



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Karla MacFarlane

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First Session

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

11:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Karla MacFarlane

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Danielle Barkhouse, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order. We'll now begin the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just want to table an article that pertains to my member statement coming up. It is entitled “‘Living in fear’: N.S. senior among those calling for end to fixed-term leases.”

THE SPEAKER: The document is tabled.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I would like to table two documents, both pertaining to both of my member's statements, if that would be okay.

THE SPEAKER: The documents are tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Also in connection with a member statement for later, I would like to table a document: "Unifor ratifies agreement with CN Autoport."

THE SPEAKER: The document is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,055

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

Whereas World Health Day is marked annually on April 7th and each year draws attention to a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world; and

Whereas this year this day is a reminder that around the world the right to health for millions of people is increasingly coming under threat; and

Whereas the focus of this year's World Health Day is "My health, my right," chosen to champion the right of everyone everywhere to have access to quality health services, education and information, as well as safe drinking water, clean air, good nutrition, quality housing, decent working and environmental conditions, and freedom from discrimination;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize April 7th as World Health Day, an opportunity to focus global attention on everyone's right health.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,056

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

Whereas Nova Scotians are concerned about climate change and want clean, healthy air to breathe, and we know the idling of vehicles negatively impacts our air, our climate, and our health; and

Whereas the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg has consistently demonstrated leadership in responding to climate change and a commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability; and

Whereas the recent introduction of an Anti-Idling Policy by the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg represents a significant step toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality in the community;

Therefore be it resolved that Nova Scotians join me in recognizing the leadership and commitment of the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg for its proactive work to improve health outcomes and mitigate climate change by implementing the Anti-Idling Policy.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 458 - An Act to Increase the Heating Rebate Program. (Hon. Patricia Arab)

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that this 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. 1,057

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

Whereas autism spectrum disorder is a neurodivergent condition that affects approximately 32,000 Nova Scotians, and April is Autism Acceptance Month worldwide; and

Whereas autistic people display a range of strengths and abilities, including learning to read at a very early age; memorizing and learning information quickly; thinking and learning in a visual way; having an extraordinarily good memory; being precise and detail-oriented; and being exceptionally honest, reliable, and dependable, with a drive for perfection and order; and

Whereas it is of urgent concern that services to support autistic Nova Scotians remain inadequate, and that all Nova Scotians have a role to play to ensure that inclusion results in the realization of our personal and collective potential;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly directs the Standing Committee on Health to make recommendations regarding the development of a provincial strategy to support autistic Nova Scotians across their life spans and in diverse sectors

such as health, education, labour and skills, and seniors and long-term care.

I request waiver of notice and passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

SHELburne CO. ATHLETES: PERFORMANCE - CONGRATS.

NOLAN YOUNG: Speaker, I rise today to recognize an amazing ending to a great season for many Shelburne County athletes. Our first Special Olympics floor hockey team won gold in Calgary, and Martin Fudge was named Player of the Game; as well, Nakita Penny won the gold in the 100-metre snowshoe competition. The U15-AA hockey team were the South champs; the Shelburne Flames were named Champion of the Day; Akaya Shand and Kassidy Nickerson won gold and silver, respectively, in provincial figure skating; the SRHS senior girls basketball were provincial champs; the LRHS senior boys basketball team won silver at provincials; the LRHS junior high boys basketball team won regional silver medals; the U15 junior boys hockey were regional champions, and SRHS junior boys basketball were regional champions. I respectfully ask all members of the Legislature join me in congratulating these fine athletes. Way to go.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

SEXUAL ASSAULT Awar. MO.: NEED FOR ACTION - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I rise today to recognize April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This April marks 10 years since the province has recognized Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Today I want to extend our caucus's support to the tireless advocates, service providers, and survivors of sexual assault. This year, I'd like to highlight the bravery of Mia Fournier-White, the president of the Student Association at the NSCC Lunenburg Campus in Bridgewater, and a survivor herself. She launched a campaign called "What Were You Wearing," which displays nearly 40 outfits reflecting what people were wearing

when they were assaulted with a goal to raise awareness and eliminate the biases that victims face. She said that she hopes this campaign will inspire people to ask different questions like “What supports do you need?” instead of “What were you wearing?”

With awareness comes the need for action, and one way right now that this government can act is to ban the misuse of NDAs in sexual assault cases to protect and support more victims of sexual assault in our province. This month and every month we urge the government to take action to protect and support victims of sexual assault.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Yes, certainly, the honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island on an introduction.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us today in the West Gallery are Steve Wilsack and Matthew Grant, who are here in recognition of their work in the Grand Parade square. I'll ask them to rise and accept the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. I hope you enjoy your visit. Thank you for being here with us and for all that you do.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

WILSACK, S./GRANT, M.: HELP FOR UNHOUSED - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Nova Scotians everywhere are deeply concerned about the housing crisis and increasing homelessness in all communities, rural and urban.

This past November, Steve Wilsack and Matthew Grant saw a growing need in the Grand Parade square, where people had started to live rough just as winter set in. They also lived in for 108 continuous days to try to keep the community sheltered and safe. They worked with people in the Grand Parade square one by one to understand their priorities and needs and then articulated these in solidarity to media and policy-makers.

The majority of those who lived in the Grand Parade square moved on to appropriate next steps thanks to their tireless advocacy. Steve and Matt ensured that everyone was seen as an individual with unique abilities. They did what so many of us want to do: they made a difference in the lives of many who had been systemically disconnected from services and support.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing the volunteer efforts of Steve Wilsack and Matthew Grant in supporting homeless people in Nova Scotia.

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

TEAM MACNUTT: CURLING CH'SHIPS PERF. - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: I rise today to extend a heartfelt congratulations to Team MacNutt, skipped by Truro resident and neighbour Ally MacNutt, who represented Nova Scotia at the Canadian U-21 Women's Curling Championships last week. Team MacNutt, who went undefeated to win the Nova Scotia banner, continued their remarkable run going 8-0, finishing in first place in the round robin, and defeating Team Alberta 9-2 in the semis.

In the final, they scored three in the second and never looked back as they defeated Team Ontario 9-5 in the final. This capped off a remarkable 10-and-0 record at the national championships to win gold in front of a boisterous crowd of family members and friends cheering, blowing horns, and ringing cowbells. Now, Team Canada will represent our country at the World Junior Championships 2025. Members of Team Canada include skip Ally MacNutt, Maria Fitzgerald, Alison Umlah, Grace McCusker, and their coach, Theresa Breen.

Ally wasn't the only MacNutt at Nationals. Her sister Anna was lead on the Team Blades squad, one of the youngest teams at the event, which played two sheets over in the bronze medal game against Alberta. They are just getting started and we cannot wait to see what's next.

I want to personally congratulate Ally and Anna on their success on the ice and thank them for being such inspiring role models for the kids and youth in our community, especially in our neighborhood.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

OFFICE STAFF: ASSISTANCE - THANKS

HON. TONY INCE: I rise in my place to thank and recognize the individuals who help me through my daily routines in my office, as many of us have great people in our offices, helping us connect and relate to many of the people who contact us. The three individuals in my office are Jennifer Robbins, Colleen Walsh, and Anne Lindsay. I'd like to thank them for all the work they do in helping me maintain this office.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

[11:15 a.m.]

