therapists, and handy people who are helping seniors make simple changes and remain in their homes longer.

Also joining us is a representative of VON Nova Scotia. VON is our amazing partner in delivering this innovative program.

I would ask that these guests please rise as I introduce them. We have Joyce Ross, who lives in East Preston; we have Betty Ross, also from East Preston; we have Amanda Bradshaw, an occupational therapist and member of the CAPABLE team for the Preston area; and we have Emily Petley-Jones, the manager in home and community care from VON.

I would ask all members of the House to join me in welcoming our guests. (Applause)

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

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

RESOLUTION NO. 961

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

Whereas Nova Scotia seniors want to stay in their homes in the communities they helped build and shape, something most can do with the right supports; and

Whereas we recently introduced a first-in-Canada CAPABLE program that is helping seniors make simple changes to their day-to-day activities and in their homes - changes that are increasing their independence and improving their quality of life; and

Whereas these changes are being led by a tremendous team of VON registered nurses, occupational therapists, and handypeople who are working with seniors to review their medications, teach them physical exercises, and make accessibility changes to their homes;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in acknowledging the great work of this team and the achievements that the seniors across this province are making together to maintain their independence and to continue contributing to their communities and the 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.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I beg leave to make an introduction before I table the bill.

I just want to bring the House's attention to Will Brewer, whom I will introduce again later before my member's statement. This piece of legislation was inspired by Will Brewer, who benefited from this program. Thanks for being here, Will. (Applause)

Bill No. 439 - An Act to Strengthen Nova Scotia Works. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I beg leave to make an introduction.

I just would like to also recognize not only the famous Will Brewer, but his mom, who is here. I've known them both from two decades ago, when I knew them in the Arctic. They're joined - I can tell by the colours there - by some other folks from the Down Syndrome Society. I'd ask everyone to give them a warm welcome.

On behalf of Harvey and all Nova Scotia citizens who are living with Down Syndrome:

[1:15 p.m.]

Bill No. 440 - An Act Respecting Down Syndrome. (Hon. Keith Irving)

Bill No. 441 - An Act Respecting a Maritime Coalition. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 442 - An Act to Continue the United Way of Halifax Region as a Not-for-profit Corporation under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act and to Repeal Chapter 73 of the Acts of 1972, An Act to incorporate The Halifax-Dartmouth United Appeal. (Lisa Lachance)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

RESOLUTION NO. 962

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

Whereas African Nova Scotians were settled in the province of Nova Scotia through enslavement or through fleeing enslavement elsewhere and continue to experience all manner of structural, systemic, and individual discrimination, yet our experience is equally characterized by resistance, resilience, creativity, spirituality, and hope that has profoundly shaped our families and communities and this province and country; and

Whereas the distinctiveness of African Nova Scotians as a people has been recognized by the United Nations in a 2017 Report of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, which stated: “There has been a long history of resistance and resilience by African Nova Scotians, and they have developed a distinct culture, traditions and social and political practices”; and

Whereas on May 8, 2018, the Government of Nova Scotia proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent, stating: “Government is committed to addressing the issues facing African

Nova Scotians, who have a long and unique history in Nova Scotia since the 1600s”;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly, on Wednesday, March 27, immediately following Oral Questions, devote no less than two hours to debate the recognition of African Nova Scotians and Indigenous Blacks as a distinct people who descend from free and enslaved Black planters, Black Loyalists, Black refugees, Maroons, and other Black people who inhabited the original 52 land-based Black communities in the part of Mi’kma’ki known as Nova Scotia.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I’d just like to make the remark that I do believe that, to some degree, all members and all parties would agree that we need to work to modernize and make this Legislature a more efficient and effective way to represent Nova Scotians. I believe that this notice of motion does this.

THE SPEAKER: Please begin your motion.

RESOLUTION NO. 963

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

Whereas the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly currently do not allow for electronic petitions to be tabled in the House of Assembly; and

Whereas the House of Commons allows for electronic petitions to be tabled, and in a 2018 report on e-petitions in Ontario, it was recommended the government proceed with e-petitions;

Therefore be it resolved that the Government House Leader be directed to, no later than the end of this 2024 Spring House session, introduce and move a motion to amend the Rules and Forms of Procedure of the House of Assembly to enable the presentation and filing of e-petitions under the rules to allow a more accessible way for all Nova Scotians to have their voices heard in our House of Assembly.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

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

PORTER, NATALIE: GENEALOG. RESEARCH PROJECT - RECOG.

LARRY HARRISON: Six months ago, Natalie Porter began working with Colchester Historeum - Museum & Archives with a Canadian Council of Archives grant. Young Canada Works at building careers in heritage. This internship's main objective was to undertake a research project about a diverse community in Colchester County.

During this time, Ms. Porter has been gathering genealogical information on African Nova Scotians from our communities. The project has grown to include information about more than 800 individuals from 20 families. She has drawn the data from records spanning 100 years, including vital statistics, census, burial records, obituaries, headstones, newspapers, directories, maps, and archival holdings.

This genealogical collection is a substantial starting point for continuous research, and on this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I would encourage similar research projects in other communities across the province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to direct the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by a number of people who are here to recognize World Down Syndrome Day. I'd like these individuals to stand up as I recognize them, please. Will Brewer, Town Crier for the City of Halifax; his mother, Allison Brewer; Lana Larder; Ashley Muise and Wes Muise and Darlene Muise. If you could please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

WORLD DOWN SYND. DAY: END STEREOTYPES - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, today is World Down Syndrome Day, a day to raise awareness and end the stereotypes that people with Down Syndrome experience every single day.

I'm so pleased to recognize my friend here, Town Crier for Halifax Regional Municipality Will Brewer, who I'm sure is a familiar face in this House to many people. Will actually became the first town crier with Down Syndrome in Canada in 2018, and has served the city of Halifax with honour, charm, and a booming voice ever since.

That's not the only barrier Will has broken. In 2020, Will was elected student union president at Mount Saint Vincent University. He used his life experience to bring programs to his school to help students with diverse abilities study on campus. Will has become a role model for Down Syndrome and the community of folks that deal with Down Syndrome, and has done so thanks to the love and support of his incredible mother, Allison, and the many friends he has, like Lana, Ashley, Darlene, and Wes, who are here with us today.

I'm so grateful to know Will. I know the future for him is bright, and hopefully we'll see him one day break some barriers and be a member in this Chamber too.

THE SPEAKER: It's a real pleasure to have you here today. I hope you enjoy your visit.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'd like to draw the members' attention to the gallery opposite, where we have with us today Pam Vaters and Marion Reid. I'd like to ask you both to stand. These incredible humans are both Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal recipients and amazing people whom I know through their service to the Dartmouth

Seniors Service Centre and art community. I ask that they receive the warm welcome of the House today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit with us.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

VATERS, PAM: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to honour Pam Vaters of Dartmouth South. This Winter, Pam retired from her position as executive director of the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre. Her impact at the Centre has been enormous. Pam grew the membership from a modest 250 to over 700 members, and she doubled the Meals on Wheels program from 2,000 meals up to 4,000 affordable, nutritious, and delicious meals delivered to Dartmouth seniors every month.

Beyond the numbers, Pam brought her special energy to the Centre, and members tell us that they began celebrating their senior years after she came to work there. She introduced new programs, launched events, and hosted regular dances. Pam cares deeply about the seniors of Dartmouth and has always been the first to help a senior in need. Her huge heart and laugh will truly be missed. I'm hopeful that she'll now finally take some time off to enjoy a nice glass of wine and spend some time with her daughters. Please join me in thanking Pam for her years of service to our community and in wishing her the very best in her retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, before I begin, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

BECKY DRUHAN: In the West Gallery today, I'm honoured to introduce several of the mayors of Bridgewater from present day dating back nearly 50 years. As I introduce them, I ask them each to rise if they wish or raise their hand to identify themselves. We're joined by Mayor David Mitchell, the current mayor, who was first elected in 2016. We're joined as well by his predecessor, David Walker, who was mayor from 2012 to 2016. Also joining us is Harry Cook, who was the mayor of Bridgewater from 1976 to 1988, and he's joined by his daughter, Tina Blinn, and his son-in-law, Don Blinn. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for joining us today.

The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

BRIDGEWATER: 125TH ANNIV. OF FOUNDING - RECOG.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I also want to recognize Mayor Ernie Bolivar, who hoped to be here today with his wife, Marilyn. He served as mayor from 1991 to 2004, Bridgewater's longest-standing mayor, and served a total of 31 years in politics. I want to thank each of them and others for their service to community.

I rise today to congratulate the town of Bridgewater, the main street of the South Shore, on its 125th anniversary of the founding on February 13, 1899. Bridgewater, nestled in the beautiful LaHave River Valley, is well established as the primary commercial and professional service centre of our region, and is both rich in history and in culture.

The town and the community are honouring this milestone with events throughout the year. In January, DesBrisay Museum hosted its first-ever theatre production, *The Lady in White*. In February, the town ran two lobster-crawl foodie tours, along with two weekends of Frost Fair celebrations, with the Bridgewater Stamp Club releasing a commemorative stamp collection with Canada Post. Upcoming festivities will welcome residents and visitors throughout the remainder of the year, including a Canada Day multicultural festival, water carnival and homecoming in August, and a Harvest Moon Festival along the riverfront in September.

I wish the Town of Bridgewater continued growth and prosperity and encourage members, Nova Scotians, and visitors to visit this beautiful town and enjoy the celebrations and this remarkable milestone.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HARVEY: DOWN SYNDROME INSPIRATION - RECOG.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, today, on World Down Syndrome Day, I want to recognize and thank Harvey and his family, who have inspired Harvey's Law, which I reintroduced today. Harvey is a remarkable six-year-old boy from Port Williams. Harvey's smile, energy, and enthusiasm for life remind us all that people with Down Syndrome have so much to offer this world. We all need to do more to support Nova Scotia families with Down Syndrome so we can build stronger, more inclusive, and more caring communities in our province. To Harvey, I want you to know you're perfect. I want to thank you for being you and teaching us all so much.

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

WORLD DOWN SYND. DAY: END STEREOTYPES - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, my socks are mismatched today for World Down Syndrome Day. My brother Adam and my cousin Barbara have Down syndrome, like

45,000 other Canadians. Adam and Barbara have taught our family so much about love, compassion, acceptance, and patience. This year's theme is End The Stereotypes. We are asking supporters worldwide to call for an end to stereotypes. People with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities encounter stereotypes every day. This can lead to people with disabilities being underestimated, excluded, treated poorly, and abused. If we have positive assumptions about people with Down syndrome, they will have the opportunities at school, at work, in relationships, and in other activities. Maybe these positive assumptions will become reality for Adam, Barbara, and the 45,000 other Canadians with Down syndrome. Happy World Down Syndrome Day.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

WORLD DOWN SYNDROME DAY: APPRECIATION - RECOG.,

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, today I rise to bring awareness to incredible individuals living with Down Syndrome as today is World Down Syndrome Day. On this day, we shine a spotlight on individuals as a part of our international celebration and appreciation.

Recognized by the United Nations since 2012, this day symbolizes the unique journey of individuals with Down syndrome. Local organizations like the Halifax NS Down Syndrome Society do such amazing work for families and their loved ones. Not only do they provide important resources, but they also engage with community groups to provide programming and services for their members with Down syndrome.

As we embrace this day, we aim to champion the rights, inclusion, and prosperity of those with Down syndrome. Let us join hands across our province to spread awareness, ignite change, and foster a world where every voice is heard, and every individual is valued.

The theme of Down Syndrome Day this year is End The Stereotypes. I ask that all Nova Scotians rise up, raise your voice, and let us together illuminate the path toward a more inclusive and compassionate society.

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

GAUTHIER, PAUL: COLE HBR. FOUNDATION - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, today I'm honouring Paul Gauthier, founder and president of the Cole Harbour Foundation. Having grown up in Cole Harbour, Paul has witnessed the potential and aspirations of this community and has taken action to make change a reality. Driven by an unwavering commitment to give back, Paul embarked on a mission to improve educational opportunities for children and youth in Cole Harbour.

Recognizing that education is the cornerstone of progress and empowerment, Paul founded the Cole Harbour Foundation in 2010. This foundation supports youth in the community from birth until graduation. In the past 14 years, they have awarded over 250 scholarships, provided hundreds of teachers with educational materials for their classrooms, supported students with math, literacy and tutoring, and partnered with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library to provide thousands of free books each month to infants and preschoolers.

Through his tireless dedication and inspired leadership, Paul Gauthier and the Cole Harbour Foundation are empowering our youth with the tools they need to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Please join me in recognizing Paul Gauthier and the amazing work of the Cole Harbour Foundation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, may I introduce a guest?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

GARY BURRILL: I'm going to speak in a moment in appreciation of the legal career of Claire McNeil, who we're very pleased to have with us here today. I'd like to ask Claire if she'd please stand first and receive the warm recognition of the House. (Applause)

Also with Claire is her partner, Vince Calderhead; Nancy Taylor, my sister-in-law; and Roger Burrill, my brother.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

MCNEIL, CLAIRE: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

GARY BURRILL: It's a privilege in the House of Assembly today to mark appreciatively the legal career and the retirement at the end of December 2023 of Claire McNeil from her position as staff lawyer with Dalhousie Legal Aid Service following over three decades of service. Since 1991, Claire has mentored hundreds of law students at Dal Legal Aid and been one of Nova Scotia's leading legal forces for equity and fairness.

In landmark cases with the Affordable Energy Coalition in 2006 and 2009, Claire was at the forefront of the legal battle for a universal service program for Nova Scotia power rates, providing for accommodated rate differentials for people of lower incomes. Claire has done exceptionally important work in the area of prisoners' rights in court applications, which serve to entrench the habeas corpus rights of imprisoned people in our province.

