



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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

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

First Session

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS:	
Gov't. (N.S.): Wildfire Victims Assistance - Request, Hon. B. Jessome.....	8490
Gov't. (N.S.): Infrastructure Pgm. for Connector Roads - Request, Hon. B. Jessome.....	8490
TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:	
Human Rights Commission 2022-23 Annual Report, Hon. B. Johns.....	8491
Annual Report on Accessibility 2022-23, Hon. B. Johns.....	8491
STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS:	
MCC Report: Commitment to Recommendations - Recog., The Premier.....	8491
Hon. Z. Churchill.....	8492
C. Chender.....	8493
Income Assistance Rates: Indexation Start - Recog., Hon. B. Maguire.....	8493

Hon. Z. Churchill	8494
C. Chender	8495
GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 1,013, Chignecto Isthmus: Fed. Action Needed - Recog., The Premier.....	8495
Vote - Affirmative.....	8496
Res. 1,014, RCAF: 100 th Anniv. - Recog., Hon. B. Adams.....	8497
Vote - Affirmative.....	8498
Res. 1,015, Paris-Hoyte, Shawna: New Exec. Dir. of ANSJI - Recog., Hon. T. Grosse	8498
Vote - Affirmative.....	8499
Res. 1,016, Paul, Chief Terry: Most Admired CEO Awd. - Congrats., Hon. B. Wong	8500
Vote - Affirmative.....	8501
Res. 1,017, Vermeulen, Ben: Death of - Tribute, Hon. G. Morrow.....	8501
Vote - Affirmative.....	8502
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 454, Expanding HPV Testing Act, Hon. K. Regan.....	8503
NOTICES OF MOTION:	
Res. 1,018, Youth Mental Health Svcs.: Need to Improve - Recog., L. Lachance.....	8503
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Riddell, Kari: Clean Foundation Work - Recog., Hon. T. Halman.....	8504
Reid-Howell, Julia: Running Achievements - Recog., Hon. Z. Churchill	8505
Labelle, Sébastien: Bus Stop Theatre Efforts - Recog., S. Leblanc	8506
Pillai, Dr. Gopalakrishnan: Med. Care - Recog., Hon. A. MacMaster.....	8506
Field, Kylie: The Nurturing Touch - Recog., Hon. P. Arab	8507
Boardmore Playhouse: Theatre Prodns. - Recog., K. Coombes.....	8507
Kehoe, Jean: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. T. Boudreau.....	8508
Smyth, Nick: Acting Achievements - Recog., L. Nicoll	8508
The Nest: New Hfx. Theatre Space - Recog., L. Lachance.....	8509
Mellor, John: Sledge Hockey Team - Congrats., Hon. B. Comer	8509
Cdn. Orthopaedic Care Day: Importance - Recog.	

A. Duale	8510
World Theatre Day: Contribs. to Society - Recog., S. Hansen	8510
Abbey Ridge: Supportive Living Pgm. - Recog., J. White	8510
HWHS Students: Head for a Cure Event - Recog., R. DiCostanzo	8511
Watts, Jennifer: Dist. Svc. Awd. Recip. - Congrats., G. Burrill	8511
MacDougall, Raymond: Zest for Life - Recog., Hon. P. Dunn	8512
Book on Black Women: New Edition - Recog., Hon. T. Ince	8513
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 1,553, Prem.: Carbon Tax Deal - Negotiate, Hon. Z. Churchill	8514
No. 1,554, Prem.: Hogan Court Deal - Explain, C. Chender	8515
No. 1,555, ECC: Better Carbon Pricing Deal - Negotiate, Hon. Z. Churchill	8517
No. 1,556, ECC: Better Carbon Price Deal - Negotiate, Hon. Z. Churchill	8518
No. 1,557, ECC: Cap and Trade Removal - Reverse, Hon. I. Rankin	8519
No. 1,558, DHW: Personal Information Disclosure - Explain, S. Leblanc	8520
No. 1,559, ECC: Energy Cost Increases - Limit, Hon. I. Rankin	8521
No. 1,560, ECC: Western Climate Initiative - Support, Hon. I. Rankin	8522
No. 1,561, FTB: HST on Carbon Tax - Remove, Hon. K. Irving	8523
No. 1,562, DCS: Disabilities Policy - Implement, K. Coombes	8524
No. 1,563, FTB: HST on Carbon Tax - Stop, Hon. Z. Churchill	8525
No. 1,564, DED: Better Carbon Deal - Negotiate, F. Tilley	8526
No. 1,565, DHW: Nursing Retention Bonus - Table, E. Smith-McCrossin	8527
No. 1,566, EECD: School Violence - Address, S. Hansen	8528
No. 1,567, ECC: Better Carbon Deal - Negotiate, B. Clark	8529
OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	

No. 450, Assessment Act (amended),	
Hon. B. Jessome.....	8530
K. Coombes.....	8533
T. Taggart.....	8535
Hon. P. Arab	8539
Hon. J. Lohr	8542
No. 423, Find It Early Act,	
R. DiCostanzo.....	8544
S. Leblanc	8547
M. Sheehy-Richard	8550
L. Nicoll	8554
E. Smith-McCrossin.....	8556
L. Lachance.....	8557
No. 405, HST Reduction Act	
F. Tilley.....	8559
S. Hansen	8562
J.A. MacDonald	8564
Hon. I. Rankin.....	8566

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5):

Gov't. (N.S.): Federal Carbon Levy: Alternative - Submit,

Hon. I. Rankin.....	8569
L. Lachance.....	8572
Hon. B. Maguire	8574

HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CWH ON BILLS AT 6:05 P.M.8577

HOUSE RECONVENED AT 9:24 P.M.....8577

HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CWH ON BILLS AT 9:25 P.M.8578

HOUSE RECONVENED AT 10:00 P.M.....8578

ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Thurs., March 27th at 9:00 a.m.8578

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3):

Res. 1,019, Barron, Tracy: Com. History Preserv. - Congrats.,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8579
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,020, Jacquard, Brett: Curling Medal Win - Congrats.,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8579
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,021, Demings, Emily: Curling Medal Win - Congrats.,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8580
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,022, Hudson, Gary: Special Olympics Coaching - Thanks,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8580
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,023, Greenville Com. Ctr.: LG Com. Spirit Awd. - Congrats.,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8581
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,024, Fitzgerald, Lisa: Curling Medal Win - Congrats.,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8581
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,025, Doucette, Lynn: Special Olympics Coaching - Thanks,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8582
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,026, Hagen, Michael: Curling Medal Win - Congrats.,

Hon. Z. Churchill	8582
-------------------------	------

Res. 1,027, Herritt, Quentin: Special Olympics Coaching - Thanks, Hon. Z. Churchill	8583
Res. 1,028, Herritt, Tyson: Curling Medal Win - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	8583
Res. 1,029, Muise, Walter: Curling Medal Win - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	8584
Res. 1,030, Mitton, Sarah: Shot Put World Champion - Recog., Hon. K. Masland	8584
Res. 1,031, Sea Port Gifts & Treasures: Donation - Thanks, Hon. K. Masland	8585
Res. 1,032, Queens County Food Bank: Com. Serv. - Thanks, Hon. K. Masland	8585
Res. 1,033, Aqualitas Inc.:Accreditations - Congrats., Hon. K. Masland	8586
Res. 1,034, Outhouse, Reginald: Com. Serv. - Thanks, Hon. J. Lohr	8586



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order. Before I begin the daily routine, I will read the late debate topic for March 27th submitted by the honourable Iain Rankin, MLA for Timberlea-Prospect:

Whereas the Prime Minister wrote to seven premiers, including the Premier of Nova Scotia, to come up with a credible alternative to the federal carbon levy yesterday; and

Whereas Quebec, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories all have their own systems and are not subject to the federal carbon levy; and

Whereas Nova Scotia had a credible alternative that was more cost-effective for Nova Scotians under the previous government while raising millions to fight climate change but this government has not negotiated new caps with the federal government, causing Nova Scotians to have to pay for the highest increase to gas in the country;

Therefore be it resolved that the Government of Nova Scotia submit a credible alternative under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change to the federal government that recognizes the work Nova Scotians have done over the successive governments so Nova Scotians do not face another spike at the gas pump on April 1st.

We will now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: I beg leave to table a petition entitled Property Tax Capped Assessment Program Victimized Disaster Victims, the operative clause reading:

We, the undersigned residents of Nova Scotia and supporters of the victims of the 2023 Tantallon-Hammonds Plains wildfire, call upon the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to make changes and introduce legislation retroactive to May 27th, 2023, necessary to ensure that Nova Scotians who lost their homes are not further victimized due to shortfalls in the Assessment Act and the Property Tax Capped Assessment Program, which might include providing that for the purposes of Section 45(A)(4) of the Assessment Act, “construction not included in the base-year assessment” and “new construction” do not include the reconstruction of one or more dwelling or accessory buildings on a property where the dwelling or accessory buildings existed and were assessed previously and were destroyed by a disaster, including a wildfire, flood or hurricane.

There are 696 names on these pages, and I have affixed my name, as per the Rules of the House.

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

BEN JESSOME: Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition entitled Establishment of a Provincial Infrastructure Fund for Emergency Access and Connector Roads, the operative clause reading:

We, the undersigned taxpayers and residents of Nova Scotia, call upon the Nova Scotia government to establish an infrastructure program dedicated to funding the construction of emergency access

and connector roads to improve connectivity, enhance responses to emergencies and make communities across the province safer.

There are 631 signatures on this petition, and I have affixed my signature, as per the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, in my capacity as the Attorney General and Minister of Justice for the Province of Nova Scotia, I do hereby beg leave to table the Human Rights Commission 2022-23 Annual Report.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

BRAD JOHNS: In my capacity as the Attorney General and Minister of Justice for the Province of Nova Scotia, I hereby beg leave to table the Annual Report on Accessibility 2022-23.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, this week marks one year since the Mass Casualty Commission released its final report, *Turning the Tide Together*.

We will always remember the lives lost on April 18 and 19, 2020, and reflect on how our province was deeply impacted by this violence and the resulting sorrow. We also reflect on the strength and courage shown by the families, survivors and communities that have come together to support each other in moving forward.

I want to reaffirm Nova Scotia's commitment to the report's recommendations and to reassure the families, survivors, and communities that we are acting, and we are doing things differently. This past year has been one of action, of listening, and of determination to work across departments with all levels of government and with community to make progress on the recommendations outlined in the final report.

As I said on the day the inquiry's final report was released, our main goal is safer communities. The government has launched a province-wide policing review that will include public engagement. This is important work and will be of great interest to Nova Scotians as it takes shape.

We are investing in community groups working on the front lines to prevent gender-based violence so that they can continue to support those who are impacted. As we strive to make communities safer, 16 community-based organizations have received \$7.1 million in funding for projects to help address gender-based violence.

We have also made progress on a number of recommendations in the report, including:

- Committing \$9 million over two years as part of an \$18 million initiative with the federal government to design and deliver mental health, grief, and bereavement services in Cumberland, Colchester, and Hants Counties;
- Adding new positions in Mental Health and Addictions in front line and system support roles, including outreach, wellness navigation, health promotion, public engagement, and grief and bereavement;
- Adding a new mental health role to mobile primary care clinic teams, which visit communities in Colchester, Cumberland, and Hants Counties three days a week;
- Providing close to 2,000 more new trunked mobile radios to volunteer emergency first responders by the Fall 2024, improving their ability to communicate as they help Nova Scotians in times of need.

As a province, we are working with our federal colleagues to advance work on recommendations that require collaboration. We were pleased with the efforts of the Progress Monitoring Committee, which, together with founding chair Linda Lee Oland, is playing an important role monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the recommendations from the final report.

Our province was deeply impacted by this tragedy. Our resolve to change, to be stronger, and to make a difference so that no family or community has to experience what occurred in April 2020 stands firm.

We are Nova Scotia Strong.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for his comments and for providing us with a copy in advance.

Each year on April 18th and 19th, Nova Scotians remember the lives that were lost and honour survivors who experienced the most unthinkable tragedy here in our province four years ago. In response to this loss that our province faced, the final report of the Mass Casualty Commission was released a year ago this week. This report, *Turning the Tide Together*, lays the foundation for the work that our province needs to do to support survivors and ensure the shock that Nova Scotians faced in April 2020 never happens again.

I want to thank the Mass Casualty Commission for their dedication in conducting this report. They have provided the framework for our province that we need to make advances toward their own recommendations. As elected officials in this Chamber, we have a duty to ensure the work is carried out from this report, particularly those recommendations that help us fight against gender-based violence, and provide additional mental health supports for individuals. We owe it to the victims, the families, and the survivors of this unthinkable tragedy, and the future generations of Nova Scotians to do so.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I'm honoured and heartbroken to rise and remember the tragic event that took place in our province. I was in the room for the release of this report. I rise today proud to have joined the families and advocacy organizations who pushed for this commission and the report that emanated from it.

I'm glad to see the progress that the Premier spoke of today, knowing that there is so much more work to be done. I thank the work of the commission, the organizations, and everyone who has been involved in bringing us to this point.

We know that this was an event that our province will never fully heal from, but that we can and must always continue to learn from. I believe that we can turn the tide together toward justice, safety, equity, and peace for all of us. I look forward to working with all colleagues in this Chamber toward those goals.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to announce a historic, important step the province is taking to support vulnerable Nova Scotians.

Effective July 1, 2024, income assistance rates will be indexed on an annual basis to the Consumer Price Index. This will apply to all income assistance streams, including the essential rate and the enhanced rate for people on income assistance.

These continue to be challenging times for Nova Scotians living on low incomes. Indexing income assistance rates will result in more predictability for our clients and is another action being taken by this government to help vulnerable Nova Scotians find success. A few recent examples include investments in the Remedy, the new Income

Assistance Disability Supplement, the School Lunch Program, and more investments in child care to lower fees for families, creating more spaces and enhancing after-school care.

[1:15 p.m.]

Indexing rates implemented on July 1, 2024, will be retroactive to April 1, 2024. We know it is very difficult to break the cycle of poverty. We know that there is more to do, but today is another positive step forward in helping our most vulnerable Nova Scotians. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I certainly want to congratulate the minister on this statement and this announcement. This has been something that stakeholders have been fighting for, that advocates have been fighting for, and that the most financially vulnerable people in this province have been pushing for over the last two and a half years. We certainly know it's been a priority for the Opposition benches in both parties.

This is an important move. We have been dealing with the biggest inflationary pressures that our province and our country have had since the 1980s. We know that in the last two and a half years, Nova Scotia has gone from being one of the most affordable places to live in the country to one of the most expensive. The most financially vulnerable - those folks who depend on income assistance - have been hit the hardest as prices for food have gone up. Prices on their power bills have gone up. Prices on everything have gone up - the rent - having the highest rental increases in the country.

I am pleased to hear this is coming in. Again, this is overdue. I wish it hadn't taken this long to get to this point. I do want to commend all the advocates who have been pushing for this. I believe it is critical to prevent families and individuals in Nova Scotia from being stuck in intergenerational poverty as a result of the current situation when it comes to the cost of living.

I do wish that it did not take such political pressure to get here. We want the government to do things because they're the right things to do, not just because there's political pressure, but at the end of the day, we're happy we're here. This is a good announcement. We think this is going to provide some moderate relief to the most financially vulnerable people in our province and those people who are being challenged the most right now as poverty rates and food insecurity go up. We certainly hope we see more of this in the future.

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

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I am pleased to rise and celebrate the movement toward an idea whose time has clearly come. It's something for which we've been fighting for a long time - something the minister committed to - and we're glad to see it happen.

I do want to point out, as my colleague did, the number of people who have worked so tirelessly for so long, including assistance recipients themselves, whom I know have spoken to all of us in our offices about the gross inadequacy of the income they receive, and the advocates who work to represent those folks in different areas. To all those people, I say thank you, and this is an important day.

I also need to say that this still leaves income assistance recipients thousands and thousands of dollars below the poverty line in a time of record inflation. The fact that this \$7 million, which almost qualifies as a rounding error in the provincial budget, is now being announced after we finished debating the budget is a good thing, but it's not enough. We are happy to see this first step toward ensuring that all Nova Scotians have the ability to live in dignity, and we will keep fighting until that becomes a reality.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice on an introduction.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I beg leave to make an introduction. In the East Gallery, we have with us today Mr. Brian Cooper. I'd like to say hi to Brian and recognize him. Brian is a member of the Halifax Kinsman Club. Anybody who's downtown regularly sees him walking the streets of downtown, picking up the garbage, not only being an ambassador for Halifax but also for all of Nova Scotia. I'd ask the members of the House to please welcome Brian to the House today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. I'm glad you're able to join us.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,013

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

Whereas the Chignecto Isthmus, located in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, is an interprovincial surface and rail trade corridor of national importance; and

Whereas the Intercolonial Railway, constructed along the Chignecto Isthmus in accordance with Section 145 of the Constitution Act, 1867, physically united the Canadian federation

by linking the Province of Nova Scotia with the provinces of Ontario and Quebec; and

Whereas Parliament passed, in 1948, the Maritime Marshland Rehabilitation Act, which provided for the Government of Canada to construct and reconstruct dykes, aboiteaux, and breakwaters; and

Whereas the Chignecto Isthmus is currently vulnerable to the effects of rising sea levels and increasingly intense severe weather events that threaten this interprovincial surface and rail trade corridor of national importance; and

Whereas the governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have undertaken the Chignecto Isthmus Climate Change Adaptation Comprehensive Engineering and Feasibility Study to expeditiously mitigate impacts of climate change on the communities and farmlands located within the Chignecto Isthmus;

Therefore be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia urge the Parliament of Canada to pass Bill S-273, an Act to declare the Chignecto Isthmus Dykeland System and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada; and

Be it further resolved that this motion be forwarded to the Prime Minister of Canada, the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, and all Nova Scotia Members of Parliament and Senators.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please go ahead.

BARBARA ADAMS: In the Speaker's Gallery today, we have two very special guests who are here representing 12 Wing Shearwater in Eastern Passage. April 1st will be the Royal Canadian Air Force's 100th Anniversary, and I am very honoured to stand and recognize the Commander and Chief Warrant Officer of 12 Wing Shearwater as part of these celebrations.

Shearwater is the second oldest military airfield in Canada, second only to CFB Borden in Ontario. I would ask that they please rise as I introduce them: Colonel David Holmes, the Commander of 12 Wing Shearwater; and CWO Kevin Wezenbeek, the Chief Warrant Officer of 12 Wing Shearwater. I ask all members of the House to join me in welcoming them to the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for being here and for all that you do.

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,014

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

Whereas 100 years ago on April 1st, the Royal Canadian Air Force was officially established; and

Whereas since its establishment, the Royal Canadian Air Force has served Canadians in peace and wartime, and has been a significant contributor to national safety and security, international peace, and global stability; and

Whereas Nova Scotians know well the traditions and incredible impact of the Royal Canadian Air Force, as our province is home to CFB Shearwater and CFB Greenwood;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature recognize the Royal Canadian Air Force centennial anniversary and extend to all members within Nova Scotia and across Canada our utmost gratitude for their courage, loyalty, and commitment to protecting Canadians at home and abroad.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

TWILA GROSSE: I'm honoured to introduce guests from the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute sitting in the East Gallery today. I ask them to rise one by one to accept the warm welcome of the House: recently appointed Executive Director Shawna Paris-Hoyte, a fifth-generation African Nova Scotian with a career marked by tireless advocacy for equity and human rights, particularly for women, children, youth, and families. Accompanying her are key members of her team: Sarah Upshaw, director of operations; DeRico Symonds, director of justice strategy; Natalie Hodgson, training lead; Tracey McCallum, project coordinator of the national impact of race and culture assessment; Tiffany Gordon, manager data collection and justice system accountability unit; Veronica Dossah, legal support/researcher; and Susan Edwards, administrative assistant. Representing the board of directors of the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute: Folami Jones, Carolann Wright, and Vanessa Fells. Finally, joining us from the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition are Bernadette Hamilton-Reid, executive director; and Karla Williams, administrative support. Welcome to the Legislature. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: It's a pleasure to have you join us today.

The honourable Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,015

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

Whereas Shawna Paris-Hoyte, a fifth-generation African Nova Scotian, was appointed as the executive director of the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute in Halifax on March 20, 2024,

bringing unparalleled expertise and dedication to justice, equity, and human rights to the institute; and

Whereas Shawna Paris-Hoyte's extensive work in law, social work, mediation, education, and business demonstrates her lifelong commitment to the rights of vulnerable groups and has influenced significant legal decisions at the Supreme Court of Canada, benefiting communities across Nova Scotia and the country; and

Whereas under Shawna Paris-Hoyte's leadership, the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute committed to dismantling systemic barriers and advancing justice and is set to achieve significant progress in human rights and social justice, particularly in empowering the African Nova Scotian community through legal reforms, education, and advocacy;

Therefore be it resolved that members of the Legislative Assembly recognize and celebrate Shawna Paris-Hoyte for her outstanding career and efforts towards fairness and justice and commit to supporting her and the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute's mission to make Nova Scotia a more equitable place for every African Nova Scotian.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister for Advanced Education and L'nu Affairs.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Thank you, Speaker. Before I read my Notice of Motion, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

BRIAN WONG: I would like to introduce a dear friend, Barry Cox, who is sitting in the East Gallery. Barry was very influential through my journey as a politician, and I

thank him for that, but more importantly, Barry is an amazing community advocate. He works hard for the betterment of the whole constituency. He is the present chair of the Lockview High School Student Advisory Committee - our school advisory committee.

[1:30 p.m.]

He was also very influential at getting our turf field. The turf field was outside of HRM policy, and Barry worked hard with the committee to get that passed. Barry continues to be that advocate, and I really wanted to recognize Barry today, so thank you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Thank you for joining us today.

