



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

9:02 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order. We will 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 Health and Wellness.

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Thank you, Speaker. With us today in the gallery, your gallery, is the honorable Dr. Ronald Stewart. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. It is such an honour to have you here with us today.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness, continuing her introduction.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We're so excited to see you, Dr. Stewart, we didn't finish.

Dr. Stewart, as many of us will know, has had a long and groundbreaking career in medicine, primarily, but also in politics. Dr. Stewart chose to specialize in emergency medicine at a time when the education wasn't available in Canada, so he had to travel to the United States before returning home to practise.

Originally from Sydney Mines, he began his practice in Neils Harbour - right? - before he travelled to the United States to work. He's also a strong supporter of the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation, contributing financially and working to inspire the next generation of health professionals.

His 50-plus year commitment to medicine, his many and varied contributions, and his dedicated leadership have earned him one of our country's highest honours, a promotion to the Companion of the Order of Canada, which we celebrated last week at the Lieutenant Governor . . .

Dr. Stewart, I just want to assure you that words cannot express our gratitude or our pride in you for all that you have contributed to medicine, emergency medicine, and to our province. Welcome. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 965

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

Whereas only 500 Canadians have been promoted to the level of Companion of the Order of Canada, the most senior level of the Order, and only six of them have been Nova Scotians, until Dr. The Honourable Ronald Stewart became the seventh; and

Whereas Dr. Stewart was the first medical director in the Los Angeles paramedic program, a founding member of the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of

Pittsburgh, a key adviser on the 1970s television series *Emergency!*, and a trusted advisor to political and policy leaders; and

Whereas Dr. The Honourable Ronald Stewart was a transformative Minister of Health in Nova Scotia, whose ambitious and tenacious work resulted in the formation of Emergency Health Services;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize Dr. Stewart's 50 years of selfless, groundbreaking work and offer him our most sincere congratulations on his promotion to Companion of the Order of Canada.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 966

HON. GREG MORROW: Speaker, could I request a moment of silence at the end of my notice of motion?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, of course.

GREG MORROW: Thank you.

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

Whereas the late Honourable Derrick Bragg, who was a fellow Atlantic Canadian Minister of Agriculture in Newfoundland and Labrador until he stepped away from the portfolio in June due to health concerns, sadly passed away this January; and

Whereas for three decades, Minister Bragg was town clerk and manager of his hometown of Greenspond and fire chief for 28 years before he served his province as minister in several departments over his time in government, which began when first elected as MHA for Fogo Island-Cape Freels in 2015; and

Whereas he is remembered by his family as a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, by his province as a minister providing great counsel to his premier, by his constituents as a politician with a straight-shooting style and a prominent sense of humour, and by me as a fellow Minister of Agriculture whom I was lucky to have known and learned from, Derrick Bragg put everyone he met on the path to good fortune simply by knowing him;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in remembering the Honourable Derrick Bragg's contributions to supporting agriculture in our region and his devotion to public service in general.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We'll stand now for a moment of silence, please.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 443 - An Act to Reintroduce Local School Boards. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 444 - An Act to Provide Volunteer Firefighters with Medical First Responder Training. (Carman Kerr)

Bill No. 445 - An Act to Establish a Provincial Lake Advisory Commission. (Lisa Lachance)

Bill No. 446 - An Act Respecting the Community Use of Public School Facilities. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 447 - An Act to Amend Chapter 1 of the Acts of 1994-95, the Environment Act. (Lisa Lachance)

Bill No. 448 - An Act to Amend Schedule A of Chapter 1 of the Acts of 2018, the Education Act, Respecting School Weather Closings. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

[9:15 a.m.]

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Before I begin, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

TWILA GROSSE: Thank you. In your gallery, the Speaker's Gallery, I'm honoured to introduce Rayshaun Jaden Brooks, an outstanding athlete at Woodlawn High School. Joining Jaden is his mother, Lachelle, and his brother, Donte. As well, I am incredibly pleased to introduce Jaden's grandmother, and the constituency assistant in my office, Katherine Brooks. (Applause)

Jaden, Lachelle, Donte, and Katherine, I would ask you to rise and accept the warm welcome in the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. It's a pleasure to have you here with us today.

The honourable member for Preston.

BROOKS, RAYSHAUN: SPORTS ACHIEVEMENTS - CONGRATS.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I rise to recognize and congratulate Rayshaun Jaden Brooks.

Jaden is a Grade 12 student at Woodlawn High School in Dartmouth. He has been active in sports starting at the young age of nine, playing basketball in various basketball leagues throughout the HRM. Jaden only started playing football in grade 10, and this became the sport that he excelled at and loved. In Grade 11, he was awarded the 2022 Most Improved Player, and in 2023, he received the Most Valuable Player award for the Woodlawn High Panthers. Jaden accomplished these awards while also working part-time. Jaden is actively now completing applications to various universities, to allow him to continue his education and play the sport he loves.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join with me to congratulate Rayshaun Jaden Brooks and wish him well as he continues to do great things. Keep moving forward, Jaden. You got this. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

JUKAI JAPANESE & THAI: NEW LOC. - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Today I want to rise and recognize a new business in my riding of Bedford South - actually, right on the boundary between me and my colleague from Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. JUKAI Japanese & Thai opened in January. I had a chance to go in a couple of weeks ago and visited with the chef there - Sam and the team. Amazing food. That's one of the great things about my constituency: We have food from all over the world. Please come and visit if you like anything under the sun - and certainly Japanese and Thai food at JUKAI Japanese & Thai.

I want to wish them well - I know they're doing very well, this is their second location - and congratulate them on all their success in Bedford South.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

ANDERSON, BRUCE: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

SUSAN LEBLANC: I rise today to pay tribute to Dartmouth North resident Bruce Anderson on the occasion of his retirement after nearly 40 years of service at Bedford Institute of Oceanography.

Bruce is a third-generation worker at BIO, working as a multi-disciplinary hydrographer. His colleagues describe him as an unfailingly pleasant, welcoming, knowledgeable co-worker who has been silently responsible for so much of what is great about working at their office. He organizes monthly coffees, open houses, retirement parties, pizza parties, and a giant Christmas potluck. He tracks people's birthdays and special events and provides onboarding for every new employee. He does it all with good grace and humility.

I know his co-workers are sad to see him leave, but I also know they will wish him a very happy retirement. I ask the whole House to join me in wishing Bruce Anderson a very happy retirement and, wish him all the best in the hopefully less busy years to come.

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

DAVE RITCEY: Before I begin, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes. Please go ahead.

DAVE RITCEY: In the East Gallery, I'm honoured to introduce some young members of the staff at the PC Caucus office: Sheumais McLeod, Garry Russell, Adam Morash, Brian Pendleton, Evan Colclough, Claire Butler, and Megan McDaniel. I would ask you all to rise to receive much-deserved applause from the members of this Legislature. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. It's a pleasure to have you with us here today.

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

CAUCUS STAFF: ENTHUSIASM - RECOG.

DAVE RITCEY: Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to talk about some of the incredible staff who work in our caucus office.

When many young people don't often show a lot of interest in government and public service, I'm pleased that so many young people are working in our office. In fact, the majority of our staff are under the age of 30. Sheumais MacLeod is our director of research; Garry Russell and Adam Morash are research officers; Brian Pendleton does both research and communications; and Evan Colclough, Claire Butler, and Megan McDaniel are communications officers.

I know our members are pleased to be working with these smart and enthusiastic young staff, and we look forward to seeing what they can accomplish in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

INDEP. LIVING N.S.: HELP FOR DISABLED - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge the exceptional contributions of Independent Living Nova Scotia. This organization has been a source of hope and support for Nova Scotians with disabilities, providing vital programs and services that promote equality and break down barriers. This organization has consistently

demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities through advocacy and the provision of essential services. Services offered by this organization include professional development training sessions, self-advocacy workshops, self-managed attendant service, and the Registered Disability Savings Plan pilot project.

It's with great pleasure that I express my sincere appreciation to Independent Living Nova Scotia for their tireless efforts to create a more inclusive and accessible society for all. Their work is a testimony to the power of community action and the vital role of civil society in shaping this world that we live in.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MORTON, TRENO: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Treno Morton. Treno is an accomplished community engagement specialist who understands the power of building inclusive communities. Growing up in Uniacke Square, Treno faced the reality of gentrification head-on. This early life experience motivated him to do the hard work of tackling this pressing social issue and advance economic justice for communities like his own. Treno has a number of academic accolades: a degree in geography and planning, urban planning studies, and global development, to name a few.

Treno's compassion for the community is evident in his collaborative work with various community groups, non-profits, and local governments to help tackle pressing social issues. Treno, as a young person, has a deep passion for creating inclusive communities that work for everyone. I'm extremely proud of Treno Morton and all that he has accomplished thus far. I would like all members of this House to help me recognize Treno Morton for his passion for his community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

BARBARA ADAMS: I would like to draw everyone's attention to the East Gallery, where in the top row is my favourite person in the political world, my constituency assistant, Lisa Rochon, who is my right and left hand. As well, right next to her - and I'll ask them both to rise - is J.M. Morales, a Nova Scotia Community College student in business administration who is working in my office. I'll ask them both to rise and enjoy the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. It's a pleasure to see you here today.

The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

COLCLOUGH, EVAN: PAPER PUBLISHED - CONGRATS.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Evan Colclough for having his paper published in the Dalhousie political science journal, *The Podium*.

Evan's paper, "The Impact of International Institutions on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Viewed through a Rational Choice Institutional Perspective," was selected as one of only six to be published in this peer-reviewed undergraduate academic journal. Evan is a tremendous young man with a keen intellect and a drive for success.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in congratulating Evan Colclough on this outstanding accomplishment. We know that Evan is a dedicated student with a very bright future ahead of him.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

ROBICHAUD, NATALIE: FRANCPRESSE LIST - CONGRATS

RONNIE LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, depuis 2015, le réseau média national *Francopresse* souligne chaque année le travail de 10 personnes de partout au pays qui ont eu un impact important sur la communauté francophone canadienne. Cette année, Natalie Robichaud, directrice générale de la Société acadienne de Clare est la seule néo-écossaise à recevoir cet honneur.

Natalie se passionne pour l'épanouissement du patrimoine culturel de notre région et travaille sur des projets innovateurs tels que nos *Chansons oubliées*, qui rassemble et préserve un catalogue de chansons de la région de Clare. Natalie est particulièrement engagée auprès de nos jeunes et développe des projets qui valorisent notre langue et notre culture. Natalie fait également du bénévolat pour de nombreuses organisations. Elle est actuellement la vice-présidente du comité organisateur du Congrès mondial acadien 2024.

Je demande à tous les membres de se joindre à moi pour féliciter Natalie Robichaud d'avoir reçu cet honneur prestigieux et bien mérité.

Since 2015, the national media outlet *Francopresse* has honoured ten people each year from across the country who have had a significant impact on the Canadian Francophone community. This year, Natalie Robichaud, Executive Director of la Société acadienne de Clare, was the only Nova Scotian to receive this honour.

Natalie is passionate about preserving the cultural heritage of our area, working on such innovative projects as *Chansons oubliées*, which has gathered and preserved the catalogue of songs from the Clare region. Natalie is especially engaged in working with

our youth and developing projects that value our language and culture. Natalie volunteers on many organizations and is current the Vice President of the Congrès mondial acadien 2024 organizing committee.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Natalie Robichaud for receiving this well-deserved and prestigious honour.

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

OCEAN WISE: OCEAN BRIDGE PGM. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, all of us in this Chamber have seen the ambition of young people in improving our collective future. In February, youth came to Halifax for Ocean Wise's three-day urban learning journey as part of the Ocean Bridge Program.

Over the prior six months, the youth have worked together to develop their own ocean stewardship projects. The youth projects are nothing short of impressive. From a sustainable clothing mending pop-up shop to an interactive mapping tool to warn residents about pollution and invasive species. Every idea came to fruition and all of them will help us make better decisions with our ocean's health in mind. During the three days in Halifax, participants finally got to show off the rewards of their hard work and I couldn't have been more proud to be involved.

I ask my fellow members to recognize the Ocean Bridge participants for taking ownership of our ocean's health in developing so many unique projects to help them do it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MACDOUGALL, SUSAN: WINDSOR ELMS CEO - RECOG.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I rise today to bid a fond farewell to Susan MacDougall and thank her for her leadership at Windsor Elms Village, where she has been the CEO for the past seven years.

Sue continually empowers and cultivates the growth of team members by nurturing their talents and skills to help them enhance their best versions of themselves. She has been a champion for the interests of the sector by actively engaging and influencing discussions with all levels of government. This ensures the needs and potentials of this sector are recognized and advocated for with unwavering dedication. By seizing innovative opportunities with enthusiasm and foresight, she has pioneered initiatives such as the solar field project and the UVC project, demonstrating true commitment to progress and sustainability.

Sue will be leaving big shoes to fill, and I want to wish her all the best in her new role as the Director of Support Services for Continuing Care at Nova Scotia Health.

[9:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

INT'L DAY OF FORESTS: AWARENESS - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to recognize the International Day of Forests, which was yesterday. It was a day to celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of all types of forests that enhance the beauty of Nova Scotia and provide a living for so many. Our coastal-influenced Maritime climate of humid Summers and cold Winters gives rise to a unique forest mix of northern hardwood and boreal species, now recognized as one of North America's most endangered forests.

Forests benefit Canadians environmentally with the rich ecosystem they support. This ecosystem preserves soil, cycles nutrients, and supports biodiversity. Trees, forest plants and forest soils also filter pollutants from the air and water, acting as natural cleansers. In addition to environmental benefits, a walk in the forest can generate many positive emotions, improve your mental health, improve your physical health, help you be more active and more creative, and can also facilitate concentration and help you feel more relaxed.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in recognizing, working to protect and manage, and ecologically appreciating the beauty and benefits of Nova Scotia's forests.

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

AUTOPORT STRIKE: SCAB LABOUR - BAN

KENDRA COOMBES: It's been 25 days since Autoport workers' Unifor Local 100 went on strike. On day one of the strike, CN Rail brought in scab workers. For 25 days, workers have faced disrespect and indignity as CN and Autoport used the courts and scab workers to try to break the spirit and resolve of their employees.

Bringing in scab workers prolongs strikes and escalates tension. This employer would rather union-bust than negotiate. This is precisely why anti-scab laws are needed. We stand in solidarity with striking workers at Autoport. CN Rail must end the use of scab labour and bargain in good faith. One day longer, one day stronger, Speaker.

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

SEAVIEW MANOR: REPLACEMENT - RECOG.

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, older Nova Scotians who worked hard to build our province deserve to be cared for in a residence that meets their needs. Seaview Manor in Glace Bay is just such a place.

In December, on behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care, I had the honour of announcing that government will be replacing Seaview Manor, increasing the number of rooms for seniors by 31 to a total of 144 beds at this home. Because no new seniors' homes have been built for more than 10 years, far too many of our most vulnerable seniors were in hospital beds or in their homes, waiting for a room in a long-term care facility.

The new Seaview Manor will provide a welcoming environment that seniors deserve. Like hospitals, these are health care facilities, however, they are also people's homes. I would like to thank and congratulate the staff and administration of Seaview Manor, and the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, for this amazing investment in the seniors of our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

AIR CADETS: POPPY CAMPAIGN PARTIC. - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I'd like to congratulate two Bedford groups that have come together to support one another. Every year, our stalwart team at the Bedford Legion distributes poppies in the run-up to Remembrance Day ceremonies. This past November, as always, they were supported by Wing 342 Bedford Lions Air Cadets, who came out to assist in the campaign. With their support, the Legion was able to raise about \$70,000 to assist our local veterans and their families.