COM. GARDEN WK.: BENEFITS - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Community Garden Week, April 1st to 7th. Each year, Community Garden Week comes around with the poking up of Spring flowers through the soil, lighting up the landscape. Gardening efforts do more than add beauty. Undoubtedly, they do indeed. They serve as hubs for nourishing the body, mind, and soul. Some community gardens in Halifax Needham that I'd like to recognize are Hope Blooms Community Garden, Mulgrave Park Community Garden, Prescott Street Community Garden, and North End Community Garden. Those are just a few. I would like all members to join me in celebrating Community Garden Week, and I would encourage all members to go visit a garden near you and enjoy the beauty.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

KENTVILLE ROTARY CLUB: 100TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I rise today to acknowledge and congratulate the Rotary Club of Kentville as they celebrate their 100th anniversary. The Kentville Rotary Club was founded in 1924. Kentville Rotary Club's guiding principles are based on a four-way test: Is it the truth, is it fair to all concerned, will it build goodwill and better friendship, and will it be beneficial to all concerned? The Kentville Club is prominent in the service of our community, providing a range of grant programs to qualified organizations that support seniors, the relief of poverty, programs for the physically and mentally challenged, preservation of the environment, advancement of education, international development, and advancement of the arts. Please join me today to congratulate the Kentville Rotary Club as they celebrate their 100th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

WILSACK, STEVE: HELP FOR UNHOUSED - THANKS

HON. KEITH IRVING: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a remarkable individual from Wolfville who recognized the urgency of housing the unhoused and acted. From sourcing tents to organizing essential supplies and power and providing a sympathetic ear, Steve Wilsack's dedication to supporting the unhoused deserves our thanks. Steve also became the voice for those living in the tent communities in Halifax, doing many media interviews over this Winter and sharing their stories. His compassionate response to the unhoused crisis exemplifies the spirit of finding solutions within the strength of our communities. Individuals like Steve and Matthew Grant embody the values of compassion and solidarity that we need to solve our province's most difficult social challenges. His selfless efforts reflect the essence of Nova Scotian kindness and generosity.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly to join me in recognizing and thanking Steve Wilsack for his unwavering commitment to supporting citizens facing urgent housing needs, and for forming a path forward for sustainable solutions.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

CN AUTOPORT WORKERS: NEW CONTRACT - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: I'd like to extend the congratulations of the House to the 239 members of Unifor Local 100 at the CN Autoport, who have ratified a three-year collective agreement, ending their strike that began February 27th at the trans-shipment facility in Eastern Passage. The agreement sees wage increases in each year of the settlement, with lump-sum bonuses in Years 1 and 2, as well as an additional paid personal day, improvements to vacation, pensions, and the cost of benefits. The Autoport strike was unnecessarily dragged out by CN's decision to employ scab workers from the outset of the dispute. It was in the course of this strike that provincial anti-scab legislation was introduced, and Jennifer Murray, Unifor's Atlantic regional director, says the union "will continue this campaign in the names of our members at Local 100, and we won't stop until we win."

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

OSSINGER, WAYNE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, Wayne Ernest Ossinger, formerly of Williamswood, living in Hants County, passed away March 31st. Wayne loved his family, loved the outdoors, his dogs, and hunting. Wayne had a huge heart. His animals brought countless smiles to kids and youths at local events. Thank you for that, Wayne. Wayne was always there for me, for the community, and for anyone who asked. To his mom Christine and his wife Kristen: Know Wayne was loved by everyone who knew him. To his brother Sherman: Love you, brother; we are here for you. To his kids Jacklyn and Hunter: Your dad was a model of a human being. Rest in peace, Wayne. A community mourns.

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

OWNERS: STREAKFREE WINDOW WASHING - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the entrepreneurial spirit and initiative of two outstanding young individuals, Harry Koutroulakis and Dylan Butts, who are currently in Grade 11 at Halifax West High School. These motivated entrepreneurs have embarked on a journey to provide professional window cleaning services to both residential and business clients in our community.

Their venture, StreakFree Window Washing, started just a few months ago, when Harry and Dylan began by going door-to-door in the Clayton Park, Rockingham and Wedgewood areas, showcasing their commitment to serving the local community. In addition to their entrepreneurial pursuits, Harry and Dylan are both actively involved in sports within our community, demonstrating their well-rounded approach to life and their dedication to making a positive impact.

Harry and Dylan are outstanding examples of the potential and talent that exists within our youth. I hope their determination, passion and drive serve to inspire other youth who see their success, and I commend them for their entrepreneurial spirit and community-minded approach. Let us celebrate their achievements and offer our support as they continue to make a difference in our community and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

FIXED-TERM LEASES: PROTEST AGAINST - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: On March 7th, tenants gathered for an ACORN rally calling on this government to ban landlords from only using fixed-term leases. As I'm sure we all know, fixed-term leases end on a predetermined date. They circumvent the need for a landlord to have a good reason to evict someone, and they provide a way to get around the temporary rent caps.

One of the tenants present at this ACORN demonstration was Dartmouth North constituent Margaret Anne McHugh, a senior who herself has a fixed term lease. Margaret Anne told Global News that she and other tenants in her building on fixed-term leases were living in fear. As a senior, Margaret Anne is on a fixed income, and worries that she, her partner, and her fellow senior neighbours could be thrown out and replaced by someone who can pay more rent. Then where would they go that they could afford?

That this could and does often happen is a failure of the system. All of us in this Chamber must heed the calls of constituents like Margaret Ann McHugh and make the needed changes to end the fixed term lease loophole.

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

TEAM MACISAAC: CURLING CH'SHIPS PERF. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Team MacIsaac on their exceptional second place finish at the Canadian Under-21 Men's Curling Championships. This team, which plays out of the Truro Curling Club, has had another exceptional year, going undefeated to win the Nova Scotia championship before heading to the nationals in Fort McMurray.

After getting off to a tough start, losing their first two games, Team MacIsaac won eight straight to make it to the final game. Then on Sunday, the team from Alberta scored one in the 10th to squeak by Team MacIsaac 7-6 in the gold medal game.

Two of the four players - as well as the coach - of this fantastic team are from Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley. Skip Calan MacIsaac is from Greenfield; third Nathan Gray lives in Dartmouth; second Owain Fisher is from North River; lead Christopher McCurdy lives in Old Barns; and the coach, Craig Burgess, is from Hilden.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating this exceptional young curling team on winning the silver medal at the Under-21 Championships. I know we all anticipate continued success for them in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

CLARK, HEATHER: HOUSING ADVOCACY - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Today I just wanted to recognize and thank a constituent of mine, Heather Clark. Heather is no relation, but she's very passionate on housing issues. I've met with her many times on all kinds of things. She always has constructive and useful things to say about the housing crisis that is ongoing.

She hasn't just dealt with it from a personal standpoint; she's also put time into being the spokesperson for ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, which is very passionate about a whole host of housing issues. I want to thank Heather for being a great sounding board, and an advocate for an issue that affects Nova Scotians no matter where they live.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MALAGASH & WALLACE ROADS: MAINT. NEED - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the residents of Wallace and Malagash area, who have been asking for the provincial government's Department of Public Works to restore the maintenance of their roads and roadsides to service levels when equipment and personnel were based locally in Wallace Station.

Over a decade ago, the management of the roads and roadsides in Malagash and Wallace were placed under Colchester management instead of Cumberland, and there's been a noticeable decline in care ever since. Most recently, when there was a Winter snowstorm, this area had no provincial equipment clearing the roads for several days. While locals were thankful for all of the private contractors and all their work, and thankful that the minister approved payment to all, we believe the taxpayers should have their roads

and roadsides maintained safely by the provincial government. On their behalf, I have requested that Wallace and Malagash be placed back under local management for several years now; 376 local people signed a petition in support of this, and I tabled that with the documents today. Once again, we ask the government to comply.