The honourable Minister for Advanced Education and L'nu Affairs.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,016

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

Whereas Chief Terry Paul of Membertou First Nation received a Canada's Most Admired CEO Award from the executive recruitment firm Waterstone Human Capital in November 2023; and

Whereas Chief Paul's award recognizes his 39 years of leadership and hard work in community economic development and Membertou Development Corporation's commitment to creating opportunities for community members; and

Whereas we, as a province, are pleased to work in partnership with Mi'kmaw leadership and organizations to help create the conditions for people in communities to thrive, both today and in the future;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Chief Terry Paul and Membertou on this much-deserved recognition and be committed to doing our part to help build an inclusive economy.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Argyle on an introduction.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Thank you, Speaker. In the East Gallery today we are joined by a constituent of mine, Andrea Leblanc. Andrea is a very familiar face at the community breakfast in Amiraults Hill. It is her first time visiting the Legislature today. I want to extend my appreciation for her support and her friendship. It is always nice to see a familiar face at these types of events, and I really appreciate her sense of humour, which is second to none. I ask all colleagues - all members - to join me in welcoming Andrea to the House today. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. GREG MORROW: Thank you, Speaker. Before I read my resolution, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

GREG MORROW: Speaker, in the Speaker's Gallery, we have members of the Vermeulen family: Andy Vermeulen and Karen Corey - please stand up as I say your names - Ben Vermeulen; Andrea Pothier; Gerald and Debbie Vermeulen; Laura Siddiqui; Adrian and Melanie Vermeulen; Alphonse and Jolene Vermeulen; Gysbertus and Jaclyn Vermeulen; and Elise Vermeulen.

Some of you may know Andy as the Chair of the Nova Scotia Farm Loan Board. Just a quick story on Andy: When I was doing some farm tours with the member for Kings North, he and Andy graciously invited me to their regular exercise class. I must tell you, they put the young guy to shame. Please welcome them to the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Enjoy your visit with us.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

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

RESOLUTION NO. 1,017

Whereas Mr. Ben Vermeulen of Milford, who together with his late wife Anna, was a pillar of the farming community, building a large-scale dairy farm that provided Nova Scotians with a farm-fresh, quality product for decades, has passed away recently at the age of 92; and

Whereas Ben and Anna, Dutch immigrants to Nova Scotia in 1955, managed to grow their business together in a lifelong agricultural success story while also raising a family of seven children, including Wilma, Verna, Joanna, Adrian, Leona, Gerald, and Andy Vermeulen, who is currently the Chair of the Nova Scotia Farm Loan Board; and

Whereas the late Mr. Vermeulen will be remembered as an excellent example of the quintessential, hard-working, innovative farmer with a passion for agriculture, who relied on his farming partner Anna and expressed his concern for community through his involvement with the Milford & District Lions Club;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House express condolences and best wishes to the Vermeulen family members and recognize the lifetime of commitment to the Nova Scotia agriculture industry, represented by the late Ben and Anna Vermeulen.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

THE PREMIER: I think the Minister of Service Nova Scotia neglected to make an introduction when he was standing. I want to recognize Colton's mum for being here today. She did a pretty good job. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Thank you for joining us.

Order. Are there any further Government Notices of Motion?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 454 - An Act Respecting at-Home Testing for Human Papillomavirus. (Hon. Kelly Regan)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 1,018

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I give notice that on a future date I will move the following motion:

Whereas the Health Services and Insurance Act was passed in November 2023 as a means to provide public sector provider coverage for patients who are mildly to moderately mentally ill; and

Whereas at a recent all-staff Nova Scotia Health Authority meeting, staff were informed that this is being rolled out in fact to Tier 3 patients who present more complex, severe mental health issues, and staff were given 48 hours to provide feedback, which felt insufficient and inappropriate to many staff; and

Whereas every Nova Scotia Health Authority child and adolescent psychiatrist has raised their concerns to MLAs, ministers, and the Premier regarding patient safety and systemic challenges related to the relative lack of integration, peer supervision, oversight, and access to psychiatry by engaging private practitioners, as opposed to clinicians and public mental health teams, especially for more complex situations;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly show its urgent concern for improving child and adolescent mental health by referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Health to make recommendations regarding how to best provide mental health services to children and youth in Nova Scotia.

I ask for waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, permission to make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please go ahead.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: In the East Gallery, we have Kari Riddell and Kelly Duggan, two highly respected members of the Clean Foundation. The Clean Foundation is a trusted partner to the Government of Nova Scotia in the delivery of many of our sustainable development and climate action programs. Kari and Kelly, please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House of Assembly. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. Order.

The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

RIDDELL, KARI: CLEAN FOUNDATION WORK - RECOG.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I'm so thrilled to recognize Kari Riddell, a dedicated environmental educator whose passion for preserving our planet knows no bounds.

With nearly two decades of service with the Clean Foundation, Kari has tirelessly championed environmental stewardship and education. Her innovative approach to teaching utilizing a charismatic puppet to convey the message of the harmful effects of littering has captivated and inspired children to become stewards of their environment.

I'd also like to welcome Kelly Duggan from the Clean Foundation and give a warm welcome to the House of Assembly to Eddie the Puppet. Eddie delights young audiences with his sense of humour, his sense of rhythm, his curious mind, and his big heart.

Together, Kari and Eddie's invaluable contributions to environmental education and conservation have inspired us all. Their voices have been resonating across Nova Scotia. I want to thank them for joining us today and for all that they do to engage, educate, and inspire our youth to be strong stewards of the planet.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

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

I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery where we are joined by two friends, Linda Margaret Thompson-Reid, and Terry Joseph Reid, both of River John in Pictou County. They've come here to hear the recognition that we're going to give to their daughter. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome, great constituents of Pictou West. You said Pictou County.

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

REID-HOWELL, JULIA: RUNNING ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Linda and Terry are the proud parents of Julia Reid-Howell, who works as a teacher. Along with her husband, she lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Unfortunately, Julia is not able to be present with us as we celebrate her accomplishments today.

I do want to recognize Julia's achievements as an outstanding athlete and dedicated runner who throughout 2023 has had an extraordinarily successful year. From April through to October 2023, Julia participated in numerous track races in addition to 11 road races.

Throughout this extensive competitive season, Julia claimed the Provincial Championship title in three distinct running events: the 5km, the 10km, and the half-marathon races. Currently, Julia holds records for the fastest female time in these three events in the province of New Brunswick.

Julia's achievements have been recognized by Run New Brunswick when, on November 19, 2023, she was named Female Runner of the Year. Julia began her running career in Pictou County at River John Consolidated School. Since then, Julia has

demonstrated a high commitment to the sport of running and continues to build on her successes that began at the age of nine when Julia set her first record.

We, along with her family and friends, wish Julia continued success and many more victories as she pursues her passion for track and road racing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

LABELLE, SÉBASTIEN: BUS STOP THEATRE EFFORTS - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: On this World Theatre Day, I rise today to honour Dartmouth North resident and all-around amazing person Sébastien Labelle as he prepares to leave his position as executive director of the Bus Stop Theatre Co-op.

Sébastien started as executive director of this vital and vibrant art space in 2016. Under his stewardship, the co-op has purchased the building it is housed within and seen the theatre and lobby space through a major renovation and improvement. The space is now much more physically accessible and has an extra space in the basement which is used for smaller performances, workshops, and community events.

He did all of this through a pandemic in which the world saw theatres close for extended periods of time and income from and for the arts dry up. As executive director, Sebastien has helped lead the member-run Bus Stop Theatre to be a truly open and available space - a place where diverse and Indigenous North End artists feel ownership and pride for the space. It's a place where everyone, artists and audience alike, can feel safe.

Sébastien's legacy is an organization that's viable and strong and a building that is sound and beautiful. The word on the street is that he's doing this to spend more time with his family, but we will see about that.

I ask all members to join me in thanking Sébastien Labelle for his contribution to the Bus Stop Theatre and in wishing him well in whatever comes next.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

PILLAI, DR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: MED. CARE - RECOG.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, Dr. Gopalakrishnan Pillai began his career at St. Mary's Memorial Hospital in Inverness in 1972, after coming to North America from his home in southern India. He planned to stay for a year or two, but thankfully for us, he stayed until his retirement in 2022.

Dr. Pillai liked the challenge of rural medicine and the need to find ways to be resourceful in responding to the needs faced by a population without local access to other

specialist physicians. He developed a family practice; he conducted general surgery; he delivered over 1,500 babies and took calls in the emergency department and the surgical services over his 51-year career. Urology was his specialty.

[1:45 p.m.]

No one stood up for our hospital in Inverness like Dr. Pillai. He was always adamant that it continues with the services and programs required for our community to receive appropriate health care given its distance from regional hospitals. That included the successful campaign for a CT scanner.

May we in this Legislature extend our appreciation for the care Dr. Pillai gave to thousands of people who needed his assistance. His mark has been left on our province.

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

FIELD, KYLIE: THE NURTURING TOUCH - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Kylie Field, an international board-certified lactation consultant and infant massage instructor. With a background as a registered nurse trained in South Africa in a comprehensive program that included general nursing, midwifery, psychiatry, and public health, Kylie brings a wealth of experience to her practice.

Kylie's approach is rooted in compassion and personalized care, focusing on nurturing the entire family as they navigate the transition of welcoming a newborn into their lives. As a lactation consultant, she collaborates with parents to develop tailored breastfeeding plans and sharing a positive and successful breastfeeding experience by both mother and baby. With her comprehensive knowledge of postpartum maternal needs and newborn care, Kylie has had the privilege of guiding hundreds of new moms toward confidence in their mothering journey.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Kylie Field for ensuring the well-being of families in our community, and I look forward to seeing her continued impact in the years to come.

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

BOARDMORE PLAYHOUSE: THEATRE PRODNS. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, on World Theatre Day I rise to pay tribute to the Boardmore Playhouse, which resides in the riding of Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier. The playhouse opened in 1979 and in 1990 was renamed the Boardmore Playhouse in honour of founders Liz and Harry Boardmore.

The Boardmore presents an annual season of plays, including plays for youth, four to five full-length plays, a biannual Shakespeare production, a biannual Broadway musical, and a one-week one-act play festival, emphasizing new play development. The playhouse supports community theatre groups through workshops for young people and advises and provides leadership in Summer theatre programs.

We must support local artists and local theatre to ensure their longevity in our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

KEHOE, JEAN: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Speaker, today I want to recognize the dedication of Jean Kehoe, who is a perfect example of what a community dreams of having as a volunteer.

Jean has been actively involved in the Rocky Bay Irish Club for many years. Her extensive efforts in creating, directing and supporting the Shamrock Players theatre have been instrumental to the success of the club.

Jean has overseen organizing numerous trivia nights, John Prine tribute shows and multiple sittings of the Mrs. Brown's Boys dinner theatres that have sold out every time. She has been key to the sustainability of the club and is known for her kindness and the support she shows to all.

I ask all members of this Legislature to please join me in recognizing Jean Kehoe for her incredible commitment to our community.

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

SMYTH, NICK: ACTING ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, on this World Theatre Day I am pleased to acknowledge Nick Smyth, who was raised in Cole Harbour and found his niche as an actor while attending Auburn Drive High School. Nick described himself as a shy child during those years, but of course, his high-school experience changed everything for him. During those years, Nick could borrow a video camera from the school and film his work; then edit and broadcast the results before the entire student body on the classrooms' TVs right before lunch.

As a teenager, he was cast in the long-running CBC television series *Street Cents*, which was known for launching the careers of fellow Halifax natives such as Jonathan Torrens and Mike Clattenburg. After performing stand-up comedy in and around Halifax,

Nick moved to Toronto, where he studied improv and worked briefly for MuchMusic. He was the face of the popular 7-Eleven ad campaigns from 2014 to 2020, in which he starred in over 40 national TV commercials. With several films to his credit, as well as appearances on many TV shows, Nick continues to find creative fulfillment, and says he'll never stop learning his craft and will always strive to be a better person.

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

THE NEST: NEW HFX. THEATRE SPACE - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: I rise to recognize a new creative space in central Halifax. Halifax's queer independent theatre, DaPoPo, has rented a space on Quinpool Road and renamed it The Nest. Organizer Garry Williams explains: "We are aiming to keep the rent low, and the space accessible. We are planning some drop-in events - writer's circle, Music Theory, house concerts, Baby Group - and such to offset the cost."

Current Nesters include DaPoPo Theatre, Patchwork Music Therapy, Unnatural Disaster Theatre, Even the Muse, Nolan Natasha, Lindsay Kyte, Blue Acres, Villains Theatre, and Coral Maloney. More from Williams: "It's a fabulously queer space where we are hatching all sorts of queer-centred projects. It's not quite *Birdcage* level, but we're working on it!"

If you want to check out the space, DaPoPo Theatre will be hosting an open house and fundraiser at The Nest on Saturday, March 30th.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

MELLOR, JOHN: SLEDGE HOCKEY TEAM - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN COMER: I rise today to congratulate Mr. John Mellor of MacAdams Lake for being named to Great Britain's national sledge hockey team. John will now go on to play in the upcoming World Para Ice Hockey Championships in Norway next month.

Since 2015, John has been playing with the Cape Breton Sledgehammers team, and quickly found a passion for the sport. His passion was recognized by sledge hockey officials in his home country who, after watching him play at a tournament in Bridgewater, invited John to train with the U.K. team. At 60 years of age, Mellor was the oldest player at the training camp, but he knows that age is just a number.

Originally from Cape Breton, John fell in love with a Cape Bretoner in 2008, and our Island became his adopted home. Along with playing sledge hockey, Mellor also coaches the Glace Bay Miners sledge hockey team, which has about 18 kids who are currently involved.

Depending on the team's success, John could find himself competing at the 2026 Winter Paralympics in Milan, Italy. I wish John great success in his future endeavors.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

CDN. ORTHOPAEDIC CARE DAY: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Today, March 27th, is Canadian Orthopaedic Care Day, a significant event in the Canadian health calendar. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the dedicated professionals who provide essential care to patients in our community. Orthopaedic care is an essential service that plays a vital role in restoring mobility, alleviating pain, and improving the quality of life for countless individuals. I express my heartfelt gratitude to the orthopaedic care community for their commitment to excellence, compassion, and expertise that makes a difference in the lives of so many. Happy Canadian Orthopaedic Care Day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

WORLD THEATRE DAY: CONTRIBS. TO SOCIETY - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize World Theatre Day. World Theatre Day is internationally recognized annually on March 27th as an opportunity for everyone to celebrate the value, importance, and contributions of theatre to our society. As a young person, acting fascinated me. It was something that I always wanted to do. Being on stage was such a rush: to be someone anywhere at any time; changing characters; learning skills and direction. Theatre gives folks an outlet to be creative. Theatre is about a connection, the spark between audience and performers - as the curtain rises, the shared experience as a community and the conversations that linger after the final bow. I would like to encourage all members to support the theatre world. Buy a ticket to a show and share your theatre experience with others.

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

ABBEY RIDGE: SUPPORTIVE LIVING PGM. - RECOG.

JOHN WHITE: Young people in need of a safe, supportive space to call home now have that in Glace Bay. The Supportive Living Program at Abbey Ridge, a provincial government-funded project by Undercurrent Youth Centre and New Dawn Enterprises, will provide eight spaces for youth between 16 and 21 years old. Six are permanent spaces and two are for emergencies.

Through the initiative, the community is opening doors to spaces for youth to proudly call home - a sanctuary where they will find safety, support, and the opportunities they deserve. The program at Abbey Ridge will benefit residing youth who are at risk of

negative outcomes due to lack of support, resources, and experience with homelessness. Residents will be encouraged to support pursuing their personal goals with resources tailor-made to their personal interests.

I am proud that we are able to partner with these wonderful community organizations that share the goal of eliminating the cycle of poverty and addiction. I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in saying thank you to Undercurrent and New Dawn Enterprises for this wonderful initiative.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

HWHS STUDENTS: HEAD FOR A CURE EVENT - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I rise today to recognize an upcoming event at Halifax West High School. The Halifax West students are holding their annual Head for a Cure event on April 17th in support of the Terry Fox Foundation.

This is the 20th year that Halifax West is holding the event. Some students and teachers will shave their heads, and some students will cut their hair to donate to making wigs for cancer victims. All proceeds go to the Terry Fox Foundation for cancer research.

The teachers and students gather in the gym as they watch their named Cancer Warriors get their hair cut by local hairdressers who volunteer their time. Each Warrior is given the chance to share what inspired them to participate in the fight against cancer.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing the students and staff of Halifax West High School for hosting this great fundraising event.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

WATTS, JENNIFER: DIST. SVC. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, a meaningful and significant presentation was made at the community iftar held at the Ummah Masjid and Community Centre in Halifax last Monday. Each year at that event, the Ummah Society presents its distinguished Community Award to someone who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to community and public service, exemplary leadership in fostering youth development and broader community well-being, and empathy in promoting intercultural understanding.

The 2024 award was made, to her shock and surprise, to Jennifer Watts in marking her imminent retirement after six years as CEO of the Immigrant Settlement Association of Nova Scotia, a position Jennifer took up after serving as Director of Settlement and Integration at ISANS, following her two terms as municipal councillor for District 8 in the HRM.

Commenting on her years at the helm of ISANS, Jennifer speaks of her gratitude, among other things, for the opportunity to work with local refugee communities as they rebuild their lives, work to bring family members to Canada, and for the chance to work with the rapid response to significant humanitarian crises that ISANS has been a part of.

The Ummah Society Community Award is a mark of the scope of the gratitude that the community has for her. I'm sure all members of the House join me in extending Jennifer Watts every best wish for her impending retirement in Cape Breton.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MACDOUGALL, RAYMOND: ZEST FOR LIFE - RECOG.

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, it is my pleasure it to rise today to recognize an amazing individual in our community. At the sprightly age of 90, Raymond MacDougall epitomizes the spirit of active living.

Despite his age, his zest for life remains undiminished, evident in his bustling schedule filled with community engagements and social activities. Raymond is a devoted church participant, but his dedication to his community extends far beyond the church doors.

Throughout the week, he joins his circle of friends for lively card games - his sharp wit keeping pace with his opponents. His selflessness truly shines in his tireless efforts to assist fellow seniors. Armed with his trusty car and a heart brimming with kindness, he chauffeurs them to various appointments. Even as he approaches his 10th decade, MacDougall remains the linchpin of social connectivity within our community. His knack for organizing ensures that there's never a dull moment, arranging get-togethers where laughter and camaraderie flow freely.

His warm hospitality and genuine interest in others create an inclusive atmosphere where friendships flourish and memories are made.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: Speaker, may I make an introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, go ahead, please.

TONY INCE: In the gallery opposite to me are - as I call their names, will they please stand and accept the warm welcome of the House: Carlotta Weymouth and Carolyn Fowler. Both women are very strong members in the African Nova Scotian community. (Applause)

[2:00 p.m.]

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

The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

BOOK ON BLACK WOMEN: NEW EDITION - RECOG.

HON. TONY INCE: Speaker, I rise today to highlight a new book entitled *Black Women Who Made a Difference to Nova Scotia, Special Edition, Sharing Wisdom Stories Inspired by Life Lessons*.

The oral history narratives in this collection were inspired by the original Black women who made a difference in Nova Scotia. Published in 2007 for the Congress of Black Woman, Canada, Preston and Area Chapter, the original book included stories from 56 women who celebrated their community leadership initiatives.

In 2020, the President of the Congress of Black Women Preston and Area Chapter, Carlotta Weymouth, and the area representative, Dolly Williams, asked Carolyn Fowler to work with them to coordinate an initiative to augment the stories of women from the original book. In this special edition, we remember those who are deceased. We say their names to celebrate them as women who have made historic contributions throughout the province in historic Black communities. They continue to pave the way for us as their descendants.

Featured in this new, special edition are, among others, Connie Glasgow-White, Dr. Clotilda Adessa Coward Douglas Yakimchuk, Judge Corrine Sparks, Betty Thomas, and Carlotta Weymouth. The oral history of stories are in their authentic voices and offer another opportunity to expand and deepen our understanding of their lived experiences.

I encourage all Nova Scotians and my colleagues in this House to read this book, and support the voices of Black women in the province.

THE SPEAKER: Order. It is now 2:02 p.m. We will now begin the order of business, Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We will finish at 2:52 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: CARBON TAX DEAL - NEGOTIATE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: All three parties in this House stood with the governing party to say we did not want a hike to the carbon tax in our province. The Prime Minister has now written to premiers who are opposed to the carbon levy and said that the doors are open to negotiate a better deal.

The Prime Minister indicated that there are other jurisdictions in the country, like Quebec, British Columbia, and Northwest Territories, that have their own systems. Nova Scotia used to have its own system under the previous government until it was scrapped by this government.

Will the Premier please, on behalf of Nova Scotians who cannot handle the increase to the carbon tax - and the fact that he missed the opportunity the last time - will he make up for that, and take the Prime Minister up on this opportunity to negotiate a better deal for Nova Scotians that will cost them less at the pumps?

THE PREMIER: I completely reject the member's characterization of the situation. The member would know full well that what was negotiated back then was a temporary solution. There's only one group that can get rid of this federal tax, and that is the federal government. I would urge the member to stop the foolishness. The federal government is committed to a carbon tax. It's bad for Nova Scotians and he should stand up and say that to the federal government. It's bad for Nova Scotians and they should stop it. That's the only way it will stop.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The fact is that we did, and it didn't do anything because the Premier didn't do his job and negotiate a better deal for this province. The Premier has a real opportunity now, just like he had last time. If he cares so much about the impact that this has on the cost to Nova Scotians, he has an opportunity to take the Prime Minister up on his offer to negotiate a better deal, as B.C. and Quebec have done, as the Northwest Territories have done, and as Stephen McNeil did previously. Is the Premier just going to keep playing politics with this, or is he actually going to do his job and negotiate a better deal for Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: I would suggest that the tone of the member suggests that he is actually the one playing politics. Nova Scotians - all Canadians, in fact - know full well that the federal government is committed to a carbon tax, and there's no talking about it. We put a wonderful plan forward. It was actually called "Better than a carbon tax." Minister Guilbeault was in Nova Scotia recently, and he stood at a podium and said, "Well, if somebody else has a better idea, why don't they tell me what it is." It just confirmed to us that they never even looked at our plan, because they're not interested in anything but a carbon tax. The carbon tax is bad for Nova Scotians. That's the reality. That member should tell his friend the Prime Minister exactly that.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Let's start off today trying to respect everyone who's speaking. No chirping. It was really out of hand yesterday. Let's not waste any time today.