I should mention that the Legion also supports our local cadet program, so it's a bit of a circle of life - all of which is to say that I would like to congratulate both our Legion members and our Wing 342 Air Cadets for all they do to encourage young people, and to provide support to our veterans and their families. We're so lucky to have both groups in our area.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RUMSCHEIDT, REV. MARTIN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, a memorial service will be held tomorrow in Durham, New Hampshire for Reverend Dr. Martin Rumscheidt, who passed away January 29th at the age of 88. Martin Rumscheidt was an ordained minister of the United Church of Canada, and who for decades was professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at the

Atlantic School of Theology. He was Eastern Canada's pre-eminent Christian socialist theologian, and wrote widely on socialist currents and the work of Karl Barth, on the life and work of the anti-fascist theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and on the Marxist feminism of theologian Dorothee Sölle, amongst others.

Martin was also a prominent voice in Christian-Jewish dialogue and reconciliation. He spoke often out of his own wartime experience as a German Christian about the Holocaust and the imperatives it imposes on ways of thinking about Christian hope. Martin Rumscheidt brought the richest of international political theology to a generation of students for the Christian ministry in Nova Scotia. His passing is a moment of major loss.

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

HAY, B./SYLIBOY, A.: AWD. RECIPS. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, each year, the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia recognizes deserving organizations and individuals for their contributions and efforts. It is my privilege to work and live near two of the 2023 recipients recognized at the 46th annual summit, Building Resiliency.

First is Bill Hay, owner of Mastodon Ridge Developments Ltd. - and that's where my office is located. Bill was awarded the Alastair & Frances Campbell Lifetime Tourism Achievement Award. Next is Alan Syliboy, multi-talented artist and musician from nearby Millbrook, the recipient of the Indigenous Tourism Lifetime Achievement Award, sponsored by the Nova Scotia Indigenous Tourism Enterprise Network.

Please join me as I extend my congratulations to these enterprising and talented individuals.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

ARCHIBALD, MAGGIE: ENDOMETRIOSIS ADVOCACY - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to bring attention to a condition that affects 1 in 10 Nova Scotians: endometriosis.

As we mark Endometriosis Awareness Month in Nova Scotia, it's crucial to recognize the profound impact this often-misunderstood condition has on individuals. Those living with endometriosis endure debilitating pain, compromised quality of life, and often face challenges in accessing timely diagnosis and effective treatment.

Among those tirelessly advocating for better understanding and support for endometriosis sufferers in Nova Scotia and abroad is Maggie Archibald. Her dedication to this cause has been instrumental in raising awareness and promoting education.

I would also like to take this moment to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone involved in advocacy for endometriosis. Your tireless efforts are invaluable in bringing about positive change and improving the lives of those affected. We must continue to promote education and improve health care resources for those affected by this condition.

Let us use this month as an opportunity to amplify the voices of those impacted by endometriosis, and to advocate for greater research, resources and compassion. Together we can create a world where every person received the care and support, they need to live a full and healthy high-quality life.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

PETERKIN, BETH: NEW CUMB. CoC ROLE - BEST WISHES

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to recognize Beth Peterkin, Executive Director of the Cumberland Chamber of Commerce.

Beth joined the Amherst & Area Chamber of Commerce as the general manager in December 2023, bringing many years of non-profit management skills to the team. Beth is also a small business owner herself, operating a management consulting business from her home in Parrsboro.

The Cumberland Chamber of Commerce, formerly the Amherst & Area Chamber of Commerce, has recently expanded the scope of its services to encompass all of Cumberland County. With the chamber continually looking for ways to provide educational, marketing and networking opportunities, Beth is certainly the right person to help the chamber achieve this goal.

Please join me in wishing Beth Peterkin the very best as she embarks on her expanded role with the Cumberland Chamber of Commerce.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

BURNETT, KERIAN: MSI COVERAGE RECIP. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, Kerian Burnett, a migrant worker from Jamaica, got very good news recently. She finally got her MSI card in the mail. This was the result of a multi-year fight to get health coverage in the wake of her 2022 cervical cancer diagnosis. As a migrant worker in the strawberry fields, Kerian was not eligible for MSI, and her two surgeries cost \$81,000. In 2023, Kerian was approved for the Interim Federal Health Program. In January of this year, she was granted a work permit through to July 2025. That work permit made her eligible for MSI.

Though Kerian now has medical coverage, many migrant workers do not, as their work permits are not long enough to qualify. Kerian and No One is Illegal, Halifax/Kjipuktuk, which has supported her through her treatment and fight for coverage, are calling on the provincial government to immediately provide migrant workers with MSI coverage when they arrive in Nova Scotia.

I congratulate Kerian on receiving her MSI card. I wish her good health, and I stand in solidarity with No One is Illegal and migrant workers, and their call for MSI for all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

LIV. HOST SOC.: OLYMPIC CURLING TRIALS - CONGRATS.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and congratulate the Liverpool Championship Host Society for securing the opportunity to host the Canadian Mixed Doubles Olympic Curling Trials. This coming December 30th through January 4th, top curlers from across the country will compete at Queens Place Emera Centre in Liverpool to decide who will represent Canada at the 2026 Olympic Winter Games in Italy.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the volunteers of the Host Society, along with all those involved from the Liverpool Curling Club and Queens Place Emera Centre. Securing and hosting such a prestigious and high-profile event takes the time and efforts of many. I know all competitors will receive a warm and hospitable Queens County welcome, and the event will be a great success. I can't wait for the New Year's party.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

PAUL, DANNY: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize someone who the Membertou community lost, but our entire island lost in the last number of months, and that was Danny Paul from Membertou. Danny Paul held the titles of elder, pipe carrier, and knowledge holder for Mi'kmaw cultures and traditions. He was one of our greatest advocates for Mi'kmaw rights and traditions, not only in Cape Breton but across the region.

Danny was recognized as a recipient of the Grand Chief Donald Marshall Sr. Elder Achievement Award, the Membertou community Edward Kabatay Memorial Award for Aboriginal Language and Culture, and he was also a member of the Unamaki Institute of Natural Resources Committee, the Parks Canada Seawall Trail committee, and elder-in-residence at NSCC Marconi in Sydney and at Acadia University.

He was a great advocate for youth, holding yearly moose-hunting camps and salmon fishing adventures in Margaree for many of the youth in the area. Danny was a

friend of many people in Cape Breton and beyond, and we all miss him. I rise in my place to recognize one of the Mi'kmaw culture's greatest champions, Danny Paul.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

WORLD DOWN SYND. DAY: END STEREOTYPES - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize World Down Syndrome Day, which we all celebrated yesterday, but each and every day, we should be taking about Down syndrome. Down syndrome is a naturally occurring chromosomal arrangement that has always been part of the human condition - a condition in which a person has an extra chromosome. People with Down syndrome are just like you and me, and have an inherent right to be accepted, included and valued as equal members of our community.

Yesterday I wore mismatched socks, like a lot of us in this room, to get people talking about Down syndrome. We need to have conversations and we need to raise awareness of Down syndrome. Every day, think about folks in our community and the fabric of life in it, and how we can all spread awareness.

I'd like all members of this House to join me in making the call for people around the world to end the stereotypes. On World Down Syndrome Day and every day, I'd just like for us to acknowledge that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

ROTARY CLUB OF SACK. & AREA: NEW MURALS - RECOG.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Speaker, I rise today to applaud the Rotary Club of Sackville and Area. Thanks to the members of the club, Acadia Park in Lower Sackville is home to two beautiful mosaic murals, individually hand-painted by members of the community. Mosaic One celebrates the 200th anniversary of the Two Great Roads of Sackville, the Windsor Highway, which used to be the Old Sackville Road, and the Cobequid Road to Truro, which paved the way for year-round travel and trade, contributing to the thriving community we are today. Mosaic Two reflects the club's passion for education and literacy, showcasing the former Acadia School's rich history, while honouring our children, the heartbeat of our community.

I would like to ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding the Rotary Club of Sackville and Area for capturing Sackville's history, leaving a legacy for all to enjoy.

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

NOEL, YVONNE: SQUARE ROOTS FAIRVIEW- RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, today I rise to express my heartfelt gratitude to a dedicated volunteer in Fairview-Clayton Park, and that's Yvonne Noel, who retired as community manager with Fairview/Clayton Park Square Roots at the end of last year. Throughout her four years in this role, Yvonne demonstrated exceptional leadership and tireless efforts through a pandemic, through floods, through power outages, and so much more. Her passion and determination have been instrumental in Square Roots' growth and success, and in positively impacting the lives of hundreds of families within our community.

[9:45 a.m.]

Just this week, Yvonne was notified that she will be receiving an HRM volunteer award for District 10. This award recognizes the extraordinary contributions of outstanding individuals who volunteer their time and skills in our communities. I actually can't think of a more deserving person than Yvonne. We will miss Yvonne's leadership at Square Roots, but I anticipate that she will be working at something new not too long from now.

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

CDN. ENV. MUSIC AWDS.: EMERG. CONCERT - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, the Canadian Environmental Music Awards were launched on March 17th at Halifax's Rebecca Cohn Auditorium during a concert put on by Music Declares Emergency. "There is absolutely no doubt at all that we are in a massive planetary crisis," said Kim Fry, co-founder of Canada's chapter of Music Declares Emergency. "It's easy to feel the weight of that . . . and really it's the artists who give us hope. It's the artists who open up our hearts, and let us connect with others."

Hosted by CBC's Jeff Douglas, the March 17th Climate Emergency concert paid tribute to the environmental legacies of Neil Young and Joni Mitchell. The concert featured Terra Spencer, Logan Staats, Jenn Grant, Talia Schlanger, T. Thomason, Braden Lam, Alexsi Campagne, Moira and Claire, Tragedy Ann, Moonfruits, cellist India Gailey, and guitarist Donna Grantis.

Speaker, I thank all artists contributing to this effort because, as the tagline says, there's no music on a dead planet.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

LUNENBURG CONCERT: FUNDRAISING GALA - RECOG.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, I rise today to recognize 80 years of music festivals in Lunenburg County and a fabulous fundraising concert that marked this special milestone. Held on March 2nd at Central United Church in Lunenburg, the gala concert featured dozens of local performers, from young ingenues to seasoned instructors, in a wonderful diverse program. There was singing, classical, spiritual, folk, and musical theatre, as well as instrumental performances on piano, fiddle, guitar, even harmonica. It was a great afternoon and a fitting tribute to eight decades of musical excellence and encouragement.

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

DART. BOOK EXCHANGE: AUTHOR PROM. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: I rise today to recognize the Dartmouth Book Exchange, whose history within our community spans more than 25 years. Specializing not only in new and used books, they are also a gold mine of Atlantic Canada literature, with a focus on Dartmouth and Nova Scotia, while very much embracing works from all around the Atlantic provinces.

Store owner Amy McIsaac actively promotes local authors through weekly spotlights. The store is a venue for events like teas and readings, fostering a symbiotic relationship between the shop and the vibrant Dartmouth community. Despite the challenges faced by authors in a competitive landscape, the Dartmouth Book Exchange plays a pivotal role in helping them overcome these obstacles with networking opportunities. Sue Slade with the Dartmouth Book Exchange emphasizes that reading is an affordable form of escapism, contributing to the thriving literary scene in Dartmouth.

Please join me in wishing the Dartmouth Book Exchange continued success in our community of Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

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

LINGAN HER. SOC.: CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I rise to recognize the Lingan Heritage Society's children's Christmas party. On December 17, 2023, the children's Christmas party was held at the Lingan Community Hall. It was fun for the whole family. The kids played games and danced to the live music while eagerly awaiting Santa Claus's arrival. When Santa arrived, many met him with enthusiasm, apprehension for some, and tears for one or two. The apprehension and tears soon gave way to happiness when Santa reached into his bag and pulled out presents for all the children. I want to thank the Lingan Heritage Society for organizing this great community event.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MACDONALD, DONALD “DUCKY”: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, Donald “Ducky” Macdonald, a retired teacher and principal, carries with him the legacy of excellence both on and off the field. In his youth he was renowned for his prowess as a hockey and baseball player. Transitioning seamlessly from player to mentor, Macdonald dedicated decades of his life to coaching school sports teams, instilling values of teamwork and determination in generations of athletes.

As an educator, he was cherished by his students, known not only for his passion for teaching but also his unwavering support and guidance. His classroom was a haven of inspiration and learning, where students flourished under his mentorship, forever grateful for the impact on their lives.

Beyond the school grounds, Ducky’s allegiance lies with the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Los Angeles Dodgers, teams that have captured his heart with their thrilling performances and storied histories.

During the Summer months, Ducky retreats to his cherished cottage at Melmerby Beach, a sanctuary nestled amidst numerous friends with his partner Heather. There he finds himself reflecting on cherished memories and embracing the simple pleasures of relaxation and well-deserved leisure.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

HFX. WEST STUDENTS: SEA HIVE CREATION - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Emma Creelman, Mayar Ibrabah, and Sophia Mulak. These are Halifax West High School students who created a winning micro-ecosystem for the global Ocean Innovation Challenge. The students from Halifax West are passionate about the science and created “The Sea Hive” to examine how one species can feed off the waste of another. They created a project for the Brilliant Blue challenge, a worldwide innovation competition that encourages youth to put forward creative ideas to protect our oceans. I ask the House to join me in congratulating this innovative team on their award-winning ecosystem that highlights the importance of maintaining our oceans’ species.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

FITZPATRICK, DEANNE: ORDER OF CANADA - CONGRATS.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise today to congratulate and recognize Deanne Fitzpatrick of Amherst, who recently became a member of the Order of Canada.

She is being honoured for her contributions to the advancement and recognition of rug hooking as an art form. Deanne was born and raised in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, and came to Amherst over 30 years ago. She is very well known in artistic circles for her beautiful hooked rugs, and her work is in permanent exhibits at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, among other galleries.

In her downtown Amherst studio, she creates her designs, sells kits, writes books, teaches rug hooking, and runs online creative retreats. Deanne truly believes that being creative changes people, so she encourages everyone to pursue their artistic side. Despite all this, she was truly surprised to receive a call from the Office of the Governor General telling her that she was admitted to the Order of Canada. Please join me in congratulating Deanne Fitzpatrick.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

SANFORD, WYATT: OLYMPICS BOXING QUAL. - CONGRATS.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I would like to congratulate Wyatt Sanford, also known as “The Kennetcook Kid,” on his incredible achievement in qualifying for the 2024 Olympics in boxing. Competing at the Olympic level not just once but twice is a testament to his hard work and talent. Only six other boxers since 1984 have accomplished this feat. Just look at his 2023 results: in February, Wyatt won Gold at Nationals; in March, he won a fight in St. John’s; in June’s Canadian Olympic qualifier, he grabbed the gold; in August at the Continental qualifier, he won silver; and at October’s Pan American Games, he won gold again, which got him a ticket to the Olympics. I look forward to cheering him and all of Team Canada on at the Paris Olympics. Please join me in wishing Wyatt the very best in his pursuit of excellence.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

LEWIS, AARON: WALK OF FAME HONOUR - RECOG.

FRED TILLEY: I would like to congratulate a good friend of mine, Mr. Aaron Lewis. Everyone will know Aaron as a fantastic musician in the Cape Breton area. He’s been involved in almost every show in Cape Breton. The reason I want to recognize him today is that, as a member of the Carlton Showband, the band has just been awarded a star on the Brampton Arts Walk of Fame. I want to congratulate Aaron and the members of the band. One of the members of the band was Aaron’s dad, and it must’ve been a great honour for him to be able to play music with his dad in the Carlton Showband. Congratulations, Aaron - well-deserved.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

ABUNDANCE STORE: WORK EXPER. - RECOG.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I rise this morning to recognize the Abundance Store, located in Dartmouth East. The Abundance Store is a charming second-hand clothing boutique run and supported by the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia. This thrift store is giving women who have gone through the criminal justice system a chance to take back control of their lives. By providing opportunities for learning new life skills and gaining work experience, the Abundance Store is playing a vital role in helping these women re-integrate into society. By continuing to support and promote initiatives like this, we can create a more inclusive and supportive community for everyone. I'd like to welcome the Abundance Store to Dartmouth East, and I hope that their success continues to grow, bringing positive change to even more lives in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

FRIENDS: APPRECIATION - RECOG.