For 10 years, Claire worked tirelessly to achieve the monumental breakthrough in disability rights in the Disability Rights Coalition's successful 2021 case, establishing the right of disabled persons to live with supports in the community in Nova Scotia.

Speaker, I wish to give voice in the People's House in gratitude to Claire McNeil from the people of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, before I begin, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, in the East Gallery, I am honoured to introduce Leta Jarvis, Jeannie Whidden, and Cindy Carruthers from People First. This wonderful organization works to ensure more inclusion and independence in our province.

Leta, Jeannie and Cindy, I ask that you stand and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome, nice to have you with us today.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

PEOPLE FIRST: ADVOCACY FOR DISABLED - RECOG.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize People First, a remarkable organization that has been working tirelessly to amplify the voices of Canadians living with intellectual disabilities since 1973.

Since the beginning of their storied history, People First has championed a profound idea, although for most of us this idea is an everyday reality that we take for granted. The idea is choice: the basic right to choose how one leads their own life, such as where to live and where to work.

For much of this country's history, these choices were made for those living with intellectual disabilities and not with them. The advocacy of groups like People First has contributed greatly to Nova Scotia's evolving spirit as our province continues to transform into a truly inclusive home through The Remedy.

I ask that all members join me in celebrating People First, The Remedy, and a Nova Scotia where everyone is empowered to have choice.

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

EASY STREET DINER: FAIRVIEW EATERY - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, today I rise to recognize two individuals I've spoken about in this Chamber before: chefs Kelly-Jo Beck and Lalanya Kaizer, co-owners of Easy Street Diner in Fairview. With a focus on quality ingredients and homemade goodness, they take pride in crafting each menu item with care and attention to detail. From fermenting their own vegan kimchi to brining and smoking their bacon and pastrami in-house, every dish is prepared with love and authenticity.

It's not just about the food at Easy Street Diner; it's about creating a welcoming and inclusive space where everyone feels at home. As an LGBTQ-friendly establishment, the diner offers a sense of community and belonging, ensuring that Easy Street is a place where diners return time and time again.

In a world where little things often make the biggest difference, Kelly-Jo and Lalanya's commitment to quality, authenticity, and inclusivity shines through in every aspect of Easy Street Diner.

In this Women's History Month, I'd like to ask the members of this House to invite all members to dine at the Easy Street Diner and experience the warm welcome and delicious flavours that make it a Fairview favourite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

INT'L DAY FOR ELIM. OF RACISM: CALL TO ACT - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. If some don't know, racism is alive and well.

The 2024 theme of the International Day for the Elimination of Racism is a decade of recognition, justice, and development. Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which we now know is extended to 2028 - something which this current government is not open to talking about or working on.

Racial discrimination and the legacies of slavery and colonialism continue to destroy lives, and curtail opportunities, preventing billions of people from enjoying their full human rights and freedoms. While much progress has been made, Indigenous peoples, racialized, and religious minority communities in Nova Scotia continue to face racism and discrimination every day. I'd like all members of this House to join me in the call to action for all individuals and levels of government to actively work to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination, injustice, systemic racism, and hate.

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

TEAM ATHERTON: CURLING ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Today I'm pleased to recognize Team Atherton, playing out of the Chester Curling Club. The team members are skip Zach Atherton from Chester; third Alan Fawcett from Halifax; second Tyler McMullen from Lower Sackville; and lead Brennan Smith, from my home town, Upper Tantallon. Some of the teammates have played together for as many as five years, and the team members have been curling since the ages of seven and eight years old.

Speaker, I'd like to congratulate them on their success at the Nova Scotia Men's U-18 Provincials in December, where they were victorious and which qualified them for a spot at the National U-18s in Ottawa in February, where they won the bronze medal. Tyler McMullen was also presented with the award for sportsmanship. The team also took part in the U-21 Men's Provincials, which was held in Truro after they arrived home from the nationals. Taking part in these competitions helps them to build their skills.

I'd just like to finish by saying I hope that all members of the House will help me in congratulating Team Atherton for their bronze medal at the nationals and wish them continued success.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

LISA LACHANCE: In the West Gallery today, we are joined by a few folks from my family for the first time. I'd like to introduce my partner, Heather Gass, who's joined us here today; my mother-in-law, Cathy Cervin; my child, Keira Gass-Lachance; and my friend, Pearl Leggatt. Welcome. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

DAUGHTER, KEIRA GASS-LACHANCE - BIRTHDAY WISHES

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to mark the 18th birthday of Keira Gass-Lachance.

Keira has never been one to shy away from working for what they want. Playing hockey and becoming a goalie was on her to-do list, and she spent hours on icy lakes and our backyard rink and watching and imitating techniques from YouTube to achieve her dream.

She isn't shy and is a remarkable advocate for Indigenous People's rights, always ready to point out where colonialism continues to permeate our society. She is a generous and loving friend. At their young age, Keira has already demonstrated remarkable strength and resilience as she endured the loss of special people, like her mother Patricia and her granddad David.

Keira has a wicked sense of humour, is the most determined person I have ever met, and I have faith that she will find many interesting paths in her life. Keira, Mom and I are so proud of you, and we love you to the Moon and back. Happy Birthday. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

WILLIAMS, DOLLY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dolly Williams, who is known for her social activism and volunteer work in our community, across HRM, and the province. Some of Dolly's activities include: President of the East Preston Seniors' Club; Second Vice President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Seniors; member of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council for Seniors; and Co-Chair for the Road to Economic Prosperity for African Nova Scotian Communities in HRM. In 2007, she published a book entitled *Black Women Who Made a Difference in Nova Scotia*. She also created a scholarship fund for Blacks wanting to become police officers, in memory of her husband Sinclair Williams Sr., the first Black police officer in Dartmouth.

I ask all members of the Legislature to please join me in thanking Mrs. Williams for all that she does for seniors and so many others in our community and in our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

NOWRUZ: PERSIAN/IRANIAN NEW YEAR - RECOG.

HON. TONY INCE: Speaker, I rise today to wish all those celebrating Nowruz a happy new year.

Nowruz is a joyous time to welcome Spring, to reflect on the year that has passed, and to look forward with optimism. As I'm sure all Nova Scotians can, I appreciate that sentiment and the intention. As I look back on the ups and downs of the past year - working on my mental health, creating the Canadian Congress of Black Parliamentarians to help

further the work of engaging a diverse population both to run and to vote, sharing precious time with my grandchildren, and publicly sharing my own struggles with housing in the past - I am reminded that no matter what it may look like to the outside, everyone has their private struggles.

I also look to the coming year with optimism. I am glad for the snowy Winter we have had so our province can be protected from wildfires. I look forward to the improved diabetic health care. I have hope that we can all work together to make life more affordable for our constituents.

I ask that my colleagues reflect on what has happened in the past and how they can provide optimism for the future, and especially wish a happy Nowruz to all those celebrating.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

RAMADAN: MUSLIM CELEBRATION - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The Muslim holy month of Ramadan began on March 11, 2024, with the first sighting of the crescent moon in Saudi Arabia the Sunday prior. Ramadan is a month of fasting, prayer, giving, and coming together as a community, deepening connections to faith and each other. It is a time for spiritual rejuvenation - fitting, as we enter Spring - reflection and growth.

I know that during this Ramadan, many of our Muslim brothers, sisters, and siblings will be holding the people of Palestine from all faith backgrounds in their hearts and prayers, and I extend my own prayers in solidarity.

On Friday night, I will be attending a Ramadan iftar at the Dartmouth masjid, one of my favourite events of the entire year. I ask this House to join me in extending a whole-hearted Ramadan Mubarak to the vibrant Muslim community in Dartmouth North.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

DARKU, STACY: BOOK PUBLIC. - CONGRATS.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to congratulate Stacy Darku of Lower Sackville. Stacy Darku is the owner of Esinam Counselling Inc. in Lower Sackville and recently published her first children's book, entitled *Imani and the Shades of Black*. The book tells the story of a young girl with a radiant smile, a heart full of curiosity, and the most beautiful dark skin. Because Imani's friends come in different shades of black, she cannot help but wonder if they are all the same, or do different shades make a difference? Imani's mother teaches her that the colour of one's skin does not define their worth.

Speaker, on this, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Stacy on her achievement and for portraying such a valuable message.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

WARRIORS VOLLEYBALL TEAM: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to congratulate the Halifax West High School Warriors girls' volleyball team, who became the Capital Region Division 1 Girls Champions this past December. The Warriors hold an impressive 103-0 winning streak. Centre Olivia Coakley said the streak has been a wild ride but the team has been able to put it in perspective and not get caught up in the numbers. The girls of this volleyball team really put in an effort and worked hard right to the finish. Halifax West High School has a strong, dedicated team of coaches who motivate the players to do their best.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Halifax West High School Warriors girls' volleyball team and coaches on their dedication and effort to the game.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

BRANDER, CHRISTE: DISABLED ADVOCACY - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I'd like to recognize a great woman in Cumberland North: Christe Brander. Christe is a strong advocate for individuals who identify as having a disability.

Christe's son was disabled in 2016 at a very young age following a stroke caused by a brain tumour. She worries greatly what will happen to her son once she is no longer able to care for him.

She recognizes those with disabilities face unique challenges and must rely on social assistance when their illness or injury does not allow them to earn what many would describe as a normal living. Christe works with those in need with these conditions as well. She goes above and beyond what the job description entails.

Please join me in thanking Christe Brander for all her work helping those who identify as having a disability in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

SWANSON, ALLEGRA: JUNO AWARDS WORK - RECOG.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to recognize and to welcome the JUNOS to town on this, the first day of JUNO Week, and to acknowledge someone whose hard work was instrumental in getting us to this day.

Over the next four days, Halifax will see nearly 250 artists on 22 stages, and it's safe to say that that might not have happened if it weren't for the tireless work of Allegra Swanson, Chair of the 2024 JUNO Awards Halifax Host Committee. Allegra has a passion for the music industry and over a decade of experience in the non-profit arts sector.

In addition to being the chair of the 2024 JUNO Awards Halifax Host Committee, she's currently the executive director of Music Nova Scotia and vice chair of the Creative Nova Scotia Leadership Council. Previously, Allegra was the manager of events at CARAS in the JUNO Awards and executive producer of the award-winning recording label the Canadian Music Centre, where she was also a director of communications. Fun fact: She's also a classically trained opera singer.

With roots on the East Coast, Allegra and her family decided to make Nova Scotia, specifically Dartmouth South, their home three years ago, and have never looked back. In her words:

In a province known for its breathtaking landscapes, the music industry runs deep, rooted in the history of over 50 Black communities and our Mi'kmaw ancestors. Music in Nova Scotia is a thriving sector that's vital to our diverse heritage, representing \$10M of the GDP in the province. It inspires, retains community spirit, and enhances well-being.

I ask all members to join me in welcoming the JUNOS to town and celebrating the work of Allegra Swanson.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

CHISHOLM, WILL: MJHL AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Lunenburg native Will Chisholm on being named Character Player of the Year by the Maritime Junior Hockey League. At 20 years old, Will is the captain of the Yarmouth Mariners, and he's had an amazing year, scoring 49 points in 48 games, including a team-best five game-winning goals and 15 multi-point games. He's a very talented athlete, and one to watch.

However, this award recognizes Will as a deeply good person: someone committed to his teammates and community, and to supporting young players via minor hockey and Yarmouth's Icy Knights youth program. In the words of Mariners head coach Laurie Barron, Will is "a pleaser who hates to say no and is willing to help anyone." And this is the part of the quote I love the most: "We need more Will Chisholms in this world."

I agree. Congratulations to Will and the extended Myra-Chisholm family. Thanks for making us so proud.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DOWNHOUSE BAND: PERFORMANCES - RECOG.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the newest musical sensation taking the Northside by storm: the Downhouse band, made up of a group of 16- and 17-year-old young men. They're doing a great job in our community. The band members are Leeland Marnelli, Nate Young, Cody Young, Nick Quirk, Owen Seymour, and manager extraordinaire Owen Sullivan.

They've been playing all over the Northside - at Duke's Place Pub & Grill, at the Sydney Mines Legion - and most recently, they played at a seniors day that was put on by the Northside Gals. I just want to read one of the quotes from one of the seniors: "The music put life in my feet. These young boys brought me back to years ago, when I owned the dance floor."

These young gentlemen are bringing life and music to the Northside. We wish them all the best in their future, and I know there are great things ahead for the Downhouse band.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

LISA LACHANCE: In the West Gallery today, we are joined by Amy Savoury, whose remarkable career I'm going to describe in a moment. I also want to let you know that if you ever see Amy's name on a ballot, be afraid, because Amy beat me in my first electoral campaign in Grade 8 in Bayside, Ontario. (Laughter)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

SAVOURY, AMY: TASTE OF N.S. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to honour Amy Savoury, who was awarded the Taste of Nova Scotia Gary MacDonald Culinary Ambassador Award. This award is presented to someone who shows a passion and knowledge of local food and acts as a leader in the local food and drink industry.

Amy Savoury is all of these things, having contributed to the industry previously at Le Caveau Restaurant at Domaine de Grand Pré Winery, where she worked as a sommelier. She later became an instructor at NSCC Kingstec, where she continues to inspire students to learn about our local industry and how their work can positively affect our local economy. There's a wonderful video for this award that you should check out, where Amy's students describe the impact and inspiration she has in her role.

I'd like to conclude by congratulating Amy Savoury on her outstanding achievement and all the work she's done through her passion for food and drink within her local community and our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

HARBOURVILLE REST. SOC.: NEW PUBLIC. - CONGRATS.