The honourable Leader of the Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Other governments have taken their role seriously and negotiated alternative deals with the federal government. Our previous government did the same. This Premier talks about his deal. We know, based on a FOIPOP, that they started slapping something together three weeks before the deadline of the federal backstop. Three weeks. Here's why the Premier wants a carbon tax in Nova Scotia, and why he won't negotiate an alternative. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

ZACH CHURCHILL: They want it so they can do this - so they can use it as a cudgel to attack Liberals, so they can play politics with it instead of doing their job for Nova Scotians and negotiating a better deal. That fact is on display every single day in this House. They'll lose their single greatest talking point if they negotiate a better deal. My question to the Premier is: Will he stop playing politics, do his job, be the bigger person here, and negotiate a better deal with Ottawa for Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: That member sat at the Cabinet table. He knows full well that this was always only a temporary solution. You know when the best time was to start negotiating? Right away, on Day 1. They sat in government and looked the other way. We won't look the other way. There's only one group of people in this Legislature who want a carbon tax, and that's the Liberals. It's called the Liberal carbon tax for a reason. It's not called the PC carbon tax.

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

PREM.: HOGAN COURT DEAL - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This morning, we heard in the Public Accounts Committee that not only will Nova Scotians be covering the capital costs incurred by Shannex and Hogan Court - including construction and mortgage costs - but we are also not requiring them to pay us for at least another two years. To me it sounds like the Premier delivered a great deal for Shannex instead of for Nova Scotians. Can the Premier explain, in light of this, how we can continue to insist that this was a good deal for Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: This is a good deal for Nova Scotians. I would double down, I would triple down, I would quadruple down, quintuple that - if I knew what was after that, I would do it as well, because this is a good deal for Nova Scotians. The system is the same as is in place for long-term care facilities in this province. More Nova Scotians will get in

more appropriate care facilities a lot quicker under this deal. I'm very proud of this deal. I'll stand beside it every day of the week.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Saying it doesn't make it true. The concept of transitional care is good. This deal is bad. The project has been doomed from the start. This government's secret deal-making involving confidentiality agreements, roundabout negotiating, and a developer being in a "very advantageous position" to minimize the cost to acquire the property and maximize the cost paid by the province is clear.

Now history is repeating itself. The sale to Shannex was announced as a break-even for the Province, but we heard this morning that the Province won't get paid until 2026, at least, and the government has already allocated up to \$20 million in spending for the Shannex project under an early works agreement. We're not getting paid; we're paying more.

It's hard not to notice who the actual winner is. For a government that insists on picking winners and losers, why won't he pick Nova Scotia as a winner for once?

THE PREMIER: The reality is that more Nova Scotians will get in beds with more appropriate levels of care a lot quicker - almost two years quicker. A hundred and seventy-eight beds. This is a good deal for Nova Scotians. The reality is that the NDP is negative on every single thing that happens in this Chamber. They were mad when we bought it, they were mad when we sold it, and they'll be mad about the next thing that happens in this province too.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Let's talk about timelines. When it was first announced, it was reported that this government wanted to open Hogan Court this year with 75 to 80 beds, and I'll table that. That was in 2023. The Bayers Lake facility was supposed to be completed by 2025 with 200 beds, and I'll table that. Despite the growing need and the urgency, Nova Scotians are now being offered at least 100 fewer beds and a timeline that is months if not years behind schedule, including a months-long pause where nothing happened while the government negotiated their way out of the mess they had created. My question to the Premier is: When will the people waiting for these 285 promised beds see them completed, and why are we getting less health care slower from this government?

THE PREMIER: The first patients could be moving in there by later this year, and that's a lot quicker than it would have been. I know that the NDP is against any arrangement where the private companies in this province are involved. I know they just disagree with working with private companies. We don't disagree with that. We see opportunities for Nova Scotians to get things done faster, more efficiently, and better for Nova Scotians. The NDP can be negative as much as they want on this, and the Liberals can pile it on private companies as well, but we work with whoever will get things done for Nova Scotia and we're proud to do it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ECC.: BETTER CARBON PRICING DEAL - NEGOTIATE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The Premier says he'll work with anybody to get things done for Nova Scotians, but he won't work with the federal government to negotiate a better carbon pricing model for the people of this province. The Premier knew what he was doing when he scrapped the cap and trade system that was negotiated and legislated under the former Premier, the member for Timberlea-Prospect.

The federal government told the Premier this. They warned him, You are proposing to end Nova Scotia's cap and trade program with no replacement. The Premier continued to do that without having a plan, triggered the backstop, and we see evidence in this Chamber every single day. We saw it in Preston. They did it so they could put signs up saying "Down with the Liberal carbon tax" because the Premier puts politics ahead of what he needs to do for people in this province. The Premier now has an opportunity to negotiate a better deal for Nova Scotia like the previous government did, like other jurisdictions did.

THE SPEAKER: Question?

ZACH CHURCHILL: Will he take it?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: This province, the Province of Nova Scotia, has been clear with Ottawa: We do not need a carbon tax. We don't need a carbon tax because we have 28 climate change goals legislated. We have the first climate change plan since 2009. Those two parties, when they were in power, did not have a climate change plan. We have 68 goals to guide us over the next five years, and just in the last year I have approved 10 onshore wind farms that will deliver clean, affordable, renewable power to Nova Scotians. That's better than a carbon tax.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm glad the minister mentioned that, because those are 10 years away... (interruptions).

THE SPEAKER: Order. Okay, from now on I'm going to recognize you and I'm going to ask you to step out. It's not fair. We will now begin, so keep that in mind. I will ask you to step out from now on if I see you chirping or hear you chirping.

ZACH CHURCHILL: This government is burning as much coal as they were two and a half years ago. The wind plan that the minister mentioned is at least a decade away. It is not going to do anything to bring relief to taxpayers right now in this province. The Prime Minister had extended a hand. The Premier, who says he'll work with anybody, is proving today that he won't, because he thinks it benefits him politically.

My question to the Premier is: Will he do his duty to the people of this province and negotiate a better deal for Nova Scotians, just like the previous government did, just like other jurisdictions are doing currently across this country? Will he do that?

[2:15 p.m.]

TIMOTHY HALMAN: I say this respectfully: The Opposition - there's a credibility gap when it comes to this issue, and I'll tell you why. This was the first file that landed on my desk. We did not kick this issue down the road. We confronted it, and we told Ottawa we don't need a carbon tax, because we are in the process of transforming how we produce and use energy. By 2027, according to the Clean Power Plan, based on the direction that we're going in with the onshore wind and solar, we'll be at 70 per cent renewables - three years away - to our target of 80 per cent by 2030. We are leading on climate action. We want Ottawa to partner with us on those initiatives.

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

ECC: BETTER CARBON PRICE DEAL - NEGOTIATE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: This government hasn't produced one megawatt of new renewable energy in close to three years that they've been in government. Yes, somebody does have a credibility issue here. It's the Premier and his government. You want to talk about credibility: The previous Liberal government negotiated and fought hard to not bring a carbon tax to Nova Scotia. We had a cap and trade system for four years. The Premier thinks it's funny. We actually did our duty. We didn't just play politics and run ads with taxpayers' money or pretend that we're doing something while we sat back and did nothing. The Ecology Action Centre even said this government is "playing a high stakes game of chicken with the federal government and betting that the impacts of the federal carbon tax will benefit them politically." Again, we see the evidence every single day here.

Will this government do what Ottawa is asking? Will they do what they have an opportunity to do: negotiate a better deal for Nova Scotians that reduces the price of carbon on the pumps?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: There is no game of chicken taking place here. What's happening is a strategic implementation of climate change policies that are embedded in legislation. We're the only province in Canada with legislated climate change goals.

Our first climate change plan since 2009 is having a real positive impact on adaptation and mitigation in communities throughout Nova Scotia. We have an Output-Based Pricing System that holds large emitters accountable while keeping rates stable. Not

only Nova Scotia but the entire Atlantic Region is united against the Liberal carbon tax. I encourage the Opposition to join us in that unity against the Liberal carbon tax.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We've had goals legislated since 2007 in this province. The government takes credit for it like it's never happened before. This is the issue right now. We're seeing it on display here. The Premier actually has an opportunity to do what the previous government did: to negotiate a better deal that has less of an impact on everyday consumers, charges big polluters and redistributes that money to everyday Nova Scotians.

The Minister has said that they've stabilized rates. He said that they have a climate action plan. They haven't produced one megawatt of renewable energy in this province in three years. They refuse to negotiate a better deal for Nova Scotians. My question to the Premier is: Do you like having a carbon tax so much just so you can beat Liberals over the head with it?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Governments always have many tools and options before them. As a government, we have decided that a carbon tax on the consumer side is completely not needed in a jurisdiction that has demonstrated consistent climate action over many years and many governments in different iterations. Therefore, that cap and trade system never functioned the way it was supposed to. We know that now. We know that was a stopgap put in place by the previous government. They know that fully well.

We dealt with the issue head-on. We are moving Nova Scotia forward with strong climate action and by transforming how we produce and use energy in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: CAP AND TRADE REMOVAL - REVERSE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I say a program that raised over \$100 million to fight climate change, that this government is spending, and limited costs to 1 cent a litre worked pretty well. In fact, this government has triggered the carbon levy by removing cap and trade legislation. This stuff about "naturally expiring" is bogus. Why would they have to remove the legislation for that to happen?

I want to table what the member is talking about. He's talking about a compliance period from 2019 to 2022 that went past the last mandate. There are three other provinces there that have their compliance mandates. That's how it works with cap and trade. The ascending carbon benchmarks required new caps that went down.

My question to the Minister: Will he finally admit that, when given the opportunity, their PowerPoint presentation extolling the virtues of the tariffs previously already in place without a price on pollution, while removing cap and trade, opened the door to the carbon levy in Nova Scotia? When will he get back to the drawing board?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: We don't agree that a price on pollution on the consumer side is necessary. That's because we have a very strong plan to guide us in the transformation on how we produce and use energy. We were crystal clear with Ottawa as soon as we formed government that the carbon tax is not necessary in a jurisdiction like ours. We are in the process of transforming to clean renewables. That transformation is going to be expedited with the approval of 10 onshore wind farms. You just wait. Once we get going with the offshore wind, as the Premier has indicated, we will emerge in the years ahead as a clean, renewable powerhouse in Confederation.

IAIN RANKIN: The problem is that pricing pollution is the law of the land. The day that they brought out this presentation that could only be described as a PR stunt, they basically told Nova Scotia - and I called it - that a carbon levy is coming to Nova Scotia. I want to table the agreement, that hopefully the minister can read, that says it's a requirement and cap and trade is still eligible. Cap and trade is challenging in small provinces, which is why we put in legislation the option to link to other jurisdictions if we have liquidity issues or new entrants came into Nova Scotia.

Does the minister not agree that lowering the cap to align with the \$65 per tonne - now \$80 per tonne, as of April - would be saving Nova Scotians at least 10 cents a litre at the gas pump?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, we've been clear with Ottawa that the price on carbon on the consumer side, as it escalates every year - we disagree with that. We feel that in a jurisdiction like Nova Scotia, our residents, our municipalities, and the Province are taking very strong climate action.

The former Premier and former Minister of Environment know fully well how stringent and almost dogmatic the federal rules are on pricing carbon. That's why we said no to this. We don't need that to alter the Nova Scotia economy to clean renewables. What we need is support on our legislated targets, support on our onshore wind, support for the green hydrogen sector, and support for our Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund. That's climate action. That's not a PR stunt. That produces real results for Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: PERSONAL INFORMATION DISCLOSURE - EXPLAIN

SUSAN LEBLANC: Late last night, under the cover of darkness, government members discussed at length the mounting concerns about this government's proposed new approach to the disclosure of personal health information, which physicians have warned will fundamentally change the nature of the patient-doctor relationship and potentially break people's trust in their physicians by allowing unrestricted disclosure of deeply private information. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness explain: What is so important that requires this government to play with fire with our personal information?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I said yesterday, there are already requirements in place for the Minister of Health and Wellness that that individual has to meet under the Personal Health Information Act already. This is about getting information in the hands of Nova Scotians so that they can have their record in their hands and they can navigate the health care system. We have seen this be hugely successful in other jurisdictions.

We have a responsibility to manage the health care system. We receive aggregate data from our hospitals, from our clinics, from all over, but we don't have aggregate data from our primary care. That's what this is about: managing a system, managing it well, managing it appropriately, and giving people access to their patient records.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The government has indicated that these changes are needed to advance the work of the YourHealthNS app - has anyone heard of that app, by the way? - which in part is being run by an Ontario-based company that was awarded this work in an untendered \$50 million five-year contract last year. It's recently come to light that this company has been facing financial challenges and was recently acquired by an investment firm. Last week in Estimates, I asked the minister about the sale and was told by the minister that the contract would be assumed by the buyer. Can the minister confirm: Has anyone from the department been in contact with the new owner of people's private health information, and what does all this mean for Nova Scotia's health data?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I want to assure Nova Scotians that we are absolutely in compliance with all of the privacy laws that are in place. We want people to have access to their health records. We want people to be able to be their advocates in the health care system. People are saying, as we hear all the time from the feedback on the app, We want more. We want to know where our records are. We want to know what our bloodwork says. We want to know about our diagnostic imaging.

People are asking for this information. Through this legislation and through the work that is happening with the Nova Scotia Health Authority and the individuals who are responsible for privacy to support us in granting that request, there is nothing to fear for Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: ENERGY COST INCREASES - LIMIT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: The answers we're getting today aren't sufficient about onshore wind and hydrogen talking points. Of course, the answer is no surprise, given the PC opposition in 2017 voted against cap and trade that limited the costs for Nova Scotians. That fund raised over \$100 million, which this government is now out of since the cap and trade is cancelled. Had they been in government then, the impact would have already been the same as we have seen in other provinces and escalating each year. My question to the

minister is: Why can't the government lay out the case, as they are trying to do in this Legislature, why Nova Scotia already has some price signals, regulation, and our unique circumstances, and set new caps to limit the cost increases to two or three cents per litre?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, as we transform how we produce and use energy in this province, the Minister of Natural Resources, the Premier, and I are always mindful of the impact of that transformation on ratepayers - on all Nova Scotians. We are in a period of profound transition, and that transition comes out of complete necessity. Climate change requires that we alter how we produce and use energy. However, in a time such as this - in a time of record inflation - we've been clear with Ottawa for almost three years that a carbon tax on the consumer side is completely unnecessary in a jurisdiction that is doing so much and has done a lot over the years to transform how we produce and use energy.

IAIN RANKIN: We said the same thing in government, that it was unnecessary; somehow, we negotiated a deal. If the government truly knew how to negotiate the best deal for affordability and for climate change, they could have stood their ground and negotiated on the merits and left the legislation as it was - but no, put politics before people. Leave the cap and trade and say to Ottawa, If this isn't good enough, tell us where the caps need to be.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister table one document, anything at all, that shows that the federal government did reject any new descending cap and trade caps that would have protected the sticker shock? Can the minister show any of his work to prove that there is no other option than the highest net increases at the gas pump in the whole country?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, Ottawa is clear that the cap and trade system established by the previous government was in compliance with the new, strict, federal regulations on pricing carbon. Therefore, the Premier and I, and our team, delivered the Better Than Carbon Tax plan, which laid out our vision over the next several years to deliver climate action for Nova Scotians: 28 legislated targets; a climate plan that has 68 strong goals and is being implemented throughout the province; and the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, which supports local climate action. We have a lot of momentum on climate action - we have a lot of momentum on this - and we don't need a carbon tax.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: WESTERN CLIMATE INITIATIVE - SUPPORT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Nova Scotia has been a member of the Western Climate Initiative since 2018. This is one of the largest trading systems in the world. It is a group that collaborates with independent jurisdictions, working to identify, evaluate, and

implement emissions trading policies to tackle climate change. This is a comprehensive effort to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and spur investment in cleaner energy. The centrepiece of the plan is a regional cap and trade program, and the previous Liberal government joined this group.

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change extended the agreement to March 31, 2024, yet the provincial government was actively opposing the principles on working together to tackle climate change. Oddly, Nova Scotia continued to chair this initiative even as late as last year - I'll table that - in their August 2023 board meeting. My question to the minister is: Why did we chair this group for WCI after this government fought so hard against the principles behind the Western Climate Initiative?

[2:30 p.m.]

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: As I said, in any decision a government makes, there's always ongoing analysis. In the end, it was determined by our government that we are a leader on sustainable development; we are a leader on climate action. It's not only Nova Scotia that's united against this carbon tax; the entire Atlantic region is against this, not only calling for the pause of the carbon tax but to repeal the carbon tax. I encourage the Opposition members of this House to join the Nova Scotia government in calling for the repeal of the Liberal carbon tax.

IAIN RANKIN: I'm disappointed the minister won't show his work on how they attempted to negotiate a deal or work with any jurisdiction, whether it's the Western Climate Initiative. There are cap and trade systems working right now in the northeastern states. Now he's talking about the Atlantic ministers. I wonder, can I ask the minister if he's ever approached any of his Atlantic counterparts to talk about the potential for linking instead of going forward with a PowerPoint presentation that he knows is not compliant with the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change? This is an opportunity to get to work with our Atlantic partners, reduce gas prices, and continue to fight climate change and raise revenue.

TIMOTHY HALMAN: In the Summer of 2022, in the beautiful territory of the Yukon, you saw in the Yukon at a federal-provincial-territorial meeting the formation of the Atlantic alliance. The Atlantic alliance at that time confronted the federal minister, and you know what we said? No to the Liberal carbon tax.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member Kings South.

FTB: HST ON CARBON TAX - REMOVE

HON. KEITH IRVING: We know this government continues to try to blame everybody else when it comes to carbon tax. We also know this government loves to tax Nova Scotians more than any other province in the country. They want to squeeze every

penny out of Nova Scotians to fund their mismanagement of this government. In Nova Scotia, this government puts HST on the carbon tax. My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: Can the minister tell Nova Scotians what the Province collects from the carbon tax?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: The carbon tax goes back to the government that made it the law, and that's the federal government. I can also tell you the carbon tax is not working. We have numbers at the Department of Finance that show that, despite the increase in price at the pump, people are actually buying more fuel per capita in this province. The carbon tax doesn't work, and it doesn't provide options for people to move away from fossil fuels.

KEITH IRVING: I took the budget, did some quick calculations, and this government is collecting \$32 million of HST from the carbon tax. Thirty-two million dollars. No wonder they don't want to get rid of the carbon tax. The federal government, through the carbon tax, returns most of it to Nova Scotians through a quarterly payment. What is the Province doing with the \$32 million? They're keeping it. My question for the minister: Will you axe the tax and stop collecting HST on the carbon tax?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Finance.

ALLAN MACMASTER: I can't wait until they axe the tax in Ottawa. If the current government in Ottawa doesn't come to their senses and axe it, there will be another government that will axe it. I know the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change - this is how out of touch that government is in Ottawa - recently made the comment that we shouldn't put any more money into roads. How well do you think a comment like that would play in our province here in Nova Scotia? I can tell you roads are one of the No. 1 concerns of my constituents. My constituents don't want a carbon tax when they're filling up at the pump.

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

DCS: DISABILITIES POLICY - IMPLEMENT

KENDRA COOMBES: On November 4th, at the Rebuilding HOPE Conference, the Premier offered what he called an unreserved apology to persons with disabilities for what he called the Province's deeply shameful treatment. I'll table that. To the Minister of Community Services: Does this government still stand by that historic apology offered to persons with disabilities?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Yes, of course we do. It's not just about words, it's about actions. That's why in this budget we're seeing over \$100 million to go toward the Remedy. We're going to continue to invest in people with disabilities, and we're going to continue to give them choices. That's what it's all about.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm glad the minister and I are in agreement that it's also about actions, rather than just words. This government has a court-mandated legal obligation, as Year 1 of the historic Human Rights Review and Remedy for the Findings of Systemic Discrimination Against Nova Scotians with Disabilities ends on March 30th, to set further commitments from this government. Before March 30th, this government must set dates for achieving and actually implementing the "no new admissions" policy to facilities funded by the Disability Support Program. Will the government stand by this public commitment and legal obligation and implement this policy within the next four days?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We're going to work with our providers on the ground. You know, it's not just about "court-mandated." We keep hearing that from that side of the aisle, that it's court-mandated. You know what wasn't court-mandated? The \$300 extra a month we gave people with disabilities. Do you know what else wasn't court-mandated? Indexing of income assistance. These are things we know are going to help everyone right across Nova Scotia. We're going to continue to do what's right for people with disabilities, and we're going to continue to carry on.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

FTB: HST ON CARBON TAX - STOP

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I've come to think that no one benefits more from having a carbon tax in Nova Scotia than this Premier and this government. It is their chief talking point. They hide behind all their failures by issuing this talking point. They have an opportunity now to actually negotiate a different deal for Nova Scotians. They're not going to do that, by the sound of things, and we have to wonder why. I think it's because they think it's politically valuable to them. As the member for Kings South said, they're actually collecting tax on top of that tax. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has said he cares about affordability and lowering the cost of fuel for Nova Scotians. Will he do the right thing, negotiate a better deal with Ottawa, and stop collecting HST on top of the carbon tax?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, the Liberal Opposition here is talking about what a great deal they had arranged with the federal government before we came to office. If it was such a great deal, why did it only last three years? Because it was term-limited. It had nothing to do with what they had to do while they were in government. It had to do with windmills that were brought on by the NDP when they were in office. They cost Nova Scotians on their power rates. That became an election issue at the time. I remember there was talk by the McNeil government before they came into office saying they were going to get rid of the monopoly of Nova Scotia Power. It was a big political issue. What was in place came to an end. What should come to an end is the carbon tax.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister can point fingers and lay blame but look at the facts. For eight years, with a provincial Liberal government in this House, we had stable power rates, and we did not have a carbon tax while we did our part to fight climate change and price pollution. This minister, this Premier, have an opportunity to negotiate a better deal with Ottawa. There has been a hand extended. Here we see them again prioritizing a political fight that they think plays to their advantage, and which has played to their advantage. They've hidden behind all their failures by pointing to the carbon tax, which people are rightly upset about. They have an opportunity now to do things to actually change that, negotiate a better deal and actually stop charging their provincial HST on top of the carbon tax. My question to the Premier is: Will he do both of those things?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, we're not doing this to the Liberal Party; they're doing it to themselves. It's pretty obvious. If it actually was something they worked and believed in, you could say, Well, credit to them. This is something that's actually working. But it's not working. Nova Scotians are buying more gasoline today with a carbon tax per capita than they were before the carbon tax came in. It is not working. It doesn't help people move away from fossil fuels. It is destroying the Liberal party. We are not doing that. They're doing it to themselves.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DED: BETTER CARBON DEAL - NEGOTIATE

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, according to a survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, two in 10 small businesses have no confidence that the government is doing things to help support them as they grow. I will table that. (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: This is a question for the Minister of Economic Development. Would the Minister of Economic Development help put some confidence back in Nova Scotia's small businesses by encouraging her members to negotiate a better deal on carbon with the federal government?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: When it comes to Nova Scotia's small businesses - with whom I check in regularly, both individually and sector-based organizations, and yes, with the CFIB - there are a number of persistent problems and a number of persistent issues. You're going to say, but the topic's been brought up by the other side today: What are some of those issues? The pressure of the carbon tax. But before that, the pressure of the Canada Emergency Business Account loans. We begged the Opposition to join us in asking our federal colleagues and they refused.