HON. JILL BALSER: As we continue to celebrate Women's History Month, I rise to recognize three amazing women in my life: my dear friends Erin Jefferey, Jessica Findel, and Lisa Croft. Erin, Jessica, Lisa, and I have been friends for 20 years. My mother once said to me, the friends you meet in university are the friends you'll have for life, and she was absolutely right. Over the years, we've been there for each other through the good times and hard times, through heartbreaks, marriages and growing families, through trips to reconnect and celebrate, all while watching each other grow and thrive. These women are passionate, talented, funny, caring, driven, and they inspire and motivate me each and every day. Erin, Jessica, and Lisa, thank you for being my biggest fans all those years ago and now. Here's to another 20 years of friendship and so much more.

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

SHERMAN, TOVA: REACHABILITY ASSOC. - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I rise today to acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of Tova Sherman, the CEO of reachAbility, an organization dedicated to providing supportive and accessible programs that empower individuals facing barriers to employment. Tova embodies true leadership, always ready to tackle challenges head on and champion the belief that everyone has something valuable to offer. ReachAbility stands as a testament to Tova's commitment to addressing injustice and inequity, transforming her passion into her life's mission.

At reachAbility, Tova and her team offer a wide range of services tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual, from employment workshops to self-management assistance. reachAbility ensures that every person receives the support they need to achieve their personal goals in a safe and supportive environment.

Tova's dedication to creating a more inclusive society is truly inspiring, and her leadership at reachAbility continues to make a profound impact on the lives of countless individuals facing barriers in Fairview-Clayton Park. Thank you, Tova, for your tireless advocacy, compassionate leadership, and commitment to building a more equitable future for all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

COASTAL TAILS DOG DAYCARE: NEW OWNERS - BEST WISHES

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to congratulate Drew Jacklin and Courtney MacNeil on their purchase of Coastal Tails Dog Daycare and Boarding. While looking for their first home together, Drew, from Shelburne, and Courtney, from Halifax, came across this business opportunity in Shelburne and knew it was the right fit for them and their community. Both great dog lovers and dog owners, they knew they had to pursue their dream business. At Coastal Tails your pup can socialize or splash in a pool and you can purchase all your dog's essentials and access training classes, but most importantly, your pup can just relax and return home after a busy day at daycare. I respectfully ask all members to join me in wishing Drew and Courtney continued success in their business.

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

CHESTER COUNCILLORS: MENTORSHIP - THANKS

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I want to stand to speak about three wonderful people. They are all councillors at the Municipality of the District of Chester: Floyd Shatford, Allen Webber, and Tina Connors. I think I've learned so much from them with my five years on council. Allen Webber, for example, has 42 years on council, eight of those terms - 32 years - as the warden; Tina Connors, 11 years; and Floyd, whom I so lovingly call Floydie, 27 years, with most of those years being deputy warden. All three are fantastic. All three taught me a lot. I adore them. I talk to them all the time and I just truly appreciate them. If you're listening, which you're probably not, thank you. I adore you and thank you for teaching me so much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

O'REGAN, NANCY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. GREG MORROW: I rise to recognize Nancy O'Regan of Guysborough for her lifelong commitment to volunteering in our community. Nancy started her volunteering many years ago when her children were still toddlers. She's one of the original members of GLOW, the Guysborough Learning Opportunities for Women, back in the late 1980s. She was also on the board in the early days of Kids First and helped launch the Transit Association of Guysborough. As well, Nancy is a member and volunteer with the

Chedabucto Curling Club, Guysborough Players, and the quilting club. Nancy also served as a council member for the Municipality of the District of Guysborough.

Nancy's career in community development projects and facilitation for groups that are wanting to see change in our community has always been one of her passions. Most of her career has been dedicated to this. After years of working hard with the Guysborough County Housing Network, Nancy is now the nominated chair of the newly formed Community First: Guysborough County Housing Association, a not-for-profit group focusing on creating affordable housing throughout the county. I know Nancy will be a huge asset to this association's board of volunteers.

[10:00 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The time is now 10:00 a.m. We will begin Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers, and we will finish at 10:50 a.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: PERSONAL INFORMATION ACCESS - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, doctors in this province are raising serious warnings about this government's law to force them to give personal health information over to the minister or her designates. According to Dr. Audain, the head of Doctors Nova Scotia, the way this legislation is written is quite broad, and it's not entirely clear what information the minister is going to be accessing. Dr. Audain goes on to say that this could compromise the therapeutic relationship between doctors and their patients. It's clear that doctors were not consulted on this serious change in the laws of this province, forcing them to give patient health information that's personal over to the minister. Why weren't doctors consulted on this?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There has been consultation. There are a couple of things. We did meet with Doctors Nova Scotia recently to talk about the changes to the Personal Health Information Act. We talked about the test-and-try pilot, which Doctors Nova Scotia is involved in. We do currently have a pilot where people have access to their records. This is the enabling legislation that will help us do that for all Nova Scotians. It's working well under the test-and-try. We are working with physicians. There are 10,000 patients who now have access to their results because of this. That test-and-try pilot will help inform how we move forward.

ZACH CHURCHILL: There has been no consultation that has clearly happened with Doctors Nova Scotia. This very different from giving patients access to their own personal information - giving the minister access to their personal health information without consent. I'm sure the individuals involved in that pilot gave consent. This legislation as proposed does not require patient consent for this. It forces doctors and their record-keepers to give personal health information to the minister. This is concerning. We're hearing from doctors privately that they think this can really increase the risk to patients and doctors, particularly from bad actors and especially considering that this government has not even protected people's personal health information in their own staff.

My question to the minister is: What protections are in place to ensure that consent is required from patients and that their personal health information will not be used for political purposes?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We will be developing regulations in collaboration, not only with Doctors Nova Scotia but also, very importantly, with the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Nova Scotia. Currently, there is data that is collected at an aggregate level from Nova Scotia Health Authority, from the IWK Health Centre, and from Emergency Health Services. It tells us how people are moving through the system. We're not interested in individual information. That's not the point.

What we want to know - as an example, if the member opposite asked me how many visits were offered yesterday in primary care offices across this province, I wouldn't be able to tell that individual. I can tell him about urgent care, I can tell him about virtual care, I can tell him about emergency rooms, but I can't get a line of sight into how many visits there are. To manage the system, we need aggregate data to better inform our decisions.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The word of the law is not aggregated data - it's personal health information. It's doctors themselves who are raising a red flag on this. The fact that there has been no public consultation on this and there has been no indication that this is going to require patient consent is very concerning considering this government had the biggest cybersecurity breach in our province's history. They weren't even able to protect a staff person's Twitter from being impacted by a bad actor. How are they going to protect people's personal health information? This is a very concerning thing. The fact that this was also bundled in an omnibus bill is even more concerning. The public doesn't know about this. Doctors didn't know about this.

Will the minister please pause this part of the legislation to ensure that she has a chance to talk to patients and doctors before they move forward with this potentially very dangerous change?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As we have said to Doctors Nova Scotia and to the College of Physicians & Surgeons, the regulations will be formulated with their input. We

also know that we're in a test-and-try environment right now, working with physicians who are working with us. It is not the personal health information at an individual level that we are collecting. It sits under the Personal Health Information Act. It is very clear. There are robust privacy laws in place. As a minister - regardless of who is in this Chair, that minister will be subject to those regulations and that legislation.

I want people to feel reassured that this is around managing the health care system and it will give people access to the information that the system has, which is their record. We hear about people not having access to records when physicians leave. This will enable them to have access to their health records moving forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ANSA: N.S. BLACK & INDIGENOUS PEOPLE - RECOGNIZE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs. African Nova Scotians and Indigenous Blacks 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 Nova Scotia are undeniably a distinct people who deserve recognition as such. My question to the minister is: I'd like to know - do the minister and the government members agree?

HON. TWILA GROSSE: With regards to recognizing African Nova Scotians as a distinct people, I believe that before that item is brought on this floor for discussion and debate, it is something that needs to be discussed with the African Nova Scotian community. We recognize that people of African descent have been in existence in this province for over 400 years, and we also recognize the injustices that have been done.

SUZY HANSEN: This discussion has been ongoing, and especially where they've changed the distinction, I wanted to bring it forward because it has been discussed by the Black Family Meeting, by the Black Congress - across the country, it has been discussed. African Nova Scotians have a very long history in this province, starting in the 1600s. Through these hundreds of years, they have experienced a unique history and shared experiences of structural, systemic, and individual discrimination. In 2017, the U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent said it - Dalhousie in 2018.

Yesterday, I was very shocked - on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination - when the government refused to join Opposition members in recognizing African Nova Scotians as a distinct people. My question to the minister is: Can the minister please explain why this government voted against this?

TWILA GROSSE: As I said, I believe that is first a proper discussion within the African Nova Scotian community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: PATIENT RECORD ACCESS - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, the minister is telling people that this change that is going to force doctors to give personal health records to the minister is about giving patients access to those records. That is not the case - it is about giving the minister access. The minister said this is about aggregated data and patient visits to primary care. The minister would have that information through billing codes and the aggregated data that is collected clinically by the NSHA. That information is already there, from an aggregate perspective. This question to the minister is: Why does the minister believe it is important for her to have access to individuals' personal health information? This is a scary situation for a lot of people, and they don't understand why.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: This change does sit under the Personal Health Information Act. There are very robust rules in that Act. The regulations will be drafted in collaboration with Doctors Nova Scotia and with the College of Physicians & Surgeons. It will be built on the learnings that we have currently with the pilot, where 10,000 patients now have access to their information. There will be aggregate data that will help the next Health Minister, me, and this system to understand, as an example, the ability of patients to be seen. Eventually - hopefully - text reminders, as an example.

The EMR information between a physician or a nurse practitioner and their patient is not the information that we are interested in. The regulations will reflect that. We will make sure that they are carefully considered.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Patients are not protected in regulations that are controlled by Cabinet. They're protected by the laws of this Province. That's where patients are protected.

Doctors privately and publicly are saying this is a bad move that is going to jeopardize patient safety and that is going to impact their relationship with patients, and doctors weren't even consulted with this. This was also brought in on an omnibus bill that did not involve public consultation and did not involve consultation with doctors. It is fundamentally changing the privacy around people's personal health information, and it's mandating - not through the consent of the patient, but through legal mandate to the doctors, to give that personal information specifically to the minister. Does the minister not see why doctors and patients should be concerned about this?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, I will go back to the fact that we appreciate that there is concern in the community. We will continue to work with physicians, with Doctors Nova Scotia, which is their advocate. We will work with the college. We know that there are concerns. We don't want to be outside of legislation or create any undue harm. We want people to access the system. We are in a time of transformation. There are digital

solutions. There are data required in order for us to do HR planning, which everyone on the other side is so critical about. This is information that will help us plan for the system.

There is no Minister of Health and Wellness in the history of ever who wants to sit and read through people's charts. That is not the intent of this. This intention is to manage the system to ensure that there is access to health care, and that we can adequately plan for human resource needs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DHW: SURGERY WAIT TIMES - EXPLAIN

HON. KELLY REGAN: Recently, there was shock and consternation in Ontario when a mother there went public with her daughter's attempts to get treatment for appendicitis. There, a 17-year-old waited 19 hours for an emergency appendectomy. It was all over the news, and I'll table that. A similar case occurred not too long ago in Dartmouth. There, a woman went to Dartmouth General Hospital at 4 p.m. on November 23rd. She'd been in increasing pain for more than 12 hours already. The ER was jammed.

As a nurse, the Minister of Health and Wellness would know that prompt treatment of an acute illness like this is necessary. How long would the Minister of Health and Wellness expect a person with appendicitis to wait for surgery after arriving at a hospital in this province?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I can't speak to an individual case on the floor of the Legislature, but what I would expect is that the hospital, whether it be IWK or hospitals at Nova Scotia Health, would follow the Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale guidelines. That clearly outlines, after an assessment when a triage score is assigned, how long an individual should wait. I cannot speak on behalf of the clinicians who were in that department that day, nor about the patient's condition. But we have standards, and we have a triage scale that helps inform decisions at a clinical level.

KELLY REGAN: Speaker, this woman was forced to spend her night in a La-Z-Boy-style chair in a room with other patients in pain. There was no place to lie down. Staff were kind and thoughtful. The nurse was run off her feet. I should mention that this person was a new mother. She had undergone an emergency C-section two and a half weeks prior. She had a premie waiting for her at home. A bed was found for her early the next morning in a hallway. Her surgery was performed more than 24 hours after she arrived at the hospital. She later discovered that her appendix had, in fact, leaked.

We are hearing from ER doctors that the situation in our emergency departments is untenable. People are dying, and contrary to what our Premier has asserted, they are dying needlessly. Our emergency rooms need help. When is this government going to provide it?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I think what's really important to understand is that the work that's happening in Seniors and Long-term Care and the addition of 5,700 beds in our province will help the emergency rooms. The investments in access and flow are going to help the emergency rooms. The addition of a contract that is very competitive for physicians to work in this province is going to help. The mobility teams that we have hired throughout this province in order to mobilize patients and get them discharged more quickly will help.

[10:15 a.m.]

There has been an underinvestment and no strategy in our health care system for years. We bring that through Action for Health, and we bring that through historical financial investments in our system.

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

DPW: NEW SCHOOL FOR CLAYTON PARK - BUILD

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: In Fairview-Clayton Park we've had an eight-year increase of 688 students in our school system. The average age of our schools is 62 - so being built around 1961 - but Clayton Park Junior High was actually built in 1946. Each school in the riding has at least two portables or modules, and there are 31 classrooms that are not situated within the main school. My question to the Minister of Public Works is: When can my community expect to get the school that we desperately need?

HON. KIM MASLAND: We know that the province is growing and that new schools are required to meet that demand. We're seeing that in all areas, but especially in the Metro area. The Fairview-Clayton Park middle school - is that the one you're talking about? Right now, we have worked through the process with HRM, and an appraisal is being done of that property. I expect we'll see something in the near future.

PATRICIA ARAB: That's wonderful. I'm very excited about that. We did have the plan for that, the four promised schools, in the capital plan. My question to the minister, though, is: Do we have a location for that school, and is she able to let us know where it will be?

KIM MASLAND: The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is actually reviewing that site proposal that we have provided from Public Works. As soon as that can be released, I'm sure you'll be the first to know.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: MEASLES VACCINE SUPPLY - UPDATE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Robert Strang recently urged Nova Scotians to check their immunization status, and for many to update their measles vaccination. Now we're hearing that pharmacies and primary care providers are overwhelmed by demand. There are simply not enough doses of the vaccine. Kari Ellen Graham, a pharmacist in Halifax, has said, "The bottom line is you could try your pharmacy, although most pharmacies are out . . . a lot of doctor's offices are now out." How are Nova Scotians supposed to protect themselves and follow the advice of the Chief Medical Officer if there are no shots available?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: First of all, I want to clarify and go on the record that there are shots available. There is MMR vaccine in this province. There is no shortage. Because of the demand, the orders that physicians and pharmacists have, they've gone through those orders more quickly. It's simply reaching back out to the BioDepot, explaining that they are out of the vaccine, and ordering more.

SUSAN LEBLANC: It would be great if people could access the vaccine through mobile health units in cases where pharmacies and primary care providers are not a viable option, but according to Nova Scotia Health Authority's website, many parts of Nova Scotia do not have mobile immunization clinics scheduled until April, and many are not even offering the measles vaccine.

Measles cases across Canada are on the rise - we've heard this. Nova Scotians should not have to wait several more weeks to access the recommended vaccination. What is this government doing to ensure that all Nova Scotians have access to the vaccinations they need when they need them?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Nova Scotians have a variety of different ways in which they can access vaccines. They can access them through the mobile clinics, they can access them through primary care providers, they can access them through pharmacists. There are a variety of different ways. There is no shortage. There is high demand, which has caused offices and folks to go through their supply, but there is no shortage of the vaccine.