CHRIS PALMER: Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to a remarkable endeavour by the Harbourville Restoration Society, which has recently unveiled a publication entitled *A Sense of Place: Living & Working on the North Mountain*. This publication is a testament to the dedication of our community in preserving our heritage and fostering a deeper understanding of our local history.

Through meticulous research and heartfelt storytelling, *A Sense of Place* illuminates the lives of those who have called the North Mountain home for generations. It captures the essence of our region, celebrating the resilience, ingenuity, and spirit of its inhabitants. Twenty-seven people generously gave their time to be interviewed, providing information, memories, and reflections of their life on the North Mountain. The project exemplifies the power of collaboration and community engagement.

On February 18th, I was pleased to join over 100 residents at the Harbourville hall to celebrate the friends, family, and neighbours who contributed their stories and memories to the book.

I would ask all members of the House to extend congratulations to the Harbourville Restoration Society on the launch of this remarkable publication. May it continue to inspire curiosity, dialogue, and appreciation for our shared heritage for years to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

GAUDET, MELBOURNE: FIREFIGHTING AWD. - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Last December, I had the honour of attending the Havelock Fire Department banquet, an event celebrating the dedication and service of its members. One highlight of the evening was the recognition of Melbourne Gaudet, who was awarded the Service Award for his incredible 48 years of service to the Havelock Fire Department.

Melbourne Gaudet's impact goes beyond his many years of service. He has played an integral role in shaping the Havelock Fire Department into the vital community institution it is today. As one of its founding members, Mr. Gaudet has been instrumental in guiding its growth and development since its inception.

I ask that all members join me in expressing our profound appreciation to Melbourne Gaudet for his enduring dedication to the Havelock Fire Department and for his steadfast service to our community.

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

BROTHER, ADAM: DOWN SYNDROME INSPIR. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Tomorrow is Superhero Day in the CBRM, but today I want to recognize one of my heroes, my brother Adam. Adam was born a fighter. When he was born, he weighed 4 lbs. 4 oz. In his first weeks of life, he developed spinal meningitis. Just shy of his first birthday, weighing 9 lbs. 14 oz., he underwent open-heart surgery. Five days after that operation, he was in a car accident.

As many of you know, Adam also has Down syndrome. Adam shows me every day what unconditional love means. He is teaching Rory and Isla how to live with love, being non-judgmental, and with kindness. I love you, Angel Boy. You are my hero and your best superpower is your extra chromosome.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

SWAINE, PHYLLIS: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to remember and recognize Phyllis Laura (Nicoll) Swaine of Barrington Passage, who passed away at her home on February 20th at the remarkable age of 101.

Phyllis was the youngest of six children. She was born and grew up in Clyde River, where she attended a one-room school. Upon graduation from commercial school, she worked at various jobs throughout the province before going to British Columbia to work for the Department of Education in 1948. In 1949, Phyllis was proud to be chosen the Queen of Shelburne.

In 1951, Phyllis married Thomas Swaine, becoming a stay-at-home mom and raising five children. After her children were gone, Phyllis returned to work at her husband's business, finally retiring at the age of 82. Phyllis was a lifelong member of the PC Party and Barrington IODE.

I respectfully ask all members to join me in remembering Phyllis's remarkable life and sending condolences to her family and friends.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

THE POTTING SHED: OPENING - RECOG.

CARMAN KERR: In Annapolis, we are lucky to have so many excellent small businesses. As a former business owner myself, I'm always pleased to have an opportunity to celebrate them here in the House.

Today I would like to highlight a new business in my constituency. Partners Todd Sweet and Tom Wright opened The Potting Shed Flowers and Plants at 17 St. James Street in Annapolis Royal on March 19th. They bring with them decades of experience in the industry. The shop offers a wide range of floral services and I look forward to stopping in after the Spring sitting.

I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Todd and Tom on the opening of their business and in wishing them all the best in their future ventures.

[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.: PALLET SHELTER LOCATIONS - CONSULT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: In November, this government committed to having 200 shelters in place to help with the homelessness crisis by mid-December. We are now close to April, and there have only been 19 of those shelters in place. This has had impacts on individuals dealing with homelessness. We've had two individuals die on the streets. It's also had an impact on neighbourhoods and small businesses.

Last night in Estimates, the Minister of Community Services said that they're not going to waste time consulting or holding town halls to determine locations for Pallet

shelters. One of the issues has been this government not actually consulting with communities and neighbourhoods before they decide on these locations. Could the Premier please tell this House: Is he going to consult with neighbourhoods and communities before he decides which locations are going to have these Pallet shelters?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): This is a serious issue, an important issue - people living rough. We're a compassionate province. We feel that when people are living rough, for sure. As a province, we've tried to step up and offer as many supports as we can.

One of those avenues of support is Pallet homes and other forms of temporary housing. We opened a number of housing shelter spaces over the Winter. The Pallet situation itself - we've been trying to work with communities to make sure we can find situations that are helpful to the people needing the support but are embraced by the community. We will continue to do the work with communities on the best placements and the best supports for people.

ZACH CHURCHILL: This government has gotten 19 of these Pallet shelters in place, out of the 200 that were committed in mid-December. One of the reasons is because the government didn't consult with neighbourhoods and communities before they decided to go into it. Last night the Minister of Community Services said they're not going to waste time consulting with communities.

That's a concern for us, because that has been one of the issues that has potentially prevented these shelters from getting up more quickly. Will the Premier please tell the House, will he consult with communities or not when deciding where Pallet shelter supports are going to be placed in this province?

THE PREMIER: The Pallets are a part of the policy to support those living rough. The Bridge is another one, and shelter spaces are another option. We'll work with Nova Scotians. There was a community meeting last night in Kentville with the community there. I had a chance to attend a community meeting in Whitney Pier. Of course, we work with communities to find the best answer. We'll work with communities - the communities know that - and we'll continue to do that.

ZACH CHURCHILL: This has been a complete failure of this government to actually have emergency shelters in place to deal with those dealing with homelessness. We just heard recently - from the Director of Income Assistance at the Provincial Department of Community Services, in an interview - we were told that these Pallet shelters are now not going to be in place until next Winter. My question to the Premier is: How much more is that going to cost, and how many Pallet shelters are we going to need next Winter as homelessness continues to rise in this province under this premier?

THE PREMIER: Obviously this is something we see from this Opposition quite a bit. First, it's "go faster, go faster" then it's "why didn't you slow down and consult more?"

We work at a pace that Nova Scotians expect us to work at, and where we can go fast, we go fast, but of course we need to respect the communities and work with the communities. We do that, we'll continue to do that, and we'll continue to find ways to support those in need. We'll do that. We'll do that as fast as we can, being respectful of those impacted.

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

PREM.: PUBLIC SPENDING ARRANGEMENTS - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Yesterday, representatives from the Department of Finance shed some light on how this government makes its funding decisions outside of the budget process. We heard that Cabinet decisions rely on verbal advice, not documentation, and that people can come into a room, discuss an opportunity, make representations verbally to Cabinet, and then, if you're lucky, get a cheque.

This was all in response to a scathing report that found that many of these kinds of funding arrangements were premature, lacked proper planning, and were made without key terms and conditions in place to protect public funds. My question is simple: Does the Premier believe in public accountability for the spending of public money?

THE PREMIER: Absolutely, and that's what's offered through media releases, through budget discussions, and through press releases. Every dollar that the government spends is in a very public format. There are times when the government needs to act. I think what the deputy was referencing and was clarified in the media is this is a policy that has been in place way back when the NDP was in, way back when the Liberals were in. It's a government policy.

The deputy minister has had a long, impressive career in government and was simply referring to sometimes the way things go about. Sometimes they are verbal, but of course, there are presentations and research. I ask the member, as I did in Estimates, which ones of the additional appropriations is she against - EfficiencyOne, Cape Breton University? Which ones doesn't she like?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The defensiveness around tabling the spending of public money in this Legislature is astounding. In 2022-23, additional appropriations surpassed 10 per cent of the province's total annual expenditures, with this government breaking its own record. With increased out-of-budget spending comes increased concerns about transparency. Luckily for us, there is a clear way to increase transparency. At the federal and provincial level across this country, over-budget spending is required to be tabled in the Legislature, with the exception of one province: ours, Nova Scotia. Seven provinces and the federal government require special warrants to be tabled in the Legislature when spending is not in session. I'll ask again: Why is the Premier so opposed to the most basic accounting for the use of public funds?

THE PREMIER: I completely reject the premise of the question. There are quarterly financial updates. There are forecast updates. There are media releases. The reality is that the NDP is so negative about everything that happens in this province. They're negative on investments that the province would make and some of the additional appropriations that apparently the NDP is negative on - \$140 million for EfficiencyOne - a pretty good organization, I would say. Money for StFX, for CBU, for Screen Nova Scotia, Horticulture Nova Scotia, Halifax International Airport Authority - these are the types of investments the NDP is negative on. Why doesn't the NDP just call it what it is? They don't like those investments. I think they're good investments.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The Auditor General has been very clear that this majority government can spend whatever it wants, and yet it chooses not to be transparent about it. Transparency would not reduce their ability to spend any of the money that the Premier just rattled off in an attempt to avoid my question. There may be no clearer example of this government's proclivity to spend in the dark than Hogan Court. In this report, the Auditor General looked at just one project and found \$81 million had been spent inappropriately through alternative procurement. That means no public tendering, no transparency. Reliance on this kind of spending is growing. Last year, Nova Scotia Health Authority spent, through alternative procurement, double what they did in 2020, when there was an emergency and a pandemic. Again, can the Premier explain why he thinks he doesn't need to be accountable to Nova Scotians when spending their money?

THE PREMIER: Speaker, the question has been asked and answered many times. The NDP doesn't like the answer. The answer is there is very public disclosure of every dollar spent, through press conferences, through media reports, through discussions - very, very public. It is absolutely, completely false to suggest that there is some lack of transparency.

I'll answer the question on the health spending. It has gone up since 2020. You know why? Because the former government didn't invest in health care, and we do. We're awful proud of that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

FTB: ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS - DEFEND

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, not only has this government not been transparent with their out-of-budget spending, but they may also be breaking the Finance Act. I'll read this Act for the House: "An additional appropriation must not be requested and may not be made for a new program or activity that has not previously been included in the Estimates for a fiscal year." My question to the Premier is: Does he realize his actions might even be breaking the laws of this province?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: A good question. Are we following the laws of the Legislature? Well, I guess if we're breaking the laws, his own government broke them for eight years. The NDP broke them from the day they started them in 2010. We are not doing anything differently. We are doing the exact same thing - we are providing quarterly forecast updates which show the additional appropriations that are put forth. What were they? Fixing the health care system more quickly, helping people with housing issues, things like Fiona. Those things we had to act on.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I am worried the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board isn't familiar with his own Finance Act, because additional appropriations are allowed. There can be special warrants for incurrences that are urgently or immediately needed like, for example, a pandemic, when this was done previously.

There has been spending, according to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, not in line with emergency situations but in line - again, out of budget spending - with the government's priorities. Again, it would seem, at a basic reading of the Finance Act, that this is actually against the law. Did the Premier actually know what the laws are of this province are, or does he even care? Does he think he is above them?

THE SPEAKER: A gentle reminder for all members to speak through the Chair, please.

The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

ALLAN MACMASTER: As we all know, we can come and go, but I know that people back in the Department of Finance and Treasury Board feel the same way as I am communicating today. Here's a fact: in 2021 the Liberal government - which that member was part of - had additional appropriations of \$1,000,098,494. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order. Stop the clock, please. Order.

The honourable Minister of Finance has the floor. Please continue.

ALLAN MACMASTER: We are following the exact same rules we've been following since 2010. If the NDP wants to chime in, I've got some numbers for them too. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

LSI: NOVA SCOTIA WORKS CUTS - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: It's very clear I don't think the Minister of Finance is familiar with his own piece of legislation that he is responsible for upkeeping, but on to another question.

This government has allowed cuts to happen to Nova Scotia Works at a time when we have a labour shortage, at a time when no matter which company you talk to, they are having a hard time finding labour. Nova Scotia Works provided services to people looking for jobs and employers trying to find workers. In fact, our own friend here in the House, Will Brewer, managed to find employment to start a business through Nova Scotia Works. This is a critical piece of government programming that is particularly important during a time of a labour shortage.

Could the Premier please stand in his place and answer why he has allowed cuts to happen to Nova Scotia Works at such a terrible time?

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you to the member opposite for raising this important question. We know that Nova Scotia Works centres across this province do incredible work in community. There are over 50 locations that are connecting people to job opportunities and jobs to people. That's the focus of the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

As a frontline staff worker myself, I know how valuable the work that they do in community is. Nova Scotia Works centres are funded completely by the federal government, so we're also waiting to get more information on our labour transfer agreements, which we are hopeful are going to be coming through very soon. The provincial government has made no cuts to these programs.

Something that is positive about all of this is that our unemployment rate is dropping, which is impacting our labour market right now.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Yes, the unemployment rate is dropping because we have a labour shortage in this province. We have a Premier and a Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and several of the ministers who stand up and brag about how much money they are willing to spend outside of their own budget, yet when it comes to a critical program like Nova Scotia Works that connects skilled workers with employers at a time when we have a labour shortage, the issue now isn't unemployment - that issue was an issue of 10, 15 years ago. There is now an issue of a labour shortage. Why hasn't the government stepped in and funded this critical program so that skilled workers and employers don't miss opportunities to be connected at a time when we need them to be connected most?

JILL BALSER: I want to take the opportunity to say to Nova Scotians and young people who are looking for job opportunities in this province we are a province that's on the move. We've known since 2015 that we absolutely need to grow as a province and increase our population. We have reversed that trend. We are now a growing province. We are a province full of opportunity, and Nova Scotia Works centres do an incredible job in making sure that young people and anyone who wants to move to the province seize those opportunities and have the resources in community to be able to thrive.