FRED TILLEY: Again we see finger-pointing, but what we don't realize is when you point your finger, there are three other fingers pointed back at you. It's up to this minister to help Nova Scotians and to help Nova Scotian businesses to weather this storm. Can we please ask this minister to work with her members to propose a better deal for Nova Scotians, Nova Scotian businesses, and help improve their confidence in this government?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I will note my late granddad used to note how often I talked with my hands - that that was the French in me - but I did not lift a finger to point. That is because I am working with this government, with my colleague the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, on a solid plan for better than a carbon tax. Meanwhile, once again, I will reference the remarks of the Senior Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada who, after three days in Nova Scotia, remarked on the incredible optimism of the business community for the way forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: NURSING RETENTION BONUS - TABLE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. On December 4, 2023, the Premier announced that travel nurses working for Nova Scotia Health, IWK, and government-funded long-term care homes can only be hired for a maximum of 180 days a year. The purpose was to manage costs and encourage nurses to take permanent positions. It is great in theory, but will only work if there are enough nurses and the working conditions are good - and neither of those conditions are reality. This is going to hurt hospitals like Cumberland Regional where travel nurses are essential in keeping our ICU and our Emergency room open.

Can the minister share: What is the plan to ensure that critical nursing services continue to be available after June 12th which, by my calculations, is 180 days after December 15th, when the new rules come into place?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We certainly do appreciate the work that happens in the province by travel nurses, but we know that not only in Nova Scotia but across this country, travel nurses and travel nurse companies are costing an incredible amount of money to the system. We could reinvest that money into our own provincial system into other things.

We are working very hard with the unions, with the employers, and throughout the university system to ensure that we have enough nurses. We are working with the College of Registered Nurses as well to make sure that we have a number of individuals who are coming into it. We know it's a tough target, but we have to hold people accountable. We know that we need to increase the workforce, and we have invested millions of dollars in order to do that.

[2:45 p.m.]

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My concern is what if we don't have enough nurses by that 180-day time period? What will happen? Our doctors that are running our ICUs and our emergency departments have come to me very concerned and worried that they're going to have to close beds - beds that we cannot afford to have closed. I know that there was the nursing retention bonus that helped many nurses. But I continue to hear from nurses who are upset that they didn't receive that, and we can't seem to find any rules or a policy on who qualifies for that retention bonus.

Can the minister table the policy for who qualifies for the nursing retention bonus? We've been told to direct people to their managers, but managers also don't have that information.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Any nurse who's employed in the public sector can reach out. They would have received an e-mail actually, because I have had several people reach out to me as well. They actually have an e-mail that explains who benefits, or who is able to participate in the retention bonus.

There are a number of initiatives that are under way. We know that this timeline is tight around the use of travel nurses. I have confidence in the employers, both in the continuing care sector and Nova Scotia Health Authority, to address the issue. We continue to work with them and monitor, as well as the unions and the college.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: SCHOOL VIOLENCE - ADDRESS

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. There may be no group of people better-positioned to speak to the state of Nova Scotia's schools than our teachers. They work on the ground with our children, and have been warning the public for years of the worsening issue of school violence. As the NSTU recently said, teachers know first-hand the devastating impact of school violence on children, school staff, and their families. Can the minister explain then why her government colleagues are preventing teachers from appearing before an upcoming Public Accounts Committee on this particular issue?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I would ask the member for Halifax Needham to rephrase her question. You cannot include any type of committee business in your question. I'll give you an opportunity to stand quickly in your place and rephrase the question, please.

SUZY HANSEN: I will rephrase the question. Does the minister think that the NSTU would have a public platform speaking in the committee - in government?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Let me be clear: we understand and value the importance of the voices of our teachers, of our educators, across the province with respect to all matters on education, and particularly with respect to safety. That is why we formed a leadership table that includes NSTU and PSAANS to deal with the exact question of safety. That's why I continue to meet with those parties on a regular basis: to address safety in schools.

That's also why I've talked to teachers across the province, thousands of teachers, meeting with them in meetings - over 80 staff meetings already - where we talk about issues around safety, and that informs the work we're doing on safety. For example, we've spoken with Brooklyn District Elementary School, and they've identified the need to review our code of conduct, which we're doing as part of this safety work.

SUZY HANSEN: Not only can teachers shed important light on the safety and well-being of students and staff, the issue of school violence gets to the heart of challenges in recruitment and retention of teachers. Forty-two per cent of teachers who have recently considered quitting indicated this was because of rising levels of school violence. The NSTU is now urging this government to reconsider. My question to the minister is: Does the minister believe that the deputy minister knows the issues better than the NSTU teachers who are on the ground?

BECKY DRUHAN: I do really appreciate this opportunity to clarify the confusion around this issue and around the question of including NSTU and teachers in this discussion. The Public Accounts Committee reviews reports of the Auditor General, and the Auditor General recommends witnesses at that committee. I think that's important to understand.

That being said, we know and value the importance of teachers speaking to us, and we're working in conjunction with and on the advice of teachers around safety in schools. That is why we are supporting families to be more engaged, because we've heard from schools like Avon View, Hilden, and Islands Consolidated about the need to include families in this work. That's why we are improving incident reporting. I've heard from our students about the need to improve incident reporting.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

ECC: BETTER CARBON DEAL - NEGOTIATE

BRAEDON CLARK: I'd like us all to snap back to reality here, because we've been inside the upside-down world of the carbon tax for the last 50 minutes. I just want to finish here and remind everybody where we started, which is that the Prime Minister has asked seven premiers - including this Premier - if their governments will negotiate a new and better system than the carbon tax. My question to the Minister of Environment and

Climate Change is: Are they going to do that, or would that be too inconvenient for their political narrative?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: We have been crystal clear with Ottawa that we do not need a carbon tax on the consumer side - a tax that doesn't do anything for the environment. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has indicated that people still drive. It has been in effect in this province for a year now and all it has had is a punitive impact on the pocketbooks of Nova Scotians. What we will move forward with, though, is the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, the Nova Scotia Climate Plan, our Output-based Pricing System, and transforming how we produce and use energy in Nova Scotia, with or without Ottawa.

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private Members' Public Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 450.

Bill No. 450 - Assessment Act (amended).

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: I move second reading of Bill No. 450. I do so proudly on behalf of at least 151 families that lost their homes in last year's wildfire in Upper Tantallon-Hammonds Plains.

I will preface my remarks with this: There has been a lot of work, outreach, time, and effort that has gone into an attempt to advocate for this change. There has been correspondence extended to all members of the House - multiple pieces of correspondence that have been extended to the minister and his office - making folks aware of just how impactful the change that I brought before the House today could be for families that experience a disaster, such as a wildfire, a flood, or a hurricane.

The intention behind this action is to justly show empathy, consideration, and financial support to folks who, through no fault of their own, are being faced with the responsibility of reconstructing their homes after a terrible tragedy such as the wildfire that we saw last Summer. I know that in all that we do, we try to the best of our ability to make the most of situations, even when they're most unfortunate. I know that remarks were made around the House today about doing just that as a result of the mass casualty that happened a couple of years ago today. In that spirit, I hope that members will, in fact, take that into consideration: how to do better for Nova Scotians even though we've experienced a terrible tragedy.

The problem that we're trying to address is that the Assessment Act does not exclude reconstruction after a disaster such as a wildfire, flood, or hurricane in its definition of "new construction." And the result of this, the impacts for those of my community members who have lost their home in a wildfire: Their property taxes are going to go up. It's obvious, and it's documented. It's actually happening. There's one family that has returned to their home, thank goodness, and has experienced a 29 per cent increase in their taxes. There's another that's experiencing an increase of 38 per cent.

This is because, contrary to what the minister has expressed, the PVSC has limitations. They have to operate within the framework that is established by the minister through legislation. They have agreed to move ahead with one protection to protect the percentage differential between the fair market assessment and the capped assessment, which is fine. However, we're still going to see them experience an increase in their taxes, because that differential protection does not go far enough.

What we're asking for is to go back to the pre-event, pre-fire capped assessment. We know, as the minister has referenced, that there was also a 15 per cent reduction that was established to show some appreciation for the situation and the state of the properties that are in that area, but that is applied to every single property owner. It does not consider the fact that some of those people who are going to be receiving that 15 per cent have total losses.

I will reiterate: The conclusion is that those who have been victimized by a wildfire in our community, through no fault of their own, are going to be paying more property taxes. The minister and this government have the ability to do something about it.

As I understand it, at the time that this program came into place, the purpose of using the term "new construction" had to do with properties that were adding to their existing home or setting up another detached building on the property. That's to reflect an increase to the footprint, an expansion of the home. That makes sense. But what it doesn't include is consideration for the fact that if someone loses their home through no fault of their own in a disaster, that should not - in my opinion, and in the opinion of close to 700 people who signed a petition this weekend - that definition of "new construction" should

not include homes that have been reconstructed as a result of a wildfire or a disaster situation.

I need to be specific, because the purpose of this - the use of the word “reconstruction” - is to ensure - and that’s part of the actual motion - the purpose of using the word “reconstruction” - it’s used to ensure that folks are rebuilding very, very closely to what they had, to almost the exact point. We’re not talking about expanding what they had; we’re not talking about building something far more glamorous. We are talking about a reconstruction, and that should be noted for the record as the intended purpose of this bill.

[3:00 p.m.]

I will table these, but I reference that all members of the House got a copy of the letter from my community members. I will also table an infographic laid out there which shows the impact that this has on folks who have to reconstruct their homes, who have lost their homes in comparison to some who have made repairs, and just how significant, to the tens of thousands of dollars over a period of the next 10 years, the increase is going to be for them.

The conclusion that we, perhaps, are leading toward - I referenced earlier, we’ve got one family dealing with a 29 per cent increase, another family dealing with a 38 per cent increase. These increases are not ones that they’d planned for, and they’re not ones that they may be capable to withstand. For a government that is so focused on the issues of housing and homelessness, if these folks are not able to continue to live where they are because their property taxes and their costs have gone up so substantially, they may be forced to find other arrangements and may be forced into finding whatever is left on the market as we speak. We want to make sure that they have the ability to stay in these homes.

In Question Period yesterday, in a follow-up interview, the minister used words like “the reality is” and “I know it’s a challenging situation.” I think he appreciates to some extent the weight of what has happened in the province and in our community. The reality is that he has the ability - I don’t even need to be here debating this piece of legislation if the minister takes it upon himself to make the change through regulation to allow the PVSC to restore the pre-fire cap.

He continually makes references to the municipality’s responsibility. This has been a PVSC policy for some time. While there are roles and responsibilities that the municipality plays, and this has been a long-standing policy of the PVSC, it is my ask on behalf of the people whom I represent and Nova Scotians down the road who went through a similar set of circumstances that we don’t continue to do things the way that they’ve always been done. That answer is not good enough. That does not show that we have a strong sense of empathy; it does not show that we - I’ve heard it used before - in true Bluenoser spirit.

We have an opportunity to make a change as legislators. The minister has an ability to make the change on his own but has seemingly decided that he's okay to say, It's not my responsibility, this is a long-standing policy, and we're okay watching the victims of a tragedy such as the wildfire continue to be victimized through this unfair taxation limitation.

What's going to happen here? The Province, the government, at the end of the day, are going to collect more tax dollars on the backs of folks who have lost everything. Some of them have lost beloved pets; they've lost family heirlooms; they've lost - I spoke with a gentleman yesterday who was very passionate about maintaining his yard, and the state that he had it to before the fire took him many years to get it to that point. These are things that are very hard, take time, effort. Many of these things cannot be replaced.

It is my hope that, as was stated in his interview yesterday - through the Speaker - the minister said, Well, they're going to have a new home. Yes, that is true, but it will be as similar as you can get to a skeleton look from what they had before. It won't have all those family heirlooms. It won't have all those personalized touches that people work so hard to get. It comes, in many cases, at great personal expense, after fighting with insurance companies to try to get coverage for whatever you possibly can. There are many families out there who are going to take a loss. I would also add that there are families who have had to move because they couldn't afford to go back. They've got contaminated properties that they have to restore. The costs are far more considerable than I think we even realized to date because investigations are still ongoing.

One of the ways that we as legislators can show this community and these people and future disaster victims that we care, that we are willing to step up for people when they're going through a tremendously difficult time, in true Bluenoser fashion - we have an opportunity to make a change here that will show people that when they speak up - as I said, this weekend nearly 700 people took time out of their day to travel to sign this petition. That's only a couple of days, and remember, these people have neighbours. They have friends and families in neighbouring communities.

There is an impact we can make to learn from this awful situation that happened in Hammonds Plains and Upper Tantallon and do something that is for the better good, that demonstrates our ability as legislators to take an issue from a problem and make a solution that is certainly going to have a positive impact on people who have been through a devastating situation. I challenge the minister to use his power, use his authority to make a directive to get this accomplished for Nova Scotians.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to thank the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville for bringing this forward. I'm happy to speak on Bill No. 450.

I just want to go back and, I guess, nerd out a little bit on property tax cap for a second. As many of you will know, the property tax cap is on most, if not all, of our homes. It goes on the first year of a sale after that first year. It also gets removed, and what most people think happens is that it's only during sales that the property tax cap is removed from your home, or should you build another structure on your home, that part is also not capped. What is not often known to people until it happens to them is that this cap gets removed if your house has been destroyed by fire, by hurricanes, by floods, natural disasters. So many people are unaware of the circumstance that their cap is taken off. When they go to rebuild, and they're rebuilding from a fire, often what they find is the shocking sticker price.

I know in my riding a number of years ago, a constituent had a devastating fire. The house was gone. They rebuilt, and they rebuilt in the same structure as the house. They didn't go bigger. They stayed in that same frame they had. A year after they were back in their home, the shock of their property tax - because the cap had been removed - they were shocked by it, and they could barely afford to stay in that home.

I had a few other constituents whom I heard from when I became the councillor for the area who also had this problem after a fire. And they rebuilt. They didn't go bigger, because they couldn't afford to go bigger. They didn't go longer - nothing. They stayed in that same format because that's what they could afford. Again, the sticker shock that they got when their property taxes came in because the cap was removed, because it gets removed with new builds.

This is what has occurred on multiple occasions. I keep seeing the minister tell me that that's not true, but my constituents have faced this. All our constituents, at one point or another, who have had fires in homes that they've owned and whose homes had to be completely rebuilt, have faced this. We cannot keep denying the reality that people are facing in this House. We need to stop denying people's reality that they are telling us that they are facing.

During the wildfires last year, our province saw a record of 25,000 hectares of land and 200 homes burned. Given the scale of damage, there are now long-term consequences to Nova Scotians. Having your home destroyed by a fire, by a flood, by a hurricane, is a deeply traumatic experience, and has long-term consequences both financially and mentally.

Associated costs related to the increased property tax should not be a long-term consequence we add to those who have already faced such a deep impact. Nova Scotians who've had homes destroyed by wildfires or natural disasters should not have increased costs that just don't go away. Sure, after they've rebuilt, the cap will go back on within a year, but it's at a higher rate. It really is. That's why this bill seems common-sense. It makes absolute sense. People should not be financially punished or have to sell their land or their home and move because of a natural disaster, or a wildfire that somebody set.

This bill would ensure that Nova Scotians who've had to rebuild after these wildfires would not see this increase in their property taxes be on what their original cap was. To not have something in place is deeply unfair. It really is. It's deeply unfair to any of our constituents who have faced this, especially after what we've seen this past year or so.

[3:15 p.m.]

This type of bill would allow impacted Nova Scotians to keep more of their money in their pockets, to do more with it. This money could help facilitate the long healing process that is much needed in the aftermath of such trauma. My riding has now faced hurricanes. People have lost homes, have faced a 200-centimetre tsunami of snow that actually took out roofs and homes of people. I deeply feel the impact that the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville feels. I completely understand what he is feeling and what the residents are feeling.

It is possible for this bill to go further, though - and I think we'd both be in agreement on that - and recognizing that housing is a basic human right. We would like to see broader protections for those who also don't own their home.

THE SPEAKER: Order. There is quite a bit of chatter in the Chamber. I would ask that if you're having a discussion to take it outside.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: We'd also like to see broader protections for those who don't own their homes - those who have rented when incidents like this happen.

With all of that said, this bill provides necessary protections for those who have lost their homes as a result of wildfires and natural disasters. The one thing I ask going forward with regards to the debate on this bill is that in this House, we do not deny the reality of what other people are facing, of what other people have dealt with in the past, by saying that what they faced did not happen, or was not true - because it has been. It was. They have all their property assessments and their tax bills to show that yes, indeed, that is what did happen to them. With that, I take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

TOM TAGGART: I'm very happy to stand today and speak about this Act, Bill No. 450, the Assessment Act. As the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville mentioned at the beginning of his comments - and I truly do understand his desire to support, in any way possible, the victims of disasters - I've done that for the last three years with people who lost a lot more than heirlooms and a house. They lost something that can never be replaced, so I understand very much the desire to support your residents whom you support.

I'm happy to stand here and speak to this bill today respecting a property tax cap. I've spent a lot of time in municipal government talking about property taxes and capped assessments and that sort of thing, and some time in the real estate industry talking to people who want to buy and sell houses about the cap coming off, changing the assessment. It's always an interesting discussion. I have lots of points of views on that, and I'm sure I will get to them before my time is up here.

I want to first talk a little bit about what our government has done. We've taken significant measures to address the unprecedented events of last Summer. Whether it be floods, or whether it be fires, we provided - I know that we can never do enough, I know that very well - but we did provide \$500 for every household that was required to evacuate as a result of the fires, both in HRM and in Shelburne County. As I go down, I want to make a point here that this is an act respecting a cap for victims of disasters.

We provided a \$2.5 million provincial investment to launch the Small Business Wildfire Relief Program to provide a one-time grant of \$2,500 to every single small business and charity affected by the wildfires in HRM and Shelburne County and a \$7.5 million provincial investment to buy 25 fully furnished modular homes to lease to those displaced by the wildfires in HRM and Shelburne County. We matched all donations made as part of the Canadian Red Cross Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada Fires Appeal.

We launched a Disaster Financial Assistance Program to cover up to \$200,000 in uninsurable losses for every eligible household or small business and not-for-profit that suffered losses as a result of the wildfires in HRM, Shelburne, and Yarmouth counties. We are partnering with online service providers like Happipad and Yardi to assist those displaced by wildfires in finding housing. I can only imagine what it was like for those who were impacted on those days as that unfolded and with everybody trying to find a place to take their children. It must have been tremendously traumatic.

Again, I don't want to minimize this, but there are lots of disasters. If my house burned tomorrow, it would be a disaster, without question. For everyone who has ever had their house burn - unless they lit it themselves, of course, and wanted to collect the insurance - it's a disaster. What do we say to the people or the person that it may have happened to, because these questions will come up? There's no denying it, right? What will we say to the person who had a fire on one of those same days in Cape Breton or in Colchester North, or wherever? They feel just as bad as those who were in this disaster.

I point to the fact that - we're going to talk about PVSC here in a minute, but apparently PVSC has made a decision - I'm just going to find it here - that if the home that burned was capped at 60 per cent of its value under the cap currently, it's not like it will all of a sudden go to the full value. I recognize that sometimes that will probably be double the price - I get all that - but it happens to other people.

Again, PVSC has already said that they will cap it at, I believe, 60 per cent. If they are capped at 60 per cent before the fire, they will be capped at 60 per cent after the fire. I think that's an important point. Now PVSC - and I hope they're not listening. I don't know anybody who likes them. They don't satisfy anybody. Truthfully, they don't, you know. This cap - I've been on all sides of it. They can't win. It's like being in government, isn't it? It's like being in the government that has to make hard decisions. They can't win.

They are, and have been for a long time, at arm's length of the government. They're there to make decisions and, trust me, I've questioned their decisions a lot of times along the way, but that's why they are at arm's length: so that I can't run to my elected member and say, Hey, I think I've been wronged by PVSC. Let's do this.