If individuals require more vaccine - whether they have a pharmacy or whether they have an office - they simply need to reach out to the BioDepot and increase their supply.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

DPW: PROSPECT ROAD STUDY - IMPLEMENT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I've been working with various departments in HRM to prioritize planning for public infrastructure needed to accommodate existing issues with

entering and exiting the Prospect communities. The last meeting I had was in November with the Joint Regional Transportation Agency, Public Works, and HRM to discuss the concerns and improvements needed for Prospect Road. I'm pleased the meeting resulted in a commitment to conduct a study to consider strategic investment to improve safety along this road.

There are 17 communities that span 30 kilometres from Goodwood to West Dover, with one corridor for access that often closes with motor accidents and fires. We just had another fire, literally this week. Can the minister please provide an update on whether this comprehensive study is under way, and when we can expect the findings?

HON. KIM MASLAND: Absolutely. That is an extremely busy road. As the member knows, I have a very good friend who lives in Prospect, so I travel that road a lot. It's incredible the amount of traffic that has increased on that road since I started going there 30 years ago. This is a joint project with the Department of Public Works, HRM, and Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The last couple of months - I know when I say, "the last couple of months," that may sound like a long time. But we have actually taken those last couple of months to really look at the scoping that's required for this study. That is done, and I expect the tender to go out for that in the next couple of weeks.

IAIN RANKIN: I appreciate the answer. The overburdened Prospect Road has seen some infrastructure investments with turning lanes throughout the last number of years, but we're going to see traffic counts climb exponentially with new residential developments considered. Expansion of the Goodwood Compost Facility will have an additional 36 heavy trucks coming per day. Expansion of the Ragged Lake Industrial Park, potential redevelopment of Halifax Exhibition Park, and a new soundstage - there is tremendous pressure on this road.

Will the study consider, potentially, new access points to eliminate that one corridor that shuts down traffic in and out? Will they consider an access point from the Prospect Road to Highway No. 103 or St. Margarets Bay Road, so that residents can get in and out in event of an emergency?

KIM MASLAND: I don't want to presuppose what is going to come out of the traffic study, but what I can tell you is it's going to be very extensive. The Joint Regional Transportation Agency is involved, and the work the JRTA is doing is absolutely incredible. I know the member has spent some time with them talking about his concerns, but what I will say is that we are committed to improving the safety of our roads. We have a safety fund. We also have one of the largest capital programs this year - over \$500 million. We have doubled and tripled our program. I want the member to know that I certainly understand his concerns. I understand the amount of MVAs that happen there and the traffic demand. We'll work with you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

DPW: NEW SCHOOL DELAY - EXPLAIN

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, the schools in Clayton Park West are bursting at the seams. We have added modulars, and now on top of modulars we're adding portables again at Park West School. When talking to HRM counterparts, they're telling me that they are waiting for the Province in the negotiation process with the land for that school. Can the Minister of Public Works tell us: What is the reason for the delay in the negotiation? HRM is waiting for the Province. That we know.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know she's very passionate about this because she asks me every session. The information that the member is providing me is different information than what I have. The information that I have is that that land is being appraised right now. HRM is appraising that, and then we'll go through with the deal.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I thank the minister. I'll go back to my municipal counterpart and tell them what you told me. I thank you for that.

For the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, parents honestly are contacting our office constantly about the school. Can she tell me: When do we expect shovels in the ground, and how much was allocated in this year's budget for that school? That will tell us if we're going to have shovels in the ground or not. Could she please tell us?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: We have a robust school capital plan to the tune of \$1 billion, which will be allocated for projects across the province, including the project that the member opposite is asking about. That money will go to build schools. It will go to plan for schools, which is the stage that the member opposite's school is in. It will go to put shovels in the ground. The \$1 billion is also going to the more robust long-term planning and diverse planning that we're doing, which prior governments have never done. We have a plan that includes long-term planning for school builds. We have, for the first time ever, a modular plan that allows us to be nimble. We have an increased technical capital asset plan. We're going to build.

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

NRR: WILDFIRE REPORT - UPDATE

HON. BEN JESSOME: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. It's been nearly a year since the Upper Tantallon-Hammonds Plains wildfire took place. The HRM has produced a report on, I guess, the aftermath and the situation as it was from their perspective. The RCMP produced a decision, which was only made available through a Freedom of Information request, that there was allegedly no criminal arson involved. The Department of Natural Resources and Renewables is responsible for

the lead on this file, and we're anticipating a report. Can the minister please provide an update?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Truly, we had historic wildfires last year. Over 24,000 hectares of our province were burned - over 200 homes. We give thanks every day that there was no loss of life during those fires. We did commit during those fires - to the member opposite and everybody involved, the member for Shelburne - that there would be an after-action plan. I know the member - speaking with him over the last two weeks - respects the fact that there are staff who were also involved with two post-tropical storm responses: the snow response and the devastating floods that took place.

I'd like to inform the member that we did receive the report this week. It's on my desk right now, and very shortly the review and update will be made public, but what - I'll speak in a second.

BEN JESSOME: Thank you. We look forward to seeing that report. We know that despite there being no human life loss, there were lives lost. Pets were lost during that fire, and 151 homes were destroyed. People are reeling from that still, and we're looking forward to seeing that report. I understand that there is a third party that is conducting that investigation. I'm wondering if the minister will table the name of the entity that is responsible for conducting that report, and the mandate they were given at the time they were charged to conduct it.

TORY RUSHTON: What I'll say is that it wasn't an investigation. It was an after-action report about the response from the department. At very first glance, what I can say is that it stands exactly what we thought we did, and it does give kudos to the response the department did, the resources that were pulled in. It also gives added value. In any emergency response you do, you learn from what you did and didn't do correctly. So there are some added bits there too: How do we improve our system within the province? During that review, we've already implemented some of those actions into this year's response in planning for a wildfire. Most of that information will be in that review, and I suspect you're going to have that very shortly.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MAH: SALE OF AFFORDABLE BUILDINGS - PREVENT

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, truly affordable housing in Halifax Needham is few and far between. Residents of the Wood Avenue and Seaview buildings have long been worried about the future of these units, most of which are rent-geared-to-income. They live in constant fear of their affordable rents being raised above what they can afford. With so much affordable housing disappearing from our community already, they will likely not be able to find anywhere to go.

We're now hearing that the land lease for these buildings has expired, and there soon may be some plans to sell these affordable buildings. Can the minister assure these residents that their buildings will not be sold?

HON. JOHN LOHR: To the member, I can say that I'm not positive which address she's talking about, but if it's a rent-g geared-to-income building, that's one of ours. We don't sell public housing, as the member may know. We're building public housing for the first time in a generation, and we'll continue to build. If it's privately owned, obviously the owners of the building are able to sell, if they choose to. That's up to them.

[10:30 a.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: Two years ago, I wrote to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and it said it was contrary to your mandate to lose affordable housing units. In particular, the two that I've just spoken about were under that same umbrella, and they shared the desire to prevent any of these good people from losing their homes. My understanding is that a group of five former co-op buildings in my riding, which provide 26 deeply affordable units, including Wood Avenue and Seaview housing co-ops, will soon be sold. These residents deserve answers and assurance that they will not be displaced or face significant rental increases.

My question to the Minister is: Can the Minister confirm whether or not there will be a sale and explain what the impact on residents will be?

JOHN LOHR: Speaker, what I can say to the member is that we made substantial investments in the past two years in co-ops. We continue to invest in co-ops, and we continue to invest in - we have a nationally recognized program, called the Community Housing Acquisition Program, which we've used to add to co-ops and assist co-ops.

Certainly, I can't make specific assurances on the floor of the Legislature without more details about those units, but I can tell this House that we've done a lot to lift the boat of community housing across the province. We've invested millions more, \$30 million more, through the Community Housing Acquisition Program in the last two years. We continue to invest in housing and in co-ops.

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

EECD: APSEA SERVICE MODEL CHANGES - REVERSE

LORELEI NICOLL: I have heard from concerned constituents about the changes to the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority, better known as APSEA, in their service delivery for children with vision loss. During the height of the pandemic, APSEA paused initial services for their students, including short-term programs, STPs, and psycho-educational assessments. Now they have introduced a new model emphasizing virtual

learning and regional in-person meetings and gatherings. However, this has had negative implications for visually impaired and blind students.

My question to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development: Is the government working to reverse these changes to improve the education of students who need more support?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. We know that APSEA provides important and valuable services to our blind and visually impaired and deaf and hard-of-hearing students. APSEA is actually a cross-provincial organization that supports not only Nova Scotia students but also students in the other Atlantic provinces.

APSEA has adjusted their service model over the last number of years, and I've spoken with prior APSEA students and families about those changes to the service model. We're very interested in watching and making sure that the service model does continue to meet the needs of our students and our families. APSEA has assured us that it will, but those changes are new. And we know that changes can bring concerns on the part of parents. I can assure parents and families and students that we are monitoring and keeping in touch with APSEA to ensure they continue to deliver their excellent services.

LORELEI NICOLL: I continue to hear from people in my community who have family members who are blind that this has negatively impacted their learning and overall mental well-being. My question to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is: Will the government re-implement the established standards and best practices for the students' education, and does APSEA itself - the board - have representatives from the visually impaired?

BECKY DRUHAN: I want to clarify for the member opposite so that she understands: APSEA is an independent organization. It doesn't work directly under the direction of the Nova Scotia government. It is an Atlantic organization that provides Atlantic services. That being said, there are representatives from each of the provinces on the APSEA board. We are watching with great interest.

I also want to clarify: APSEA services have moved from a more centralized model of providing residential service to a model that is more reflective of inclusive practices, which means the short-term programming is being offered now locally and in communities where people reside. Again, we understand there are concerns - there always are with changes. We are monitoring, and we look forward to seeing the results of those changes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

MAH: RENT SUPPLEMENT CRITERIA - CHANGE

BRAEDON CLARK: Over the last couple of weeks, I have been working with a constituent of mine, Madison Jablonski, who has been denied a rent supplement, even though she pays well over 50 per cent of her income on rent. The reason why is because the rent supplement program is based not on the actual rent you pay but the average market rent, which I think has some problems with it.

As Madison said in the email to me, which she has agreed to share: “The lady on the phone said, ‘we base it off the average market rent for your area, for bedford a 2 bedroom is average \$1,400.’” Madison says: “Please, show me these 2 bedrooms for \$1,400 because I can’t find anything for less than \$2,400 plus utilities.”

My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: Does he think average market rent is an accurate measure for this program?

HON. JOHN LOHR: The program is fundamentally a federal government program that we have adopted. We have made some changes - we do have some flexibility - but the average market rent portion of that is a federal government requirement, which comes from Statistics Canada and is for specific areas that, for us, aren’t always specifically one community. It’s just how it’s done. We continue to adapt the program, as the member may know. One of the most significant changes we’ve made in the program, I’ll talk about in my supplement.

BRAEDON CLARK: I recognize there’s a federal component to the program, but I believe strongly that the Province needs to take the lead on this and look at a measure that is more accurate, because no matter - whether you’re talking about Bedford or any other part of this province - there can be substantial differences between average market rent and the rent someone is actually paying. As Madison said to me - and I’ll table this: “Maybe this program needs to be revised as it’s extremely inaccurate, it’s completely unfair to say someone’s denied because this is the average rent when it’s very obviously not. How is that even allowed?”

My question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to looking at a new metric for this program so fewer people like Madison are denied when they need help?

JOHN LOHR: We have one of the most successful rent supplement programs in the country that has one of the highest uptakes, if we look at our other provinces. I’ve said this before in the House. It was a 50/50 cost-shared program. We now are putting in approximately \$50 million to the feds’ approximately \$13 million. We continue to invest in the program.

I can assure all members of the House that the program is being constantly re-evaluated. We’re looking at the program all the time and how we can change the program

or make it more - it's extremely successful now. We're very proud of the program. We realize it's extraordinarily important to Nova Scotians, and we recognize the stress in our province that causes the need for this program.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: PATIENT PRIVACY - RESPECT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'd like to stand in my place today and add my concerns, as well, on behalf of the physicians in Cumberland North who have contacted me about the proposed changes to laws that will mandate the physicians to disclose personal health information to the minister and anyone acting on behalf of the minister.

The relationship that a patient has with their physician, their primary care provider, or any care provider is sacred. It often takes people a long time to build up the courage to share very personal things with their doctor. News flash: People don't trust politicians. People trust their doctors, though, and I'm wondering if the minister responsible will take another look at this piece of legislation, go back, consult with physicians, and bring back something that respects the privacy of patients in this province.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We will continue to have dialogue and discussion and to formulate regulations in collaboration with Doctors Nova Scotia, as well as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia. We want to protect people's personal health information. We are looking at aggregate data that will help us manage this system, and we are looking at ways in which those private physicians who have electronic medical records can contribute to helping us plan and develop this system as well as provide patients across the province with access to their health care records.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Protecting people's private health information does not involve disclosing it and mandating physicians to share that information with politicians. It's contradictory, what the minister is saying, with what they're proposing in legislation. The fact is the information that they need is already available through MSI billings. All of the billing codes - every day a physician sees a patient, whether it's a diabetic visit, hypertension, for psychological reasons, and also the time spent with the physician is there as well, if it's a five-minute visit versus a 20-minute visit. That information is available. This is an erosion of democracy, and this is not acceptable, what the government is proposing.

THE SPEAKER: Question.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question to the minister is: Will she rethink what she is proposing and protect the personal information of private patients in this province?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There's so much that happens on the floor of this Legislature under privilege that really is not appropriate for here: fearmongering and scaring people and telling them we're going to get into things that we shouldn't when there are things shared on this floor that should never be shared. What I would like to assure all members of this House, as well as Nova Scotians: There is no movement to erode the relationship with their physicians. We will care for and be so careful - robust, regulations in place. I don't want people to be afraid of that.

This is to improve the health care system that people have. This is to improve our ability to make a system that is more responsive to patients' needs and in order for patients to have access to their health care records.

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

LSI: WORKPLACE HARASSMENT - CURTAIL

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration. Our province will need 11,000 more tradespeople by 2030. I'll table that. Women and gender-diverse people are stepping up to meet this demand. However, a recent YWCA Halifax study shows that 90 per cent of the 101 women and gender-diverse tradespeople surveyed last year report having experienced workplace harassment. I'll table that. The YWCA is calling on this government to create a sector-specific third-party sexualized violence response team to ensure intersectional, trauma-informed, and timely response. Will the minister commit to establishing this much-needed response team to curtail gender-based workplace harassment in the trades?

HON. JILL BALSER: Of course, the report was important work, and we know that there weren't a lot of surprises in it. We know that sexual harassment is happening in the workplace. We have to get to the bottom of it and make sure that we're putting in every method we possibly can to prevent it, to make sure that women and gender-diverse people are protected and safe on the job.

I know that that report had multiple recommendations for government, and we are going to look at them. I'm happy to say that meeting with the YWCA to be able to discuss those recommendations - one of them which is already under way - doing consultations around the definition of harassment. To the member: Yes, we are looking at these recommendations very thoroughly.

LISA LACHANCE: Forty-one per cent of respondents to the YWCA survey identify as members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We know that harm is happening, and we know it's happening where people are trying to earn an income. We need to know more. More work needs to be done with community partners in Nova Scotia and nationally like with Pride at Work Canada to fully understand how workplace sexual and gender-based harassment in the skilled trades sector is impacting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Can the minister assure us today that this government will work with 2SLGBTQIA+ community organizations to ensure welcoming and safe workplaces are achieved?

[10:45 a.m.]