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

RECIPS.: ORDER OF LA PLÉIADE AWARDS - CONGRATS.

LISA LACHANCE: Madame la présidente, je me lève en place aujourd'hui pour reconnaître les néo-écossais nouvellement nommés ici à l'Assemblée législative à l'Ordre de la Pléiade. Ceux et celles qui y sont nommés ont tous fait de grandes contributions aux milieux de la langue française et de la culture francophone. Donc, je prends cette opportunité pour féliciter la Dr. Rohini Bannerjee, Réjean Aucoin, Chris d'Entremont, Geoff Regan, Denise Comeau-Desautels, Lisette Aucoin-Bourgeois, Lisette Sieberath, Norbert LeBlanc, Lena Metlege Diab, et Robert Thibault. Merci pour vos contributions. Votre prix est bien mérité.

I rise today to recognize the Nova Scotians who were recently named to the Ordre de la Pléiade in this House. Nominees for the distinction have all made and continue to make important contributions to the French language and francophone culture in Nova Scotia. Congratulations to all the recipients and thank you for your contributions. Your awards are well-deserved.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

RYAN, BRYDEN & MAXINE: LITTER COLLECTION - THANKS

TOM TAGGART: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Bryden and Maxine Ryan of Great Village. As I travelled along Highway No. 2 this morning, like many other mornings, I passed Bryden and Maxine on their morning walk. This couple has been picking litter on their morning walk for years. True to form, just as I passed Bryden - who is not a young man - he darted into a deep ditch to pick up a wayward piece of plastic. I ask this Legislature to thank Bryden and Maxine as well as all the other proud Nova Scotians who regularly gather litter on their daily walks.

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

HAMM. PLAINS PHYSIOTHERAPY: PAIN MGMT. - RECOG.

HON. BEN JESSOME: Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to recognize the team at Hammonds Plains physiotherapy: owner Becky Thomas, Vicki Forsey, Nicole Crosby, Adrienne Backman, Ginger Ryland, Erica Norris, Dolly McIntyre, and Kim McBride. Together, they work hard and do a fantastic job of mending bumps and bruises, and helping

patients manage chronic pain. They've worked on me a couple of times with my bumps and bruises over the years, and they were tremendous neighbours alongside me for more than 10 years. It's a little bittersweet to leave the neighbourhood, but I'm not far away. I just wanted to take an opportunity to recognize them for all the hard work that they do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

DAUGHTER, SIJORA - BIRTHDAY WISHES

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize my beautiful daughter Sijora Aylena Hansen. Sijora was born on April 6, 2014, and she was such a tiny little thing: super cute, with a full head of hair. Sijora loves basketball, tennis, being a bossy sister, and creating a mess - I mean, art stuff. Sijora is a loving little bug. She is sensitive, and she's a great friend to all of her buddies at school and in the community. I always knew she should be the one to help keeps things in line. She is definitely small, but mighty - a lot like her mother. I love everything about her. I would like all members to join me in wishing my little Sijora, my boo, a happy 10th birthday, and I wish her many, many more.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

DNRR, EMO & CBRM: SNOWSTORM RELIEF - THANKS

HON. BRIAN COMER: Today I rise to acknowledge everyone involved in a recent wellness check during the recent record-breaking snowfall event in Cape Breton. During the snowstorm, Samantha Lowes and her spouse, Darryl Boudreau, of Dutch Brook, had lost power and had run out of supplies, including drinking water for their two young children. The family called their CBRM councillor, seeking assistance, who then connected with the municipality's EMO and the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables. Two conservation officers arrived at the property via snowmobile after driving through some very tough areas with snow drifts more than two metres high. Thank you to the conservation officers with DNR for their work in delivering these supplies under such harsh conditions, to the municipal council for making the connection, and to the EMO.

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

BLACKMORE, BROOKLYN: "BEEN THERE TOO" - THANKS

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 10th annual Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and to send my support and appreciation to survivors, service providers, and all advocates who work day in and day out supporting and advocating for survivors. Today, I want to recognize singer and songwriter Brooklyn Blackmore, who wrote "Been There Too" about her personal sexual violence experience. The single was released on April 2nd, Sexual Assault Awareness Day. The song and the music video are raw and real, and Brooklyn beautifully shares the real trauma and pain that one in three

women globally can relate to. Sharing her trauma through her art is powerful and extremely brave. I know her words and story will help many people in Nova Scotia and everywhere. To the survivors of sexual assault, as Brooklyn says in her songs: “If you choose to speak up, just know that I believe ya,” because I’ve been there too.

[11:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

BOOKS BEYOND BARS: ADVOCACY FOR PRISONERS - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: I want to give appreciative recognition to the fact that Books Beyond Bars, a Halifax collective involved in prison justice and abolition work, is approaching two decades of its advocacy work for women and gender-diverse prisoners, and for prison reform in Nova Scotia.

Members of Books Beyond Bars go into the women’s section of the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility in Burnside twice every month to improve access to books, writing, and literature for people who are incarcerated. The group distributes books and writing journals in a book exchange program, collects writing and artwork for a zine called *Words Without Walls*, organizes writing workshops, and facilitates a read-aloud program through which people are recorded reading children’s books. The recordings are then sent to their children outside.

Books Beyond Bars operates out of a library storage unit in the North End. Through a partnership with King’s Co-op Bookstore, the collective can source books for the program at discounted rates. Books Beyond Bars operates with the belief that sending people to prison does not address the social and economic issues that lead to people’s incarcerations: poverty, abuse, trauma, addiction, and so on. That’s the truth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

MARCHAND, AARON: VOL. OF MO. FOR DEC. - RECOG.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Speaker, today I would like to recognize Aaron Marchand of Louisdale. Aaron was the Richmond County Volunteer of the Month in December. Aaron is the Chief of the Louisdale & District Fire Department and has been a dedicated member since a young age. Aaron shows great loyalty to the department and is committed to enhancing the department and boosting morale among the members. He is also a member of the Barachois Trail Association and is actively promoting its use as a recreational resource for all ages. Aaron, who is the husband of Ainslie and father to Calder and Dillon, is a tremendous supporter of community events, and is always first to lend a hand to volunteer. I ask all members to please join me in recognizing Aaron Marchand, one of Richmond County’s well-respected volunteers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

KAPTAN, BURCU: INSPIRING IMMIGRANT - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, I am so thrilled to stand here today and congratulate my great friend Burcu Kaptan. Burcu has been chosen as one of the 2024 Most Inspiring Immigrants in Atlantic Canada. Burcu's journey began when she landed in Canada at eight and a half months pregnant with only four pieces of luggage. She has defied great odds to become a successful entrepreneur. Burcu is the founder of 10Fold- HFX, a company that provides a digital employee experience in human resources. Burcu is dedicated to driving positive change right here in Nova Scotia. In her spare time, she leads the Turkish Society of Nova Scotia. That is where I met her - and I loved her from Day 1. I ask the House to join me in celebrating Burcu Kaptan's award, and thank her for her contributions to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MUNDLE, N./MURRAY, J.: STORM DRAINS LETTER - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, today I rise to recognize Norma Mundle and John Murray, who recently sent me a letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Wesley-St. Matthew's United Church in the Village of Pugwash. They are asking for the storm drains to be replaced in the Village of Pugwash. I did table this letter when I tabled documents.