Again, I'm not minimizing the tragedy that happened in Shelburne and HRM, in particular in the Hammonds Plains and Timberlea area. It was a tremendous tragedy, as it is every time a house burns. It's a tragedy. It's a tragedy to those it happened to. As I understand it, this bill would do nothing for them. This bill is specifically about climate events that happened last Summer. And they are, again, tragic events.

The PVSC - I'll go back to my notes here - will be applying the cap in a manner that protects the percentage differential between capped value and the assessed market value - or assessed value - which is what I would call "what it's supposed to be." That's another debate. A lot of time the assessed value is not - and that's a current assessed value - is not what people would consider the real market value. That's always been a debate. Market value is what a willing buyer and a willing seller will pay for a piece of property. That's different again from the capped or the assessed value.

Anyway, the PVSC has agreed that the ratio of the capped value to the market value before and after the wildfires will be maintained such that no homeowner is negatively impacted from a capped perspective. Since the wildfires broke out in our province last Summer, the government of Nova Scotia has undertaken many initiatives to support homeowners and businesses who suffered a loss because of these emergency events. I listed many of those initiatives earlier on. These programs and supports are intended to assist and minimize the financial impacts of the wildfires. In working with our partners, such as municipalities - I don't know if they have any say in this or not - but working with our partners, such as municipalities and the Canadian Red Cross, we are proud of all that we have done to support communities across the province that were impacted by the wildfires.

If HRM wasn't consulted or the Municipality of the District of Shelburne weren't consulted, they should have been, certainly, because they're the ones that are going to be impacted by this. There's no impact whatsoever for the provincial government. Property taxes are all returned to the municipality. Property taxes are always returned to the municipalities. They have more, I guess you'd say, skin in the game - more incentive to agree or disagree to this because it will make an impact to their bottom line. They will be the ones who will answer those questions when somebody from downtown Halifax or in

Dartmouth whose home burns and was worth \$600,000 and was \$1.2 million or something by the time they got it rebuilt and the assessment went up. They'll have to answer those questions for those residents. Why did they not benefit the same as the people who were in these other tragedies?

It doesn't really - I understand the desire to help these folks, but there are always unintended consequences to everything you do.

[3:30 p.m.]

I'm sorry. Speaker, I'm sorry. I've been kind of thinking and talking. I'll speak to you more directly.

There we go. Halifax Regional Municipality: The Halifax Regional Municipality Charter empowers HRM to spend money and collect taxes with respect to an emergency under the Emergency Management Act. Therefore, if HRM wishes to do so, they may have the authority to provide a grant in lieu. That happens often in municipal government - granted in lieu of taxes to these property owners. That's really, when it gets right down to it.

Housing and home taxes are a municipal government responsibility. There's no getting away from it. There's no changing that. That will be - that's all part of the Municipal Government Act. I may be repeating myself here, but as a former municipal councillor, I would want to have a lot of time to discuss and really understand, again, the unintended consequences of this.

How this would impact the budget of my municipality, and as a result, impact not only the folks who lost their home - that wasn't within a natural disaster, but also the increased taxation rate of the municipality, because that is their sole source - or not sole source, but major source of income, is housing.

It's great stuff. I commend the member for wanting to support his residents in any way he can. Again, I understand fully, probably better than most in here, how a tragedy affects a community. I also understand we have to make sure, again, that we understand all the consequences, all the realities, I guess would be a good way of putting it - all the realities of changing the law like this, and all the different people that it impacts. Including my good friends at PVSC.

As a government, we've been working hard to make sure the people affected by the wildfires are treated fairly. The Property Valuation Services Corporation, PVSC, has been working on the Capped Assessment Program, as have municipal governments and previous governments for years, to try to deal with this capped assessment.

I guess when I think about it, there are other ways to look at this. I think probably a direct - a grant in lieu, or some kind of - HRM is really - and Shelburne County are really the people that this . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I'm just going to speak for a few moments on this. It's interesting because I feel like I might be one of the only people in the Chamber who has experienced damage or a total home loss in two different circumstances. The first was due to a natural disaster, and the second was due to a common fire, not that anything was common about it. Just wanting to bring the perspective of the difference between the two.

During Hurricane Juan, my family home had a flat roof, and the winds were quite high, so throughout the night a gust of wind had gotten underneath the shingles and actually blew the entire roof off the house and into the garden, the backyard of the house. We realized that it had happened in the middle of the night, but it was the middle of the night, so there's not much that you can do. So we went to sleep and said, We'll deal with it the next day.

If anybody remembers the hurricane, after the winds had died down, there was a significant amount of rainfall. So again, the relevance of my house being a flat roof is that it rained the entire night, and that water collected into the roof, and I woke up the next morning being rained on. The water, the insulation, the drywall had all come down in my bedroom.

It was a traumatic experience. We had pretty much the entire home destroyed because of water damage, in the end, but the trauma wasn't just that. The trauma was everybody else was dealing with the same thing. This was something that happened to a number of people. There were a lot of things that took place. Trying to nail down contractors, trying to nail down insurance - your insurance brokers and getting the policies done up. It was not easy.

As time went on, the costs of building went up as you waited, as you were trying to replace - there were several months when I was living in the bottom level of the house even though the top two floors were a disaster. We had a weekend away with my girlfriends, and one of them spilled the Brita - the water filter. I went to grab a tea towel, and I started to have a panic attack. I couldn't understand why. It took me a second. It was because, for two weeks, I had been sopping up water from around my house using tea towels. I tell that story because it's funny, but also, it's true. It's a reality. That process took forever. It took us significantly longer to fix and to rebuild, not because it was complicated to do but because we were a part of a much larger natural disaster that impacted people across this province.

When I look at this bill, I understand. I understand what the member for Colchester North is saying. I get that completely. This is a one-time fix. Why doesn't it apply to others? I understand that the government has no ability to rush insurance companies to get adjusters in or to get more contractors in to do rebuilds, but we do have the ability to alleviate a bit of the stress.

It's a bit of a gesture to say, Okay, we know you have gone through this collective trauma together, and you have had to face a lot of difficult situations. The loss of pets - I can't even talk about - I was on the Facebook page during the wildfires this Summer where people matched their families up with the pets that were able to get out and the lost pets. I know that I'm very thankful that there was no human life lost, but my pet is my family. I can't imagine something happening to her.

Again, it was the collective. It's a lot of people having to go through the whole thing together and not having access to the resources that an individual who has a fire - or who has damage done to their home for whatever reason outside of a natural disaster - has the capacity to do.

We'll go to the second. We have a family property in Queensland, and in Summer 2002, we had a total loss fire. It burned right to the ground, and there was nothing. That was where our family had gathered. I have talked about that house in the Legislature before. My grandfather bought the property back in the 1950s. This house had items that belonged to my grandparents, items that belonged to my great-grandparents, items that belonged to my parents, who have since passed - things that were irreplaceable, that if I just had five minutes to grab a handful of things, I would do that. The sadness of that loss is always going to be with me. I know that. I have resolved myself to that.

However, the process that happened after this significantly more damaging event - remember, during the hurricane, it was two floors of my house that were water-damaged. It was many months of arguing, fighting, trying to get contractors, and trying to get the work done, as opposed to a total loss where we were done with insurance and everything was wrapped up in a neat bow in a short amount of time. That's because there wasn't anybody competing. It was a one-time thing. It was our house that was impacted by it and nobody else.

When you're talking about trauma, I don't think there's anything in this bill that involves major policy changes or has major financial repercussions. This is an ask to help alleviate some of the trauma and the stress that this group of people is feeling. Honestly, I think there are several solutions that, if this bill isn't something that the government or the minister wants to move forward on - which is completely fair. We understand. We do our best effort in Opposition to put something forward and hope that maybe it stems some dialogue. If it's not this bill, maybe there's something else that can come forward from the government side. Maybe there are some adjustments that can be made. I think that even

having the minister agree to speak to PVSC to see what can be done, or if there's anything that can be done, I think that would be a fair compromise.

I think my colleague documented, or he tabled the petitions today - he tabled a number of documents today. This is a community that's still grieving. This is a community that is still very much, almost now a year later, in the throes of this trauma and this loss. As the MLA for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, my colleague is trying to alleviate some of that loss, and as somebody who has experienced a similar loss, I have to say that there's a lot of meaning in that. It's one of those things where you can say, Oh, we're going to do this, but then we're going to have to do it for everybody. I would argue that we should do it for everybody else. I think there should be a one-time exemption for anybody who faces a situation like this because of a natural disaster.

If I were the government, I would take this member's private bill and I would expand it and put it across the province, so that so many people who have been - we talked about this in this Chamber last Fall, and in this sitting: 2023 was unprecedented in what happened to us, in terms of natural climate disasters. We still see it. We're still not on the other end of it.

The windstorms - I have to say that over the Christmas break, there were more powerful winds in my neighbourhood that weren't even classified as anything than in any of the hurricanes that happened in the Fall of 2023. We were getting by far 100km-plus gusts of wind. Clearly, this is something that we're going to have to address. There's going to be something that has to happen just from a taxation perspective, and I know that seems silly, I do. I do understand. I'm going to say I understand where the member for Colchester North was coming from, but when you are in the depths of something like this, when you are displaced and you've lost everything, if there's anything that we can do - if there's any little thing that we can do in order to make a difference - I feel that we have an obligation to do so.

I'm very proud of my colleague for bringing this forward. I have seen, since 2013, this member give his heart and soul to his community. There are maybe a handful of MLAs whom I have worked with that I can say will throw it all out for their people. He puts it all on the floor. He gives it all - whatever sports metaphor. He leaves it all on the court. He's constantly, constantly, constantly advocating for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. Constantly. This is a regular thing. This is long before any wildfires happened. In May of last year, when they started and he saw how his community was struggling, this is a guy who rose to the occasion.

I have to say that even if this particular piece of legislation isn't something that the government can commit to or want to, I feel that there has to be some sort of more productive dialogue that happens between the minister and the MLA, even if it's a meeting with PVSC just to explain why he thinks that they have the authority to do this. Let's get to the crux of it. Let's take baby steps, all right? We don't want this - okay, we don't want

this, but this should not be the end of the conversation. This bill, or this situation, shouldn't die on the floor of the Legislature because we've called it to second reading and now it's not going to go anywhere else.

[3:45 p.m.]

I think that one of our responsibilities as MLAs, and a responsibility that I've always tried to follow, is that even when we have a difference of opinions or we are divided in policy, it's only a stepping stone, a starting-off point, and there is more that we can learn. There's more that we can do. I also, quite frankly, feel that most of it happens outside of the floor of the Legislature in terms of negotiation and talking and having alliances and having collaboration between different parties. That's okay, that's cool, but I'm just really hopeful that this particular issue doesn't die here on the floor at the end of second reading.

I'm really hopeful that the MLA and the minister can find some sort of a solution for these residents, some sort of a more appropriate explanation for these residents - maybe not appropriate, appropriate is not the right word. A more considerate rationale for these residents, and maybe even a compromise. Honestly, I want to say it on the record, if anybody can do it, it's the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: I do want to speak briefly to the bill. First of all, as some people have experienced dialing 911 and calling the fire department, I'm one of those people who has experienced that. It was a barn fire - I know a barn is not a home, it's vastly different, but I can tell you, I know if I take that and translate it to how traumatic that moment was for me, I know how traumatic it is to lose everything in a fire. We recognize that.

I know that the people I've talked to who have lost homes, what they say they typically miss the most is lost photographs. There's a lifetime of memories in photographs, gone. I wonder if that will still be true in the future, because all our photographs are on our phones now. They're never really lost. For many people, that is what is the single biggest loss, and we respect that. In terms of the heart-stopping year we had last Summer, we certainly recognize the trauma that that caused people, not only in HRM but in Shelburne as well.

The member is putting forward a bill. I will ask the member to remember that last sitting, I think it was Bill No. 329, we did put an amendment for the member that related to taxation in HRM. He may recall that. It related to specifically allowing HRM to tax businesses differently, to change that. We have been very responsive to the member for that.

I will point out the member didn't ask at that moment for anything in particular around homes, and to be fair to the member, the reason that he didn't was because that

already existed. It wasn't required for HRM. The first solution, for a local solution, would be simply to ask the member to speak to the councillor in the area and communicate with the councillor in HRM in which this resides.

The reality is PVSC is a province-wide organization really mandated to assess the values of properties across the province. The board of directors is made up of municipal councillors and enabled by provincial legislation, for sure, but a municipally managed, municipally-run organization. The manner in which they've dealt with these losses is consistent over time. I know there are people in this House, I know there are individuals who have lost homes in the past, who have told me that the way PVSC dealt with it was exactly how it's being dealt with here.

There's a long-standing history - I don't know how far back it goes, honestly - at least five or ten years or more - of PVSC, when a home is destroyed by fire, the cap is not lost for the home. If the home was capped at 75 per cent of value, the new value of the home is still - the cap is still at 75 per cent. The cap is protected for the home.

I think the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville understands that; I am not sure the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier understood that. If the member had a constituent who didn't have that experience, then that certainly would be something to appeal to PVSC about, because there's a long-standing history of PVSC handling the losses of these fires in this way and we respect that. What's different is this is a pretty big group now and it's very unfortunate, but that is the history of that.

The reality is that there is only one taxpayer, and we are doing things as a government to address taxes. We are dealing with bracket creep, as all the members know. That doesn't have an immediate effect because there's a need to give the Canada Revenue Agency almost a year's notice. That's the reality. We'll see bracket creep for all Nova Scotians who work and earn money, including all members of the Legislature - you get your T4, too - you'll see the effects of bracket creep, every member of the Legislature, everybody working in the province will see that. In January 2025, when you see your first pay stub for the new year, that's the reality. It's coming. I mean, we are concerned about taxes. We're concerned about taxation. There's only one taxpayer.

This House has had lots of talk about the taxes that we face on all the goods and services that we buy. They are real. One of the things we've done as a government, following suit with Ottawa - I can criticize Ottawa on the carbon tax and give Ottawa credit on taking the tax off the multi-unit apartment buildings, which we followed suit on, which is a massive tax reduction to help lower the cost of new builds.

Clearly the carbon tax is another tax which is a consumption tax, really, that has immense impact. You might think, Well, it's gratuitous me bringing this up, but it does add to the cost of the builds tremendously for these people who have lost homes. The reality is,

Speaker, only a few of them have completed their homes. In fact, I read a member's statement for one of my staff who is one of the very first to have rebuilt a home.

We know that when a home is burned down and replaced that many people have replacement insurance. It depends on the insurance product that the homeowner has, so there can be vastly different experiences for homeowners, we recognize that. Many homeowners will have replacement insurance. If you have a house assessed at \$500,000 and you have replacement insurance and it burns down, because of the cost of construction - which is not just carbon tax. It's other things too. It's costs of labour, all of those costs...

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time has expired for debate on Bill No. 450, the Assessment Act.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 423.

Bill No. 423 - Find It Early Act

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I am happy to rise and speak in second reading for a bill that is so important to me and to many women here and all over Nova Scotia. I will start again.

I move second reading for Bill No. 423, the Find it Early Act. I am happy to speak to this and just wanted to start by describing what this bill is all about. This bill is about women who are 50 per cent of the population in Nova Scotia and across the world have dense breasts. Dense breasts - I honestly didn't understand what that is until I was diagnosed with cancer. With dense breasts, it's very difficult for mammograms to identify the tumour from the dense breast tissue. They both show up as white, and many mammograms miss the tumour or miss the cancer. That's exactly what happened to me.

I had a lump. When you have a lump, it's actually lucky because you have something, and then you're in the next stage of being diagnosed with something. I went and checked it with a mammogram and ultrasound in February 2022. Everything came out negative and clear as can be. I went on my way, and everything was wonderful.

But with it, there was a letter that came home, telling me about my dense breasts. But I honestly didn't understand the risk that I was under, and that a lot of mammograms would miss the tumour. I wish I could go back and do something, but what I'm doing here is to bring awareness to other women. Please listen to me. Listen to what the risk is. Every

one of us knows a woman who's had breast cancer, because of the high number. Fifty per cent of women have this risk.

I first truly want to thank Jennie Dale and Paula Gordon from B.C. They really educated me about the high risk of dense breasts, and what they've done across Canada to make sure that women receive better screening at an earlier stage, so they don't have to go through the hell that I went through: mastectomy, lumpectomy, chemotherapy, radiation. All these treatments are very harsh, very difficult, and very expensive. We can avoid it. I wish I had been able to go and get a mammogram in February 2022 and find the cancer. It would have been probably in Stage 1. What a difference that would have been to my life, instead of Stage 2 six months or a year later.

That's when I had a second lump, and I am lucky to have had a second lump. That one came up with 95 per cent malignancy. That's when my doctor called me and told me on March 6, 2023 - so it wasn't long. I actually took my time before I went to see the doctor because it was the same breast. I'm sure it was negative. It took me three months before I really looked after it and went to check it.

That is what a lot of women don't understand - the risk of dense breasts, and the fact that our mammograms are not accurate enough. Forty-three per cent of those mammograms miss if you have Density C or Density D, so please look at your density. Look at your daughter's density and all your loved ones. This is an important thing that I learned the hard way, and I will speak up until my voice is gone to make sure other women understand this.

I also want to thank Dr. Paola Marcato and Cheryl Coffin who joined me at the press conference on March 6th. We explained as much as we could. There were 75 women who showed up here. Honestly, there was not enough room in the gallery for them to all sit here. I was stunned. But that shows how many women are affected by this. That is how important it is to women, and we have enough women here in the Legislature who need to take it seriously and speak up. Please. Those 75 women have gone through hell and back - a lot of them - and it really touches my heart.

I also wanted to thank the media. Since March 6th, I've had the *Toronto Star*, the *Chronicle Herald*, the Canadian Press, Global News, Radio-Canada Francophonie, News 95.7, Radio-Canada, and the *Halifax Examiner* all do articles or talk about this. They're all saying the same thing: it does not make sense. Why are we waiting until we are at a later stage to find the cancer? They are all stunned. All the media are stunned. A lot of us didn't know that, just like it was for me.

Talk to your daughters and do not accept the mammogram. Mammogram alone is not finding it. I ended up with a mastectomy, chemotherapy, and a lot of hardship. That happened to me at 61. I have met so many women in the last year. They are finding me, coming to talk to me, and wanting their voices to be heard. I actually spoke to one of the

ladies who was here. I didn't realize that she was here, but she wrote an op-ed in the *Chronicle Herald*, so I picked up the phone and I spoke to her. She is 40 years old. Actually, I have it here. I just want to make sure I have her title. She is an associate professor at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University, and she wrote this thing. She said: "I'm a breast cancer survivor." She is 40 years old.

[4:00 p.m.]

It should come as no surprise that I was thrilled to learn of the introduction and the first reading of the proposed Find It Early Act in Province House last week. The Act would provide access to an additional diagnostic screening for women with dense breasts in Nova Scotia. This kind of supplemental screening is currently denied to Nova Scotians despite clear evidence that for many, mammograms alone are not enough to detect cancer before it has grown and spread. Just think about it - denied.

Instead of the doctors helping us and telling us, Go find it early, so you don't have to go through hell - it doesn't have to cost the Province so much money - we deny them to look for it. We deny them the opportunity to find it early. It just does not make sense.

Nova Scotia, despite it being one of the first provinces where women could self-refer for screening for mammograms at age 40 - we are leaders in many aspects, okay? We tell them to go and get a mammogram, but we don't tell them that if they have Density C and Density D, that mammogram is worth zero to them. Forty per cent of the time that mammogram will give you a false negative like it did to me.

The Province also provides patients with a breast density notification after the first mammogram, which is wonderful for this province. In 2019, my colleague the Minister of Health and Wellness brought it in, but we've been telling women, Here, you have a high risk, but you are not allowed to have anything else done after this - no MRI, no ultrasound, and no contrast-enhanced mammography.

These are technologies available in other provinces. My own sister has the right to have an abbreviated MRI in Ontario, but I, who have the cancer, can't go get an MRI for my healthy breast. Imagine that, guys. Imagine that.

I just want to emphasize the high risk of dense breasts and how we can be proactive, and try to catch it before it spreads and before we need chemotherapy. The cost of Stage 4 compared to Stage 1 is 11 times. It will cost approximately \$400,000 to \$500,000 to treat a patient with Stage 4 cancer. That's a lot. The MRI is half of that cost. That machine can detect so many cancers - four times more cancers - than a mammogram by itself. Four times. That could be hundreds and thousands of women who can be caught early and don't have to go through chemotherapy, mastectomy, lymphedema, and the hell.

I spoke about this bill last week as well, and explained about one of the women who sent to me about the indignity of going through these harsh treatments - how we lose our dignity with it, and how hard these are.

I also want to end it with an amazing thing that this young lady who is 40 - the lawyer who teaches at Dalhousie. She said:

Put simply, cancer has changed my life, and every day I worry I will have to do it all again because a mammogram alone might fail to detect a recurrence in my dense breasts. This is not a political issue. Cancer doesn't care if you're liberal or conservative, rich or poor, or even what your gender is, although it's clear who breast cancer affects the most. This is a question of access to health care and equality for the 43 per cent of people whose cancers risk going undetected until they have grown and spread.

I still don't understand it. We think that the experts in Nova Scotia are basing their denial for extra screening on mortality rates, just because you have dense breasts - even though we know that if you have dense breasts, it is harder to detect and you have a higher chance of cancer. That's a known fact, and it has been known for a decade.

What Nova Scotia is basing their information on is mortality rates - so until I die. Do you know how many years that could be? That's what they're trying to weigh. There have been no studies done with all that information. Who wants to base the hell that we are putting all these women under as not important - but hey, they didn't die right away from the cancer. That is wrong. That is unfair. Other provinces have learned that it is wrong to do that to women and they have moved on, and they are offering extra screening. Ontario, B.C. and Alberta are ahead of us. We've been leaders in breast cancer. Let's not stop now.

I beg - I don't know how else I can say it. I want to educate, to spread the word. Please, I don't want this to happen to your loved ones. I don't want this to happen to your daughters. It breaks my heart when I speak to a woman in her 40s who is having to go through a mastectomy, and losing her identity with hair loss or all the horrible things of the so-called treatment. I don't call those treatments. I call them barbaric treatments.