JILL BALSER: Of course, the answer is yes. We want to make sure that we're working with members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to make sure that community members feel safe and protected at work. This report is going to guide government with government recommendations, but I also know that the YWCA put in so much care by speaking to community partners that we also have to work with. The answer is absolutely yes.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

CSDS: HEALTH RECORDS SHARING RISK - ASSESS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This government is forcing doctors to give personal health records digitally to the minister's office. This is happening after the largest cyber attack in Nova Scotia's history. Certainly, the Minister of Cyber Security and Digital Solutions, his department must have done a risk assessment and analysis of this decision. Could the minister please inform this House if his department has been consulted in this, if there's been a risk assessment done, and what the risks are to Nova Scotians' personal health records?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I guess if the member opposite wants to talk about cyber responses, we can look back at the previous government's response to the FOIPOP breach.

I think our record stands firm, and I'll defend my department's actions and our response on leading this cyber breach. I'm not shying away at all from the magnitude and the breadth of this breach. It was a global vulnerability, but we worked hard to identify the risk, contained it, and notified Nova Scotians. Guess what? Cyber risk is not going to go anywhere anytime soon. It is a real threat for all of us in this House and all Nova Scotians. As a government, we're working hard to protect the information of Nova Scotians every single day.

ZACH CHURCHILL: So the answer is no. His department hasn't done a risk analysis on people's personal health information. Nobody wants to be held ransom by bad actors. That department hasn't even done a risk assessment on this, which has been made very clear by the minister's flippant response to this question.

My question to the minister, again, is: Does he not think he has a responsibility - when his government is telling doctors to give personal electronic health records to the

minister's office after we've had the biggest cyber breach in Nova Scotian history - does he not think his department has a responsibility to do a risk assessment of that so he can assure Nova Scotians that their personal health information isn't going to be in jeopardy because of bad actors?

COLTON LEBLANC: I'd say that work is under way. I think it's a bit rich for that rhetoric coming from the member opposite.

We're on a journey of transforming the delivery of health care under the leadership of the Minister of Health and Wellness - something that the former Minister of Health and Wellness failed to do. He might want to shy away from how long he was minister. The fact is that he was a Minister of Health and Wellness of this province. Guess what? There are a lot of things in this province that must change. That includes health and wellness.

Again, if the member opposite wants to talk about the boondoggle of a response that they led for the cyber breach, I'll go head-to-head and defend our actions every single day.

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

DHW: DENTISTRY WAIT-LIST - REDUCE

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, in a September 2023 report, there are 130 adults with special needs who remain on the IWK Dentistry general anaesthesia wait-list, even though they have aged out of that facility. I asked the question in the last session in November. Extended wait times are currently sitting at over two years for basic dental hygiene care. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: What is the update for patients - these 130 adults with special needs - who require this type of dental care?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: There have been a couple things that have happened. One of the things is that we do have a contract with Scotia Surgery to be able to perform lower-acuity dental procedures that require anaesthetics outside of the IWK. What that does that it frees up OR time for more complex cases to be done in that more acute environment.

The other thing that was recently changed is through the Insured Dental Services Tariff Regulations. We are now supporting dentists in doing sedation in their offices, with adequate training. That will also help reduce the wait-list for other lower-acuity procedures and free up OR time for the more complex.

BEN JESSOME: Will the minister commit to producing a six-month report on whether those actions that she's just referenced are putting a dent into the wait-list and looking after folks who do have acute needs?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I do want to give a shout-out to the IWK. We know there are a variety of communities that have people living with special needs who have aged out of IWK, but for a variety of reasons, they do continue to provide complex care. I'm really grateful. I know the IWK regularly keeps track of their . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Order. The time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers has expired. It is 10:50 a.m.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, 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 Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I am happy to speak for a few more minutes on this bill. I adjourned debate on this bill last night and said a lot of the things I wanted to say. I just want to reinforce a few points. The major point is that this bill is not your run-of-the-mill, standard Financial Measures Act, it's an omnibus bill. It has a lot of things in it that require a lot of examination, a lot of debate, and they should be separated out.

I suspect that maybe the government piled them all into this to avoid having to talk about these things individually and run the risk of bell-ringing or delaying tactics or whatever they think would have happened. I believe that is what happened here.

If you look at the explanatory notes for the FMA, you'll see how odd some of it is. Let's say, for example, Clause 5 makes professional accountant a protected designation. That's standard FMA stuff - basic, non-controversial, housekeeping amendments, no problem there. Then if you go further on, you'll see added definitions of image, motor vehicle, and number plate. Obviously, nobody is going to have a major beef with that.

Then we get into really substantial clauses here that require a lot of debate, as we've just heard in Question Period which just ended a minute ago. Clause 110 amends the Personal Health Information Act to allow Cabinet to make regulations requiring personal

health information to be disclosed for the purposes of planning and management of the health system, resource allocation, and creating or maintaining electronic health record programs and services.

I know the minister has already spoken about this in Question Period. Obviously, there is a disagreement between some sides of the House on this. The point is that something that is potentially as significant as this should not be buried in Clause 110 of the FMA. It should be a stand-alone amendment to the Personal Health Information Act so that all members of the House - and more importantly, as I said last night, members of the public - are aware that this is happening and have the ability to make presentations to Law Amendments Committee, if they so choose, to write to the Law Amendments Committee, to write to MLAs, to write to the minister and say: I agree, I disagree, here are my points. I don't believe we're going to make informed decisions on any side of the House when you have such significant changes at Clause 110 of the FMA.

Again, there are two other ones I want to mention here; Schedule A - not even in the FMA itself, a schedule to the FMA - provides for the Professional Firefighters Volunteer Act. As I said last night, as the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration has indicated, there are going to be amendments coming to that at Law Amendments Committee, I presume on Monday. That shows that there was something that was unanticipated in this bill that the government recognizes needs to be changed. There's nothing wrong with that. I think when the government realizes that there has been a mistake, it is incumbent on them to make amendments. That's fine. My issue is more so, as I said, having this as Schedule A of the FMA rather than a stand-alone bill. It's not as if the Legislative Calendar is chock-full in this session - we have two bills plus the Budget, plus the FMA - so I guess four, if I'm being generous.

Finally, Schedule B, the very end of the FMA. Schedule B provides for the Office of Children and Youth Act. Again, that's a big thing. I know that, Speaker, in your past role you were talking about the importance of that, the current Minister of Community Services and the former Minister of Community Services, I'm sure, and many members on this side of the House, and many members of the public - particularly children and youth. It's our duty to make decisions on their behalf in many cases.

But to do it in a way like this, where we are going to have very limited time to speak to that bill - and more importantly, when Law Amendments Committee comes up, if we have a few hours - and we know that at the best of times, I think it's 10 minutes to present if there are fewer than eight presenters. That's just arbitrary, but that's the rule. We will have more than eight presenters for the FMA, I'm sure, because it covers such a range of issues. When we have more than eight presenters at Law Amendments Committee, they have five minutes to speak. That's not a lot of time when you're talking about the importance of personal health information, when you're talking about issues around unions and professional versus volunteer firefighters, when you're talking about an office of children and youth. Five minutes goes by in a flash.

Then as members, we have five minutes to ask questions, which is very, very limiting. If we had a more sensible Law Amendments Committee process, that would be fine. If Law Amendments Committee ran over the course of two or three days, maybe, and we had time to get all those people in - fine - I would have less concern. But we don't. That's not the way it works. We rush through and get things done as quickly as possible.

I think the FMA as written is far too broad, touches on far too many topics that are completely unrelated to the housekeeping financial measures that we see traditionally in FMA legislation. I certainly hope this is not a trend. This is a one-time mistake, in my view, and when we're doing this again in a year's time, I hope that the FMA is what it is intended to be, which is essentially an instrument to allow the budget to pass and to make necessary but inconsequential amendments, like defining what a licence plate is and changing references and numbers of bills and so on. That's what it should be. That's not what it is this year, and that is the reason why I have concerns with it.

With that, Speaker, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I rise today to speak on the second reading of the FMA. Speaker, there's a lot in this bill. I will do my best to address any of the concerns on behalf of the people of Cumberland North.

I'm going to start with the issue around mandating health care professionals to disclose their personal health information. When I brought it up in Question Period, the Minister said that I was fearmongering and scaring people, which is quite an accusation to make here in this House. I have a responsibility as MLA to bring forth the concerns and the voices of the people I represent. Patients and doctors do not think that people's personal health information should be disclosed to the minister. If the minister doesn't like that, I make no apologies. My job is to bring the concerns of the people to this House. I do not believe that I was fearmongering and trying to scare people. My attempt was to make sure that the minister was aware of what physicians are saying in my community. That is important, and that is valid.

There's no question that this Province should move forward with electronic medical records, personal health records, and allowing patients to have access to their personal health information. This is attainable without the government having access to people's personal health information. When physicians see their patients, they have to submit billings, and they have to code it with the diagnoses. They also have to share if they spend more than the normal allocated time for an office visit. So if someone goes to see their physician - maybe they're going through a divorce or some situational depression - and the doctor spends 45 minutes with that patient, then it gets billed as psychotherapy, and that is recorded through the MSI billings.

[11:00 a.m.]

A person goes in for a vaccination, and it's a 10-minute visit. That is recorded. There's a diagnosis put in through the MSI billings. If the Department of Health and Wellness needs information on what the diagnoses are of the patients here in this province to be able to allocate resources for spending, that information is already attainable for them - for the department. They do not need to have access to dig into people's personal health information.

I've been a registered nurse now since 1991, and I worked in family practice for many of those years. I can tell you - and most people in this room I'm sure are already aware of it - when people come to see their physician, they're usually not coming for good reasons. They're usually coming because they're under a great deal of duress for either physical, emotional, spiritual, or mental needs. It often takes time for the relationship to build with their physician to disclose or ask questions about some of those very personal and private things. It's a very sacred relationship that patients have with their physician.

To think that a politician is going to have access to that information is very concerning. I've had experiences in the past, in my professional work as a nurse, where personal health information records have been breached, and it has caused great anxiety. In fact, I had some patients in other parts of the province who refused to go back to a clinic after their personal health information was breached. It's a very, very serious matter.

I also have concerns about the Premier's Office having access to people's personal health information, because what this bill says is "the minister or anyone else designated." We know how closely tied the Premier's Office is with every department. Whenever there are FOIPOP's done asking departments about the trace of communication between the Premier's Office and that department on an issue, people get back blank pages citing solicitor-client privilege, because the Chief of Staff is the Premier's personal lawyer, I guess.

So that causes great concerns, and I'm not fearmongering. I think that it was very disrespectful for that to be shared here in this House. People have a right to know what laws are being passed in this province that affect them directly. When someone goes to their physician and talks about very private matters, they should know that that information is going to be kept confidential.

Confidentiality is a core tenet as a health care professional. Core. When that trust is broken, it is very damaging. When we talk about being transformative and changing our health care system for the better, taking away people's rights to privacy with their physician and allowing that personal health information to be disclosed is absolutely going in the wrong direction. It is a violation to people's rights. It is an erosion to democracy.

Yesterday, on a different topic - but related - I heard the Premier talk about, or defend, the lack of bringing appropriations of extra spending here into the Legislature. And the Premier's response to the criticism was that he can do whatever he wants, and that he is sharing the information with the public through press releases and communication. But that's not democracy. That's not responsible government. That is not part of parliamentary democracy.

Parliamentary democracy, which we are supposed to be doing here in Nova Scotia, involves bringing all budget spending to the legislative branch of government - that is in this House - so that all 55 MLAs have an opportunity to look at the spending, whether it is before or after the money has been spent, and provide feedback based on what the people they represent think. That's parliamentary democracy. We are the only province in all of Canada where, basically, the majority government has a blank cheque and can spend and do however they desire, and not bring it back to the legislative branch of government to be debated, to be discussed, and to provide transparency for the people of Nova Scotia so they know how their tax dollars are being spent.

I believe it is an abuse of power. I believe it is one of the downsides of a majority government. I know that whenever a government is trying to get elected, they want to have a majority so they can put through whatever they want. But it should be done ethically and responsibly, using parliamentary democracy - the principles of parliamentary democracy - which is bringing everything here in this House to the legislative branch of government. By not doing that, it is an abuse of power. Having power is a privilege. It should not be abused.

I am going to speak more directly to pieces of the Financial Measures Act. As others have shared here in Opposition, one of the biggest concerns with this bill is the fact that it has so many amendments from other pieces of legislation all sort of dumped into this bill as an omnibus bill. Again, kind of reflecting a similar pattern of an erosion of democracy or a lack of transparency, I guess, is a better way of describing it.

Why was this bill presented in this way? The first Act amended is the CPA Act. Why was the CPA Act not brought to this Legislature as an amended Act and debated on individually? Some of these amendments are housekeeping - I understand that - and the CPA Act is one of those.

The Consumer Protection Act is a good piece of legislation, good amendment, making sure there is enhanced consumer transparency and protection regarding lending practices. That is a positive thing. Good to see, but again, does it belong in a Financial Measures Act?

The fisheries and coastal resources - I agree with some of my other colleagues here that that should also not have been part of the Financial Measures Act. That should be in its own piece of legislation. It is a very important topic that has been discussed in the

Legislature. There have been some concerns brought forward by stakeholders that what we are putting forth in legislation should be realistic. It should be something that, when it is brought before a judge in a court, will hold up, and there are some concerns that what this bill is proposing would not hold up in court.

What has been proposed is that there is a lower fine and then maybe a tiered approach. If you look at precedent and what judges have decided in the past, judges have said that the fines are too high to start, but if someone continues to break the law and puts fines in place, then yes, it should maybe go up.

Whatever legislation we are putting in place here in this House needs to be well-thought-out, well-researched, well-consulted, and will hold up in the court of law. There have been some concerns that this particular amendment to the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act would not do so.

The Gaming Control Act is also, again, a housekeeping item. We have Gypsum Mining; HRM bridges - a very important piece of legislation there; amendments to the HRM Municipality Charter also should have been brought forward as its own individual piece of legislation.

Then we have amendments to the Highway No. 104 Western Alignment Act. This is a piece of legislation that I have certainly spoken to at length here in this Legislature since first being elected in 2017. The Cobequid tolls dramatically caused harm to the people I represent in Cumberland North and all of Cumberland County. I was very pleased to see the Premier remove the tolls for Nova Scotia residents who have a registered vehicle here in the province.

Honestly, I believe the whole Cobequid Pass Toll Plaza should be removed. The reason for that is because it is a physical barrier for the people in our area. The people in Cumberland - one of the things you'll hear very regularly, if you spend any amount of time in Cumberland, is that they feel that Nova Scotia ends at the tolls. It's a landmark that people would like to see gone.

I know that there is some positive revenue coming into the province because of the tolls that are there, but if you look at the concept of Maritime collaboration and working together with our Maritime provinces, there may be some consideration to removing that toll. I think it is important. I've printed out the financial statements for last year, but I haven't had a chance to actually analyze them really closely, and to actually see how much revenue the Province is actually realizing from that toll plaza.

Based on this piece of legislation - this amendment to the Highway No. 104 Western Alignment Act - I'm assuming that means the Province is planning on keeping the tolls there forever, or not removing them as per the legislation, which states after 30 years the

tolls are to be removed. That was in the legislation, so I'm assuming that's not clear in this. I'm assuming that means that they are not planning on removing them at that 30-year point.

The income tax amendments: This is something that's very important to the people of Nova Scotia, and it's something that I had proposed on behalf of the people of Cumberland North, and that is to index the income tax brackets. I would say that the way it's been communicated to the public has not been forthright, and every other province in Canada has been indexing their income tax brackets. I think most Nova Scotians didn't realize that as inflation has gone up, their income tax brackets were not also going up. It was kind of a hidden tax for people. The fact that we're now going to be doing what every other province in the country is doing is just what is the ethical and responsible thing to do.

The one thing that's not included in this bill, and in the budget, that should have been is also increasing the basic personal tax exemption. We have the lowest in the country, meaning that our people here in Nova Scotia pay income tax before anyone else in the country. Our lowest income earners are paying income tax before anyone else in the country.