[2:15 p.m.]

Absolutely, we know that we need more workers in this province, and that's where my Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration comes in to make sure that, again, we have welcoming communities, welcoming workplaces, and anyone who chooses to come to Nova Scotia thrives in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DCS: LACK OF CONSULTATION ON SHELTERS - EXPLAIN

FRED TILLEY: We continue to see a reactionary response to many things by this government. In the Fall of 2023, 200 pallet shelters were promised to the province of Nova Scotia. Thirty of those were announced to be in the community of Whitney Pier. They didn't consult with the community. There were no advance discussions. We had a lot of confusion in the community, a lot of outrage, and now we don't know where those Pallet shelters stand in the community. The community would like to know: Does the Minister believe that consultation upfront could have avoided all of this confusion with Pallet shelters in Cape Breton?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: In fact, there was consultation upfront. I don't know if the member actually attended the meeting in Whitney Pier, but there was consultation. Not only was there consultation within the community, but we've been talking to the mayor of CBRM, we've been talking to the councillors, we've been talking to New Dawn Enterprises and Erika Shea. There has been non-stop consultation.

In fact, the reason why we are here today is because we need not just this side of the House but other people on the other side of the House to support this. When we hear people downplaying it and saying "slow down" and "go fast," it adds confusion in these communities. I'm here to tell you that we're working through the confusion, we're working with our partners, and they're coming.

FRED TILLEY: The meeting that the Minister refers to was well after the fact that the pallet shelters were announced. The communication was not with the community. The consultation may have been with certain individuals but not with the community where these shelters were going. My question to the Minister would be: Can he confirm, yes or no, where the site will be in CBRM for those 30 Pallet shelters?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: What I can tell the member is that we're working right across the province to find spots. Homelessness is something that affects not just Cape Breton but everywhere else. What I will say is that I hope that the member and all members of this House show the same passion they show in this House in support that they will show in their communities if and when these come to their communities.

I will be the first to say in this House as I said last night: I welcome Pallets to my community. I welcome shelters to my community, and I hope that the member and all members of the House will show that same passion if and when we have these community discussions in their communities.

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

NRR: CAPE BRETON ENERGY POVERTY RATE - EXPLAIN

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. A recent report from EfficiencyOne has cast a light on the mounting issue of energy poverty in Cape Breton. Nine of the top 10 Nova Scotia communities with the highest rates of energy poverty are located in Cape Breton. I'll table that. Sixty-eight per cent of households in Dominion are experiencing energy poverty. In Eskasoni, this number is 87 per cent. Why is Cape Breton disproportionately represented on the list, and what is this government doing to address this?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Energy affordability is an important issue not just in Cape Breton but all over Nova Scotia. That's why right from Day 1 our government started investing in programs like EfficiencyOne. Just in 2022, we announced low-income families can apply for a free heat pump and electrical upgrades for their houses.

We also invested in more efficiency programs for middle-income families who can afford more affordable heat pumps, efficiency upgrades to windows, insulation, and many other things. That is \$157 million that our government invested to leverage another \$140-some million. Over \$400 million, since we have taken government, has been invested in affordability for - I'll speak in a few seconds.

KENDRA COOMBES: The highest rates have been in Cape Breton and a number of them are in my community, in my riding. The same report details the lived experiences of Cape Bretoners facing rising energy costs. New Dawn Enterprises in Cape Breton recently reported that: "Rising energy costs in recent years has led some seniors to wrestle with the tough decision of either to 'heat or eat.'" In Eskasoni, there are several stories every year about the working poor who have had to cancel their electricity for a period of time. Can the minister please tell Cape Bretoners: How will this government reduce their energy costs?

TORY RUSHTON: In addition to my comment about the \$400 million, \$117 million was invested on behalf of all ratepayers in Nova Scotia, so we did not see a double rate increase this year because of the fuel adjustment mechanism. I want to correct the members opposite who have been saying all session that that fuel mechanism was created by this government. That started in 2018, when the previous government kept punting it down the road, and here we are with \$317 million that we have to deal with. On top of that, some of the affordability initiatives that we put in - it was \$50 million that we put into

Efficiency Nova Scotia above and beyond. That was additional appropriation that that government doesn't like.

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

DCS: PALLET SHELTERS LOCATION - REVEAL

LORELEI NICOLL: In October, 200 Pallet shelters were announced and we were hopeful that the majority of them would be up and had folks living in them this winter. However, only 19 of the 200 units so far have actually been put in place and much uncertainty remains as to where and when the rest of the other Pallet shelters will go.

It is agreed that we need more supports as fast as possible, but the government has caused major delays because they may have or did not talk with people, I'm not sure, but I understand from what I read they did not consult. How are these shelters going to be up in a fast, responsible way? My question is to the Minister of Community Services: Are any of the pallet shelters going to the old school location on the Eastern Shore?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We are consulting, we are talking, and I would advise the member to speak to her former colleagues at HRM, including Cathie O'Toole, the councillors, people whom we are talking with every single day. We are working with our partners to get these things on the ground.

One of the things I will not do is negotiate here in this House. We are looking at land prices, we are looking at purchasing, we are looking at leasing. We are continuing to put an emphasis on getting these pallets in the ground. Again, I will say I hope they show the same passion in their own communities that they do here. Instead of it being a hindrance, they are helping us.

LORELEI NICOLL: The Halifax Forum has been open since January as an emergency shelter and there were originally plans to have Pallet shelters at the Forum as well. However, after making announcements before doing the required due diligence, it was announced in January that the government could no longer put Pallet shelters at the Forum location, and I will table that. Does the minister agree that they should have done the homework and consulted with communities to understand the requirements before making these announcements, and if they did carry out consultation like they said, what requirements did the Forum not meet? Yes, I spoke with my former colleagues and they said it is the provincial regulations that are not permitting them to use the Forum.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. We continue to look for the right spots. We are consulting with communities. Sometimes that means you must change the spot to make sure that the necessary resources are there - resources like water, sewer, and transportation.

We are also consulting with our service providers to make sure they have the best possible space. This isn't just about the feelings of the members of this Legislature. These are real people who need space and need help. We're listening to our municipal partners, but we're also listening to the people who need the most. We're also listening to our stakeholders. We will continue to do so, no matter what they say or think.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

DCS: CONSULTATION ON SHELTER LOCATIONS - COMMIT

HON. TONY INCE: According to Affordable Housing, there are over 1,180 homeless people in the HRM. I'll table that. We have seen those experiencing homelessness double in the past two years. It is deeply concerning. One hundred of the 200 Pallet shelters were dedicated to the HRM, but there are currently only 19. The rest of the locations across the province are being delayed because of lack of broad public consultations. Speaker, I ask the minister through you: Will he commit to consulting with the HRM and other communities before deciding on Pallet shelter locations?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That's exactly what we're doing. We're consulting with not only the politicians and the leaders; we're consulting with our stakeholders, and we're talking to individuals on the ground.

The thing about this is that we want to find the best possible place so people feel welcome, they feel they have a dignified roof over their head, and at the same time, the community is accepting, and everybody buys in, because these things don't work if people aren't bought in on this stuff.

We're going to continue to work with our stakeholders and the municipalities, and we'll continue to have conversations. I'll tell you something funny. One of the members across jokingly said to me, "You're always on the phone." You're right. I'm always on the phone - with the HRM, with their stakeholders, and with all the people who are involved in this process.

TONY INCE: The Director of Income Assistance at the provincial Department of Community Services said in an interview that she could not confirm if the rest of the Pallet shelters would be up and lived in by next Winter. I'll table that. This is obviously a concern. We have 181 Pallet shelters paid for, but the government hasn't confirmed when the shelters will be lived in. My question to the minister is: Will the rest of the 181 Pallet shelters be lived in by next Winter? Yes or no.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The truth is - again we'll go back to the consulting and what the members are talking about with consultation - constant consultation. My priority right now is to get them on the ground and in the ground as fast as possible. One of the ways we can do that is if we have full-party support on these things. We cannot have one

side or another side talking negatively about these shelters and about these Pallets, because what happens is that people hear it, which makes it very difficult for us to get these in the ground. My number one priority right now is working with our partners to make sure these Pallets - not just the Pallets, all options - are in the ground as fast as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

DCS: NUMBER OF SHELTERS IN VALLEY - REVEAL

CARMAN KERR: Homelessness in rural Nova Scotia can look different than it does here in the city. Many people couch-surf or sleep in cars - they are in the woods, in our parks - and the data is not there to get a better idea of how many people are truly experiencing homelessness in rural Nova Scotia. Some groups have said there are roughly 231 people, from Windsor down through to Digby, living rough. I'll table that. The government has promoted Pallet shelters in the Fall, and we continue to see delays in them being put in place. My question to the minister: How many units are coming to the Valley, and when can we expect people to be living in them?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. It also gives me a little bit of time to talk about the consultation that happened last night in Kentville. There was community consultation around the Pallet shelters in Kentville last night. We do know that at least 20 are going in there right now. What I would say to that honourable member is: We'll give you a hundred if you want them. Just stand up and say you want them.

CARMAN KERR: I'm not the MLA for Kentville, but I'll . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Annapolis has the floor.

CARMAN KERR: I'm not the member for Kentville and that area, but we'll gladly take more in the Valley, should we need some. We know that Pallet shelters in Kentville are at full capacity right now. I've tabled that document. Does the minister think that's enough for the hundreds of people across Annapolis? Will the minister - and I think he already has - commit to more? How many more will he commit to?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I do, and that's what we're doing. We're going full steam ahead on this. I want to respectfully thank the member for saying that he will take more. I will make sure that the department reaches out to you. I don't just mean the Pallet housing. I mean all options are on the table. We need willing partners in all parts of this province, whether you're PC, Liberal, or NDP. If he's willing to work with us, he's a leader on the ground. I'll be there as soon as the House rises. I'll come down and we'll work through solutions with you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

[2:30 p.m.]

DHW: NURSE LOCUM PGM. - IMPLEMENT

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. This province spent \$126 million last year on travel nurses who work for private agencies. I can table that. Despite this large sum, our nursing shortage is not going away. The Nova Scotia Health Authority continues to have over a thousand nursing vacancies. Too many of our nurses are having to work 24-hour shifts, while others have to work up to six days a week. This is leading to burnout and nurses leaving the line of work.

The travel nurse program is making it worse. On top of burnout, local nurses are working next to travel nurses who are making much more money. Why is this government continuing to throw money at private nursing agencies when the perceived solution is clearly not working?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We know that there is a provincial and national nursing shortage. We have to use travel companies right now. There is no other alternative. It allows us to keep beds open. There has been an underinvestment in nursing education for a number of years, which has resulted in this nursing shortage.

We are raising the number of seats. We are recruiting. Our Patient Access to Care Act is bringing people in from all over the country. If we were to walk away from travel nurses, we would have to close beds in this province, which we're not willing to do. What I can tell the member is that we're one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to actually limit the use of travel nurses, and we're anxious to see what that will result in as the time moves on.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Janet Hazelton, the president of the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union, has presented a clear solution to this government. She would like to see a nurse locum program in place of their reliance on agency nurses. In a committee earlier this week, she said, "It's very doable. All it's going to take is for the unions and the employer to sit down and negotiate this. We just have to do it." I can table that.

When asked about such a program, the department said talks have been limited. Will this government listen to what nurses are saying and implement a provincial nurse locum program?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Moving the same number of people around in a different way in the province is not going to help our nursing shortage. We have done a number of things. We've increased the number of seats. PACA - which that member voted against - will bring nurses from all over this country to Nova Scotia, enabling them to work within five days. We are looking at immigration strategies. We have to raise the supply of

nurses. We need to train them. We need them to come and move and live and work here. We have a competitive contract. We are an incredible environment to work in.

There are a number of things that are happening through the new collective agreement and by the employers to improve conditions for nurses, and I am confident in our ability to address the nursing shortage.

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

DCS: INDEXING INCOME ASSIST. PAYMENTS - COMMIT

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, we all know that Nova Scotians are feeling the pinch from the rising cost of living. It's increasingly difficult for folks to meet their basic needs - no one more so than those who are on income assistance.

We recognize that the government made a one-time \$150 payment and increased the amount for those receiving disability payments, and that something is better than nothing. We were disappointed that we didn't see an increase for monthly payments across the board, nor did we see indexing to income assistance.

The minister's position on this side of the House was clear a few weeks ago. Has the minister's position changed now that he is a member of the governing party and minister?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: My position has not changed. I can tell you my values have not changed, and what I believe in has not changed. I've been in this job for two weeks, three weeks. We've been able to achieve a lot of great things, and there's more to come. I will say that I hope everybody takes a deep dive into this budget, and they see the great stuff that's happening around diabetes, around a lunch program, and things that are going to make a substantial impact in people's lives. What I will say to the member is that nothing's changed, and I've said it a million times in this House: buckle up.

THE SPEAKER: Just a friendly reminder to the member for Halifax Atlantic to speak through the Chair.