Let's catch it early. Please help me. Please educate everyone on this so that we don't have more women going through this. I plead forever and ever, until my voice is gone. I thank you for this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I want to begin by thanking the member for Clayton Park West. Her bravery and her leadership on this issue and the subject is totally inspiring. She is doing what we are supposed to do in here. She is bringing something to the floor of this

Legislature, and she is fighting for it - and not just fighting for it emotionally, but with facts and with expert opinion and with personal stories. She is a true advocate.

I am inspired by her. I am shocked that we are having this conversation - that we need to have this conversation. I will just add a few more words to this, and hope that maybe we'll see some change in this sitting. Listen, no one thought we were going to see the income assistance rates indexed this sitting, did we? It happened. Wouldn't it be amazing if we got out of this sitting with this change because of the work that this member has been doing? It could happen today.

I feel a little weird about starting with a story, but I have been the recipient of that terrible phone call - when you go for your test, and the doctor calls and says, They've found something on your mammogram. That has happened to me. I'm sure it's happened to many people. The moment that happens, your stomach drops out of you. You pick up the phone, you think, Whatever. Who is it? Then, suddenly, your life could be changing in front of you, in the moment, forever. All the possibilities are in front of you: could be nothing, could be a death sentence, and then there's everything in between.

When that happened to me, my doctor said, Yes, they need you to go in right away - which is also super-scary. This must be bad. I went in a couple days later and had the ultrasound, and they told me then, It's good. It's fine. I only had that terrible waiting for three or four days, but I'll tell you, the relief and the feeling of being taken care of by the medical system in those few days was amazing. I was thinking, Okay, this could be happening to me, but I'm in excellent hands here because my doctor called me literally the day after my mammogram, and then I was getting back in for another one in a couple days - and we'll see what happens. That mini-experience of maybe having bad news felt like I was being well taken care of. I was so grateful for that.

Compare that to this idea - or this truth - that women with breast density C or D just don't have that ability to feel that. I don't even know what density I am because - I know it's on a piece of paper downstairs somewhere. I have no idea, frankly. I really should figure that out. Even if I did know, it doesn't really matter, because right now, we don't have the ability to do extra screening.

Anyway, I'm happy to stand and support this Act, but I want to continue by providing a definition of health equity. The member finished her speech with this, with talking about health equity. The Canadian government defines it as "the absence of unfair systems and policies that cause health inequities." I'll table that definition. I want to start there, because it makes it clear that we have an obligation to rectify the unfair breast cancer screening system in our province that's causing extreme health inequalities.

The member for Clayton Park West has given us the statistics. In 2019, Nova Scotia began to directly inform women of their breast density. Great. That's the first step. Up to 50 per cent of cancers present in the densest breasts - that's Category C and D - and they

may be missed by regular breast screening. Despite the Nova Scotia screening program recognizing the associated risks with Category C or D, the program doesn't allow women to access the additional screening they need to protect their health. If we are supposed to be providing or making sure that every person has equitable access to health and health care, then we are denying people with breast density C and D that access.

To achieve health equity, in general terms, we must work to reduce the inequalities and to increase access to opportunities and conditions conducive to health for all. In more specific terms, when it comes to breast cancer, it's clear that we need to ensure that women with Category C and D breast density have access to the additional screening they need. It is common sense. It doesn't make sense not to do it, as my colleague has said.

[4:15 p.m.]

Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada that does not offer this supplemental screening - the only province in Canada. We are leaders, as we hear every day, in so many things. How is it possible that, in 2024, we don't have this supplemental screening? Notifying women of their density category and then leaving them without a pathway to additional screening when it's needed is nonsensical. In fact, it's kind of cruel. The logical thing to do is painfully clear. Notification of C- or D-level density should immediately trigger a pathway to additional screening.

This matter is particularly frustrating because of the scale of this problem. It's not a small problem. Breast cancer accounts for 26 per cent of all cancer diagnoses for Nova Scotia women. In 2023, almost 800 Nova Scotian women were diagnosed with breast cancer, and approximately 180 women died of it. It's incredibly disheartening to think how many of those women were denied comprehensive screening at an earlier point in their fight against cancer. We don't know what we don't know. We don't know how many of those people who died might still be alive.

We also - my colleague made such a good point earlier. It's not just about mortality rates. It's about quality of life. (Laughs) I was going to say the cost of living. I'm not going to repeat. The expert here has given us the examples: increased treatments; mastectomies instead of lumpectomies; hair loss instead of no hair loss. And all the other health issues that come with chemotherapy, with reduced immune systems and all that. Clearly, I'm suffering from lack of oxygen to my brain right now.

The earlier breast cancer is detected, the easier it is to treat. A hundred per cent of the women diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer survive - a hundred per cent. When it isn't diagnosed until Stage 4, the survival rate drops dramatically to 22 per cent.

The bill in front of us today can save lives by ensuring that women gain access to supplementary screening without delay. It also will improve lives. This bill would rectify the health inequities that currently exist in our health care system and ensure that we are

providing women in this province the same level of care that is being delivered across the country. The current refusal to ensure that additional screening is available is a blatant refusal to advance health equity in this province, specifically health equity for women or people with breasts. That is why I am happy to stand and support the bill and thank my honourable colleague for the work she is doing. I hope no one else must go through what she did because they have dense breasts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I'm rising today to speak to Bill No. 423, the Find It Early Act, which was introduced by my honourable colleague across the floor.

It's clear, as you say, how breast cancer and screenings impact all of us - not just women, but men who have high-density breasts as well. We truly appreciate the member bringing this to the floor of the Legislature to talk about this important and serious issue. I can't imagine, personally, what you've gone through. I know at my age, just turning 50, I did myself, without - I'm not in a high-risk category. My mom and my grandmother - there's no family history, so my doctor was of the mindset that age 50 was enough. You're right, though. People around us are finding out that they do - I did go a little bit before I was 50 and had my first exam, and it is terrifying. You don't know what that call may or may not be, or if you'll have to go back in.

I do want to speak to some other parts of it. Nova Scotia does have high-risk screening programs since March of 2021. As I mentioned, it's recommended that individuals aged 40 and above are available to have a screening. On top of that, there is high-risk screening for those individuals who fall in that category, offered from ages 30 to 74 who would have extremely high risks of breast cancers due to genetic traits or previous cancers or a high history of chest radiation. These individuals are able to receive that advance screening.

Our partners at the IWK Health Centre have been very committed to looking at and addressing this newer advanced screening, high-risk clinical practice guidelines that they've implemented, which include and should be referred to as the more advanced screening. What these guidelines are doing is trying to implement private province-wide implementations of these guidelines. There's also our new clinical practice guidelines on who gets access to MRI for breast screening.

There are many mechanisms within the booking system to ensure that anybody who does need to be moved up for diagnostic imaging to work with an abnormal screen, symptomatic diagnosis appointment - or the cancer survivor, as I mentioned before. Also, according to triaging, so trying to get individuals into the secondary screenings when it's deemed that it is really important to do.

Upgraded software across the province is improving newer technology so that all the images are standard, and the accuracy across the province is more provincially implemented.

The minister is committed and has said that she is willing, when the House rises, to try to have a better understanding between the advocacy and the advocates and the clinical studies that are being done. Programs that are in place proactively - books, workups, biopsies, ensuring that known concerns are not on the general waiting list. They are triaged in a manner that would see that appointments for screening could happen on a more urgent basis.

We are one of only two provinces in this country that even offer a high-risk screening program. I think that is something to be proud of and take notice of. Our breast imaging program is supported by a central booking system. It's a provincial standardization that has equitable access to make sure that individuals are able to access it through one point of entry across the province so that individuals who are in the Central Zone aren't getting more appointments because that's where a lot of them happen. I'm lucky to be able to book either in Halifax or at the Valley Regional Hospital, which is where I chose to go. It's also important to know that there are mobile units that come into community to make sure that individuals who require this have access to it.

Again, supplemental screening is something that the minister would have to work in hand with our clinicians on to make sure - obviously, these additional screenings require more resources, more equipment and staff, to make sure they're there - the more training that it would entail, quality of oversight, and would need to be offered at various sites throughout the province to maintain Nova Scotia's approach - as I just mentioned - to equitable access, to make sure that these trained professionals are spaced diversely across the province.

There's a U.S. task force that recently updated their guidelines for breast cancer screening and indicated that there is insufficient evidence to assess the benefits and harms of supplemental screening for breast cancer in women identified to have dense breasts on an otherwise negative screening mammogram. They have also stated that there is need for more research, more advanced evidence, and some trials.

The Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care is doing the same. They're doing a review for breast cancer screening. The target is Spring 2024, when the Canadian Task Force plans to release their guidelines. The Canadian Task Force often reviews similar areas that they see the U.S. task force - being our neighbour - engaging in, and dense breast screening is one of the issues that they're reviewing now, as is our American counterpart.

Given the current situation, the evidence is not there for a population-based secondary screening at this time, but we will continue to monitor the evidence as it

develops, particularly in other provinces across Canada, and the information that we receive from both task forces. Our government is committed and willing to continue to work with our clinicians, both at the IWK Health Centre and the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

What's important, and not to be overlooked, is the Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program itself - and data driven to the advice and recommendations for their new and emerging technologies that are being brought forward. There are many new options we can look at, and this could include increasing the number of MRIs and/or expanding access and introducing ultrasounds or the like.

When the Canadian Task Force finalizes - it is quite timely - in Spring 2024, the Minister would be able to take those guidelines created by the Task Force and have a chance to look them over and see what kind of recommendations - if there are recommendations made from that study. It's difficult to make a clinical change of this magnitude on the floor of the Legislature without the basis of fact and without clinical consultation with our partners at the IWK Health Centre, the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and the breast screening practices in Canada.

I don't want to go too far, but Dense Breasts Canada - and I think it's important - currently ranks Nova Scotia as a five out of five for its screening program that we have. We are the only province in Canada with a five out of five rating. Nova Scotia does not accept requisitions in our central booking for supplemental screening for dense breasts, and we have no private clinics in Nova Scotia that offer this.

I thought it was interesting to look at some of the areas in the province, when we talk about doing jurisdictional scans. P.E.I. announced that they would do supplemental screening for Category D breast density four years ago, but it's not currently available. They do offer the annual screenings. In New Brunswick, you can get the MRI and the ultrasound, but it's offered only through private clinics, and they don't even offer annual screening mammograms for Category D density.

I'm trying to be mindful of my time, and I think it's important - I want to make sure I get this in, and I might be able to go back to that. Our good friends at the CBC did an article on this back on October 4, 2023: "Advocates want more cancer screening for those in N.S. with dense breasts." It talks about, as the member opposite said, advocacy for having this dense breast screening, but what I did find interesting is that, although the advocates suggest that Nova Scotia's lagging behind, Dr. Siân Iles, a medical adviser to the Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program, said: "there simply isn't enough evidence yet to support additional screening." Iles went on to say that "breast density is a relatively new consideration in a person's overall health." I can table this article for the member opposite.

The article went on to say:

She said there are expert opinions, but as of yet, there is no organized population-based breast screening program anywhere in the world that recommends supplemental screening for people with dense breasts. “It could be beneficial, but we need evidence when we're going to talk about a population-based publicly funded screening tests,” said Iles. “We need good peer reviewed evidence and the reviews of the evidence so far have not come out saying you need to provide supplemental ultrasound screening.”

[4:30 p.m.]

She also noted that Nova Scotia, as I mentioned earlier:

is one of only two provinces that has a high-risk screening program. Patients who are over the age of 30 and have a greater than 25 per cent risk of breast cancer can access mammography and MRI screening.

The article goes on to say:

“Breast density is one of the risk factors that's incorporated into that risk estimate, so having dense breasts, it's very important to know your other risk factors and if you do meet that 25 per cent risk, then you are eligible for a screening program,” said Iles. Dale said Nova Scotia has been a leader in breast cancer screening, noting people over the age of 40 have been able to self-refer themselves for a mammogram for decades. She said it's . . .

I've got to get back to my other thing. I can table this for the House and for the member, but I just want you to know that the minister is committed - sorry, Speaker, through you to the member - that the minister is committed to reviewing and collecting the data, balancing, looking at what recommendations might come from the Canadian Task Force, and monitoring best practices and jurisdictional scans from across the country, and in fact in other parts of the world. She's travelled many times to the U.K. and abroad in other places to see what best practices come into place, and some of the newer changes to health care came from exactly that.

By continuing to listen to the advocacy and having the information come through the Task Force, I believe that there are still lots of conversations that can be had. With that, I will take my seat.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I'm pleased to get up and fight the fight for Bill No. 423, the Find it Early Act. I know the member opposite for West Hants began speaking by saying, It's clear. That's the problem with dense breasts: They're not clear. The fact that they cannot see anything in a regular mammogram because of their density is why tumours cannot be seen through the typical mammogram. I get up to speak on this because every day of our lives, we should be learning something to make things better for others, especially for women's health.

Ovarian cancer: well-educated on that after I became an MLA. Endometriosis: well-educated on that. It's not just a matter of saying this day is going to be for endometriosis, this day is going to be for something else to do with women's health and not actually do something that's fair for all women in Nova Scotia.

If there's one thing that really gets my ire, it's unfairness, in case you never noticed that. It just sticks in my craw, as my mom would say. I know the minister will try her best to sort of address this, but the urgency is what we need to hear.

The minister believes in preventive health. We all believe in preventive health. We spoke about health equity. Do you know what that is? It's the absence of unfair systems, like the member for Dartmouth North mentioned, where everyone has a fair opportunity to attain their optimal health. Women deserve optimal health. You do that by creating funds for research, medical education, clinical care - we all spoke, we heard about it - and education.

We feel - as Nova Scotians, we inform ourselves, we get educated, and, as women, knowing we have different parts, we have to do that much more work, because for some reason the medical system seems to think, Oh, we don't really - and talking to people about endometriosis, that was a real shock to hear that doctors are trained not necessarily on women's parts, so they don't know how to diagnose different things because they are not trained to do it. Now that is very unfair.

The one thing that each of us knows is the anxiety around breast cancer, ovarian cancer, every female part that can get a tumour. The silent killer in ovarian cancer; the dense breasts; the fact that they cannot find the tumour to see it in the regular way - we think in Nova Scotia that we're doing the right thing to keep ourselves alive by going to these facilities, going to the doctors, going to the equipment and saying, Awesome.

Then, like my dear colleague - there's no one more educated and more preventive than this person right here, to the fact that she gives me anxiety. I am not playing lightly on the anxiety piece, because at the end of the day we all went through a pandemic, and every day we hear from people - our family members, the residents we serve - their health anxiety is off the charts. If you add something like this to that anxiety that becomes real, what are we doing to resolve that anxiety? They are trying very hard to get out there and

do everything they can so that they don't go through the trauma that my colleague went through.

All of us have this kind of female instinct when we hear things and we say, Well, that seems like a no-brainer. That came to me that day at the press conference, when Dr. Paola Marcato of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation spoke, and she said that every other province does this. So with the evidence that the member opposite spoke so eloquently about, and so profoundly, why do all the other provinces recognize dense breasts and actually don't deny the women in those provinces? B.C., Alberta, Northwest Territories, Ontario, Quebec, P.E.I., New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, Yukon Territories - Nova Scotia is the only jurisdiction that says, "No supplemental screening allowed by screening program - only province where women are" - and they use the word "denied."

Myself, when I hear the word "denied," as a woman, I say, How unfair is that? Now I'm right back to being unfair.

My colleague used the word "nightmare" to describe what she's been through. How many of us women in Nova Scotia have woken up in a sweat in the middle of the night because we had a nightmare that we were told that we have breast cancer? How many of us know, because it's identified, that you have dense breasts? Every day, you have to live and put that in the back of your mind - well, I don't think the tumour that's there in my dense breast is cancerous, so I'm not sure if I can get a clear picture of what that means for me.

Every woman around the world worries. We worry about everything. We're mothers, many of us. We worry about our kids. We worry about ourselves. But as I aged, I realized the worries for my children were not because of what I feared life would be for them, what I was more fearful for, because I realized the grief that they would have to endure if I wasn't here. That's what, I think, every woman in this House needs to understand. We're here once. To defend and dismiss why Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada that does not provide this is very concerning to me.

Now, to emphasize what my colleague, who was just biting it to pieces to speak the second time, I will itemize the things that she said and wrote on this piece of paper.

A mammogram is not accurate. It gives a false negative, as was her case. The high-risk program does not include density breast category C. They do not have MRIs in mobile units. Insufficient evidence is based on mortality. Well, a lot of data should never be formulated on mortality. If you really are about preventive health, it's about living, not dying. She said: Needs a family doctor. So how can patients without a doctor survive what she has survived?

I can't emphasize enough the great opportunity that each and every one of us has by being in this Legislature. We say it's a privilege. It is a privilege, and it's a privilege to speak on women's health because it's long been denied. Again, I use the word "denied."

I look forward to - maybe before this term is finished - when the minister will actually stop denying the women of Nova Scotia and actually address the dense breast and the Find It Early bill. It needs to be done.

[4:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Would it be possible to find out how much time is left? I want to make sure I share it. Okay. That's great. I'll only speak for a few minutes.

I just want to stand in support of this bill, tabled by my friend and my colleague the member for Clayton Park West. It's truly an honour to be here in this Legislative Assembly and to see such a brave, courageous woman. I want to just say thank you to her.

The legislation that my colleague has put forth in this Legislature will literally save women's lives here in this Province of Nova Scotia. We know that. We know, based on the research and based on the professionals and the information that she has brought forward, that the legislation she has brought forward will save women's lives in the future. I don't know how anyone in this Chamber could not vote to support this bill if we're truly doing what's best for Nova Scotians, in particular the women and lives in this province.

The fact that Nova Scotia is the only province where this is not available is quite embarrassing and shameful, to be quite honest. If this province wants to be transformative and transform health care, prevention and early diagnosis of any disease entity when it's possible, we must take that. We must take that action. In my opinion, the only responsible thing to do is to pass this bill that the member for Clayton Park West has brought forward.

I want to acknowledge the great leadership of one of my former colleagues from Eastern Passage, now Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care. I know that she led change back in 2019 that contributed to positive change around the work around dense breasts. I implore her today to take leadership within her own caucus to help get this bill passed here in this Legislature today.

As women, we have to stand up for one another. We have to stand up for one another. Honestly, in the last half-hour, listening to some of the things that were shared, I have to say the member sitting in front of me who tabled this bill is probably one of the most courageous and bravest women that I have met. The fact that she stayed in this

Chamber while her experience was disregarded and dismissed is unbelievable. It was hard listening to her. I'm so proud of her that she stayed and sat in here and did that.

This is absolutely a gender equity issue - absolutely. Gender equity in health care refers to unfair, unnecessary, and preventable inequalities that exist between men and women in the state of health and the state of health care. This is an absolutely perfect example of gender inequity here in the Province of Nova Scotia. We have before us a bill that will save lives of women in this province. To not pass it is being irresponsible.

Last week on Friday, I attended an incredible women's event here, and it was led by an executive business coach named Harriette Schumacher. She's a real business leader here in the Province of Nova Scotia. She does work globally with many high-profile businesses. She gave a speech, and she talked about the need for more work to be done here in the Province of Nova Scotia empowering the women of this province. She shared with me her disappointment with the lack of work that is being done here to support and promote women's issues here in the Province of Nova Scotia. She encouraged many women who were there at the event to come and speak with me about what they can do to be more proactive and to get more politically active here in this province to try to promote positive change, in particular for the women of this province. I look forward to many of those women doing more work with many of us here in this Legislature, hopefully maybe even in the next election.

I do want to just emphasize my support for this bill. Again, I want to say how proud I am of the member for Clayton Park West. This is a truly personal bill because she has just recently gone through this very personal experience and she's brave enough to share with us here in this House what she has gone through in hopes that she can change the lives of other women and prevent them from having to go through the pain and suffering that she has gone through. One of the phrases that I have seen and I'll often use it in challenges in life is turning pain into power. That is exactly what this woman is doing right here in this Legislature.

We have the ability to support her. Speaker, I ask that all members of this Legislature do the right thing and pass this bill.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I just wanted to pop up for a few minutes and express my strong support for this bill and for the work of the member for Clayton Park West. Across the way, the member for Hants West referred to having no public population health argument toward better screening, which I found fascinating and wrong, actually.

A population health approach invests research and actions that address factors that are known to have the greatest impact on health status, such as social, economic, and environmental factors. On one hand we're quite aware that the impact of gender on health

and social and economic outcomes has been negative and has been difficult to overcome. We know this. We know that gender is a huge factor in population health. We also know that in Nova Scotia, we have some of the highest rates of cancer in the country, and we have some of the lowest rates of survival. That's another fact about the health of our population.

The other thing that's interesting is that in fact dense breasts as an issue is really new. I certainly didn't know about it until the last few years. The question isn't: Have we done enough so far and we'll see how it goes? The question is: How are we going to use the information that we now have, that we can actually screen for? It's not even that we have a problem for which there is no way that government can act. We have a problem that affects approximately on average 43 per cent of women, and I can tell you that if there was a health issue that affected 43 per cent of men, we would have found out about it a long time ago, and we would have dealt with it a long time ago. It would actually be a public health emergency.

Forty-three per cent of women, and I'll also read some of the other stats - I need to delve a little deeper to fully understand them - but 50 per cent of women in their 40s have dense breasts, 40 per cent of women in their 50s have dense breasts, and 25 per cent of women older than 60 have dense breasts. Why did that number decrease? Because people die from breast cancer. That's why that number decreases.

We really have to think about the investment that's a minimal investment. My apologies to the member for Clayton Park West. We know what we could do. It's not even a huge investment. Every time this government is like: We're going to go faster, we're going to go harder, we're going to do better on health care; but anytime there's actually a little bit about equity or gender-affirming care or about this issue, which is clearly a gender issue, this government is like: Well, we'd better stand back slowly and evaluate how it's going before we make any decisions.