We have the lowest. Alberta has the highest. I believe Nova Scotia should be somewhere in the middle. If we're paying around \$9,000, our basic personal tax exemption, and Alberta's is around \$20,000, we need to be looking at that. Many experts or organizations, including the Halifax Chamber of Commerce in their pre-budget submission to the minister, had recommended increasing it, I believe, up to around \$15,000. Many stakeholders believe it needs to be at least \$12,000 or higher. Most people believe that taxpayers should be able to keep as much of their tax dollars as possible. I certainly support that as well.

We're looking at health care in this province. One of the biggest indicators and determinants of health is income. When people don't have enough money to pay their rent, pay their mortgage, buy their groceries, and take care of themselves, you're going to see a decline in health. A lot of times you also see an increase in suicide rates as well, as people are under financial pressures. I am pleased to see this in the Financial Measures Act and in the budget, indexing our income tax brackets, but it didn't go far enough. We need to also increase the basic personal tax exemption.

There are other tax changes I would like to have seen in this budget and in this bill, including removing tax on tax. I fully support removing the carbon tax, and that's a federal responsibility, but I also think this government could be doing more by removing the HST or giving some sort of tax relief to Nova Scotians, considering all the extra revenue they have realized from the HST that has been charged on the carbon tax, as well as the increased fuel prices.

When Opposition MLAs and I called on this government to provide some tax relief for fuel in this province, it was not answered and was not done. That is something very

real. The people of this province are paying tax on tax. It is philosophically, fundamentally wrong. They should not be charged tax on tax.

[11:15 a.m.]

When you look at the price of fuel that people are paying at the pumps for diesel and gasoline, there is the basic commodity fuel price and then on top of that there's the federal excise tax, 10 cents per litre; provincial motive fuel tax, 15.5 cents per litre; a transportation fee, depending on where you live in the province; and now the carbon tax. Then you have the surcharge that retailers can put on and another 15 per cent on top of that.

People are paying the 15 per cent HST on top of their carbon tax, federal excise fuel tax, and provincial motive fuel tax - tax on tax. That is fundamentally wrong and should be changed.

I've also called on this government to remove tax on used vehicles. This is something that members opposite have advocated for themselves. I'm surprised that the government has not brought this forward yet in their mandate. I'm hoping that this is something we will see in the future. The people who suffer the most from having to pay sales tax on used vehicles are mostly those in lower socio-economic levels, and we are harming those by continuing to have this tax grab on sales of used vehicles.

Moving on with the Financial Measures Act, we have another amendment to the Pension Benefits Act included in this omnibus bill, and of course, the Personal Health Information Act, which I have already spoken to. This amendment to the Personal Health Information Act is mandating custodians - this is the word in the bill, Speaker - that would be if you have an EMR record, if you are a family physician or a specialist and you have an electronic medical record or a paper file, this bill mandates you to disclose personal health information to the minister or designated individuals acting on behalf of the minister.

When the minister accuses me of fearmongering and trying to scare people, I think that shouldn't have been allowed, first of all, but I just want to clarify that the purpose of me making sure that the people of Nova Scotia understand what laws are going to be passed here in this Legislature.

Hopefully the government will listen to the stakeholders, listen to the physicians who have concerns, listen to us Opposition MLAs who are bringing concerns forth on behalf of the people we represent - that matters, that's democracy.

Just in case anyone here, the government MLAs, have not read the bill themselves, this amendment says they mandate custodians - which would be physicians - to disclose personal health information. It is not needed. If the department needs to know how many people in the province have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or COPD or shingles,

any kind of information like that, that's already available through MSI billings. They do not need to have access to mine or anyone else's personal health information.

Something that's not included in this bill is whether this is retroactive. If the government does pass this, if they don't make any amendments, will this give the government access to my previous and patients' previous medical files from 20 years ago? Or will it be present day, going forward? It's a very big concern, and I think the government needs to take a closer look at this. It's important that we protect people's privacy in this province.

I'm sure we're going to see lots of amendments come forward in Committee of the Whole House on Bills on this bill, and there will be lots more to say at that time and in third reading.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm only going to take a few minutes here. I just want to make a few points. There will be other opportunities to talk about this as the bill moves forward, but a couple of points I want to make before I get into my critic role. We've heard a number of speakers get up and talk about a bill like this that has so many different components in it.

When you're looking at multiple departments, you're looking at multiple ministries that in some way, shape, or form are in this - which is very unusual, the process for doing it - what we're starting to see is things are starting to get pulled out of it. We saw the fire department stuff pulled out of it. We saw that pulled out of it. Now we're into a big debate - and rightfully so - on protecting people's personal information. You now have doctors coming forward. You have other individuals involved in the medical community coming forward saying that they weren't consulted.

We heard in Question Period that the minister responsible for Cyber Security and Digital Solutions hasn't done any kind of planning around this, hasn't done a risk assessment of what that means to start compiling this information. As we know, we've seen the largest cyber breach in the history of the province. It's interesting. This is what happens when you put all these components from different departments and ministries in one bill: Problems start to arise, and we're seeing it. The fire? It's a start. I feel like this information is there.

I see someone in the gallery, Speaker. I'm going to ask for an introduction from the Leader.

THE SPEAKER: Just a reminder that you're to speak to the Speaker. You're not allowed to recognize people in the gallery. It's a procedural thing. (Interruptions)

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition would like to do an introduction, that's why I was sitting down. I don't know if you can do it while I'm speaking. (Interruption) Do I continue, Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, continue on, please.

The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Even distracting from the gallery, like he used to be.

As I said, I'm going to take a few minutes and just go over this very quickly. As I was saying, this is what happens when you do this. This is what happens when you lump multiple departments and ministries within one bill: Due diligence isn't done. The government's taking things that are good, putting them in these bills - putting them in this bill which we support, but, also, you're starting to see problems arise. We saw it with the fire department and the volunteer issue being pulled from the bill after it was implemented.

Now you're into a big debate on health information. That is in the bill, and I suspect that conversation isn't going to end today. There are some major concerns coming from the medical community around access to information and the protection of information from a government who oversaw the largest cyber security attack in history with no risk assessment, as my Leader talked about in Question Period. No risk assessment done, no kind of analysis around what - how the information is going to be protected, and that's a huge concern for everyone.

Governments change. The member for Cumberland North said it too. People have a level of mistrust in the elected body. I say to myself, I had the opportunity to serve in Cabinet in other aspects. I wouldn't want to have that information. That's not right. As my Leader said, you can get that through billing codes. You can get that in other ways. You can get that data in other ways. You don't need to have access, as an elected representative, to people's personal information.

As the member for Cumberland North said, not only the person in the department - we have a current minister, the member for Antigonish, who's the minister. The previous minister was from Antigonish. Good people, trying to do the right thing, but you're opening that door to the event that somebody uses that information incorrectly. Why would the government want to do that? Why do you want to go down that path, when there are other ways to access that information? The point being that in the Financial Measures Act, this is in there. As we know today, no risk assessment was done. No analysis was done. There is no real, strong argument to collect this information. I suspect this is going to be the talk

- we have medical professionals and doctors coming forward with major concerns, and I suspect this conversation is far from over.

The other thing is that the Financial Measures Act also talks about gypsum, which is great. I believe I know what it's for. The member for Victoria-The Lakes would understand this. There's a great new opportunity that is kind of reborn in the mining community in Cape Breton around gypsum. We've got companies reopening. I know that company very well in Iona. In my previous life, when I wasn't a politician, I ran a business, and they were a primary customer of mine. They put a lot of food on the table for suppliers. They put a lot of food on the table for the people who were mining there. That is a huge opportunity for that community.

I wish whoever's involved - I had the honour to be the Minister of Energy and Mines for three years. Good people in that department. That is a great opportunity for the province. There's strong social licence in the community for that mine. They were excellent, and they continue to be. A lot of the same people are involved with that. They were excellent to the community. I'm sure they will continue to be.

It shows that mining - there's still lots of potential for mining and mineral resource development in the province. I wish everyone in Iona all the very best. A lot of jobs are going to come to the community. It's excellent for the economy.

The reason why I wanted to get up for a few minutes - I'm going to go to my critic role. We talked about the youth advocate in the office, and I had the opportunity to ask questions during Estimates yesterday. When you're developing something as important as this, something we all support, you must be able to at least give me a sense of what it's going to cost. I didn't get that yesterday. I asked specific questions around what that office would be, what the advocate would look like, what the staffing component would be, and all these things, and I got a very long answer of really nothing. That's unfortunate because this is something that we should all be celebrating. We want to do whatever we can to support and advocate for our kids. When the minister gets up and doesn't provide a single cent or really any direction of what the office is doing - like, "stay tuned, buckle up" - that's not good enough.

I don't understand why that would be in here with no information. Why wouldn't it be something separate? That should be something that you should celebrate. It would be almost like - they're different - similar, I guess, sense. When you're rolling out a pre-Primary program, child care, or these important aspects of bills - we would never lump that into a bill that has a multitude of other departments within it.

This is an important office that everyone supports, and I wish the government the full success in doing it. It's important for our kids. When the minister gets up and offers nothing - any kind of background on what the office is or what it's meant to be - I'm sitting there and thinking, "Why is this in the Financial Measures Act?" Again, you have the fire

information and decisions in the FMA removed. You have massive discussion now on protection of people's personal information. That's now a huge debate.

[11:30 a.m.]

I asked about this office for the youth advocate. No information coming forward on it. It's no wonder we have questions. No wonder the general public has questions, that they're starting to question this bill. I don't get it. These are things you should be celebrating, not putting in one document. I just don't understand.

I guess the point I was trying to make - I'm going to stop for now. We'll have lots more to say. The bill, I just don't understand. There are aspects of this bill that I would want to put out there front and centre. This is one of them, the advocate. Why it would land in the FMA under a pile of other legislation, I don't understand.

I'll also finish with what I started with: We're starting to see the holes in this bill. The fire was the first. Now you have the personal information. What else are we going to find out in this as we go? There's no information on many of the things that are in here. For our youth advocate, there's no information there, and I think we're just going to continue to find problem after problem as we go through this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the Speaker's Gallery. We are joined by a great friend of this Chamber who served, I believe, as the MLA for Argyle for 15 years. A former Minister of Health, Minister of Community Services, I'm sure other portfolios as well. Currently he's the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons in Ottawa, and most importantly my member of parliament for West Nova, the very liberally minded conservative, the honourable Chris d'Entremont. (Applause)

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

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm very happy to stand and speak to the Financial Measures (2024) Act, which is, of course, the legislation that accompanies the budget of the Province. I do think there are a lot of things to be concerned about in this budget that my honourable colleague from Sydney spoke to. I want to expand on some of those concerns.

We have an incredible affordability issue in this province. This is literally a crisis for hundreds of thousands of Nova Scotians. Nova Scotia has gone from being one of the most affordable places to live in Canada to one of the most expensive in the last two years under this government. And yes, there has been global inflation, there have been macro factors that have impacted affordability here, but there have also been some policies that we are seeing to continue under this government that are also going to continue to impact the cost of living for Nova Scotians.

I want to address, first, the item that we have certainly fought for on the opposition benches, and I'm certainly happy that the government has moved forward with that, and it is indexing income tax to inflation, trying to eliminate bracket creep in Nova Scotia. This is something that the Liberal caucus has been the sole champion of for a number of years until recently. It's been such a good idea that our honourable colleagues in the NDP have started talking about this, and the government has actually included it in their budget.

However, we have to point out that while this is a helpful move to protect people from being taxed more as a result of inflation, it is not a massive tax cut as the Premier has pretended it is. What this does for Nova Scotians is ensure that as inflation goes up, you're not being affected by bracket creep and that your tax brackets are being adjusted with inflation, so that if inflation is going up and you're being pushed into another tax bracket, this should potentially help protect you from that.

However, it's important that Nova Scotians know the actual financial impact of this legislation alone, again trumpeted by the Premier as the largest tax cut in the province's history. Is it going to save Nova Scotians, depending on their level of income, between \$59 and \$259 a year? This is what the Premier has trumpeted as the largest tax cut in our province's history, and he has certainly been beating his chest about it.

This is not enough to deal with the massive affordability crisis that people are experiencing. It does not make Nova Scotia's taxes more competitive overall in the province. Not only have we seen in Nova Scotia the highest increases to rental costs, the highest increases to housing in the country, people have been hit with increased property tax over this last year. We've had increases, obviously, to the housing market, which is preventing younger people and even working families from getting into the housing market to begin with. We've had power rates go up by 14 per cent under this government despite the fact that they promised that wouldn't happen.

In 2025, saving \$59 to \$259 a year is not going to address all these cost pressures that are smothering people financially, that are creating a lot of stress amongst not just the most financially vulnerable and those on the low income side of the equation, but on working class people, families who have two incomes coming in, who are trying to do the best for their kids, who are trying to put them into sports, who are trying to get them into recreational programs, who might be supporting their senior parents, making house payments, making tax payments.

This does not go far enough to make Nova Scotia an affordable jurisdiction from a tax perspective. We still have the highest taxes in the country. In a regressive fashion, we're taxing things that we want people to do. We want people to be more productive, and in this province, we tax income at the highest level in the country. We need people to be consumers and we have the highest sales tax in the country. We want people to buy homes and invest in them and they get penalized for that because of the property tax regime.

Certainly, protecting people from inflation and income tax is a decent start but it does not go far enough to make this province more competitive, from a tax perspective, or more affordable for Nova Scotians. This is why our party continues to advocate for a cut to the HST. We actually have the money to do this right now. We have had a windfall - this government has had a windfall of revenue unlike we have ever seen before, at least in living memory, revenue coming from the federal government, which this party will still attack every chance they get.

Most of that revenue is coming from increased taxes. Each Nova Scotian is paying more in taxes and, as inflation has gone up, the costs of things go up, the sales tax goes up. That is driving more revenue into the provincial treasury and the government has been blowing that money, in my opinion. Not just in my opinion, but also according to the opinion of the Auditor General and many people in Nova Scotia who actually believe in managing the finances responsibly, as a province, which is certainly something that I care about. It is certainly something that I think matters for the younger generation of Nova Scotians coming up. It matters for my kids, my grandkids I hope to have one day, and all that next generation of Nova Scotians who are either moving here or being born here.

This government is throwing that future in jeopardy by incredibly reckless spending, where even according to the Auditor General we are not seeing value for money. We are not seeing a reversal in the negative trends of health care. In fact, we have seen the statistics that matter in health care, from how many people have a family doctor to how ill people are, to how many deaths we're seeing in our emergency rooms, to the wait times for specialists, MRIs, for ambulances, for getting patients from ambulances into emergency rooms. All these things are getting exponentially worse, two to three times worse under this government, despite the fact it's spending billions of dollars more.

Again, we have a government that brags about how much they're spending and we do not see a return of value for Nova Scotians. We do not see the improvements that people expect and need in our health care system, like getting a family doctor, like having lower wait times, like saving more people in our emergency rooms instead of losing more people. These are the things that matter to people.

And again, for all the chest-beating and backpacking that happens in here - or back-patting, I should say - and all the money being spent, we are not seeing a reverse of those trends. I believe, it was John Hamm who was fiscally responsible, who did care about the taxpayers' money, who didn't waste money for the sake of capturing headlines and driving

a media cycle. He said, We are going to keep spending more money on health care and the situation is going to get worse until we change how we are doing business with health care. That certainly is not happening.

I am very concerned about the lack of support for the most financially vulnerable in this province. We have a homelessness crisis. We have a poverty crisis. We have a food security crisis. All of these statistics are getting worse, and peoples' lived experiences are getting worse. We have now one-third of our food bank visits being children and youth in this province. I've met with food banks; we've met with Feed Nova Scotia. The demand on their services - again, just to give people the necessities of life with food - is getting worse and worse and worse. Food insecurity has drastically increased under this government.

I am very happy that there is a lunch program announced in this budget. Again, something we have been fighting for on this side of the House for two years - something we did commit to previously, during our years in government. I am thankful that this is in, because this will help feed our children and our youth in our schools if it is implemented correctly and if we can get this in place.