They go on to say:

The drains have collapsed in several places and the DOT filled the holes with gravel to close them. This should have been a temporary solution but it has been done now for several years. The gravel has filled the culverts at Wesley-St. Matthew's United Church and the manse driveway, so the water will not drain away . . . We have also observed other drains on other streets . . . Please, it is time to redo the drainage pipes for Church Street and check other streets as well. Serious water damage to our church and manse will close our church. We do not have the finances to pay for repairs, mold and mildew issues . . .

It is a continuous problem, and we ask the minister to repair the storm drains in Pugwash as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DART. WHALERS: HOCKEY TOURN. PARTIC. - BEST WISHES

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, as we debate whatever it is we are debating today - legislation - there is a much more important debate going on. It's not really a debate, but a competition and that is the SEDMHA hockey tournament. It starts today.

I want to wish, in particular, all the teams from the Dartmouth Whalers an excellent tournament. I wanted to take this time to do my annual thank you to the Dartmouth Whalers Hockey Association and all hockey associations in the province. I know we all have our particular ones that we cheer for.

I have to say that I spent a lot of time in East Hants this year and Eastern Shore, and usually came out victorious, so that's fine. In particular, I want to thank the U-13 Sea Orcas coaches and parents, volunteers Neil Fisher, Brian Cormier, Jason Murphy, Katy Mattatall, and Moira Fisher, and the U-11 Huskies: Jean David Paradis, Joe Triff, John Joyce Robinson and Maya Belanger. Thank you to all those parents and volunteers who make hockey so fun for our kids.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

SOC. OF SVDP: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, St. Joseph's Conference, Bridgewater, whose volunteer work, kindness, and caring provides support for community members in need in Lunenburg County. The organization's mission of service centres love, respect and joy. Its Neighbours in Need program assists community members with food, gas, power bills, home repairs, property taxes, medication, rent, emergency housing, and more.

Some of Saint Vincent de Paul's dedicated volunteers have been with the organization for as long as 36 years. Their unique service provides access and support year-round, with volunteers taking turns being on call throughout the year. In 2023, 636 requests for assistance were received and 810 residents of Lunenburg County - adults, children and seniors - were assisted. They recognized that supporting vulnerable community members takes the collaboration and support of many other community organizations.

I give my heartfelt thanks to the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and its supporters who make a difference in our community, and I call upon members of the House of Assembly to join me in extending our gratitude.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

FAIRN, EVAN: CONSTITUENCY ASSISTANT WORK - RECOG.

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, I'd like to thank Evan Fairn, my constituency assistant, for everything he does throughout the year but especially when I'm in Halifax when he takes on an extra workload and extra responsibilities. Evan is professional, he's hard-working, he's kind, and he's patient. On a regular basis, I hear from constituents how lucky I am, how Evan deserves a lot more money, and more importantly, how he has improved so many lives with his work. I am forever grateful to have this man as a friend and a co-worker, and I appreciate him very much.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank.

ARCHIBALD, EMMA: WORLD CUP DEBUT - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Speaker, over the past two years I've spoken in this Legislature several times about Fall River's Emma and Mya Archibald. I rise again today to congratulate Emma on her debut at the World Cup with the Nordiq Canada Para Nordic development team in Italy last month, and to Mya, who is representing Canada on the Under-20 women's soccer team in Germany this weekend.

Emma had an impressive debut that included a sixth-place finish in the 10k pursuit classic, 5th in the 10k mass classic, and 7th in the skate sprint. Emma finished 5th overall in the sprint finals. Mya is playing two international matches this weekend representing Canada in Germany in preparation for the Under-20 world championships in Colombia later this year.

I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in congratulating both Emma and Mya Archibald in their amazing achievements.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DOUCETTE, LISA: LE POULLAILLER HOST - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, Lisa Doucette du village de Concession a un talent pour le partage avec les autres. Que ce soit en tant que directrice générale de Radio CIFA, chroniqueuse pour le journal local, ou membre actif du club de jardinage Rooted in Clare, Lisa aime partager ses connaissances et permettre aux autres de parler de leurs passions.

En fait, au cours des deux dernières saisons, Lisa anime *le Poulailier*, une émission télévisée sur le canal Eastlink Community TV. Des invités des communautés acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse se joignent à Lisa dans sa cabane accueillante pour discuter de sujets qui intéressent les acadiens de partout. Les thèmes abordés varient de la culture et du patrimoine, aux entreprises novatrices, et aux pratiques durables.

Je demande à tous les membres de se joindre à moi pour féliciter Lisa Doucette d'avoir terminé les deux premières saisons du *Poulailler* et lui souhaiter bonne chance dans la préparation de sa troisième saison.

Speaker, Lisa Doucette from the Village of Concession has a talent for knowledge sharing. Whether it is as the general manager of CIFA, as a columnist for the local paper, or as an active member of the Rooted in Clare Garden Club, Lisa enjoys sharing what she knows and giving a platform to others to talk about their passions.

In fact, for the last two seasons, Lisa has hosted *le Poulailler*, a French-language talk show on Eastlink Community TV. Guests from Nova Scotia's Acadian community join Lisa in her cozy backyard shed to discuss topics of interest to Acadians everywhere. Themes range from culture and heritage to innovative businesses and sustainable practices.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Lisa Doucette for completing the first two seasons of *le Poulailler* and wish her well as she prepares for a third season.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

WE CARE RADIOTHON: FUNDRAISER - CONGRATS.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, another successful Yarmouth Hospital Foundation's WE CARE Radiothon was held on February 29th. Despite power outages trying to cause havoc on the event, more than \$115,000 was raised.

The focus of this year's WE CARE Radiothon was about heart health. Cardiovascular disease is one of the leading causes of death in southwestern Nova Scotia. Proceeds will go towards the purchase of heart equipment, including two electrocardiogram units and 15 patient wrist monitors, as well as a patient data management platform for the expanded cardiovascular rehab program coming to Yarmouth Regional Hospital.

I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating all the donors, sponsors, volunteers, and supporters of the 2024 Yarmouth Hospital Foundation's WE CARE Radiothon on another successful event. Our community is grateful for the hospital foundation's incredible work.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

OFFICE STAFF: HARD WORK - THANKS

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, today I rise to thank - so much - my constituency assistant, Joanne Horgan, and my student, Sammy MacDougall. Without Joanne and Sammy in the office, things wouldn't be able to happen like they do in Northside-

Westmount. They are hard-working and diligent, and they keep me on task and on schedule. I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank them for all their hard work. It doesn't go unnoticed by the constituents of Northside-Westmount, and I truly appreciate them both.

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

[11:45 a.m.]

CREW: *THE CURSE OF OAK ISLAND* SHOW - CONGRATS.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the people from the reality TV show *The Curse of Oak Island*. This year marks the 10th anniversary of a TV series that has become ingrained in popular culture. When travelling abroad, upon learning that someone is from Nova Scotia, a familiar question often comes to you: "Do you live near Oak Island?" Oak Island is nestled on the beautiful coastline of the community of Western Shore and has been the object of treasure hunters since the late 1700s. Although their quest for recovering pirate treasure may not have borne much fruit, the series has been a boon to this part of Nova Scotia. Their efforts to develop the Oak Island property as a tourist attraction are commendable. As well as tourism, the local economy has, in its own share, boomed a little by the influx of interim residents looking to live here during the production year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

CHARLES, JOHN: TRAIL PROJECT - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to recognize John Charles of Prospect. With a background as a city planner with HRM, John took a lead role in planning a trail along the historic Old Kelley Point Road in the Prospect Peninsula. The trail from Prospect Bay Road to Kelley Point will be about two kilometres and will provide a scenic coastal hiking path that will feature cultural heritage values, ocean access, and provide safe pedestrian connectivity.