I think the other thing that the member for Hants West perhaps skipped over; because this is a new issue, in 2016, in fact no province was screening for dense breasts. No province was notifying women about their dense breasts, and we've actually made remarkable progress. You can go on the Dense Breasts Canada website and see a map of Canada that shows in fact that we are advancing on the issue of screening for dense breasts. No, Nova Scotia is not doing the best. We're not actually in the top. The top provinces are not us. Just give me a second.

Anyway, I think we still have a lot to learn. There are other jurisdictions doing a better job. This is an issue that affects potentially half of women in their 40s and 50s...

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time has expired with regard to Bill No. 423.

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I just want to thank everybody who was part of that debate. It was wonderful. I've been here for nine years and I'm really blessed to have some really strong women in my caucus who have taught me a lot, as well as my colleagues from all sides of the floor.

Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 405.

Bill No. 405 - HST Reduction Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I'm pleased to get up today to speak about Bill No. 405, the HST Reduction Act.

Our caucus believes that we need to do a better job of helping all Nova Scotians across all walks of life, all ages, and all income levels. A reduction of the HST by 2 per cent would do that. It would provide a stimulus to the economy. It would allow people to have a little bit of breathing room when it comes to paying for groceries, for heat, and for the expenses of day-to-day life. It would mean more money in their pockets. It would be a great complement to the income tax bracket creep act that this government has put forward.

We need to do a better job. We've heard the government's side talk about the fact that they don't know where the money to do this would come from, where the \$500 million to make something like this happen would come from. What I've witnessed over the last two and a half to three years from this government is that there's money for everything. If there's a fire, let's throw money on it. If there's another situation, let's throw money at it. Let's hope that something sticks.

Something as important as putting money in the hands of Nova Scotians during an unprecedented affordability crisis in our province would be a very welcome addition for the people of Nova Scotia. When our party introduced this idea back in February, my email lit up, my texts lit up, and the office phone lit up with folks wondering when this was happening, saying that this is a great idea for Nova Scotians.

I had to tell them that it's a great idea and in the next election, it's going to be in our platform. We could do it so much sooner than then if this government would actually - you know, they've taken all kinds of ideas from other areas, and we're pleased about that, and we've got lots more ideas to put forward.

I know personally that a reduction in HST for my household would mean a significant improvement in the way we're able to function. So can you imagine families with children who are still living at home and activities? If you look at the amount spent by the average household family and figure out how much tax they're spending per year, a 2 percentage point reduction in that tax would be a significant amount of money.

We talk about the biggest tax cut in the history of the province with the income tax bracket creep. That's not a tax cut. This would be a tax cut. We'd be happy to pose in the picture with the Premier saying how great this idea is for the front of a budget. We would be happy to do that because it's good for Nova Scotians.

[5:00 p.m.]

We've talked about things in this budget that are good for Nova Scotians. Indexing tax brackets is great for Nova Scotians. It's great that we've finally joined the rest of Canada and stopped that. The difference on that one, I just want to reiterate, is that we're not actually cutting taxes - we're just helping people avoid paying more. So it's not technically a tax cut; it's a tax avoidance, I guess. I'm sure the CRA doesn't like those terms, but that's what it is: it avoids paying tax at a higher level than we're doing. It's a great thing, don't get me wrong.

Another great thing is continuous glucose monitoring. I have no idea where that idea came from, but that was a great idea to put forward, because that's helping a lot of Nova Scotians.

Some of these things that are in this budget are great. Hopefully we're saving that HST cut for the next budget, because I think Nova Scotians could really benefit from that - but they could benefit from it now. It's not too late, we're still in the sitting. We would happily welcome another bill put forward by the government that would be a reduction in the HST. I know that Nova Scotians would appreciate that. The announcement we saw today indexing income assistance to inflation is another thing that we've been advocating for since we were elected in 2021. Great for Nova Scotians. We're doing things for the most vulnerable, which is great.

We've got the Seniors Care Grant, which I want to talk about for two seconds, even though I'm on the HST. I want to talk about that Seniors Care Grant because we didn't index the income levels for the Seniors Care Grant, which means many seniors no longer qualify for it. A way we could help alleviate that and put more money in their pocket is to give them a reduction of the HST by 2 per cent. We're going to help the most vulnerable by doing that - seniors who are trying to make ends meet in their homes. We're going to help young families who are just getting started in life, trying to put down roots and build homes, buy homes, go to work, put their kids in activities, more money to help spur on the economy to grow even further.

But we're also going to help the working families - families that are working their tails off to make ends meet. You've got two people in a family working. They don't qualify for all of these incentives that are put out. They may not qualify for the HARP. They may not qualify for the home repair rebate. They may not qualify for any of these rebates. What would be good for them would be a reduction in the HST by 2 per cent. It helps everyone.

We know that there are people who are trying to stretch things, and this would give them that little wiggle room. The money is going to go back into the economy. I would almost argue that the government may not even see a reduction in the HST revenue that they would get from the HST, because this money is going to be re-spent, and there's going to be a lower tax - granted, on a bigger number - which at the end of the day might even be more money in the revenues of the government.

At the same time, it's there. It would show the people of Nova Scotia that the government understands the plight that they're under trying to make ends meet. It would help Nova Scotians to move forward with that purchase that maybe they've been putting off. Maybe their car is in desperate need of being replaced, and that little incentive of 2 per cent would help them get over the threshold.

It's going to help businesses in our community. There are many businesses, and we heard it today: 2 per cent out of 20 per cent. Two out of 10 small businesses don't feel confident that this government knows what they need or knows that they support them. What a way to show businesses that you support them, by a cut to the HST. It will improve their bottom line. It will improve their ability for greater sales. I hope the government is actually listening to some of the folks that I'm sure they're getting the same calls I'm getting at their offices.

Think about what we've seen in the rise in building costs over the last number of years. A reduction in HST on building costs will help people to do those necessary repairs to their homes and to build some of those multi-generational suites that we've been looking for. They can combine an HST cut with some of those other grants that are available.

It'll help landlords reduce their costs, and maybe not increase the rent as much, and provide more affordable housing for people. It will help renters. It will help homeowners. It literally will help all Nova Scotians, and that's what a good policy will do. A good policy can be spread out over the entire population. There's no segregating populations by monetary ways. It's going to help the most vulnerable. Yes, it will help those who are doing well in our economy, but they're going to be there to spend more money.

At the end of the day, I don't see any downside to a reduction in HST by two percentage points. We'll hear this government say they don't have the funds to do it. We know differently; they had a \$1.4 billion increase in revenue this year. They're going to have a significant increase next year. We've seen them project deficits over the last three years that mysteriously turn into surpluses. So we suspect that the same thing will probably happen with this year's budget.

I'm going to sit in a second, but I would like to really ask the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board to take a good, hard look at the ability to give Nova Scotians the break that they truly deserve, and give it to them soon. Nova Scotians deserve it. Nova Scotians

need it. Nova Scotians want it. Let's help them out. Let's get them through this affordability crisis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: We welcome the opportunity to talk about the cost of living challenges that Nova Scotians across the province are facing and the ways that this government could help, but isn't. Costs of all essentials have been rapidly rising - everything from power and food to fuel and housing. Everyone is feeling the pinch.

The cost of groceries increased over 6 per cent last year, and 13 per cent the year before. Last year's Food Banks Canada report card noted that 53 per cent of people in Nova Scotia feel that they are worse off than they were a year ago. This is a higher proportion than any other province. Power rates have increased 13.6 per cent in two years, and families are struggling to make ends meet.

We agree that people need a break. That's why we've been putting forward ideas for years now to help average Nova Scotian families facing rising housing costs, food costs, energy costs, with wages that just aren't keeping up. Ideas like removing unnecessary vehicle fees, the renewal sticker, for instance; or rent control and other rental protections. Stop seniors' evictions. Stop fixed term lease abuse.

We also suggested paying Nova Scotians a living wage. Free birth control and menstrual products. Low-income power rates. Ban power disconnections. Expanded home warming program. Heat pumps, as we all discussed before. Pharmacare co-payments. Universal school food program, which means free for all, not for some. Seniors income benefit. Paid sick days. Stop tip theft and wage theft. Increase and index HARP.

We want to make life more affordable for people. We want to keep people in their homes. We want to support them being healthy. We want to support them in their work safety so they can be healthy at work. We know that the Liberals let all these things stand while they were in power. We do think that discussions about affordability need to talk about taxes. We need to have these discussions. We need to make sure that this system is fair and works for Nova Scotians. That's why we've been talking for a while now about cutting the HST entirely off all grocery products. That's why the Nova Scotia NDP government removed all provincial tax off family essentials, including children's clothing, footwear, and diapers, and all provincial tax off power bills and home heating. This is all because we believe that Nova Scotians trying to afford these essentials need a break from increasing costs.

It wasn't that long ago that Stephen McNeil voted against taking the HST off power bills and home heating. In fact, the Liberals voted eight times to tax home heating and energy. I think many Nova Scotians like us are skeptical of these big promises the Liberals make in Opposition. The Liberals have been promising a gas tax since 2009, and even

asked about it again today. Despite the eight years in government the member for Yarmouth was in Cabinet, this never happened, so why would Nova Scotians believe him on this?

We are also skeptical about the math the Liberals are using here, estimating that people will save \$650 per year. It is based upon a false presumption that we all spend equally, which is untrue. Those with more disposable income will spend more and will therefore benefit more than others from an HST cut. A cut to the HST will give more money to people buying luxury goods than the families who deserve the break.

We heard some of this pushback after this was announced last month. Lori Turnbull, the director of the School of Public Administration and Associate Professor of Political Science at Dalhousie, said that this plan is “unlikely to have a major impact on the affordability crisis in the province,” and that “could be seen as missing the mark, to give something to people who largely don’t really need it and put the province at risk of not being able to provide the same level of service.” I will table that in a minute.

We heard last month from the Liberal leader that people need to eat, people need clothes, people need phones, people need internet. We agree, absolutely. We propose that no groceries should be taxed. Children’s clothes already don’t have the provincial tax on them at all. We could be looking into removing the provincial tax from other essential services and products, the way the Nova Scotia NDP did on power bills, which would help more people more directly.

I also want to highlight the reality that sales tax is a massive revenue generator for our province, last year bringing in \$2.3 billion in revenue. Revenue losses at this scale are undeniably going to mean “cut somewhere else.” I’m curious where the Liberals are proposing these cuts to take place. Do they want to cut spending on health care? Housing? We need a little bit more information, because how would this revenue loss impact our ability to create a universal school food program?

I know we both agree that a universal school food program needs to be free. Our ability to hire more family doctors, maybe, or build enough affordable housing. We’re looking to the Liberals to explain this, and that’s what I just stated.

What we are hoping to accomplish here needs to be discussed. Our caucus is in favour of increasing affordability for Nova Scotians, but we recognize that not all Nova Scotians are in similar positions. The measures the Liberals are proposing would disproportionately benefit those with higher incomes and disproportionately disadvantage those in the middle class and those with lower incomes.

I also want to state that even though I was having this message put forward, because there are a ton of ideas on this side of the aisle, I will say this: We have a government that has an opportunity to do a lot of things and yet they choose to do minimal. This is why the bill that’s being put forward is being put forward as a measure. But we all have ideas and

recommendations in order for measures to be kept so that all Nova Scotians are treated fairly - all Nova Scotians deserve a break, and all Nova Scotians can actually feel good in their homes, also have universal school food, and have all the things they need so they don't have to struggle and worry about what is going to happen tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

[5:15 p.m.]

JOHN A. MACDONALD: On the face of it, this sounds like a good plan, although I do want to comment on a couple of things that my member opposite said in his opening remarks. I just have a huge exception to the point of the massive fires we had, the people who lost their homes. His view is that we had a massive fire and we threw money at it. I take offence to that. Those are people who didn't have it, so I just can't believe that that's what was said.

For me, let's look at . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: I don't know if this is a point of order, Speaker. I didn't say anything about - what I said was that . . . (interruption). Okay, a point of privilege or something. He's taking . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. If you want to stand on a point of order or point of privilege, I will recognize you at the end of this debate.

The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Let's look at it. A 2 per cent decrease in HST would mean \$500 million in revenue that the government would not have. The Opposition speaks about the budget showing a deficit. This would add another half billion to it. This is based on the 2023-2024 forecast. Or would the Opposition prefer that we cut services?

I should explain how a change in HST would work. The HST is a co-ordinated tax agency with the federal government whereby the CRA determines the tax base. It's called the Comprehensive Integrated Tax Coordination Agreement. Let's talk about how the process changes. There are specific dates and time frames that have to be done with the federal government to make changes: a 120-day prior notice without an amendment, the first date being January, April, or July, and if mutually agreed, October; after the province has actually given notice to the federal government, an Amendment Notice the province is required to make public, an announcement in respect to the province's proposed

amendment, at least 60 days prior to the effective date of the proposed amendment, followed by the tabling of legislation.

The last time the HST was changed was on July 1, 2010. It went from 8 per cent to 10 per cent. Due to this, the Affordable Living Tax Credit was also announced at the same time in 2010 to counter the HST increase. This cost the province approximately \$61 million in 2023-24. Is the Opposition suggesting we remove it?

The Province also administers HST rebates for the Province's portion of the HST - Your Energy Rebate, the First-time Homebuyers' Rebate Program, and rebates for personal items such as children's clothing and printed books. Is the Opposition considering we should stop doing that?

The province recently announced it will provide a rebate for the provincial portion of the HST for purpose-built rental housing, effective September 14, 2024, with the same eligibility criteria as the federal measure. Is the Opposition suggesting we don't do that?

I'll also table a document here that shows that in 2013, the Liberal Party platform actually said "We will not harm the education and safety of your children to meet misguided political promises." For years there have been cuts to services, so I'm guessing that's the next stage. Should we stop with the Seniors Care Grant, which is about \$30 million a year? Should we stop building new schools? A school costs between \$20 million and \$40 million.

Maybe the member doesn't have gravel roads, but in rural Nova Scotia, we've got a lot of them. The province owns 23,000 kilometres of roads and 4,100 bridges. Maybe the member feels we should stop or underfund these programs, like has been done in the past.

I know that in my area, gravel roads - or gravel-less roads - are common. I've been on some of them. I'm wondering if I should tell the residents on Atwood Road, Walker Road, Selma Road, Maloney Road, Moose Brook, Malcolm Lucas Drive, McGrath Lake Road, North Salem Road, Lakecrest Drive, MacIntosh Road, Old Renfrew Road, Owen Davis Drive, and Ryan Avenue, just to name a few, that we're not going to be able to put any gravel on them.

Some of these roads need to have some major work to get the gravel back due to years of lack of government support for the hard-working members of the Department of Public Works. More have just been kicked down the road until this government was elected in August of 2021. The gravel program was \$11 million. We then doubled it to \$22 million. The last two years, it was \$36 million. The bridge program was \$30 million. It's now \$60 million.

I've reviewed some of the recent tenders to see what it's costing to maintain our roads. Repaving of some roads is about \$330,000 per kilometre. Should we stop repaving

roads? Gravel roads, it's about \$216,000 per kilometre. We've already had years of them not being done. We're not going to stop that. Or maybe the member thinks we should not replace some of the valuable equipment that we need for public works?

This government will be investing in public works, health care, education, and mental health, and we will continue to.

THE SPEAKER: Are there any further speakers?

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: We're very organized this evening on who's speaking to bills.

I'm pleased to speak to the HST Reduction Act. I'm really supportive of the initiative to try to reduce the tax burden in Nova Scotia, especially since we're seeing record spending over the last number of years: three budgets in a row with virtually every department in government now overspending their predefined budget with a careless view of the budgeting process altogether.

We know after this budget passes that at some point in time in the year, especially in March Madness, this government will be spending not in the order of a magnitude of tens of millions, but hundreds of millions of dollars. I would actually expect probably some kind of spending in the order of magnitude of a billion dollars, which is thrown around here like never before.

The amount of spending should be considered, and tax relief should be considered before that kind of spending is proposed. The reduction in HST is just one part of the tax envelope that we can look at. The previous government reduced income taxes for those who made less than \$79,000 a year after we found a way to claw our way back to a balanced fiscal responsibility after years of overspending that we're seeing now. Eventually, a Liberal government will have to come back in and make tough decisions again, so that we can come to a fiscal framework to be able to responsibly reduce taxes.

Not only did we reduce income taxes, but we reduced small business taxes, and we reduced corporate taxes to try to make us a little bit more competitive. We actually introduced the cap and trade system that would have reduced the impact to gas tax across the province.

There are a number of areas where we look at taxation and trying to find the best way to relieve Nova Scotians in what they pay in taxes. The next logical step, after looking at all the other ones that the last government cut, is the consumption tax. We have an opportunity. If this government really believes that we are the leaders in Atlantic Canada, and that we can be the leaders in economic growth, why don't we have the lowest

consumption tax in Atlantic Canada? We only need to cut the tax by 1 per cent to be able to have that claim. We're proposing cutting it by 2 per cent. We know that that will stimulate more consumer spending, which goes into the economy.

We know that helps the economy. We know it helps average everyday working families in the middle class if we reduce consumer spending on almost literally everything you spend money on, including gas. I know my colleague talked about how HST is removed from power. At one point in time, maybe the Liberal Party didn't support that, but we were in government for eight years and left that relief in place so that people had that opportunity to continue to spend on their fuel and on their oil and on power bills and not pay HST. Obviously, our position has been consistent since I have been in this House that HST wouldn't be charged on power bills.

If the party opposite had been in power - they opposed the cap and trade system in 2017, which would have put taxes up on power bills, on oil for home heat, on consumption tax. That's why it's really important, when we look at trying to be a competitive place in the federation, that we look at our overall tax. The only tax relief we're seeing in the budget so far is not a tax cut. In fact, it's just preventing a future tax increase by indexing. My colleague for Kings South has given the numbers on just how cheap that is. We're talking about a tax relief in this bill of, I think, \$600 million of tax revenue that the government will no longer collect but will go directly into Nova Scotians' pockets over a number of years.

That's why this HST relief program, I think, is the next logical step. It probably would have been, if we were still in government, an area that we would look at given that we already cut income tax for middle- and low-income families. We already cut small business tax. We cut corporate tax. We found a solution to keep consumption tax on carbon minimal. This last part of consumption tax, the HST, would have been an area that we would have looked to, given that so many provinces that we're competing with for the top talented people across the country - no matter what they're educated in, whether it's people working in areas that attract venture capital, whether it's doctors and lawyers, professional people. People whom we want here to grow the economy do look at a competitive tax base.

When we have now one in four people in our province working for government, more than any other place in Canada, when we have the biggest government in Canada now, with 63 per cent of our GDP, we need to find a way to make our government smaller, more effective. I think what this party, our centre party, clearly stands for is not big government like the party opposite - trying to spend their way through every problem, trying to find new issues even after they table the budget to spend money on, trying to bring new bills to the floor of the Legislature when we have actually already passed the budget - but we actually look at reducing the impact on people and the taxation that they're facing.

Instead, the government decides to run increasing and increasing deficits year over year. I would say I haven't seen it since the 1980s, but it's even more than that. They

believe in deficit spending when we're not in a recession, against what all leading economists have said is not sustainable. They believe in running a deficit no matter what the economic outlook is - population growing, GDP, unemployment all positive.

What happens with the next pandemic? What happens with another emergency when we have no reserves, when our debt-to-GDP is skyrocketing, when we're throwing out the Ivany report and trying to be fiscally responsible?

[5:30 p.m.]

They won the last election based on people wanting more spending in health care - fair enough. Does that justify overspending in every single department other than Finance and Treasury Board? Does that justify ignoring the whole budget process and making a mockery of every Spring sitting when we come into this House?

Why don't we look at reducing the burden, taking the chequebook away from the Progressive Conservative Party that wants to continue to sign cheques and put out news releases virtually every single day without scrutiny? The spendthriftness of this government is out of control. That's according to the Auditor General. They're not even following their own processes. They're not following the Finance Act. It needs to stop.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We have now reached the moment of interruption. The notice of the topic for adjournment debate was submitted by the member for Timberlea-Prospect, and reads as follows:

Whereas the Prime Minister wrote to seven premiers, including the Premier of Nova Scotia, to come up with a credible alternative to the federal carbon levy yesterday; and

Whereas Quebec, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories all have their own systems and are not subject to the federal carbon levy; and

Whereas Nova Scotia had a credible alternative that was more cost effective for Nova Scotians under the previous government, while raising millions to fight climate change, but this government has not negotiated new caps with the federal government, causing Nova Scotians to have to pay for the highest increase to gas in the country;

Therefore be it resolved that the Government of Nova Scotia submit a credible alternative under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change to the federal government that recognizes the work Nova Scotians have done over successive

governments so Nova Scotians do not face another spike at the gas pump on April 1st.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

GOV'T. (N.S.): FEDERAL CARBON LEVY: ALTERNATIVE - SUBMIT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I submitted this issue tonight because there is a brand new opportunity for the government to get back to work and get back to the negotiating table and negotiate with our leveraging position that they threw out the last time they had an opportunity in 2022.

I want to go back to August, when the government came up with a plan - within weeks, I understand, on the 19th - when "Nova Scotia pitches something 'better than a carbon tax' to Ottawa," and that was reported in CBC, which was a PowerPoint presentation that went through targets, and I'll table that. I said at the time that I wouldn't dignify it as a plan. I said they have effectively announced the carbon tax is coming to Nova Scotia. I believe that every member in that House who was paying attention knew what they were doing by proposing something that wasn't aligned with the Pan-Canadian Framework that was agreed upon by jurisdictions across Canada in 2016.

To put it simply, carbon levy or cap and trade. Instead, they tried to put together a PowerPoint presentation with a whole bunch of targets, some of them updated, but really the only target that was relevant to the discussion was carbon reduction: the GHG reduction target of 53 per cent by 2030 below 2005 levels. That target was established in 2019 by former Minister of the Environment Gordon Wilson, and all parties supported it.