The honourable member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

BEN JESSOME: We certainly know that most of the Feed Nova Scotia clients are single people on income assistance. Nick Jennery, executive director of Feed Nova Scotia, said it himself best at a Standing Committee on Community Services meeting: "Until we index our various support programs, we will continue to push people who are already in poverty deeper into poverty because inflation just keeps piling up and it just makes things more difficult." I'd like the minister to commit. Understanding that his position has not

changed on the matter, when will he commit to indexing income assistance payments across the province?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm going to commit to a lot of things. I'm going to commit to listening. We're going to commit to consulting with individuals. We're talking to people in the departments. We're talking to Nick Jennery. We're talking to people to figure out what we can do to put the most amount of money and resources in people's pockets. That starts with this budget, but it doesn't end there.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

DCS: SAFETY OF FORUM SHELTER - ENSURE

BRAEDON CLARK: Speaker, we were happy to see in January the opening of the shelter at the Forum for people who have been experiencing homelessness here in the Halifax region. However, those who went to the Forum had genuine concerns about their safety and privacy at the Forum, causing many, unfortunately, to prefer to stay in tents or outside, where they felt safer and more dignified. My question to the Minister of Community Services is: What changes, if any, have been made at the Forum to ensure that the people who are living there are safe and secure where they are?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I will say it's a little insulting to our stakeholders and to the department to say that these situations are not safe. They are safe. The first thing, when we get into these programs and we have these agreements, first and foremost we put the safety of the individuals that we are serving at the forefront.

They are safe. They are warm, safe, dignified places. We will continue to work with our stakeholders. We'll continue to work with people like Shelter Nova Scotia. We'll continue to work with 902 ManUp, who've stepped up in a time when we needed it most. I want to thank them for all their hard work. I appreciate them every single day.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'm also aware of the fact that there were many nights back in January where some of the beds at the shelter were not used. The capacity was 70; 32 beds were open. That's almost 50 per cent of the beds unused, unfortunately. The shelter at the Forum is due to close in August. I wonder if the minister can commit to the House: Is the minister confident that when it closes in August, there will be somewhere to go for everyone who is there now today?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The truth is that we provide spaces. We provide wraparound services. We cannot force people into those spaces - nor would we ever force them into spaces. What we do is we have people on the ground each and every day, working with individuals to find the best possible solutions for them - not one size fits all. We are trying to individualize every single solution for every single person. It takes a lot of work, and it takes a lot of effort. We'll continue to do that.

Again, I want to thank our service providers and the people in the department who are working on the ground. Our stakeholders - HRM has done an incredible job, municipalities right across this province have done an incredible job, and so have the people who are working on the ground. Thank you to them, and we'll continue to put people first.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: LOCAL DECISION-MAKING - RETURN

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question today is for the Premier. During the last election campaign, the Premier and his party indicated they were bringing back local decision-making, both in education and in health care. Here in the PC document, it says: "The teams will be established in health care by establishing a Chief of Staff at each local regional hospital." This has not happened.

Also, it talks about bringing back school boards. It says: "Abolishing school boards abolished a critical check and balance in the system. As such, your PC government will return school boards." Neither of these things happened. Can the Premier please update the House if this is still part of the goal, or has it proved to be too difficult for him to obtain?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: At all of the hospitals across the province, we do have site managers who are supporting staff in that area. They are generally people who are from the local area, know the community, know the staff well. In addition to that, we do have executive directors and the zone vice presidents of both clinical services and medicine. There is a very robust structure in place. We work very hard to support facilities. The site managers are empowered and encouraged to make decisions locally.

There are some things that are done centrally, of course, in one Nova Scotia Health Authority, but decision-making is happening at the front lines. We're looking for unique solutions for each of the facilities. We're open to pilot projects from staff. We continue to work on the ground.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: There actually has been no change. The site managers were in place, and unfortunately, site managers aren't able to make decisions. Previously, when there were chiefs of medical staff, they could actually have the power. They were empowered to make local decisions. Right now, those people who are in place do not have that.

Also, part of the PC platform says: "We know that health care deteriorated when the government removed local decision-making from local communities." I just want to remind the Premier that they have not done anything to bring back local decision-making. In fact, all decisions made for Cumberland, for example, are made out of Truro or Halifax, and often local people, local managers do not get results.

In fact, back on March 11th, I sent an email about a pain clinic and still have not received a response for the people. Can I ask the Premier: When can Nova Scotians expect to see local decision-making in health care and education?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Interestingly enough, just prior to the House sitting I had the opportunity to sit with a site manager from Northern Zone. The work that's happening in that site is incredible as a result of her individual effort, working with her team. They are reducing off-load times. Their surgical wait-list is reducing, their throughput through the hospital. With SAFER-f Bundle they've seen significant movement in terms of getting people transitioned to community.

The site managers are absolutely empowered. There's also been a great deal of work that's been happening with the community health boards throughout this province, looking at their role. These folks understand their communities very well, and we value their input very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RTA: FIXED-TERM LEASES ROLE - ACKNOWLEDGE

GARY BURRILL: My question is for the Minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act. The Canadian Centre for Housing Rights has just in the last couple of weeks brought out a new study focusing on things like housing costs and evictions in six cities across Canada, including Halifax. The study found that in Spryfield, for example, 39 per cent of the single-person apartments that had been affordable became unaffordable in a five-year period. Does the minister acknowledge the role that fixed-term leases are playing in this massive loss of affordable housing?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Again, I've answered this question pertaining to fixed term leases. In general about the Residential Tenancies Program, we look through the lens of a balance of tenants and landlords. I know that's not the answer that the member opposite wants to hear.

Again, our solution to the housing crisis is more housing, more options that Nova Scotians can call home. That's why we're taking unprecedented action as a government. We're investing in housing right across the spectrum, whether it be modular housing, student housing, removing the provincial HST on new purpose-built housing - \$1 billion over five years to build more than 40,000 new homes. That is what's important: more places for Nova Scotians to call home.

GARY BURRILL: What I have asked is: Does the minister acknowledge the role of the proliferation of fixed-term leases in all the loss that's being experienced in affordable housing units? It is acknowledged widely elsewhere. Christina Carter, for Chebucto Connections in Spryfield, identified fixed term leases as a key factor. She explained that,

since the rent cap doesn't apply to new tenancies, those rents are often being raised above the affordability line, which this study identifies as \$870 for a single person.

The facts here speak very clearly. In a year when the rent cap was 2 per cent, the price of apartments that changed hands went up 28 per cent. The evidence supports Christina Carter, and it does not support the minister.

I want to know how he thinks he can continue to try to tell the people of Nova Scotia any different.

COLTON LEBLANC: I will acknowledge that the rent cap is a temporary solution while our government takes unprecedented action to build more places for Nova Scotians to call home. I will also say that the Nova Scotia housing market has experienced unprecedented and record-high unit completions. I will also recognize that we have a low vacancy rate, which validates our government's investments to build more houses - more places that Nova Scotians can call home. We're not shying away from the challenge in front of us. Under the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, we're moving in the right direction.

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

DCS: INCREASING INCOME ASSISTANCE - COMMIT

HON. BEN JESSOME: On a couple occasions during this Question Period, the Minister of Community Services has accused the Opposition of trying to confuse the situation. The government made a commitment around Pallet shelters. I think perhaps he forgets that it is our job to ask questions when commitments are not followed through on.

So as not to confuse the situation, given that the minister's position on increasing income assistance payments and also indexing them hasn't changed, in his new role as minister responsible: Yes or no, will he commit to increasing income assistance payments and indexing them to inflation?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The member is right. I am confused, and I think Nova Scotians are confused, because at one point, if you're listening in this Legislature, you hear, Slow down and consult. Then you hear the next day - not even the next day, the next question - Speed up, go faster.

What I will say to that member is that we will take . . . (interruption). If the member wants to stand up and speak, they can. We will take advice, I will take advice, and the department will take advice from the stakeholders and experts on the ground, not from partisan politicians.

[2:45 p.m.]

BEN JESSOME: In my last question, I referenced Nick Jennery, the executive director at Feed Nova Scotia. The evidence is clear: The longer this perpetuates, the longer that we fail to make these increases and increase payments based on indexing them to inflation, the further behind they go. It's not partisan politicians making these accusations. I come at this very humbly. The minister, as recently as today, has accused Opposition members of confusing the situation. I am looking for a simple yes or no: Will he commit to making the changes that he believed in on this side of the House?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'm committing to improving the lives of Nova Scotians who need it the most. I'm committed to improving the lives of the most vulnerable Nova Scotians. I don't want to go there, but the member talked about my being on the other side. I sat there as income assistance rates were frozen for six years. I hear and see the passion to increase those rates. I will tell them - and I will tell that member - I have been here for three weeks; watch what's coming.

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: I'm going to take the opportunity today to actually continue talking about my rainbow budget. There are a few really important things that I didn't get through yesterday, talking about how actually taking into account and understanding the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Nova Scotia can help us strengthen our province in health, in social outcomes, and in economic development.

I'll pick up on the theme of economic development. We need to make sure that our economic development efforts, our skills and labour training, respond to equity issues. The

recent YWCA Halifax's report on sexual harassment in the skilled trades only underscores this.

There were 101 respondents who identify as women and gender-diverse, and 90 per cent of the respondents reported facing sexual harassment in the workplace. Forty-one per cent of respondents identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. So we have a skilled trades shortage. We have a need to have skilled trade folks available to build housing, to build infrastructure, and to continue with our ongoing development. My community, these communities, can be part of a solution.

But I need to be clear on some of the barriers. Firstly, with gratitude to the YWCA Halifax, people need safe workspaces. It's clear that isn't the case for many skilled tradespeople currently in Halifax. The result of that is that people look for other ways to have their careers. They leave the direct skills trades provision, and we lose people who we need and who can be part of the solution.

I've invited ministers to think about current efforts around economic development, labour, skills, and training, and how they are responding to the needs of diverse communities, including the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. For instance, with the MOST program, which I have spoken to before, it was interesting in Estimates this past week to find out that the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board was not able to comment on the gender of folks who are accessing the MOST program, and other relevant information like occupation and location. I think that's a fascinating lack of curiosity about who's accessing the program, and if you want to improve a program - and in this case, expand a program to include nurses - understanding what's actually happening with the program, I think, would be a great base for that. So understanding who's actually able to access MOST and having an understanding of how that's working for them.

I've suggested before that 30 is low for international standards around youth. The UN, for instance, the category of youth and young people - which the minister emphasized as a major target - is 34, and for good reasons, and particularly for folks from diverse communities, from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, who have to adjust and adapt to a number of things along the way that may affect their educational journey and their professional development journey. That can be evident as folks who transition, who often take time off study or work to achieve this, but also for folks who become parents or take on caregiving responsibilities.

We also saw, with great fanfare, additional funding and changes to apprenticeship programs in Nova Scotia. Again, understanding who is in apprenticeship programs - including women, including folks who are 2SLGBTQIA+ - is really important for understanding who we are trying to support, what their needs are, and if this program is working. If we're not getting the results that we want - which I would suggest, for instance, in MOST, that we're not - then how can we make the program better and more accessible and more inclusive?

I've spoken before in terms of economic development for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, about the amazing amount of entrepreneurship and business owners across the province. I would invite MLAs, as they're thinking about how to support their community, to think about how to support businesses in their community from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, who - again, the challenge of having one's own business is great. It's an amazing journey, in terms of investment and trust. It usually involves your whole family and your community to support you.

But 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs and businesses face additional barriers. I've spoken before in this House about the experience of the folks at Bee's Knees General Store & Bakery in Lawrencetown in the Valley, who've had the exterior of their store and their Pride flag attacked multiple times. There are other instances where 2SLGBTQIA+-owned businesses have faced discrimination from their neighbours and other stores who have placed derogatory signs and also who face a lot of harassment online.

Again, I think one of the main points that I hope people take away from my two rainbow budgets this year - Part 1 and Part 2 - is the role that we can all play in providing leadership in our own communities, to say, in fact, No. We stand for justice. We stand for inclusivity. We will not allow our 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, entrepreneurs, family members, and students to have their experience of living in our communities affected by hate and discrimination.

I've spoken before, too, about the opportunity in the world of tourism to highlight the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in Halifax. I've spoken even about the idea of how we can make this a choice destination for folks from other parts of Canada and the northeastern United States. We have amazing community-led celebrations of diversity and inclusion in really beautiful places - some of the most beautiful places in the world, as we all know. Whether it's Wolfville, Kentville, Annapolis Royal, Bridgewater, Eastern Shore, Truro, Cape Breton - we have amazing places where we are welcoming people to Pride. One of our roles as community leaders could be making sure that you know about your Pride celebrations in your community. Actually, I'm sort of looking around the room and I honestly can't think of any community that doesn't have Pride events at some point in the next few months. Make sure you know about them. Show up. Show your support. Learn about the folks who are in your communities.

I will just note that when you don't show up, it's also noticed. South Shore Pride had its first parade this past year, and I think I was - actually, I was the only MLA. South Shore Pride actually includes three ministers who could have been there and sort of comprised part of that community, and the lack of the ministers attending, the lack of other MLAs attending, was absolutely noticed. This was their first Pride, with dozens of floats, dozens of organizations who had put in amazing amounts of effort, and the streets of Bridgewater were lined with people out to support the Pride parade. We need to be there too, as community leaders.

[3:00 p.m.]

Considering equity in economic development is really important, because otherwise we're losing a lot of talented people. The disproportionate rate of trans people experiencing poverty connects to difficulty maintaining and gaining employment. Among surveyed trans Ontarians in 2015, 18 per cent knew exclusively that they were turned down for employment because they were transgender; 13 per cent knew exclusively that they were fired for being transgender; an additional 15 per cent were unsure if they had been fired because of being transgender; and 15 per cent said co-workers never accepted their identities. I'll table that survey, or that study.

I've talked before about the Halifax Point-in-Time Count as well, as an example of where we can see how current structural difficulties result in negative economic, social, and health outcomes for 2SLGBTQIA+ folks. For instance, we know there's a high number of folks who were homeless in the 2022 Point-in-Time survey who identified as being prior youth in care - 49 per cent. Of those, 16 per cent were queer, and 34 per cent under the age of 24. What we're seeing here is that the child welfare system - the care system - isn't working well for supporting and transitioning folks into adulthood. On top of that, diverse communities such as 2SLGBTQIA+ young people are even more ill-served.