In June 2023, the Prospect Peninsula Residents' Association, spearheading the project, received several sources of funding for a comprehensive trail design and management plan for a hiking trail. The trail plan is a necessary first step in obtaining an LOA from the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works. Upland Studio and Design Ltd. was engaged to develop the trail plan. Detailed trail mapping, environmental inventory, cultural landscape inventory, property research, and GIS slope analysis have all been completed. John has invested hours of his time and expertise as a planner reviewing the draft report and working with government departments on this project.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking John for his work and dedication on this project that will benefit the community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

INDUCTEES: ANTIG. COM. FENCE OF FAME - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I would like to congratulate the newest inductees onto the Antigonish Community Fence of Fame: Gail MacDougall and Glenna Ingraham, who were inducted this past October. The Community Fence of Fame, displayed on the outfield fence at The Sandlot, acknowledges individuals or community groups that have made a difference in the community through sport and recreation.

Gail MacDougall coached the Dr. J.H. Gillis Regional Royals Girls basketball team, notching over 900 wins. In 2009, Gail was awarded the Dorothy Walker Distinguished Service Award for outstanding contribution to school sport, and in 2017 she was inducted into the StFX Sports Hall of Fame. Gail has always instilled respect and integrity in her players.

Glenna has been involved with Antigonish Minor Challenger Baseball and the North Nova Highlanders for over 18 years coaching baseball as an organizer, fundraiser, and whatever else is needed to support the programs. In 2021, she was named Baseball Nova Scotia's Coach of the Year. She has more recently focused her energies on ensuring that girls in both Antigonish and Nova Scotia have an opportunity to play ball.

I ask all members of this House to thank Gail and Glenna for their commitment to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

FIREFIGHTERS: WILDFIRE RELIEF EFFORTS - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'd like to recognize the bravery of some of our volunteer firefighters last May during the extensive fires in the Hammonds Plains and Tantallon areas. I'd like to commend, in particular, Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Volunteer Platoon Captain Blake Mann of Station No. 8, and volunteer firefighters Jesse Organ - formerly of Station No. 8 and now at No. 58 - and Riley Coffey and Shervin Kannanchira Shibi, also of Station No. 58.

On the night of May 28th, these four members were investigating the fire conditions on Westwood Boulevard when they heard cries for help from down the street. Despite the danger to themselves, they followed the cries to another street, where they found two residents who had not been evacuated. They quickly helped the two people into a fire

vehicle and they got the heck out of the immediate area to a safer location where they provided first aid while awaiting EHS.

Thank you, Blake, Jesse, Riley, and Shervin. Nova Scotians won't soon forget those who came to their aid in their time of need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

GIDDENS, HAL: BOOK PUBLICATION - CONGRATS.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I rise today to congratulate Harold Giddens of Cumberland South on publishing his new book *Charlie, The Little Bear That Did*.

Harold is a retired professional engineer who is also retired from several boards, including the local hospital board and the CNSOPB. His best memories come from when he was a young boy living in the country reading about the fun relationships between wild animals and kids just like him. Hal and his family have been in the blueberry business for many years and a friend has a sugar woods, all of which inspired the setting for his story.

I ask that the members of the House join me in congratulating Harold on his first book - we do expect the second book to come soon - and wishing him much success in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

COSMAN, T./WHIDDEN, M.A.: NSBA WORK - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I rise today to congratulate and thank Tom Cosman and Mary Ann Whidden for their outstanding contribution to the Nova Scotia Beekeepers Association, recognized through the 2024 Honorary Lifetime Membership Award. Since establishing their beekeeping operation in the early 1980s, Tom and Mary Ann have grown their business to over 2,000 hives in Greenwich. Tom's leadership with the NSBA, including his presidency, and Mary Ann's ambassadorship at the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market underscore their dedication to one of the oldest forms of animal husbandry. As first-generation farmers, they have enriched our rural agricultural economy and inspired future generations, including their children Ivan, Simon, and Lauren, who are poised to continue their legacy. This marks the first time in NSBA history that this award has been presented to a couple, recognizing the power of partnership in growing our apiculture industry. I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in congratulating Tom and Mary Ann for this well-deserved honour as the 2024 NSBA Honorary Lifetime Members.

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

VOLUNTEERS: SNOWSTORM RELIEF - THANKS

HON. KEITH BAIN: The snowstorm of February 1st to 5th, which struck many areas of Cape Breton County and all of Victoria-The Lakes, ground communities to a halt. Many residents found themselves being trapped, especially seniors and people with mobility issues who were unable to shovel their way out of their homes. Their traditional resources for snow removal were not effective. Fortunately, our community is both humble and resourceful. With the use of social media, neighbours helping neighbours, word of mouth, the CBRM 311 system, and the Victoria County Municipal Office, links were made with local contractors, farmers, and fishermen with equipment to clear driveways. As well, volunteers, hockey teams, Coast Guard students, and others showed up to help shovel. Residents volunteered their snowmobiles to carry supplies. There was even a team of hikers who snowshoed 1.5 kilometres up a mountain to shovel for a senior who lives off the grid and had recently had surgery. We can accomplish anything together.

Speaker, I ask all members of the House of Assembly to please join me with a heartfelt thank you to the many volunteers who took care of their neighbours, strangers, and vulnerable residents.

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

DAYCARE CTRS.: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, Sunday marked the end of Women's History Month, so today I rise one last time to highlight a remarkable aspect of our community in Fairview-Clayton Park. With pride, I emphasize that we are home to more than 15 daycare and dayhome locations, each owned, operated, or managed by women. This significant presence not only reflects the leadership and entrepreneurial spirit of women in our community, but also underscores their profound impact on shaping the lives of our children. These daycare centres, under the guidance of dedicated women, provide more than just a safe haven for our children: They serve as nurturing environments where young minds are enriched, curiosity is fostered, and futures are shaped.

The positive influence of these women-led centres extends beyond the children they care for, reaching families and contributing to the overall well-being of our community. To end this year's Women's History Month, let us recognize and celebrate the invaluable role that these women play in our community, shaping the next generation with care, compassion, and dedication.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

ECONOMY REC. CTR.: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

TOM TAGGART: I would like to bring to your attention a unique community centre located on Highway No. 2 in Economy. This centre runs under a board of directors who not only attend to financial matters, but also plan and organize community events. This facility hosts rug hooking, yoga, a cybercafé, dancing, and booking musical talents along the shore. They have recently established a food cupboard for those in need of a satisfying meal. Thanks to all they do, this recreation centre meets many of the needs of residents in several small communities in Colchester North. I'd like to recognize the fantastic work of the board of directors of the Economy Recreation Centre.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

MILLER, CHRIS: NAT'L PARK ADVOCACY - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: On December 20th I received a text from Chris Miller, the head of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, letting me know that the additional public lands at Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes were officially protected, including the lands of Charles Lake. Chris and I and many others had worked diligently in 2021 to have these additional 35 acres behind Maskwa Aquatic Club be protected and added to the park. I am thrilled to see that this day has come. The pristine beauty of Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Park is a jewel in the HRM, and this protection of additional land will be enjoyed for generations to come. I would ask the House to join me in thanking Chris Miller for his continued advocacy and dedication to designate Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area as a national urban park.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

DALA: NEW SPACE - BEST WISHES

HON. JILL BALSER: I rise today to bring recognition to the Digby Area Learning Association, also known as DALA, for their many years of hard work and success.