Again, we are still freezing income assistance for the third year in a row - the most financially vulnerable. At a time when cost of living is shooting through the roof, we're putting pressure on working families and working-class and middle-class people. Think about what this is doing to our constituents who are barely making ends meet. Freezing income assistance again for the third year in a row when we are seeing the highest inflationary cost increases in many respects in the whole country, and again, this government turns a blind eye on this issue and does not have a plan to address poverty. As a result, poverty rates are increasing in Nova Scotia.

I am very fearful that those individuals and families who are dependent on social assistance right now - again, to survive - because of this government's inaction and lack of compassion for them, are going to be trapped in intergenerational poverty. They are not going to be able to escape the dependency on this system because costs are going up 20 per cent, in some respects, for rent and housing, 8 to 15 per cent in food, 14 per cent in power, and these folks are making less and less and less.

If this government does not think that financial insecurity, that food insecurity and that housing insecurity do not have an impact on health outcomes and pressures on our health care system, then they are not talking to doctors. They are not paying attention to those social and economic determinants of health that statistically are present in the data that the government itself is collecting. This is a major blind spot for the government. We are going to have some families and individuals in this province who are going to suffer for generations because of this government's lack of compassion and care for poverty and food insecurity.

We also have, during a housing crisis - when we have literally run out of homes and rooms for people - a cut to the housing budget by a significant amount. This is coming off a previous sitting where the only thing this government was talking about was housing. We are going to fix housing. We are going to fix housing. Look at all the actions we are taking. The proof is in the pudding in the budget. A cut to the housing budget when we are in a housing crisis.

[11:45 a.m.]

Homelessness has doubled under this government. People literally died on the streets this Winter. This government promised they were going to get shelters in place by mid-December. We are now almost in April. There have been 19 of those 200 shelters that have been put in place. We have staff from the Department of Community Services telling us that they probably won't even be in place until next year. The homelessness situation is probably going to be worse next year.

Again, there are actions that this government is taking that they cannot blame on other orders of government or other stakeholders. It's their responsibility. They have cut eligibility for rent supplements at a time when rents have gone up more in Nova Scotia than anywhere else in the country. Now you have to be paying at least 50 per cent of your income in rent to qualify. I do think that is a consequential decision that is increasing housing insecurity in this province, and that is making life more untenable for hundreds if not thousands of Nova Scotians.

They have frozen income assistance, as I mentioned before. They have cut back at a time when, for the first time in a decade, power rates are shooting through the roof again, up 14 per cent. They've cut back on energy rebate programs for the most financially vulnerable in our province. These are decisions that have consequences in people's lives. These are decisions that have impacts on the future of this province and people's ability to live and thrive here, let alone survive. The government takes no responsibility for it. Again, don't you know we're making the biggest tax cut in Nova Scotia history, from \$59 to \$259 a year? It's not going to cut it.

Other concerns I have about the FMA are the number of non-budget-related items that are being bunched into this omnibus bill that aren't even necessarily related to the budget, but also have implications for Nova Scotians. This is a clear example of how this government operates. They do try to conceal things. Big consequential decisions are concealed in omnibus pieces of legislation to try to keep the media, the Opposition, and the public unaware and quiet on these issues. This government's fundamental motivation as a government is to control perception of what people are saying about them. That's become so clear at every level, from health care to how they approach legislation in this House.

The Premier answers one question a day from each Opposition leader. He's accumulated more power than probably any other premier on record in this province, and he answers fewer questions than anybody who's come before him. This government said they ran on transparency and accountability. They are not transparent as a government. An example would be concealing the fact that they are mandating doctors through this law, the Financial Measures (2024) Act - again, what's the relation? Someone should probably stand up and try to explain this, but in the Financial Measures (2024) Act is hidden a piece of law that mandates doctors to give electronic medical personal records of their patients to, specifically, the Minister of Health and Wellness or a designate. This is in the Financial Measures (2024) Act.

We heard in Question Period today the Minister of Cyber Security and Digital Solutions, who was minister during the biggest cybersecurity breach in this province's history. One hundred thousand staff, including MLAs in this Chamber, our personal data and information, including our Social Insurance Numbers, were hacked and taken by bad actors. His department has not even looked at the risks associated with forcing every single doctor, without patient consent, to give their personalized health care information to the minister.

According to doctors, including Dr. Audain, representing Doctors Nova Scotia, and doctors whom we've heard from privately, this is creating a major safety risk for patients. Again, no thought even given to making this contingent on the patient's consent or the doctor's consent. It is mandated through law hidden in the Financial Measures (2024) Act. This is not a government that demonstrates transparency and accountability, or even a desire to be forthright about some serious consequential decisions they're making that are impacting Nova Scotian lives, and in this particular case, their personal health records.

Overall, I will say - because I don't want to speak too long on this bill; I know other members want to speak to it - again, I will say that there are items in this budget that I support, because I know the government will try to say that we voted against things that we advocated for.

I do have to point out that the best ideas in this budget have come from the Opposition - both opposition parties. I do have to say, it is quite flattering to have a majority government that does seem very obsessed with what the Opposition is doing. If people don't believe me, they just need to watch Question Period every day. I would say that 50 to 70 per cent of the government response on serious questions affecting Nova Scotians' health, lives, and affordability, is what? Commentary on the Liberal Party, the Official Opposition, and the times we've had in government.

The best ideas in this budget have come from the Opposition. There's nothing wrong with that, but it is very odd that the government doesn't give credit for where some of these ideas are coming from. They're very quick to take ideas or take credit for decisions

made by a previous government, and in the same breath tell this House that the previous government didn't do anything.

It is a display of character and an approach to politics that has become, I think, very much a part of the modus operandi of the PCs in Nova Scotia, and it's different from how previous governments conducted themselves in this Chamber and beyond.

I will say one thing that the previous government and previous Liberal governments of Nova Scotia did care about was how much money is being spent. There was, has been, and continues to be on this side of the House in our party, a very real concern for the financial future of this province and for the responsible use of taxpayers' money.

This is a responsibility that this government has just blown to the wind. They do not care how much money's being spent so long as it continues to create the perception that they're doing one of their numerous slogans that they spend taxpayers' money promoting, by the way, as well.

We are driving debt up in this province. They are running deficits, again, at a time when we have more revenues than ever before. They are not achieving value for money based on results, no matter if you're looking at the affordability crisis affecting people, support for the most financially vulnerable and those Nova Scotians dealing with low incomes, or whether it's in health care.

Again, there are very clear examples of this government burning hundreds of millions of dollars with no thought for the morrow. No thought for the impact on Nova Scotians, other than the headline that they're going to get out of it. We've got very clear examples of that that have been outlined by the Auditor General and have been talked about by this party.

Four hundred sixty-four million dollars for a nursing and health care recruitment and retention bonus that we were told would get 2,000 nurses back into the system as a result of that, and we would recruit more paramedics. We got 148 nurses back into the system as a result of that massive spend, and one net new paramedic over the last year.

It's not just about money. That's the big problem I have with how this government handles the public's money. They think that's going to fix everything, so let's get it out the door. More money out the door faster, even if there's not a return on investment, even if it's not going to have an impact. The Auditor General told us in just the half a billion dollars that she looked at that the government did not do any due diligence in assessing whether there was even a need for these massive investments.

Again, why this is important to Nova Scotians is because at a time when we could actually become more competitive from a tax perspective, where we could deal with the overarching debt problem that this province has had, when we could be positioning

ourselves to set our kids and our grandkids and the future of this province up for success, this government is not taking into consideration any of that.

They only care about whenever the election comes. They care about re-election. If Nova Scotians are watching and they don't believe me, they just have to watch the Premier's responses to questions every single day. When the Premier is in the Chamber, we must also watch the responses of the ministers. When the Premier is not in the Chamber, we do get better responses from the ministers, though, and that was made very clear today.

My overall concern with this budget again, to conclude . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Just a friendly reminder to the Leader of the Official Opposition that you're not to refer to anyone's absence or attendance within the Chamber.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: It was nice and refreshing, for the most part, to get more complete responses today that were more focused on answering some of the questions.

We have a Financial Measures Act here that spends billions more with no thought for what the return on that investment is going to be, despite trumpeting this as something that's going to have a major impact on affordability for Nova Scotians. It won't, and that's going to become increasingly clear as the days, weeks, and months pass.

While there are specific things in this Budget that we do support, I am very concerned about the cuts to housing, the freezing of income assistance, not seeing enough on making life more affordable for working-class and middle-class people, and nothing in this budget that's going to help the young people coming up in this province to buy a home or find housing - a Budget that is also continuing on with this government's record of reckless spending without any thought for the impact that's going to have on future generations.

I must point out one more thing. At the heart of the revenue projections in this Budget is this government's focus on continuing to try to double our population aggressively without a plan to accommodate that population growth. We do not see a plan in here to increase infrastructure. We have a cut to a housing budget. Again, the government is dependent on revenues of population growth that's going to see us doubling in, I believe, the next two decades.

That is going to also create - if we're not responsible with how we look at population growth in this province and if we don't have a plan to accommodate that growth - more problems around inflation, cost of living, housing shortages, homelessness, and lack of access to health care and government services.

My plea to the government is: You won the last election. You've got to govern now. These decisions really matter. They're consequential, not just for the present moment but for the future, and I hope the government starts taking that responsibility seriously.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: I'm also happy to stand and say a few words in response to the Budget. There are a few things that I'm thankful for in the Budget. Mainly, when I think, top of mind is health care. As I mentioned yesterday, we have three community groups in Annapolis that are working hard to retain and attract health care workers throughout Annapolis County. All three groups received their full funding ask, as far as I know. I'm certainly appreciative of their work and that this budget has offered what they've asked for.

I really was excited to see the \$1.8 million announced for the new nursing program at Acadia University. Nurses are so integral to our health care system. I come from a family of nurses and physicians - my mom, my sisters, et cetera, and I certainly know the value of what they bring to our health care. I'm eager to learn more about the program. Although excited about that funding, it's all about what outcomes are positive on the ground once those graduates move on and find their way in the communities.

Just a personal story: I was accepted to the accelerated nursing program at Dalhousie University 10 years ago. I was excited to join my family and my friends as a nurse throughout the Valley. As life goes, it didn't work out. One of the main factors was considering moving my young family from the Valley to Halifax for that program, meaning my partner would have to change her job and her career. My kid - my baby at the time would have to start a life in a new place. I chose to pursue another career at the time. I'm hoping that this program attracts more local students to attend Acadia for nursing. I'm hoping that the outcomes are there and they stay in the community and help us out in health care.

Another one that stood out as a positive for me as agriculture critic was - the Minister of Agriculture actually stood up and announced the cell service funding. I've been in the Legislature talking about how inherently dangerous farming is. Again, growing up on a farm and having personal stories of people suffering on the farm with different injuries. Cell service in the Valley is even more critical now than it's ever been. I'm thinking about our farmers, our fishermen and women - another inherently dangerous profession. I'm also thinking about business owners - tourism and otherwise. I'm thinking about families who are desperate to have better cell service, all through the lens of as we lose emergency in Annapolis and emergency hours in Middleton. We certainly need cell service to be there when we need it, so I was happy to see that in the budget.

Lastly, I'm certainly pleased to see the universal lunch program. I think one of the members in the House mentioned last session that Annapolis suffers from some of the highest child poverty rates in the province. It's not something I'm proud of, or any of us

would be proud of, but far too many times - either through my kids who attend elementary or otherwise - I hear about kids and families who aren't able to afford lunch, who come hungry to school. It's heartbreaking, so I was excited to see that the government included this in the budget.

[12:00 p.m.]

To that point, through an agriculture lens, I'm curious about how we're going to involve our farmers and those in the agriculture business with this universal lunch program. Certainly, at home we're surrounded by farms and producers, and I would like to obviously see local, fresh food from them involved in these schools and involved in this program as much as possible.

Things that I wish were in the budget - I just put forward a bill to help our volunteer firefighters. It's for their medical first responder training. For members of the House who may not know, your volunteer firefighters have a basic cost of \$250 to \$300 for basic training. They have a full course cost of upwards of \$600. That doesn't take into account that in places like Annapolis, these volunteers have to travel outside of the constituency for training, so they're paying for overnights at hotels. They're paying for food and travel. Sometimes these costs for volunteers are upwards of over \$1,000. This bill - I hope the government will look at, but I was disappointed that more support wasn't there for them.

I would have liked to see more funding for our urgent treatment centre in Annapolis. Like I mentioned, we lost our emergency room last year and it was replaced by an urgent treatment centre. We went from seven days and nights a week for emergency coverage to three days a week for urgent treatment coverage. I was hoping there was funding in the budget to make that UTC more sustainable in Annapolis. I hope the government finds a way to help our community get that urgent treatment centre from three days a week to five days a week, and hopefully seven days a week.

Just quickly, I would have liked to see some help on parking fees. I've mentioned it a few times before, and I still hear it quite often. For lots of people struggling with affordability it would be an easy thing to do. People in Annapolis are paying \$3 every time they visit a hospital facility. There are certainly lots of facilities in the province that are free, and people are asking me as the MLA why our facility can't be free like other areas.

I have put a bill forward on that at a previous session, but I was hoping there would be some funding to maybe offset that.

When I look at agriculture, there are some positives in the budget. Unfortunately, agriculture doesn't get the funding or the attention that I think it deserves. It certainly doesn't get the funding that other departments get. There are some positives around dike land upgrades. Even in Annapolis, there's some funding to help us with dike lands down that way. Always want more funding, but certainly wanted to highlight that.

Things that I would have liked to see in the budget for agriculture that weren't there would be, for example, in fruit producers. I think they have asked about bin funding - apple bins or bins for fruit - for a long time now. They find it hard to compete, and they find it hard to fund that themselves. Other provinces have been involved in sustainable CAP funding and have millions for replant programs. There's nothing in this budget that helps our farmers and producers with replanting. I would hope that there would be in a future budget.

Stakeholders - including the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, the farmers themselves and producers - have mentioned several times that they're looking for more funding for succession planning. They're looking for more funding for mental health services. They're looking for more help with growing an agriculture growth strategy. There didn't seem to be much funding for that in this budget.

Overall, I just wanted to speak for a few minutes. There are some good things in this budget. Health care really stood out to me. I think I'm on record, at least at home and here in the Legislature, fighting for health care more than anything else. I'll continue to do so. There were some things, as I mentioned - the nursing program, support for our local communities - that stand out. I was wishing for more support for our agriculture industry. They're more important than ever now that food security is top of mind, and affordability issues are top of mind. I hope in future budgets, agriculture is given the priority it deserves.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'm not going to speak at length on the budget because I have already spoken at length on the budget ad nauseam, and I'm sure that folks don't need to hear me repeat that all again. I do want to discuss a few things that are in the Financial Measures Act quite briefly.

There are a lot of clauses in here that allow notice of sale at public auction, et cetera, to be posted on a municipality's website instead of in a newspaper. There are a number of clauses throughout this. Boy, if you want to speed up the death of our local newspapers, this is how you do it. I understand why - newspapers may be disappearing as we speak - but I would have preferred to see that it be in a newspaper, if available in the local area, if not on the website.

When we stop and think about the number of newspapers that have closed up shop in this province - what's currently happening with SaltWire - much of that is driven by ad revenues, and they have lost them since the birth of Kijiji and websites like that. That was a kick in the teeth to newspapers. But one thing they could always count on was that the government always had to advertise in them. That's gone. Although I know this particular government likes to control the message, I don't think they're trying to hasten the death of our newspapers, but that's the end result of what we're doing here. If you don't have to publish certain things in the newspaper, if you can put them on a website, there goes that

ad revenue. I mean, here's Joseph Howe in the Legislature here, presiding over our deliberations. I think it's kind of sad that we're going to hasten that even further.