That is the best target in the country, and it continues to be. The government came in in 2021 and put it in a new piece of legislation with a whole bunch of other goals that we were going to update in regulations as part of Gordon Wilson's bill that was passed in the House in 2019.

There wasn't anything new, other than an aspiration to build a whole bunch of offshore wind and eventually export hydrogen all over the world. This government staged a public relations stunt and knew that it was a poison pill for the federal government to accept.

Now I respect many of the members opposite, and that they are opposed to a carbon tax. That is beside the point of the importance of working within a federation to try to find the best solution for our constituents that minimizes the cost, the sticker shock, and still continues to fight climate change with a price on pollution. And I'll say it here: I believe in putting a price on pollution. It is the cheapest way, and the only credible way, to fight climate change, the defining issue of our time. And it requires collaboration.

Hard things are hard. I heard about this: It's hard to figure out the solution. Well, when it comes to climate change and figuring out how it aligns with affordability, it does take work, and sometimes saying no, which we did in - it actually forced a negotiation, when we said a carbon tax wasn't coming to Nova Scotia. Okay, what's the alternative? What else is in the plan? Well, we can look at a cap and trade system. Quebec and Ontario at the time both had one. We're talking about virtually over half the population of Canada, and they link to California, the largest economy in North America. What do they know that we don't? How come they understand that they can find the lowest-cost carbon reduction? What does the whole European Union know that we don't know? The largest trading system in the world finding the lowest-cost reductions to fight climate change - virtually the whole continent.

Collaboration I would put before confrontation. When I asked if the minister would work with his Atlantic colleagues to find a way to put forward a cap and trade system within our own region, or with the 10 northeastern states that have a cap and trade system, he said, No, in 2022 we got together and we confronted the federal government. We puffed up our chests and said no carbon tax is coming to Nova Scotia or to Atlantic Canada.

Where did that get us? That got us the largest increase at the pumps in the country juxtaposed with the collaboration that had to take place and the hard discussions about where we will set caps. Where were the caps set to make it 1 cent a litre? I'll tell you: They were set recognizing our hard caps we already had in regulations here, and that's why we had high power rates. We are one of the only jurisdictions that had hard caps on renewable energy standards that made our power rates more expensive at the time. That's why our caps weren't set as low as in Quebec and Ontario, so it had less of a carbon price.

The carbon price, when we left government, was \$50 a tonne, corresponding with 1 cent a litre. Now the carbon price is moving up to \$80 a tonne. You can't tell me that it's justified to have a 17-cent price increase at the pump, when it went from 1 cent at \$50 a tonne to 17 cents at \$80 a tonne. Whose math is that? Progressive Conservative math led us to where we are.

This concept of cap and trade has worked to solve many issues, some of which Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was part of. The ozone layer with the Montreal Protocol capped and traded CFCs and halons to make sure that we were looking at the lowest-cost price for the private sector to tackle that issue that was having a deleterious impact to our ozone layer. Acid rain in the 1990s, looking at reducing sulphur dioxide at the power plants, something we have an issue with in this province. That's something the Province could do too, by the way - reduce our sulphur caps.

Want to close some of those coal plants down, three of them over time already. It's driving up our costs, driving up our carbon pricing costs over years. Close them down, we solved that issue with acid rain. Taking lead out of gas in the 1980s, cap and trade again. Three major environmental issues were solved by trading systems.

We had a system and we had legislation that would not even have needed to be amended for us to link with other provinces, other states, that are showing the way with innovation and guaranteeing carbon reductions. That's what a cap and trade system does when you compare it to carbon taxes. Cap and trades guarantee that we reduce our carbon emissions. The only thing it did for this province? It raised tens of millions of dollars each auction to spend on electric vehicle incentives. I guarantee you the members see more and more EVs on the streets.

Efficiency programs for low-income Nova Scotians. Two of the things I announced on the first day of my office as Premier that that party criticized, especially in rural areas. Trying to divide urban and rural communities. Clean programs, solar community programs leading the way. All this revenue, which is now over \$100 million, the government has removed themselves from being able to get because they couldn't come up with a program that was in the best interests of Nova Scotia.

They said they will continue in some way, so that will come from general revenue. What's that? Again, it's tax. We just talked about HST. They're either going to have to increase taxes, a future government is going to have to increase taxes, or they're going to continue to add to the debt for our future generations to pay. They are downloading social costs of carbon to my kids and yours, and the health of our population will suffer, and they are downloading fiscal costs with this view that nobody cares about deficit spending anymore.

Don't worry about giving up that revenue in that Green Fund. Don't worry about that. We'll find the money, as we always do. We'll spend money no matter where the squeaky wheel is. If there's a pesky environmental group that wants a program, we'll find it in general revenue.

The reality is that the Pan-Canadian Framework was violated when this government removed our cap and trade legislation without a price on pollution. They knew with that PowerPoint presentation by just reiterating existing targets that there was no price on pollution. That's what triggered the carbon levy. The carbon levy that Nova Scotians are paying at the pumps is a direct result of an abdication of leadership and working together to find the best solution for Nova Scotians - that recognizes that we have the highest power rates and high gas prices, and recognizes that we were leaders, and can continue to be leaders by working together to fight the defining issue of our time.

I request the government go back, work with your colleagues across Atlantic Canada at least, if not throughout the United States where we used to be a board member. We chaired the Western Climate Initiative up until last year, and I understand that our agreement runs out in the next few days. Let's get back to the table with the Western Climate Initiative. Let's get back to the table and demand a better deal from Ottawa. Let's start the carbon levy, and get back to a cap and trade that works for Nova Scotians.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you to the member for Timberlea-Prospect for kicking off this discussion. I do think - and I think we all share this - we know that everything we're doing here needs to be centered around the question of our environmental sustainability and survival. We know that when we don't take action on addressing climate change, it results in negative health outcomes, it costs our province more money, and it's holding us back.

I think government has another chance to get this right. I know we have legislated goals and targets that really, while bold, were also the easiest part of all of this. This was the easiest part. Now we need action that actually gets us to the goals and targets.

I don't want to be sitting here in five years of missing targets, or 10 years of missing targets. It's really important to me that we actually take action on, as the member for Timberlea-Prospect said, the issue of our time. This is what Nova Scotians expect us to do. This is what people want to see us do.

We have legislative goals and targets, and lots of things are just not happening on the environmental front in terms of getting us there. I think we're late on the solid waste plan. When we heard about the rollback, the scrapping of the Coastal Protection Act - and I continue to hear from dozens of people every week - thousands of Nova Scotians were appalled, because they thought that was actually a concrete action that was going forward.

Then we had this government that was all about picking a fight with Ottawa and with the other provinces, yet at the same time the Premier today said that he'll work with anybody. If that's the case, now is the time to put that into practice: to do the work - not pick a fight. Nova Scotians want us to do the work.

We all say this. We all spent last year experiencing climate change on our front doors. Folks in other sectors, like in agriculture, have been talking about this for years: their homes, their families, their livelihoods, their farms are all affected on a daily basis by very real climate change, and it's not slowing down.

We just had the warmest February on record for the world. This is only increasing. We have a real responsibility to step up and come up with a plan to start making some change, and also addressing the climate anxiety that people feel. Government has a role in that - in putting forth not only some targets but some clear action that's going to get us there.

I think the other real anxiety that people have in this province these days is around their economic anxiety. People are worried. People are worried about how much life is going to cost. Everything is getting more expensive. Yes, inflation has slowed down, but it's still a factor. Wages and salaries have not kept up, and costs that people feel in their

immediate lives have a huge impact. The stress that people feel about going to fill up their tank these days is palpable. It's what people talk about - if you need to drive for your work or get to your work, and then have higher prices on food.

[5:45 p.m.]

Without controlling the message around options for putting a price on carbon or other actions, this government has left people to wander into an area of policy debate that's being negatively influenced, particularly from the federal level, and - instead of talking about capitalism and where our issues are coming from - blaming it on the carbon tax.

That's not helpful for anyone. It's not helpful for us. It's not helpful for addressing climate. It's not helpful for folks who are worried about the cost of living. Honestly, I don't see that this government is a leader on climate change. Targets and goals - great. Anybody can set a target. Anybody can set a goal. It's actually doing the work to get there.

They didn't negotiate to find a plan that would better accommodate Nova Scotian realities. They haven't created meaningful transit, energy, or other alternatives. I know people have to drive in rural Nova Scotia. I grew up in rural Nova Scotia. The fact of the matter is that we're quite a small province and could really do an amazing job with public mass transit. That can help achieve climate goals and help achieve people's economic and financial goals.

Despite a pledge to local foods, it's unclear that this government has any strategy for supporting the agricultural industry, which needs help and support to respond to climate change. It can also help us bring down food costs, because we can bring down transportation costs and be able to truly have local food and local access in the province.

We need to move past rhetoric. It is stunning to me that we're in another legislative sitting without real ideas coming forth. On coastal action, there is a map over which people are disputing the data that's there. There might be some other things that come forward in the next little while that might help municipalities, but basically there's nothing. There are some real opportunities here. We can immediately mandate net zero building standards. We can immediately ban fossil heat from all new health care infrastructure, public housing, special planning areas, and land acquired through the Build Nova Scotia programs. We could meet our goals in terms of housing, health care and infrastructure, and at the same time be meeting climate goals.

We need to expand our Demand Side energy programs and make sure that people don't have to pay out of pocket when they make the choice for heat pumps, solar or insulation, and in fact, that we are supporting people up front. I think you would see a quick commitment from lots of people who know they have a problem, but can't figure out a way to get the money organized to address the problem. I'm one of these people on the Halifax

peninsula who's sitting with an oil tank and hot water radiators in my old house, and I can't figure out how to afford getting rid of that and getting heat pumps.

Another piece is - there's so much we could be doing through the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration in terms of building a green workforce. We talk about the need to build up the trades. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board couldn't provide any information on who's accessing the MOST program, for instance, so we don't know if some of the people accessing it have done the green technology program at NSCC or other things. This is the type of integrated approach we need.

It's a complex issue, and we need solid, complex solutions so we're hitting it from all angles. We know we need to get Nova Scotia Power off fossil fuels. We've talked a lot about where the low-income energy program is and just saying no to taking things out of the ground at this point. We think there should be a \$1 billion housing preservation fund that includes financing and requirements for retrofits to ensure that all buildings purchased and financed are net zero within five years.

The Joint Regional Transportation network should be this entire province. We are actually quite a small geographic area. Throughout the province, we need enhanced access to mass public transit. Young people need it, seniors need it, our workers need it, and the environment needs it. Again, this is an industry. It also creates benefit for those who can get involved.

We need to really up our game in terms of progressive building codes. We also call for the passage of the Coastal Protection Act despite what we've seen happen here in the past month.

This is the time and this is the challenge. If we don't actually achieve the goals and targets that this government has set out, we're letting down our communities, our youth, and the industries that could be built from that. I certainly want to see that this government steps up and is a partner in finding solutions for climate change.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Ten minutes is not a long time to speak on an important topic. Most people around here feel it is one of, if not the most important, topics of our lifetime.

I think that everyone can agree that all MLAs in this Chamber want to continue to work toward a green, renewable environment and province, not just for ourselves, but for our children. The things I keep hearing about over and over - and that is frustrating me - are things like: These are public relations stunts, and there was a plan and there were all these different things that happened.

Before I get into the why, I want to tell you about a little firm called Maple Leaf Strategies. You may not know what Maple Leaf Strategies is. We know what the Toronto Maple Leafs and Maple Leaf bologna are. Maple Leaf Strategies is actually a public relations firm and a government strategy firm.

There was an email sent April 14th from the then-Premier's Office to Maple Leaf Strategies that said "Further to my recent outreach to you, we are still unclear on how to proceed with the statement Premier Rankin made in his letter to Mr. Sorensen of March 8, 2021 . . ."

THE SPEAKER: Order. When there is a quote - I'm sorry, please just acknowledge by the member's constituency.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: . . . the Premier of the day "made in his letter to Mr. Sorensen on March 8, 2021 where he wrote:

"While I am not in a position to specify a particular approach to carbon pricing post 2022 in Nova Scotia at this time, I want to assure you that we are committed to a carbon pricing compliance pathway for your project." Our question is how do we turn this commitment into action? We would welcome a discussion in real time.

What this says, and what this shows, is that there was no plan. The truth is that we know - and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change won't say it - but one of the first things that was said to him when he walked into that ministerial position was that the cap and trade system was dead. It was gone. It didn't work for Nova Scotia. It was broken.

The fact is that we continue to hear comments about California, Quebec, and being part of the cap and trade system there - the WCIS. The department was very clear that this was going to cost Nova Scotians money - that Nova Scotians would actually be paying out for credits.

The system that was supposedly supposed to take place would actually cost Nova Scotians more money out of their pockets, and that money would have . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would ask that the member for Timberlea-Prospect stand in his place and retract that.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, what the member had said about spending more money is not true. I disagree with what the member had said.

THE SPEAKER: Order.

IAIN RANKIN: I will retract my comment.

THE SPEAKER: As we all know, in this Chamber it is unparliamentary to accuse another member of lying. I would kindly ask the member to stand in his place and please retract that statement.

The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

IAIN RANKIN: I have a lot of respect for the Chair and yourself, Speaker. It's the first time I've had to do that in 10 years. I retract the word "lying."

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic. I would also ask the member for Halifax Atlantic to make sure he tables those comments, please.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, the reason I wanted to stand up on this today is - it's not just that. It's the confusion around the federal side of this. We have MPs who stood outside of this House, who go up to Ottawa and say that we need to carve out the carbon tax for rural Nova Scotia. That's what they say.

The fact of the matter is I cornered one of those MPs - one of those particular MPs - and I said: Parts of my own community are rural. We don't have access to bus routes. Why aren't we getting it? He said: Take it up with Ottawa.

If there was so much faith in a carbon tax, why are they carving it out? I would argue that the federal government putting forward and saying a carbon tax is working, and then scaling it back and scaling it back and scaling it back, is for political purposes. Is the carbon tax political or is it not political? Does it work or doesn't it work?

There are ways to reduce our carbon footprint. We all know that. What we heard today in Question Period from the minister is that Nova Scotians are still driving. We're still driving. They're actually driving more.

There were incentives for electric vehicles, and what we heard when speaking to the other minister in the department - 1 per cent in Nova Scotia took advantage of that. I'll tell you, just the other day, I went to look for a vehicle. We're looking for a vehicle for five - two adults and three children. An electric vehicle, \$120,000, \$140,000. A two-year wait,

20 per cent down. They told me, You've got to put about \$30,000 down. We're going to hold it for two years, and then you'll get a vehicle.

I heard one of the members talking about no investment in mass transportation. I just saw a massive investment in a ferry in Bedford. Yesterday, the Department of Public Works sat here and members of the JRTA who are actually doing the work on how to move people around this province in mass transit ways - that's an insult to them. It's an insult to all the work they're doing across this province.

I went back and I looked a little bit at what was said and what wasn't said, and in 2016, when this was being negotiated, the then-minister said that we were a leader in Canada in GHG reductions, in carbon footprint - we were doing better than anyone else. Well, those numbers haven't changed, so why was it true then and not true now? I would argue that the federal government gave the then-provincial government - which I was part of, I was proud of the cap and trade system - they gave them two years to negotiate it, to get something done. Well, that letter that I'm going to table was sent in April 2021. An election was, what, three months later? Where it said there was no plan?

I know we hear the Premier talk about: Go fast, get things done. Go fast, get things done. They're expecting that minister to do a plan that took them two years in three months.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for late debate has expired. I want to thank all members for participating on this important topic.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[6:05 p.m. The House resolved into Committee of the Whole House on Bills with Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[9:24 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered the following bill: Bill No. 419, and has made some progress.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, pursuant to Rule 5(c), I rule the House hours for March 28th be not 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. but 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for March 28th that the hours be 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[9:25 p.m. The House resolved into CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[10:00 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered Bill No. 419 and has made some further progress.

THE SPEAKER: As we've now met the hour of adjournment, we stand adjourned until tomorrow from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Tomorrow's a new day. Thanks, everybody.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 10:01 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 1,019**

By: John A MacDonald (Hants East)

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

Whereas the former Rawdon Gold Mines Union Church in Hants County was a community landmark since 1908, serving as a place of worship and connection for generations of families who settled this area; and

Whereas the small wooden rural church was saved from demolition, relocated, and repurposed into a unique home nearby that preserves its architectural and historical significance, and was granted municipal heritage designation from the Municipality of East Hants; and

Whereas its owner, Tracy Barron, turned the story of the building's new lease on life into a children's book about a little Nova Scotia church mouse who went on the adventure of a lifetime when his home suddenly started moving beneath him;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Tracy Barron - a long-time public servant and seventh generation of the Barron family to make Rawdon Gold Mines her home - on preserving her community and family history in renovating this beautiful old building, and the publication of her new book *The Adventures of Spencer the Church Mouse*.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,020

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Brett Jacquard won a Bronze Medal for Curling;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Brett on this impressive achievement and thank him for making his community proud.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,021

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Emily Demings won a Bronze Medal for Curling;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Emily on this impressive achievement and thank her for making her community proud.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,022

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Gary Hudson attended the Games to coach and support our athletes;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank Gary Hudson for dedicating his time and energy to our athletes, our community is better because of volunteers like Gary.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,023

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the Greenville Community Centre has been selected for the Lieutenant Governor's Community Spirit Award for 2023; and

Whereas recipients are chosen by a selection committee based on evidence of citizen engagement, civic pride and a positive outlook on the future of the community while reflecting the diversity and resiliency of communities right across the province; and

Whereas the Greenville Community Centre is being celebrated and recognized for preserving the community's rich history, demonstrating community spirit, and its dedication to making life better for their citizens;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate the Board of the Greenville Community Centre : Sheridan B. Lawrence, President; Bruce Johnson, Vice President; Wanda Doucette, Treasurer; Chuck Smith, Secretary; Sheridan A. Lawrence, Director; Pam Alexander, Member; and Angie Lawrence, Honourary Member on being awarded this prestigious and well-deserved honour and thank them for their dedication and generosity to all members of their community and making it a joyous and wonderful place to live.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,024

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Lisa Fitzgerald won a Bronze Medal in Curling;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Lisa Fitzgerald on this impressive achievement and thank her for making her community proud.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,025

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Lynn Doucette attended the Games to coach and support our athletes;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank Lynn Doucette for dedicating her time and energy to our athletes, our community is better because of volunteers like Lynn.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,026

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Michael Hagen won a Bronze Medal for Curling;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Michael Hagen on this impressive achievement and thank him for making his community proud.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,027

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Quentin Herritt attended the Games to coach and support our athletes;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly thank Quentin Herritt for dedicating his time and energy to our athletes, our community is better because of volunteers like Quentin.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,028

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Tyson Herritt won a Silver Medal for Curling;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Tyson Herritt on this impressive achievement and thank him for making his community proud.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,029

By: Hon. Zach Churchill (Yarmouth)

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

Whereas the 2024 Special Olympics Canada Winter Games were recently held in Calgary; and

Whereas several athletes from Yarmouth made the exciting trip to compete and represent their hometown with pride; and

Whereas Walter Muise won a Bronze Medal for Curling;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Walter Muise on this impressive achievement and thank him for making his community proud.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,030

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Sarah Mitton from Brooklyn, Queens County, has become the Women's Indoor Shot Put World Champion; and

Whereas in securing the Gold Medal at the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Glasgow, Sarah twice broke her own Canadian record, registering a massive final throw of 20.22 metres; and

Whereas her next major challenge will be the Summer Olympics in Paris this year, where Sarah will be amongst the favourites to win;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in wishing Sarah the very best in her quest for Olympic Gold and enjoy the outstanding achievement of being a World Champion.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,031

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Sea Port Gifts & Treasures is a beloved gift shop, located in beautiful Port Medway, Queens County; and

Whereas Valerie Tailleur, store owner and her team presented 3 schools and a rescue mission in the South Shore area with cheques totalling \$1,300 as a result of her Ornaments for the Christmas Tree donation fundraiser; and

Whereas the famed warm welcome and hospitality keeps customers coming back, the store has immersed itself in community life since opening five years ago;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking Valerie and her team for contributing in so many ways to Queens County and beyond.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,032

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas the Queens County Food Bank, which is operated by over 50 volunteers and expertly led by Shelly Pancyk, is a critical asset within our community; and

Whereas the Queens County Food Bank serves over 200 families per month, which is an increase of 35 per cent from pre-COVID times;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in thanking each and every one of the amazing volunteers who make all this happen, working tirelessly every day of the week to serve the community in such an essential way.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,033

By: Hon. Kim Masland (Queens)

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

Whereas Aqualitas Inc., which is leading the way as the first organic cannabis producer in the world, has been issued with the European Union Good Manufacturing Practices Certification and a Health Canada Drug Establishment License; and

Whereas based on the Mersey Harbour in Queens County, Aqualitas is a Nova Scotian licensed producer committed to producing clean, consistent, and safe products by utilizing organic and sustainable processes; and

Whereas these latest accreditations confirm compliance with the highest industry manufacturing standards in the world in relation to the way in which flower cultivation, finished packaging, and extraction processes are conducted;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating everyone who worked so hard to achieve these world-class accolades.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,034

By: Hon. John Lohr (Kings North)

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

Whereas Reginald Outhouse is a very dedicated caretaker and has been a long-time volunteer at Valley Community Learning Association, and like many other courageous adult learners, in 2014, Reg went back to school at Valley Community Learning Association (VCLA) and completed his GED; and

Whereas For 25 years, he has helped at the soup kitchen, served at Open Arms and for many years, with his gentle and persistent, and unique style, he has been an avid fundraiser for the Coldest Night of the Year; and

Whereas Reg's greatest act of generosity has been his constant presence and support for his little sister Marie, whom he has since 2007 been the sole caretaker of, making sure that all her needs are met;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly that all members of this Assembly join MLA John Lohr in thanking Reginald Outhouse for his many good deeds and contributions to his family and community.