I also want to touch on the experience of seniors. 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors and older adults experience mental health issues and have poor physical health in comparison to older cisgender and heterosexual persons, often correlated with high rates of isolation and loneliness, as well as lifelong discrimination. As we know, minority stress takes a social, health, and economic toll. Most queer and trans seniors we know and look to for guidance built and lived most of their lives without legal and social protections - the ones that we are still fighting to maintain.

Many of us set up our family relationships to the greatest social and financial advantage. We were able to share each other's insurance, workplace programs, home ownership, investments, family budgeting, and retirement planning. For too long, today's seniors had limited access to validate their relationships, their lives, and whether they owned a house or a car together. Even as legal battles were fought over every step forward, it didn't always result in substantive equality.

Still, it's often not easy for senior 2SLGBTQIA+ folks to advocate for themselves and to be able to come out time and again. As they travel forward in communities that aren't used to queer folks having rights, that need to come out time and again continues. I've had the chance to talk to the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care about research on 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors, and I think Nova Scotia could truly become a national leader in truly inclusive long-term care.

To finish up, I want to emphasize that it is absolutely time to step up. I've spoken about the wave of hate and misinformation that's being targeted at trans folks and at young

people, and our whole community is feeling it. We are community leaders, and we need to step up. We know there is hate and misinformation, and folks in my communities are not hearing reassurance from their leaders. Every MLA has a role to play in supporting their 2SLGBTQIA+ constituents.

On Tuesday, this government voted against referring to the Health Committee a topic looking at the status and the experience of two-spirit folks here in Nova Scotia, and I can tell you that community response has been swift. People are very disappointed at even the thought that this current government wouldn't allow that examination of issues. Again, I find it fascinating to have a lack of curiosity about who is in Nova Scotia and what their concerns and priorities are in general. That's a fascinating lack of curiosity. It makes people feel excluded and not represented in this Chamber.

We all have an immediate opportunity to make things a little bit better. Next week is Trans Week of Visibility, with Trans Day of Visibility on March 30th. You have opportunities. You can find events in your communities. You can come in next week and celebrate trans folks and businesses and organizations in your communities through member statements. You can share messages of support to the folks in your community who are waiting to hear from you. It is a very scary time, and people are waiting to hear from you. We have a flag raising planned for April 26th, and I look forward to all of your support next week for Trans Week of Visibility.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I wanted to preface my words today as an MLA new to this role and the budget process and hearing the responses and questions that we had during the budget process because, as an MLA, we all know how many times residents contact us daily with their personal health stories. Any information I'll be saying today, I will be tabling as well because it's based on the information that has been in the media.

My understanding of what I'm going to say is during the budget process, a lot of information is shared from the top down. I guess I'm trying to get an understanding of the situation from the bottom up.

The recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Health highlighted a number of concerns that all Nova Scotians should be aware of. Physician and nurse shortages continue to be a major concern, and it seems only likely to become worse as these groups face increasing retirements, job dissatisfaction, and burnout. This government was elected on the promise to fix health care. It boasts that it has increased the health care budget by \$1.2 billion in the last two years to a whopping \$6.5 billion in the 2024-25 Budget; yet we continue to see a deterioration in many key performance metrics and an inability to meet performance targets. Are we getting value for money, or is this government learning that some problems can't be addressed simply by spending money?

Since coming to office, much has been made of the use of technology to improve our health care system. New apps, dashboards, and systems have been developed and heavily promoted, but has this led to improvements or is it simply putting a nice face on an existing flawed system? The Action for Health dashboard paints a pretty picture of a not-so-pretty story and situation. Last night, I heard about the urgent virtual care in ERs being a solution. I looked into that and found out that staffing is an issue, and they can't be used without a staff person there. Is the technology working?

Our primary care wait-list has swelled from 60,000 in March of 2021 to 156,000 in March of 2024. This upward trajectory is continuing despite the money being spent. There are now over 1,000 nurse vacancies across the system. Emergency room wait times are approaching 10 hours in some hospitals, and according to the Premier's cover message in the *Speak Up for Healthcare* report - which has served as the foundation for the government's Action for Health Plan: "The Speak Up for Healthcare tour was created with one goal in mind - to make sure the voices of frontline healthcare workers were heard. We spoke with the people who know the system best - doctors, nurses, paramedics and the many other healthcare professionals who are working in it every day."

It seems that one group was left out - the patients. Let me illustrate with a personal experience story. Last year, our family made the most difficult decision to move my elderly father, who has no mobility, into a long-term care facility. My mother was his primary caregiver with limited supports in a rural area, and at the age of 85, she was no longer able to cope, especially given the limited home care support available. In July, he was admitted to the small rural hospital while waiting for placement to long-term care. This hospital did not enforce a masking policy, and one day just after returning from a visit with him, we received a call a half hour later from the hospital telling us my father tested positive for COVID. Fortunately, he recovered quite quickly, and after a couple of months, he was placed in a nearby long-term care facility. Naturally, my mother also got COVID.

Shortly after moving to the long-term care facility, he contracted COVID once again and this time developed pneumonia. A decision was made to send him to the regional hospital about an hour away, as the local hospital did not have the resources to deal with this issue. He spent one month recovering at the regional hospital, being moved into four different rooms during that time. As you can imagine, this was very upsetting for him at 90 years old at this point.

It was also a difficult time for my mother, who could not often make the long trip to visit him, as she does not drive at 85. Most often her calls to the hospital inquiring about his condition were not returned. When she was able to speak to someone, she received the stock answer: He had a good day. He ate all his meals.

After a recent visit with my mother in Cape Breton during March break, on my way back to Cole Harbour, I stopped in to visit my father at the regional hospital and, as you can imagine, my heart sank when I met an empty bed in his room. Concerned, I went to

the nursing station to see where they had moved him, only to be told that he had been discharged and sent back to long-term care the day before. It seems that someone had taken the time to update a dashboard, but they couldn't take the time to notify the family of this development. No explanation or apology was forthcoming.

Further, about three weeks after my father was sent from the long-term care facility to the regional hospital, my mother received a bill from the local pharmacy for standing prescriptions for my father. It seems no one at the long-term care facility bothered to let the pharmacy know my father wasn't there and was in hospital and no longer needed the prescriptions filled until he returned.

It seems to me that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, and I have heard so many other similar stories. The Care Coordination Centre might be working for the health care practitioners, but it sure isn't working for the patients.

I've never worked in health care, but simple checklists could have prevented these issues that we are encountering, along with better communication with patients and patients' families and a bit of compassion. Yes, we need more doctors, nurses, and other health care providers, but it really is time for this government to stop throwing money at the problem and start making some serious decisions and taking serious actions to address the systemic problems our health care system faces. It's time to stop blaming past governments for the situation. I'm really tired of hearing that one.

It's time to stop patting themselves on the back for the limited progress being made on fixing the system, because when we go into hospitals and when we hear from people who are trying to navigate the system, it doesn't help for me to say, Well, did you try the app? Health care should not be a partisan issue and should not have been made a partisan issue in the last election.

It is time to take a hard look at the organization, practices, and procedures around our health care system and to address the bureaucracy that has built up and causes a disconnect between health care management, frontline workers and - the most important - patients, because our health care system consumes massive amounts of our tax dollars and must be made accountable to all Nova Scotians.

Newsflash: We are all aging, and we are all going to be where my parents are now. If it costs this much now, how much are we going to be throwing at it to fix it in the future? If we don't fix fundamentally what is going on at the ground level in our health care system, I can't imagine what the future looks like. I am not being negative, I'm just being pragmatic.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. KENT SMITH: I am pleased to rise and speak for a few brief moments, basically in response to the member for Clare yesterday raising some points under the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act and directed pointedly at the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

[3:15 p.m.]

I'd like to begin first and foremost by thanking the member for Clare. He said some nice things yesterday about me and my department and I'd like to return the favour by saying I wish that all critics on the other side could take the member for Clare's lead on how to be a critic - some applause there, thank you very much. He's certainly a gentleman and I know that the member cares and I think it's pretty clear to this House that the member really cares about the industry and cares about his community.

I'd also like to share and to remind everyone about the importance of our fishing industry in this province, that it represents over \$2.5 billion in exports to our province. I think members have heard me say that before. It's no secret that it is the largest industry in our province, the largest sector by more than three times over the next largest export. I hope we can see that the largest export also has the smallest budget of all government departments. Luckily for me, I've lived my whole life doing a lot with a little, so I'm really glad to be in this role. Hopefully I can do what I can to steward the seafood industry along.

Just to quickly talk a little bit about the points the member for Clare raised yesterday. I'll go linearly, as I like to do. He talked a little bit about the DFO, he talked a little bit about enforcement, he talked a little bit about the provincial responsibilities, and a little bit about climate change. That's the order in which I will respond to them.

First and foremost, it's no secret that the member for Clare and I certainly agree that the DFO has not held up their end of the bargain when it comes to enforcement. They look after all harvesting activities and make sure that everything that is harvested is harvested legally and it then enters the market legally.

Unfortunately, as has been the case in the member's riding and in Yarmouth and in some other places along Southwest Nova, that has not been the case. It's been blatant. It's been vessels fishing out of season that have been allowed to tie up and unload without any enforcement efforts whatsoever. I certainly spent three or four days touring Southwest Nova near the beginning of the season. I had several meetings with industry associations, met with individual harvesters and individual processors. They shared that concern with me.

My department has taken it very seriously and we've done everything we can. I've tabled multiple letters here calling for the federal minister to do her job and direct her enforcement division to increase enforcement efforts to protect the valuable resource that we have. We haven't seen the results of that yet, but we're going to keep pressing her, the

federal minister, the federal Department of Justice, the federal Public Prosecution Service of Canada. My deputy has spoken with the federal deputy. It's been an ongoing dialogue that we continue to have with her. Hopefully, as time goes on, the message will be received, and enforcement efforts will increase.

With respect to enforcement of elvers, we saw how that unfolded and how our eight lawful elver-harvesting licence holders have been punished by the inaction of the federal government in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It is very unfortunate for those 11 licence holders. They represent about \$50 million in exports for our province. The fact that we weren't able to support them - I shouldn't even say "we" - that the federal - DFO was not able to support them this season was incredibly disappointing. We sent multiple letters to that effect saying this is so sad for them and it only promotes the illegal activity that we continue to see.

The member referenced the 26 or so arrests that we've seen recently, which is a great start. We're certainly thankful that they're taking an interest in the fishery sector right now, but it's nowhere near enough. The 26 are a drop in the bucket when it comes to the number of illegal harvesters who are out there on the rivers. I just hope that as the short season progresses, they continue to send a message.

Our responsibilities - the member spoke a little bit about what the provincial responsibilities are, and I'm certainly pleased. I won't go into detail on an item that's included in the FMA, but we've spoken a lot about the fact that we're able to increase fines, so that the first offence and second offence are going up. The minimum fine for convictions will be going up with the passage of the FMA. We're certainly proud that we're able to add that tool to our toolbox for another deterrent to deter illegal activity.

The other aspects that we are able to do are our abilities when it comes to conservation officers - I'll just correct the record ever so slightly. The member spoke about eight conservation officers for the province. That's eight for southwest Nova Scotia. Seven of those positions are filled. There is one vacant position for southwest Nova Scotia. I'm really, really pleased to be able to table the job description that is being posted right now. It is for a fisheries inspection conservation officer Level 1-2. The job that is posted right now under the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables is for a fisheries inspector, a dedicated person to help with fisheries enforcement from the provincial side of things. I hope the member takes solace in knowing that we're listening, and we've responded that way.

The member also talked about having a more regional approach, having a more Atlantic approach. I'm not sure if I have ever spoken about it here in the House before, but there is a joint steering committee. That is a federal-provincial partnership with all of the Atlantic provinces, as well as the regional manager for DFO. I'll tell the member that the people on that committee - there are various entities. I'll share it with the member later. There's a list of about seven different entities, as well as provinces and the feds, that are a

part of it - the executive director of fisheries is the co-chair; DFO regional general manager is the other co-chair. They have been working for over a year on finding a solution to fighting the illegal cash sales in Atlantic Canada. That action is happening - probably not happening quickly enough, but there is work being done on that side of things.

I talked about the Atlantic, talked about the conservation office. The last thing I think I'll mention before I sit down - the member talked about climate change. The quote was: "Climate change is having an impact on the lobster stocks and other seafood." We recently commissioned a report from the Centre for Marine Applied Research, which is an organization that works under Perennia Food and Agriculture Corporation through my department. They recently completed a lobster vulnerability study with respect to climate change. The findings are positive. The findings are that there is no direct impact right now on our lobster supply and lobster sustainability from climate change. That's not to say that 50 or 100 years down the road, there might be some changes. But as it stands now, we're confident that the lobster stocks and supplies are safe from climate change.

I don't want to take too much of our time here, but I did want to take a moment to make sure that we got on the record a response to some of the things that the member for Clare brought forward yesterday. We may not have this chance to talk publicly again, so I wanted to make sure that everything was documented and certainly appreciate the member opposite and appreciate the House for giving me the time to share those facts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Can the Speaker clarify if I have full 15 minutes?

THE SPEAKER: We're just resetting the clock. It's 45 minutes in total before we finish up this session.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: That's what I just need to know, how much time I have.

THE SPEAKER: Until 3:35 p.m.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Okay, so I'll go ahead with my original speech then. That's great. I wasn't sure if I had the time.

Speaker, today I would like to rise and speak to a topic that I believe would impact the provincial budget in the future and affect the future prosperity of the people that I represent in Cumberland North, all of the people in Cumberland County, as well as the province of Nova Scotia, the Maritimes and all of Canada. That topic is Maritime collaboration and the removal of interprovincial barriers.