The Digby Area Learning Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing education and training opportunities for the people of Digby and the surrounding area. In February 2023, DALA held an open house to celebrate their new space in Conway. DALA offers a wide range of learning programs: adult learning, GED preparation, technology help, tutoring, construction courses, and they even operate the Learning Grove Childcare Centre. DALA also offers free access to computers and printers.

If you ever want a quiet space to sit down and grab a coffee, DALA will always welcome you. I ask that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature join me in recognizing and congratulating the Digby Area Learning Association and all their incredible staff and

students for their considerable contribution to the community. I also wish them the best in their beautiful new space. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

LEG. STAFF: EFFORTS - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: I rise today to recognize the Speaker's House, the Pages, the Commissionaires, the staff, those who make this place a comfortable place. I know very often we show up here without taking into consideration the people who come here to serve us. Sometimes we call hours that are unnecessary. But I know for a fact that no matter what we do here, they're here always. They're here to support us and to make our job easy. I rise from my seat and ask members of this House to join me to thank those people who are here day in and day out.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

GALLOP, FRED: HELP FOR SENIOR - RECOG.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I rise today to applaud Fred Gallop from Lower Sackville. Karen Smith in my office received a call from a senior who needed post-surgery care following her cataract surgery. Her surgeon told her that the surgery would not happen unless she found someone to stay with her for 24 hours following that surgery. Karen reached out to a few local organizations, and in no time, Fred Gallop of Knox United Church in Lower Sackville very quickly found two ladies to stay with the senior. He also offered to drive her to and from the hospital. I would ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in applauding Fred Gallop for quickly coming to the rescue of the senior so her surgery could go ahead as planned.

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

PTAs & SACs: WORK FOR STUDENTS - RECOG.

HON. BEN JESSOME: I rise today to say thank you to the parent-teacher associations and the SACs across Hammonds Plains-Lucasville and beyond, who frankly do all of the things that need to be done to fill in those gaps that exist with respect to the student experience in our schools. I know how hard the parents, the staff members and the support staff and the volunteer community members work to ensure that young students throughout our province, and specifically in Hammonds Plains-Lucasville have what they need to make the student experience fuller and to ensure that the teachers have the supports in the classroom with what they need. I just want to say thank you to those two groups of people.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time is now 12:00 p.m. It is time for the order of business Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers.

[12:00 p.m.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: INFIRMARY PROJECT DELAY MISTAKE - ADMIT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: A second water-main break is affecting services at the Halifax Infirmary, the Veterans Memorial Building, and the Abbie J. Lane Memorial Building. It's affecting the emergency department. It's affecting a number of services. People are now being asked to go outside and use the washroom at porta-potties. Does the Premier now see the problem with having delayed the major investment in expanding the new Halifax Infirmary project?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): This is a very serious issue, for sure. Our concerns, our priorities are people, the patients, the staff, the families. Of course, we're very focused on this. The pipes that have broken are from the 1940s, so we know that certainly it speaks to the importance of infrastructure investments, for sure. We're committed to infrastructure investments, there's no question about that, but right now we're dealing with what is literally an emergency situation. We're totally focused on returning the water at that facility.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We could be one year away from a completed new building had the Premier not delayed the biggest infrastructure project in our health care system in a generation. We are here because of that delay. There has been no rationale given for that. The cost of his project has gone up and the scale of it has gone down. Nothing about that delay makes any sense. Can the Premier please take some responsibility and admit that his government made a mistake by delaying the new Halifax Infirmary and QEII redevelopment project?

THE PREMIER: What I would say is we're dealing with what literally is an emergency situation right now, trying to support patients, trying to support staff and families, trying to return water. This is an absolutely critical issue, and there's no question that the member, the former health minister, wants people to forget his past, the past of the Liberal Party, but the reality is we're working on infrastructure, we're making historic infrastructure investments, we're making historic investments in health care. Despite all of that, there's an emergency situation that we're dealing with today and we're focused on people today.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The government is sure spending a lot more money but they're making poor decisions when it comes to health care and delaying this project is one of those poor decisions. It's been delayed for three years. Now we're at a crisis point with no timeline even given on when this project is going to be done. At least on this situation, can the Premier please give a timeline on when water service is going to be given back to those facilities so that people can get running water again, drinking water, and don't have to use the washroom outside when it's close to zero degrees?

THE PREMIER: Of course, crews are on site. They're working - there's a lot of effort, a lot of good people working on this. They hope to have the water restored today. This is a very serious issue, there's no question about that. The focus of the people, of the Health Authority, of people working there, of Public Works, of every Nova Scotian is really on getting through this emergency today. The pipes have broken, the pipes are from the 1940s. It's an awful situation. We're trying to get the water back up and I'm told that the water should be returned today.

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

PREM.: LACK OF HEALTH AUTHORITY PLAN - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: According to the Health Authorities Act, Nova Scotia Health is required to annually submit a health services business plan to the Minister of Health and Wellness. This includes annual operating expenses, coordination with community health boards, and a public engagement plan. I'll table that. However, when you check the Nova Scotia Health website, no such plan has been filed since 2021 and the dissolution of the Health Authority board. Can the Premier explain why under his watch there has been no public plan or budget released from Nova Scotia Health?

THE PREMIER: Of course, the budget is very public. We've had, I think, over 80 hours of budget debate in this House and very public documents. I can certainly provide the member with a copy of the budget if the member has missed that part of the process of the House here. What I would say is those operating plans have been submitted. I can check on the website posting, but there's no question that budgeting and thinking ahead and investing in Nova Scotians - those are the things this government is focused on.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: It sounds like the Premier may not be aware of what I'm talking about, but according to a Freedom of Information request, the Nova Scotia Health Authority was in fact given express permission not to produce this report in fiscal 2022-23. That would be the budget. This was the same year that Nova Scotia Health completed the ill-fated purchase of the Hogan Court hotel hospital, and awarded a nearly \$50 million untendered contract for development of the health app. These purchases were made without proper tendering and without guiding strategy or financial accountability provided by a business plan - yet another example in a growing list of ways that this government is evading transparency in their health care spending. My question to the Premier: Does the

Premier not think it's possible to meet our current health care challenges in a transparent way?

THE PREMIER: I completely disagree with the characterization from the member. We know that the NDP is extremely negative on this province, extremely negative on the state of health care. I think the member told me during Estimates that if the government provided everyone with a unicorn, they'd still probably complain about that. That's absolutely true. We are totally committed to fixing health care. There are positive signs, for sure. I hear that from people working in health care. I hear that from patients. There's work to be done, no question about that, but we'll continue to do that work. We're focused on Nova Scotians, not negativity.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I find it strange that the Premier would disagree and call "negative" a piece of information released through Freedom of Information by the Department of Health and Wellness, but whatever. Since we last saw a plan, health care is so much worse. The number of Nova Scotians on the primary care wait-list has more than doubled under this government. Health care professional vacancies are on the rise, increasing 197.6 per cent since 2019-20. The number of nursing vacancies within Nova Scotia Health has surpassed a thousand. Emergency departments are unexpectedly closed more frequently - up 32 per cent since 2021-22. The Premier is trying to assure Nova Scotians that health care is being fixed, but why should Nova Scotians believe him when every metric is worse, and now we know that there isn't even a plan?