The other thing I really want to talk about today is the Personal Health Information Act, which is amended in the FMA. Again, we have a number of pieces of legislation that could have been stand-alone bills. The government likes to get in and get out, and I get why. Every day is another Question Period, except for Mondays, and with Question Period, there's always the opportunity for someone to screw up. I don't think democracy is well-served when we have these omnibus bills that jam a bunch of things in together. All of these could have been dealt with - most of these could have been dealt with in stand-alone bills, but we're not doing that.

When I look at the clause of the bill that amends the Personal Health Information Act, it's the second-last clause, basically, in this bill. There are 111 clauses, and we're just going to slip that one in at the end. When we look at the explanatory notes that were distributed with the Act, Clause 110 amends the Personal Health Information Act to allow the Governor in Council to make regulations - this is the part that gives me the willies - "requiring personal health information to be disclosed for the purposes of planning and management of the health care system," et cetera.

All of us have constituents who come to our office, and when they need assistance with the health care system, we get them to sign a consent form. I can't tell you the number who balk at the thought of people who are not their health care providers having access to that information. They're deeply concerned about that regularly, and I must spend time going through why this is, why we need that consent, and how I'm not going to be able to help them if they don't sign this thing. Here we have another instance when the government wants personal health information. It doesn't say anything about aggregate here. The concern of the doctors who are expressing it, and the patients who are increasingly expressing it to us, is that it won't be aggregate information. It's personal health information - because that's what it says here in this explanatory note.

The government's response is that there will be regulations that will make it clear what exactly is being looked for, but the problem with regulations - as we all know in this Chamber - is that the devil is in the details. We've already had our health information laid wide open - as my Leader puts it - for some bad actor to see. We've already been through that - anybody who has worked or is working for the Province. I mean, it was the biggest data breach in history.

For folks who were trying to sign up for the electronic monitoring of their bank accounts, it was not an easy process. That's why they've had so little uptake, I'm convinced. If you've ever changed your name, then you must go through extra hoops to try to sign up for it, and it doesn't happen. If you're a woman, and you've been married and you've changed your name - I guess if you're a man, you could change your name too, but

it doesn't happen very often - you must go through the extra hoops. That's when people are getting hung up. They're not getting that protection.

While the minister stands up and pats himself on the back for the response, there's a whole ton of people who've been left out of that response because they couldn't get that company to recognize their credentials. I had one case when every time a woman logged on to try to do it, she began getting fraud calls - every single time. I said, "I think your Hotmail account is compromised. I would suggest you get a Gmail address."

[12:15 p.m.]

People are not exactly overjoyed at the government having access to their health information. You can understand why. Because every time we turn around, we're getting a new Visa card because our Visa information has been accessed by somebody who shouldn't have it. People are very wary of this. I have great concerns about this.

We know that governments don't have a good track record of keeping personal information personal. It happened to us. It happened to this government. The difference is theirs was found quickly, because I think it was a ransom that was asked for. The other one was not. We didn't ask for their minister to resign, even though it was a huge, massive breach. Instead, those were the folks who went after the minister, who wasn't even the minister when it happened, and demanded that she resign.

You can understand why Nova Scotians are reluctant to have this shared. Doctors Nova Scotia is not super wild about it, either. It made me sort of stop and think about the fact that doctors would have to share this information. We've been hearing a lot of talk about red tape reduction for doctors. Is this something more they're going to have to share?

We have some questions here. Doctors don't like it. The president of Doctors Nova Scotia says, "The way that the legislation is written is quite broad and it's not entirely clear the information they might be accessing."

The second-last clause in the 35-page bill says there is an additional obligation for doctors and other health care providers to "disclose personal health information to the minister or a person acting on behalf of the minister for the purposes of planning and management of the health system, resource allocation, and creating or maintaining electronic health record programs and services." There's nothing there about aggregate information.

I think we can all understand that people are concerned about the broad nature of the legislation. There's a solution here: The government can modify this proposed law and tighten up the wording. That's what Doctors Nova Scotia would like to see. I don't think this is an outrageous ask, and I really want to clarify: What is the obligation on doctors?

What do they have to share? Is this going to be another obligation that doctors have at the end of the day to have to do? How is this going to work? Will it be automated?

We know that the government has access to billing codes. They have information on what kinds of things people are coming in for help with. We don't really understand why this is a necessary piece to this bill.

I've shared my previous thoughts, as I've said, on the Budget. There are some good things in the Budget, much of which colleagues on this side of the House have proposed. But there are some concerning things which I've already shared, and these things, particularly this clause - the fact that we're hastening the demise of newspapers, and the fact that Nova Scotians' personal health information will be required to be shared with the Minister of Health and Wellness or their designate - is of concern to me, and it's of concern to Doctors Nova Scotia and to many patients too.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I would like to add my voice as well and speak to the Financial Measures Act. There are two things that I'm going to focus on. I'd like to echo the voices of my Leader, the member for Yarmouth, and the member for Cumberland North who spoke. Her husband is a doctor and knows, but I also received two emails, and one of them is from a constituent I really care about. He is so upset, and a lot of what was said here today he has mentioned as well.

He made a really good point. He said that he feels that this government is fighting family doctors, and no wonder we are not getting anybody going into family practice. Honestly, those were his words, and that we are going to see even more with this legislation, because the relationship between the doctor and the patient is sacred. That information is only to be given to the patient and to the doctor - not to the minister, not to the staff. He sees that as a power grab. Those were his words in his email to me, and I feel very strongly against having that information, my information as a patient, to go to the department or to the minister. I just wanted to add that, and then I will move on to what I spoke about the other day.

It is very important to me, and I just want to tell people that since March 6th, the *Toronto Star*, the *Chronicle Herald*, the *Canadian Press*, the Radio-Canada, News 95.7, CBC, the *Examiner*, and *Global News* have all spoken about or did articles about the dense breast bill that I introduced on March 6th, and there is a reason why that many media would cover that. It makes sense. It is wrong what we're doing in Nova Scotia, and I will speak until - I don't know, until I have no voice left to save other women from going through what I went through. It is wrong what we're doing to women in Nova Scotia, and dense breasts affect 50 per cent of women in Nova Scotia. That's a high number.

Fifty per cent, their mammogram will miss their cancer, and they will go through - I have a letter that this woman from Wolfville sent me, and I didn't have a chance to read it, but please listen. A lot of this happened to me and to the 70 women who showed up on March 6th. She wrote this letter to the minister, so the minister has this letter:

To my therapist, there is no dignity in this. The therapist said, No, there is only dignity in the way you handle it. I have Stage 3 breast cancer and dense breast C. My initial cancer diagnosis was December 2nd, 2022, and I am still undergoing treatment. It will be over a year and a half from diagnosis to being done.

I was dignified when I defecated my pants while walking around the block. I was dignified when I was eventually hospitalized because of therapy-induced colitis, now potentially a lifelong condition. I was dignified while I lost my hair, had both diarrhea and constipation, had chemo veins, vomiting, no sleep, peeling skin, and night sweats, all reactions to the massive amounts of toxins and drugs going through my body.

I was dignified throughout multiple biopsies, a needle injecting dye around my nipple four times, and two surgeries: a mastectomy and initial lymph node removal, and then subsequent radical lymph node dissection. I was dignified the first time I looked at my disfigured body where I used to have breasts. I'm dignified in the face of potential lymphedema, chronic shoulder pain, and the complications of abnormal lymph nodes.

I'm still dignified as I await radiation therapy and continued chemotherapy. I'm still dignified as I await a second mastectomy, as it wasn't protocol to do them together. As I await at least a five-year time span for a breast reconstruction, I have told myself: I can do this, but at what cost and why? Why do I have to go through this? The cancer could have been detected if the screening process worked. By the time they detected my cancer it had already metastasized or spread. Even the invasive mammogram after I discovered it was negative. Now I find myself feeling undignified and quite angry at the social and economic cost to my life, my family, and the health system.

The investment into lab technicians' training and salaries certainly offsets the economics associated with the amount of time, medical professionals, costly medications and drain on the MSI and the Nova Scotia health system.

On top of that is the loss of my salary, the additional expenses I bear for travel, medications, hair coverings, prosthesis, physiotherapy, and mental health support not covered by the health care system. Yes, the dignity of it all. Why does the Nova Scotia government feel a letter indicating that I have dense breasts relieves them of responsibility and liability? Other provinces and other countries have seen fit to fund additional screening beyond a mammogram and a letter. Why is my sister's life in a different province more precious than mine in Nova Scotia?

I said the same about my sister who gets an abbreviated MRI, but I don't get it here, even though I am the one who has cancer.

Why does the Nova Scotia government disbelieve the scientific evidence and data above the importance of additional screening for women with dense breasts? In the face of overwhelming evidence, I urge you to vote for additional breast screening for women with dense breasts. Sincerely, L. Spidgell, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

When I read that letter it just - she described it so much better than I can. There is no dignity in the treatments that I received and all these women who were here in the Legislature. It is horrific, it is barbaric, it is very difficult, and it can cost so much more than the screening itself. It has been proven by other provinces that we actually save money. Because my cancer wasn't found at Stage 1, like my other colleague in this House, the cost to the government would be between \$150,000 to \$200,000 just for the mastectomy and four sessions of chemo.

In other cases where it is found at Stage 4, we are looking at \$400,000 to \$500,000. The machine that B.C. is using is called contrast-enhanced mammography, is actually \$100,000 and all they are doing is retraining those same mammogram technicians on using the new technology. That's all it takes, but we're saying, No, let's wait and give them harsh treatment and let's cost more money to the government, why not?

It is just unbelievable and that's why the media is picking this up, saying it does not make sense. It does not make sense financially. I submitted something very similar and I asked for an ultrasound in October, the day before my last chemo.

You've had time to look at this, you've had time to check with the department. Why is Nova Scotia behind? That same day my oncologist said to me, Rafah, if you're going to fight for something, don't fight for ultrasound. Ultrasound missed my first lump.

In February 2022 I had a lump, and I had a mammogram and an ultrasound, and it said clear as can be. Six months later I have another lump, now it is 95 per cent malignant. How is that possible, on the same breast? That means the first mammogram and ultrasound

missed it. And many women with dense - C and D - the mammogram will miss it. An ultrasound increases, but it doesn't do as well as an abbreviated MRI, which is what Ontario is giving women and my sister and this woman's sister. But we don't get it here.

[12:30 p.m.]

We are denied - the only province that denies extra screening, even if you have cancer. Imagine that. This is the province we're living in. That means your sisters, your daughters, your mothers are at the same risk as I was. And there are so many of us. Please, go check what density you are. Because when they told me my density, I didn't take it seriously. I had no clue what that really meant and how serious that was until I had to go through this hell. I have no other description but "hell" for a year of all these treatments. And the dignity of it and how well this woman has described it to me.

We need to do something, especially the women here. But the men more, for your daughters, your wives. Even men can get breast cancer, and we know that from somebody here in this House, whose brother has passed away because of breast cancer, as a male. It is serious. I plead and beg. We should not wait on this. We already have heard so many other women and put them through this.

We can stop this, and it is available, and other provinces have done it. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. Listen to the experts. One expert here has a different idea, but other experts across Canada have moved on from mortality. Our expert in Nova Scotia is basing her decision on mortality. And to do the studies until I die, and on all these women until they die, to prove that extra screening would have helped, will take a long time. And should we wait for that?

I have spoken to so many women who are struggling. Three women from - actually, government workers, who haven't worked for three years - two years, three years. The woman who spoke at the press conference is working part-time because these treatments are difficult and take a lot out of you. But I'm a fighter. And I will be here until this bill is passed and until I can save other women from the hell that I went through. I need you to help me. I'm begging you to help me and listen.

There are enough articles. I told you how many media have spoken about this, written about this. Just check it out. Just look up "dense breast" or "Find It Early Act." I just listened to another broadcast that is happening in the States - the same thing. Many states have increased screening for their women and allow the insurance companies to cover it. We must do this. This is less expensive than the hell we're putting women through. It will save taxpayers' money, but life . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I just want to remind the member to speak through the Chair and to focus on the FMA. It's a very passionate speech, but I have to rule that there's nothing in the FMA directly related to the conversation.

The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I'm sorry, Speaker. I am very passionate, but there is a lot about the money. The FMA is about our Budget, and this will save not only the hell that I went through but money for the government. So that is on FMA, and we can add it to our costs.

And this should have been looked at last year, not now. Last year. I gave you what I knew, but I was going through a hard time at the time. And I've learned so much more since last October, and the cost is one. So look at it. This is serious, and we need to do something about it. Stop putting women through the hell that I went through.

THE SPEAKER: Seeing that there are no more speakers, is the House ready for the question?

The motion is to move second reading of Bill No. 419.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Monday, March 25th between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. Government business will include the Committee of the Whole House on Bills, and the Committee on Law Amendments will be 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Monday, March 25th.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Monday, March 25th between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 12:36 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 967**

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas the birth of a child is an exciting and momentous event and marks the beginning of a wonderful journey; and

Whereas few events in life are as powerful and positive as the birth of a child; and

Whereas on July 20, 2023, Sarah and Philip Ready welcomed their daughter into the world;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Sarah and Philip Ready on this miraculous event in their lives and wish them a lifetime of happiness as parents.

RESOLUTION NO. 968

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas the birth of a child is an exciting and momentous event and marks the beginning of a wonderful journey; and

Whereas few events in life are as powerful and positive as the birth of a child; and

Whereas on June 23, 2023, Sarah and Noah Deveau welcomed their son into the world;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Sarah and Noah Deveau on this miraculous event in their lives and wish them a lifetime of happiness as parents.

RESOLUTION NO. 969

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas in 1996, after realizing that lobster fishing wasn't the future he wanted, and knowing the huge potential sitting in his backyard, having watched wild oysters grow naturally in the brackish waters of Eel Lake, Nolan d'Eon sold his lobster outfit and founded D'Eon Oyster Company Ltd.; and

Whereas Nolan continues to work endlessly on becoming more efficient and environmentally friendly and a major milestone for his company was processing Salt Bay oysters with a completely off-grid, solar powered processing barge, increasing production and drastically cutting out wasteful steps that before used fossil fuels; and

Whereas Nolan was recently honoured to receive the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia's Lifetime Achievement Award, an award given to celebrate and applaud an individual who has made a significant and substantial contribution throughout their career to advance the aquaculture industry in Nova Scotia;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Nolan d'Eon on receiving the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia's Lifetime Achievement Award and wish him and D'Eon Oyster Company Ltd. continued success with their future endeavours.

RESOLUTION NO. 970

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Blair MacDonald on receiving the Specialist of the Year Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 971

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Dylan Engell on receiving the Making a Daily Difference Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 972

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Giselle Dugas on receiving the Healthy Communities Leader Award and thank her for her dedication and exceptional care she provides to her patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 973

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Islam Eissa on receiving the Lifelong Learner Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 974

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Jason Kwan on receiving the Outstanding Resident Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 975

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Jim Chandler on receiving the Dedicated Mental Health/Continuing Care Physician Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 976

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Joel Cox on receiving the Distinguished Recruitment Partner Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 977

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Kenny Yee on receiving the Mentor Champion Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 978

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Madeline Arkle on receiving the Rising Star Award and thank her for her dedication and exceptional care she provides to her patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 979

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Roland Muise on receiving the Healthcare Hero Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 980

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Suzanne Whittemore on receiving the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advocate Award and thank her for her dedication and exceptional care she provides to her patients.

RESOLUTION NO. 981

By: Hon. Colton LeBlanc (Argyle)

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

Whereas physicians are essential to an effective health care system and are appreciated for providing excellent care in our communities; and

Whereas the Yarmouth Region Medical Professional Recruitment Partnership recently hosted its second annual Physician Appreciation Reception in Yarmouth to celebrate excellence in local physician services; and

Whereas in addition to an evening of fellowship, 12 awards were presented, of which 11 recipients were nominated by colleagues and one was nominated by the community.

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Dr. Tom Muise on receiving the Family Medicine Physician of the Year Award and thank him for his dedication and exceptional care he provides to his patients.