Some would even suggest we go as far as having a Maritime union to strengthen our region and foster great economic prosperity. But I think we should start with something that is absolutely achievable and possible, and that is removing interprovincial trade barriers.

Cumberland North, Cumberland County, borders New Brunswick and is only 40 minutes from the province of Prince Edward Island as well. This provides a unique perspective on Nova Scotia, the Maritimes, and our position in the country. Our unique geographic position has positioned our people in Cumberland, historically, to have unique experiences. There's a long history of strife that has deepened the character of the people of Cumberland. We are strong, but as the elected representative, I can say that it is time for our area to realize our full potential and this can only happen with a clear focus, a purposeful intent to work together with our fellow Maritime provinces and remove the geographical and non-geographical trade barriers.

Last year, I attended the Atlantic Economic Forum at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish at the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government. Over and over again, I kept hearing business leaders and former political leaders, like Frank McKenna, state that the single biggest factor inhibiting economic growth in the Atlantic Canada region is interprovincial barriers. The time is now for the Maritime provinces to unite, remove these barriers, and capitalize on the economic potential of our region. Take back our political strength that we have not seen since the beginning of Confederation.

Cumberland is the geographic centre of the Maritime region. We have a rich history that has long experienced conflict. The French and the British empires fought over the Chignecto Isthmus area for years back in the 17th and 18th centuries, and we all know too well about the expulsion of the Acadian people from Beaubassin.

Cumberland has experienced wars. Cumberland also led the confederation of Canada. We also fought fervently against it. We all know the history of Sir Charles Tupper, who was born in Amherst and was also Premier of Nova Scotia from 1864 to 1867. He led Nova Scotia and all other provinces into Confederation and, for a short stint, was Canada's prime minister. There was also Joseph Howe, who also represented Cumberland County here in the provincial Legislature for a period. He was premier right before Sir Charles Tupper, from 1860 to 1863. He represented Cumberland County between 1851 and 1855, and he was ardently opposed to Confederation.

While Tupper wanted an intercolonial railroad across what is now Canada, Joseph Howe wanted the trade to increase with our natural and historical trade partners, the New England states, and we know what happened. Howe lost his fight and Tupper won, leading to Confederation in 1867, a short 157 years ago. In 1867, Confederation joined the East to the West, creating the country of Canada. Many believe our Maritime region has only seen a steady decline in political influence and relative economic status since that time.

The county of Cumberland alone used to have a population of 41,000 in 1921 and since then we've seen a 25 per cent population decline. The rest of Canada has seen growth while our Maritime region has seen decline since Confederation. Let's take a look at the federal government. In 1892, the Maritimes lost four seats in the House of Commons, followed by another four seats a decade later.

In 1873, the Maritimes used to have 43 federal seats. By 1966 we were down to 25, meaning as the total number of national seats increased as the rest of Canada prospered, Maritime representation decreased. Today the Maritime provinces have only 25 of the 338 seats in Parliament, an overall decrease from the original 21 per cent of the total seats in Canada to now only 7.4.

The Maritimes are rich in history, we are diverse in culture, and we have all the components needed for a wealthy, robust region, but we must work collaboratively to remove all the interprovincial barriers as soon as possible. Before Confederation in 1867, the Maritime region enjoyed a prosperous economy through fishing and forestry and agriculture, and, to some degree, mining. We also enjoyed natural trading with our friends, the Americans, the U.S. Eastern Seaboard, and traded efficiently across the Atlantic Ocean with Europe.

Since Confederation, we have seen a decline in our economic prosperity, having the weakest economies in the country and some of the largest interprovincial barriers. A quote from a document that I'll table - *Internal Trade in Canada: Case for Liberalization*:

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

Nova Scotia has nearly 40 non-geographic trade barriers - one of the highest provinces. Nova Scotia has increased non-geographic trade barriers by 2.1 per cent from 1997 to 2015. I will table this document.

In Cumberland County, we have a first-hand view of these barriers. I see it clearly, as the local MLA, and I work very closely with the local MLA, Megan Mitton, on the New Brunswick side for Westmorland County. We have worked together on many issues, including the Chignecto Isthmus and the pandemic, which was one of the biggest examples in recent years where each province worked in isolation, which caused so much strife and hardship on the people living in border communities. The Premiers and the provinces were unwilling to recognize the importance of how closely we are intertwined with each other.

[3:30 p.m.]

There are also several examples that I can give - whether it's Public Works, the Departments of Health and Wellness, Environment, Economic Development - where our government departments are not working with our fellow Maritime provinces and are causing hardship to the people in all of our provinces, but especially to those living in border communities like those in Cumberland North.

There is overwhelming public support to remove interprovincial barriers to create free internal trade. The surveys of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in 2014 showed that most Canadian firms - 87 per cent - believe that provincial and territorial premiers should commit to reducing internal trade barriers. Nine in 10 small businesses, including several industry associations, think that all firms should open access to all markets in Canada. More than half of the firms believe that provincial and territorial governments should not protect local businesses from competition from other provinces and territories.

A survey conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs found 89 per cent of respondents agree that Canadians should be allowed to bring any legally purchased product from one province to another. Nine in 10 Canadians say there should be free trade between the provinces because we are one country.

There is a precedent in Australia where mutual recognition was adopted in 1993 to remove regulatory barriers to the free flow of goods and labour between Australian states and territories. This brought about a more efficient economy, strengthening competition in many industries and benefiting consumers with lower prices and more choices for goods. Australian courts have often applied Section 92 of the Australian Constitution, which is similar to Canada's Section 121 of our Constitution Act of 1867: "The Constitution's internal free trade provision prohibits both internal interprovincial tariffs, as well as non-tariff trade barriers."

Today, as we discuss and debate the Nova Scotia budget - and on behalf of the people of Cumberland North and the businesses of Cumberland North - I am suggesting that we take a close look at the reasons for the economic and political decline we have experienced throughout the Maritime region and immediately take action to strengthen and reverse this trend.

Past movements, like the Maritime Rights Movement, resulted in national subsidies that for the most part today are not relevant. We have ACOA, and they throw some breadcrumbs our way, but it's not enough. It never will be.

The Maritimes have a solid history of economic independence. Before Confederation, the Maritimes were known to be self-reliant and strong. As time goes on,

more and more decisions are being made by Ottawa, and the heartbeat of our Maritimes continues to weaken.

It is not healthy for our country when too much power is centralized in Central Canada. Quebec and Ontario hold the balance of this country's political power. We have seen the Premiers of western Canada advocate for more respect and autonomy. It's time we here in the Maritimes speak up for ourselves as well. The most pressing reason for Maritime unity is the issue of health care. I'll save that for another day.

Speaker, we need to remove all interprovincial rules and regulations that inhibit natural trade and movement, and form a united force that will strengthen the Maritime region on all issues, most notably on health and economy. A strong future is in our hands and the hearts of our people. It's time to explore the possibilities, expand our dreams, and reach for opportunities to build a healthier, stronger region for our children and our grandchildren.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South, on an introduction.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the House to the West Gallery, where we are joined by a special young man whose name is Harvey. I'd like Harvey to stand up. He's the inspiration for the bill that I reintroduced today. He's joined by his mom, Sarah Thompson, who was my CA for a year. Harvey's father Ian is here, as well as his sister Hailey. I'd like everyone to join me in giving them a warm welcome to the House. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. Enjoy your stay.

The motion is carried.

We'll take a brief recess while we get set up for Supply.

[3:47 p.m. The House resolved itself into CWH on Supply with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[7:55 p.m. CWH on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Nolan Young 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 House on Supply has met and made most considerable progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

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

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

LISA LACHANCE: I am pleased to rise and continue talking about the FMA that's before us. I previously spoke a lot to the values around the commissioner on - for children and youth, and I actually want to complete by talking about some of the aspects of that that are critical. The minister, earlier in Estimates, acknowledged a number of these issues, but they're not currently in Schedule B of the FMA. I understand that they are issues to come, but I do think that they should be spelled out in the FMA.

Just to situate us back in the question of why a Commissioner for Children and Youth: Why do we need this? In our last session talking about this issue, I talked a lot about the child poverty rates that we see in Nova Scotia. We have other data as contained in the *One Chance to Be a Child* report that points out different areas where children are not thriving to their best possible outcomes. We talked about discrimination and we talked about the key foundational pieces around children's rights that should guide us here in Nova Scotia in the creation of the Commissioner for Children and Youth, and that Canada has signed on to, and that the world uses, really, to think about how to best support children and youth to thrive and develop to their fullest ability.

I think it's important to recognize that we also continue to have challenges as a country as well. By having a Commissioner for Children and Youth here in Nova Scotia, it's one way that we can be learning from others who are doing this work across the country and also be able to really connect on common issues.

In terms of how Canada is doing, we actually - in 2023, in the most recent UNICEF Report Card 18, Canada ranked 19th out of 39th high-income countries. I think one of the things that's important is that you're probably more familiar with some of the rankings of quality of life that come out that often place us - Canada - and the Scandinavian countries in the Top 6, in the Top 7. I think it's important to notice the discrepancy between the general population's experience and that of children. We are one of 10 of the 39 countries - we're one of only 10 - where childhood poverty in lone parent households is more than 40 per cent, again pointing to the challenge of poverty. We all know the long-term impacts that has on social, economic, and health outcomes.

In the most recent review of Canada by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, other issues that were highlighted were definitely the unfinished work of reconciliation as well as other forms of discrimination as major issues.

[8:00 p.m.]

I do think that there are some pieces that need to be put into the Schedule B so that we actually know what's being created in terms of a commission. As I noted, there has been quite a bit of work, and I believe the minister also noted that and has connected to some of the people who were behind the *One Chance to Be a Child* work, and from the IWK, and who are leading this work. I think some of the key elements that we have to talk about are structure and governance, and this could be laid out in Schedule B, clarifying that there's a statutory authority to establish the office, not just the position. We can even identify some of the key areas of staff skill, expertise, and competence that one would need in the office of the commissioner, such as folks who are skilled in youth engagement and in providing support to a youth advisory structure, which should also be in this document. We should be making sure that we are legislating the existence of a child and youth advisory council.

We need the commissioner to be reporting independently to the Legislature, on an annual basis, and be able to also provide input to the Legislature when they feel it's necessary. We need to ensure their independence and autonomy. The commissioner should be appointed to lead the office through an impartial, non-partisan, inclusive, transparent, and competitive recruitment process. The commissioner should be accessible and serve all Nova Scotia children and youth, without discrimination.

Statutory authority for the responsibilities and functions of the commissioner should be drafted with exclusive reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols: the United Nations Human Rights principles related to the status of national institutions, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 2.

We should ensure that there is a provision for establishing multi-disciplinary teams to provide advice to the commissioner, as well as special recognition of the rights and needs of Indigenous children and youth.

In terms of the roles and the responsibilities and what that looks like day-to-day: the commissioner should have legislative authority to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of all children and youth in Nova Scotia; to build a culture of tolerance, justice, and respect for human dignity. The commissioner should be empowered to promote the human rights of all Nova Scotian children with authority, and responsibilities to advise and make child rights informed recommendations about legislation, policy, protocols, practices, services, and budgets.

The office of the commissioner should engage in public education and awareness, to provide public education and advocacy respecting the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth, pursuant to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNDRIP.

The Child and Youth Commissioner Office should take steps to ensure that children, youth, their families, and the broader public are aware of the functions and locations of and ways to communicate with the commissioner and their office.

As I mentioned, we should legislate - the commissioner should have legislative responsibility to engage Nova Scotia children and youth, as per Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The commissioner should have statutory responsibility to assist children and youth - or groups of children and youth - who are receiving or who are eligible to receive a government service. Right now, we have the Office of the Ombudsman that can play a bit of that role, but this should be transferred to the office of the commissioner.

The commissioner should be given statutory function to conduct systemic reviews or investigations on matters affecting a group of children or youth, in response to recurring circumstances and trends - such as sexism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism, et cetera - to improve child rights implementations and outcomes for the broader population of children and youth in Nova Scotia.

The commissioner should inform and advise government on matters concerning the rights and best interests of children and youth in Nova Scotia, specifically providing information and advice to government, government agencies, and the broader community about the availability, effectiveness, responsiveness, and relevance of service for young people.

Information and advice to government may also be provided about legislation, policies, protocols, or practices related to children and youth. Efforts to inform and advise on harmonizing laws with international human rights efforts can be part of this work, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNDRIP, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The commissioner should have the statutory authority to collect data, engage in research, and review and monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of laws, policies, and services that relate to the rights and interests of children and youth in Nova Scotia. In carrying out this duty, the commissioner should be given authority to undertake or facilitate child rights impact assessments.

The commissioner should have the right to inform a bias and provide recommendations. The commissioner shall have statutory authority to receive, review, or

investigate a complaint by a child or youth, guardian, or person who represents a child or youth regarding a public service provided to the child or youth or group of children and youth.

The commissioner shall have statutory authority to conduct individual and systemic reviews and investigations, and the commissioner shall have the statutory authority to require a response from government on the recommendations or advice made within a specified period.

The commissioner shall have statutory authority to require a public body or community organization to provide any information that the commissioner deems necessary to carry out their responsibilities. The commissioner shall have the statutory authority to produce a range of reports, including a mandatory annual report.

Previously we talked a little bit about some of the other examples of offices of advocates or commissioners that exist across Canada. I shared the story of the work of the Office of the Advocate in Saskatchewan, which really dove into the issue of youth suicide in First Nations communities in northern Saskatchewan, and engaged dozens of First Nations communities, and thousands of children and youth in looking at the issue, understanding the issue, and identifying what government could do.