THE PREMIER: I completely, completely disagree. Certainly, completely disagree with the . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. Let's reduce the chirping. We're just beginning for the day, so this is our first warning. Thank you.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Of course, the Hogan Court deal is an absolutely good deal for Nova Scotians. I'll double down, triple down, sextuple down on that deal. That is a good thing for Nova Scotians, despite the NDP's negative spin. A year ago, there were 1,500 nursing vacancies in this province. There's a thousand now. There's a long way to go, for sure, but you know what's helped? The Patient Access to Care Act, which I'll remind this House is a good thing. It's helping Nova Scotians. It's doing its job - in just one year, incredible progress. I'll remind this House that the negative NDP voted against the Patient Access to Care Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: HOGAN COURT PROJECT COST - DIVULGE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: All the evidence is pointing to the health care system getting worse, despite the fact that the government is spending so much more money on it. That's why the government can only brag about spending so much more money on it. What we don't know is how much more money is going to be spent on the Hogan Court project because of the contract with Shannex. We've heard there's going to be a massive premium for that mortgage. Can the Premier please be transparent and tell the House how much that project is going to cost, or is he going to keep concealing that information from the public?

THE SPEAKER: I just want to remind all members in the House that we're really getting close. We're on the cusp when we use the words "conceal" or "covering up." Let's just try to refrain from using those words - all of us, please.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'll do my best to be my best self in here today, as Nolan's son's teacher asks us to do. There is no concealing here. Mr. Shannon and I sat at a press conference. We talked about the work that's happening with Hogan Court. We have a leader in this sector who sees that this is a new model of care, one that is so innovative and so incredible that he wanted to buy that facility. He wants to roll that model out not only in Nova Scotia, but potentially in other parts of Atlantic Canada. I'm very proud of that deal. There are still negotiations under way. This is not dissimilar to the work that we do with long-term care, and this is about caring for frail elderly people in our province.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I will table several examples of the Premier using the word "conceal" and never being given a warning in this House. It happened several times last week, and here we have, again, a government not making . . . (interruption).

THE SPEAKER: Order. Are you indicating to the Speaker that it was wrong of me not to mention it, or is there a reason why you are bringing this up? There was a discussion with the Clerks around using the word "conceal" as well as the word "cover-up" and it was suggested and advised that today I remind everyone not to use the word "conceal" or "cover-up."

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Thank you very much, Speaker. We have, once again, a government that is not answering a very important question on costs. We have a government that spends money hand over fist while Rome burns and the health care system gets worse by the week. We have a simple question here. We have heard that there is a massive premium being paid to that company - a company that, by the way, is bailing out this government on a massive boondoggle that they spend taxpayers' money on. They are

lucky Shannex came to the table. My question to the Premier now is: How much is it going to cost to fix this big boondoggle that this government created?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I totally disagree with the member opposite in terms of the characterization of this facility. This is a state-of-the-art facility. There are a number of frail, elderly individuals in this province who could transition home if there were other options for them. This is a model of care that will include allied health care professionals. This is not happening anywhere else. We are working with Shannex. There is some work around the initial purchase of the building, and we are continuing to work. This is not dissimilar to the way in which we fund long-term care facilities. The real issue is that nobody thought of this before we formed government; had they, we would be far further ahead, and we would have more capacity in our hospitals. We are working and coming out of a hole that was left to us to fill because of deferred maintenance from the former government.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DED: CAPE BRETON RAIL LINE SUBSIDY ENDED - EXPLAIN

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise to my feet on behalf of a lot of Cape Bretoners who are asking questions today after the news that the Nova Scotia government has ended the subsidy for the Cape Breton rail line. I've spent the morning talking with local government representatives and advocates within the community who had no idea the government was making the decision to end the subsidy that protected key infrastructure and the future potential of rail in Cape Breton. My question to the Minister of Economic Development is: Why did she decide to end the subsidy for the rail line in Cape Breton?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, we know there are people in Cape Breton who are disappointed at this news, and I respect that the government of the day entered into the rail preservation agreement to retain the opportunity of a return of rail service on the island. With the news of the purchase of - the acquisition of a stake by CN in the Cape Breton and Central Nova Scotia Railway last Fall, I met with CN and with businesspeople from the island, including the proponents of Novaporte, and a decision was made not to renew this agreement.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Let history be told: It was this government that abandoned the rail line in Cape Breton. That will go down in history. This matters on the island. There are advocates who have been advocating for years to protect that infrastructure. A lot of work went around to make sure we could negotiate a deal to make sure that rail line wasn't abandoned and removed. Now, with the removal of this subsidy, in my opinion, it is just triggering the process to remove that infrastructure. Cape Bretoners are upset, and, as I said, history will show that today this government abandoned rail in

Cape Breton. My question to the minister is: What is her message to Cape Bretoners today who found out that this government - this one for history - abandoned rail in Cape Breton?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: To be clear, the infrastructure to which the member is referring, in lots of ways, is a cow path. It's a corridor, and the taxpayers have been paying \$360,000 a year for the last number of years. But \$18 million since 2003, first to subsidize the railway line when it was operating, and since that time, to preserve this opportunity. We are not saying that rail will never return to Cape Breton, but it is going to take a business plan identified by the private sector to do so.

[12:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MAH: HOME BUILDING FUND ACCESS - OBTAIN

HON. KELLY REGAN: A standard line from this government is that they're not doing things when it's pointed out that they're not doing things - they're waiting for federal money. There's currently up to \$5 billion available to provinces and territories to accelerate the construction and upgrading of critical housing infrastructure. However, to access the money the government needs to meet terms and conditions by January 1, 2025. Those terms include implementing measures from the Home Buyers' Bill of Rights and the renters' bill of rights. It's important that Nova Scotia takes steps to access these funds. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: Will he ensure that the department meets the terms and conditions to get more money to build more homes?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, what I can say is that the federal government is an important partner of the National Housing Strategy. We've always signed on. We've always been a partner in whatever federal money is available. In terms of what the member is talking about, we have no more than media reports, either. We have to look at the details of that, but certainly we are very committed to not leaving federal money on the table as a government, I can tell you that.

We are very pleased to see that the federal government in many ways is imitating things that Nova Scotia has done. We've been very innovative. We've gotten attention across the nation with our program to provide government land for housing - where we can, freezing development fees. Many of the things in the federal government's list of requirements are things that they've taken from the Nova Scotia playbook, so flattery is the sincerest form of a compliment.

KELLY REGAN: We're concerned that this government will leave millions of dollars on the table, and that could mean more Nova Scotians left out in the cold. This government has not done its homework before on important issues - and we all know what they are here - and Nova Scotians have had to foot the bill for that lack of attention. There

are conditions attached for the millions of dollars in health care spending, and I will table that. Ditto for the millions of dollars municipalities are receiving for housing. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Will he assure this House and all Nova Scotians that this government will work with the federal government to meet all the terms and conditions so that more housing can be built, and infrastructure upgraded with the millions of dollars that are on the table from the feds?