Next door in New Brunswick, the former New Brunswick Child and Youth Advocate, Norm Bossé, looked at the story of Lexi Daken, a 16-year-old who committed suicide after being sent home from an ER despite needing urgent mental health care. The Advocate found that the death was preventable and created the report *The Best we Have to Offer: Final Report on the Youth Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Services Review*. It shared recommendations to help prevent similar youth deaths.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Child and Youth Advocate has done lots of work that we could draw inspiration from here in Nova Scotia. One example is that after numerous media reports documenting incidents that showed the discrimination that many gender-diverse young people in Newfoundland and Labrador face, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate created a special report on trans youth in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2019. This report focused on the experience of transgender youth in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the inequities for these youth in the education and health systems.

A series of recommendations came out of the report, including mandatory curriculum content on gender diversity for students, in particular faculty at Memorial University, government department in-service training opportunities on gender diversity for professionals who work with children and youth, review and revise curriculum for K-12 education to incorporate content on gender diversity, and ensuring provincial access for gender-diverse young people to shelter space that is safe and accessible.

In Ontario, the Office for the Advocate for Children and Youth was sadly disbanded

under the current government, but previous to that did an enormous amount of work. They had the mandate to investigate any deaths of children and youth in care, and to produce reports on those. They worked closely with a number of Ontario First Nations, and actually created an ongoing initiative and governance body, and youth engagement project called Feathers of Hope.

There's a lot of positivity we can gain from a commissioner, which can help inform our work to make sure we're doing the best we can for children and youth. At this point, we see the impacts of not having an independent voice and advocate or commissioner for children and youth in Nova Scotia in some of the challenging results that we see in outcomes.

I respectfully disagree with the minister from earlier tonight. I think we need to see all of that in this. It is great to see this on paper, but there is no timeline, there is no budget, and there is no reference to the statutory authority that the commissioner will have.

I think it should also include a statutory responsibility to establish a youth advisory structure. As I mentioned, all this needs to be in here for us to be able to know that this government means action - and a deadline for setting everything up.

There are lots of other areas. As we know, it is a huge document. It is a bill that was put together that really should be a series of bills brought forward to the Legislature to ensure that we - all MLAs and stakeholders - are aware of what the content is in the bill, and are able to represent their concerns and their views at the Law Amendments Committee, to be providing us with letters of feedback, and to be engaged in the work of public policy development. I don't think we want to limit public engagement and public policy development. Every time that we connect with stakeholders, hear what people have to say, and have a way to consider that, we have better policy and better outcomes.

I'm well aware that that's not how this government likes to work, but of all the things I have become cynical about, I am not going to lose that commitment to public engagement.

One of the areas where I am getting some concerned feedback from folks, whom I hope are going to be able to appear at Law Amendments Committee - again, I know we have the Law Amendments process. It is an imperfect process. First, for instance, I have been telling people to get ready for Law Amendments for about a week and a half at this point. People don't know when they are supposed to be booking time off from work.

The physicians who have been contacting me with concerns about the Personal Health Information Act changes - well, they see patients most days, and in fact, we want them to see patients every day or as much as then can. To expect folks to be able to engage in an unclear legislative process is unrealistic. It is naïve to think that - or you might think that it is done on purpose so folks don't notice and can't get engaged.

Here are some notes that I have from a couple different physicians who are reaching out to their colleagues to let people know that this is here, and to invite their colleagues to get engaged. They talk about Clause 110, which would grant ministerial access to physicians' electronic medical records. This is where your personal health information - with private notes from your physician visits, medical history, medications, other records, lab results, and referrals - are all housed.

The government is making these changes to facilitate health systems planning. They can, however, get all this information from other deidentified sources and other databases that currently exist. They do not need access to EMRs. Other provinces make health care system plans and develop patient information apps without accessing your electronic medical record. I believe this is unprecedented across the country and risks the development of a slippery slope that puts patient information and physician autonomy at risk.

This government has made missteps in the past in the name of efficiency, and have been, in my opinion, good at recognizing those mistakes - see, this person is quite willing to give folks a chance - and they are not acting on them or correcting them. The call to action to reach out to your MLA - people need to understand the problems and risks this clause poses to our personal information, and the autonomy of physicians working in Nova Scotia.

Another physician talked about being worried that access to personal health information could lead to more patient profiling, something I've done some literature searching around. This in particular has massive implications for groups, termed loosely, individual patients with certain diagnoses in communities, et cetera, which then could influence their care on many levels.

The research is compelling with regard to bias and inequities around racialized groups, immigrants, persons with mental health diagnoses, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, communities, and so many more with vulnerability and complexity. This is a massive issue that could be easily backed by evidence. I'm trying to get people to organize.

Again, a piece of this that's buried in this large FMA that people might not be - are experts or physicians who think about personal health information - might not have the chance to scan through this large FMA. They might see the title Financial Measures (2024) Act and not expect to find it here. I'm hoping that we hear from more folks.

We certainly are not being transparent. We're not giving folks enough time. I really am concerned about the structure of this FMA.

I think at this point, I'm happy to take my seat, and I look forward to hearing from stakeholders at Law Amendments Committee.

[8:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I just have a few comments regarding the FMA. I do echo the comments or concerns around an omnibus bill. I'm speaking specifically to the fisheries and Coastal Resources Act. The concern I have that - it's similar to what we have heard from other colleagues - but even when the bill briefing was called, no prior notice that there would be any changes or anything having to do with fisheries. As a critic, I wasn't able to attend the bill briefing, as I imagine others similar who didn't know that it would affect their critic roles. Partly, I think fishing is important, and it deserves a stand-alone bill. I always think that, anyway.

I think the biggest concern I have is for the stakeholders. When I reached out to some of the associations to see if they would be interested in or even consider coming to Law Amendments Committee, when they called to get on the list, they called me back a bit confused because they weren't sure if the FMA was actually the bill they were supposed to speak on. In saying all that, I'm happy to see that the fines are being increased. The associations and the industry have been calling for that. We have been very supportive, and I have been very supportive.

I do have one concern with the amendments. I'm pretty sure that the association will be proposing amendments at the Law Amendments Committee. When you look at Number 2 - I'll just read the amendment quickly: "Subsection 116(3) of Chapter 25, as amended by Chapter 2 of the Acts of 1999, is further amended by striking out 'of not less than one hundred thousand dollars and nor more than five hundred thousand' and substituting 'not exceeding two million'."

For repeat offenders, basically this amendment is taking away the minimum fine and increasing the maximum fine, if I understand it correctly. Maybe I'm misreading it, but the fact is that it says "striking out 'of not less than one hundred thousand dollars'." We know that the courts have been reluctant to give out, I would say, significant fines. The times that they have given - I remember there was one fine which I think the court ruled was excessive. Without a minimum fine for repeat offenders, I'm scared that - although the intent of the minister I agree with is to increase the fines - I have some concerns that the courts might take that as an opportunity to levy lower fines than maybe the amendment is proposing.

I know minimum fines are something that the associations are starting to talk a lot about. I know at the beginning, as always, discussion around maximum fines and the idea of having a minimum wasn't really in the discussions, but of late that has come up quite a bit. I'm looking forward to hearing from the associations if they can make it. I'm assuming from my discussions with them that they will be proposing at least that amendment.

In my supply last night for 15 minutes this was the subject, so I don't want to repeat over and over. But I think this one amendment is a point of concern for me. I think the idea - I support the changes, and I think the intent is to really discourage that activity and punish those who really try to go against it, but the fact that there's no minimum could create a challenge.

I realize that's out of this room's control. It's the courts that decide. But I think the minimum fine would at least put a floor where the courts would have to impose that fine.

With those few comments, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I thank my colleagues the members for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island and Clare as well for their comments. I'll also be reasonably brief as well on Bill No. 419, the Financial Measures Act.

I will start on the positive side, because I do think there are some good things in this bill. Of course, as we've said before on this side of the House, the indexing of income tax brackets is a big thing. It's something we've been calling for. Glad to see that in the FMA. It's something that is simple, easy to understand, and will save people money in a cost of living crisis, so that's good.

A couple of things on the transportation and public works side that I see in here make a lot of sense to me. One is modernizing the process around Halifax Harbour Bridges. I know the bridge commission is moving toward a system where they won't have or need toll booths anymore. Things will be automated, collection will be much more efficient. I saw that in the bill here, and that's a good thing.

Another one that I'm familiar with, of course, is related to the Highway 104 Corporation and the decision to remove tolls for Nova Scotians, which is a great decision. To keep them on for commercial traffic out of province, I also think made a lot of sense. My assumption, based on the changes to the Act, is that the amount of revenue the Province is collecting at the tolls is more than is needed to maintain just that one section of highway, which as we all know is maintained very well. To spread the wealth, I guess, and use excess funds if they are available for other highway projects across the province, is a good thing. I think that's a legacy of a highway system that's been managed extremely well over the last quarter-century - 25 to 30 years. Good to see that.

I'm also happy to see the creation of codes of conduct for the municipal level - wardens, mayors, councillors. In many cases, those don't exist, and obviously that's an oversight and that's something that needed to change. We see that in the FMA as well.

Those are good things. The problems - not to repeat what my colleagues have said,

but the major issue we see here is that this is an omnibus bill, I would say. The FMA comes through every year. Often it consists of housekeeping or relatively minor changes, for the most part, and of course there are some of those in this year's FMA, but there are also really meaty, substantial legislative changes buried within this bill. I think there are maybe 12 to 15 pieces of legislation that are amended in the FMA here. They're not all housekeeping, by any means.

For example, some of the ones I've mentioned that I think are good are still substantial changes. For my responsibility as municipal affairs and housing critic, there's an extension of the Executive Panel on Housing for a two-year period. That's a significant body that's doing really important work. Unfortunately, I don't think we've ever gotten a great level of insight into what they're doing or how they're making decisions, and I think that topic certainly merits a debate as an individual bill. We're talking about a body that can make decisions to designate the entire municipality of HRM as a special planning area, for example, and they're dealing with planning and development applications for tens of thousands of units and tens of thousands of people.

Whether or not it's a good decision to extend the life of the executive panel for a couple of years, that's an open question which I think should be debated not as one of 15 bills, but as one of one. I think that's very reasonable, to make that point.

As other colleagues have mentioned as the Minister for DCS was talking about during Estimates tonight, the creation of the Office for Children and Youth is another major change that deserves and demands to be its own bill so that we can have a separate process and members on all sides can have a realistic, fulsome debate on that particular issue.

I think we are also seeing the consequences of jamming everything into an omnibus bill, because we have two bills already that have drawn - one that we hear will be withdrawn and amended from the FMA - that's related to changes to the Professional Firefighters Volunteer Act. I know the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration mentioned this today - that I believe there are amendments coming to this piece of legislation under the FMA because of unanticipated implications of the change. Again, when you cram everything into a bill like this, that's what's going to happen, inevitably, despite good intentions or otherwise.

These are complicated issues, and I think we see that with that piece of legislation related to firefighters - volunteers and professionals - and also around health information. Doctors Nova Scotia has come forward and raised concerns around the use of personal health information that is authorized under the FMA here to support the Your Health NS app and other applications.

I know the Minister of Health and Wellness has discussed this, and feels that the changes are appropriate, but again, it's difficult for Opposition to get the whole picture of that when we're dealing with 15 bills in one, masquerading as one. We see those two issues

already cropping up even before we get to Law Amendments Committee.

That's kind of the last point I want to make, tonight at least. I'm a member of the Law Amendments Committee. I know many of us have sat on that committee. It can be not efficient, I would say, at the best of times when we're dealing with one bill of significance or of consequence, and it's really - I mean, I've been talking so far about how I think putting everything under an omnibus bill is unfair to the Opposition, and I think that's true, but it's really unfair to the public. That's a big problem, because, as I think the member for Clare was saying, if the public thinks, Okay, there are changes to the Fisheries Act or there are changes to the Municipal Government Act, well, that's what I'm going to look for. Well, no, actually it's under the Financial Measures (2024) Act. How would they know that? How would they know when this issue is coming up? And if you have 15 bills all at once, some of which lots of people will want to speak to, it just becomes a logistical nightmare. It becomes impossible. People's voices get silenced because there's just not enough time to get everybody through the door and to speak on each of these bills that are of consequence.

I think that's a real problem. I don't think the Law Amendments Committee for this particular bill is going to make for easy watching or listening, because I think a lot of people are going to be left out and not have their voices heard, and I think we're going to have oversights. We've already seen that on two of the bills in the FMA.

I will have a few more comments on this as well tomorrow, Speaker, but for now I move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 419, the Financial Measures (2024) Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 419, the Financial Measures (2024) Act.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Speaker. That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise, to meet again on March 22nd between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Government business will include second reading of Bill No. 419.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that we do now rise to meet again tomorrow, March 22nd, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until tomorrow.

[The House adjourned at 8:30 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 964**

By: Hon. Iain Rankin (Timberlea-Prospect)

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

Whereas Since January of 2023, the Prospect Slammers have been involved in a project to promote pickleball in our community and encourage new players to get off the couch and come and try pickleball; and

Whereas the Prospect Slammers have welcomed over 200 new people to try the sport and have organized open houses, tournaments, play and lunch, drop-in events, and given away free passes; and

Whereas the Slammers applied for (and received) a grant from the Prospect Road Recreation Association to purchase balls, paddles, free passes, and nets to loan to people who wanted to try playing, and according to Wayne Paddock, who heads this group, “You know players are committed when they buy their own paddle”;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking the Prospect Slammers for their community work to introduce and teach community members to play pickleball and for encouraging and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Their work is simply good for the sport and good for the community and good for the Slammers to have new people to play with.