JOHN LOHR: What we have seen the federal government doing with the Housing Accelerator Fund is bypassing the provinces and going directly to the municipalities. This is a program that works very well in Central Canada. However, if we look across Atlantic Canada, this is an issue in each of our Atlantic Canada partners, that we've seen that we have about 7 per cent of the population and we've got about 4.5 to 5 per cent of the funding. There's about \$200 million or \$300 million missing, because the structure of the program doesn't recognize the unique characteristics of Atlantic Canada: largely rural; largely a lot more home ownership than in Central Canada. When the federal government designs these programs, we do our best to work with them, but they're not necessarily designed for us.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: PRIMARY CAREGIVER ATTACHMENT - ASSURE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Our offices hear regularly from people who are struggling to have their needs met without attachment to primary care. One told us, "I live with some chronic ailments, and I have no support to properly manage them. My partner is in a similar position. I have three children, and there are many things I would like to have support with from a primary care provider." Another person said, "Both of us have multiple disabilities. My spouse's health needs constant monitoring. We have no continuity of care, and it is stressful." My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: Can the minister assure these and all 160,000 Nova Scotians on the Need a Family Practice wait-list that they will have attachment to a primary caregiver?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I do want to assure folks who are on the Need a Family Practice Registry that one of the most important things and options available is to update their health information. Recently, as a result, people living with chronic conditions such as diabetes have actually been attached to a clinic to support their health care needs. Also, they've been scanning for people who have time-limited conditions such as pregnancy to make sure that people have access to the care they need. There are a number of ways in which people can access, and it also speaks to the necessary and important step of making sure that every individual in Nova Scotia has access to their health care records to ensure continuity of care.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Not sure how those two things line up, but let's go on to the next question. Another person told us: "I can utilize services like Maple for refills, but no

one is consistent. When my mental health is worse, I don't have anyone to provide support and help change my meds if needed." Another said:

My 77-year-old father has been without a family doctor for several years now and has been waiting the whole time. He's getting his prescriptions refilled by phone appointments but has had several health issues that need a primary care doctor as a main point of contact. He's dealing with prostate cancer, high blood pressure, joint issues, and all the things that go hand in hand with getting old, all without a family doctor.

Are these the people whom this government thinks are managing just fine with virtual care?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, I go back to how important it is for individuals to work either through 811 or online in order to update their information. We know that there are people who do require complex care. In some cases, that can be handled through a pharmacy, as an example - cardiovascular health, there's some diabetic care that can happen through there. There are a number of different avenues.

We are looking at attaching people to a family practice. A family physician is very important, but there are other primary care providers who can support people in a health-home environment. I would encourage people to make sure their information is updated on the Need a Family Practice Registry, and also to look at other avenues in which they can get support. We are scanning that Need a Family Practice Registry on a regular basis to look for people with chronic conditions and attach them to appropriate chronic care.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: HEALTH CAPITAL BUDGET UNDERSPENDING - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The government suggests it's because of deferred maintenance that we're dealing with these capital issues right now. I want to point out to the minister that this government, in the three years they've been in office, has underspent their health capital budget, in the most recent year by \$290 million. My question to the minister is: If she's so focused on building new health care capital, why is her budget underspent by hundreds of millions of dollars year after year?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, there is a lot of work to do in terms of capital infrastructure. I'll just start by telling a little tale, because I remember what it was like trying to have capital infrastructure replaced in health care. In 2016, the former government cut the capital health budget for long-term care facilities, meaning that we only could get any type of infrastructure investment if it was emergency funding. Yes, there is

some slippage, but it's because there is so much work to do we can't get to everything all at once.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Again, I think we see the fundamental flaw of this government is that they're so fixated on the Opposition and the past that they are not looking toward the future. They are not even executing on governing. This minister wants to blame past governments for their current capital issues. Her budget is underspent by hundreds of millions of dollars. Why is she more fixated on what happened in the past instead of what's happening now, and does she think that might be part of the problem?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There's certainly a trend here. They're mad when we spend it; they're mad when we don't spend it. I'm not sure what to do with the money, but the point of it is with the labour market the way it is, with the disruptions in supplies over COVID, there is so much work to do. There has not been capital infrastructure in so many areas of this province. We have equipment that's past its useful life never invested in. We need to do renovations to do that. We have facilities not invested in, only through emergency funding, waiting for something to go wrong in order for site managers to beg for money in order to approve and get things done. Yes, there is an incredible amount of work to do. I'm confident in our ability, but we will take some time. There has been slippage as a result of the huge pile that we need to overcome in terms of capital investment and cleaning up.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

RTA: RENTAL DENIALS FOR CHILDREN - STOP

BRAEDON CLARK: In recent weeks, we've seen distressing stories about parents being denied rentals simply because they have children. Family status is protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act, but unfortunately, in a case that I will table here, the commission ruled against a couple with children even though a director for the rental company, when speaking to the Human Rights Commission, admitted to having a no-children policy. My question to the Minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act: Does he agree with the commission's decision, and if not, what will he do about it?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I certainly agree with the member's position that these types of policies that landlords are speaking about - of having no-children policies in apartment units - we don't support that. As for the decision of the Human Rights Commission, I respect their jurisdiction, their purview, and I don't have a comment on their decision.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'm glad that the minister agrees with that position. I think we all would. My subsequent question now - we've talked about residential tenancies quite a bit, enforcement being an issue that I think is lacking. This is a prime example of a situation where we are dealing with a 1 per cent vacancy rate in Halifax, less in other parts,

and people are being denied rentals simply because they have kids, which is patently unfair. My question to the minister - I appreciate that he agrees with the principle - is: Will he act on this by creating an enforcement bill, and perhaps even legislating that policies such as this are simply wrong and should not be allowed?

COLTON LEBLANC: As the member would know, there are a number of circumstances that are protected under the Human Rights Act, and Nova Scotians, if they're faced with a similar situation, should go through the Human Rights Commission to go through that process. That said - pertaining to the introduction or implementation of a compliance enforcement unit - again I'd remind the member that's not going to be the silver bullet to address the housing crisis in the province and perhaps would not actually address what the member is bringing forward to the floor of the Legislature. Again, I'd remind the member, and all members of this House, that the true solution to the housing crisis is more housing. That's why under the leadership of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, one billion dollars over five years to develop 40,000 units - that's the right direction.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

MAH: RENT SUPP. THRESHOLD - CHANGE

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Fifty per cent of someone's income in rent in today's market is just not affordable. The rent supplement threshold for my riding is \$1,200 a month. You cannot find anything for that price in Clayton Park West - nothing under \$1,800 or \$2,000. Trust me on that. We are hearing from many who have worked hard all their lives and now cannot afford to live in Clayton Park West. Does the minister believe that anyone in Clayton Park West can get an apartment for \$1,200?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We recognize - as the Minister for Service Nova Scotia said - the real solution is supply. That's why we're building more public housing units and investing in more supply in every way possible. The specific program that the member is talking about is one that is a partnership with the federal government, even though we're putting far more money into it now than the federal government. It's based on average market rents, Statistics Canada, federal government data. We recognize the stress in the community. We recognize that and we're working hard on that. I will remind the member that it was our government that chose to allow people to be both on the list for public housing and on the rent supp list at the same time - which the previous government did not allow, which has also increased the applications to the program.

RAFAH DICONSTANZO: I thank the minister, but his numbers are wrong and old. They need to be updated. The government needs to do the right thing and change the supplement threshold in this province. It is impossible to get an apartment in my riding for \$1,200. People are struggling. Can the minister please let my constituents know that he will change that threshold as soon as possible?

JOHN LOHR: I think I did answer the question. This is an average market rent threshold put forward by Statistics Canada. These numbers evolve, and Statistics Canada does catch up, I hope, with some of this data. We continue to work as a government on multiple fronts to address the housing crisis. We realize that we're making, for example, a hundred-million-dollar-plus investment in taking the HST off, following suit with the federal government. We're doing many, many different things. We will continue to do more.

[12:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: N. END DAYCARE CTR. OPTION - PROVIDE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. The North End Community Day Care Centre is facing an uncertain future. The building that the daycare has long operated in is being demolished this Summer, and the building that the daycare intends to move into - the new St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary - is now not slated to open until September 2025 as a result of many delays. Can the minister please tell us where this daycare is supposed to operate for the 14-month period that SJAM will still be under construction?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: The member and I have spoken about this issue. As I indicated to the member when she and I spoke, the department is aware of this and is working with the operator to provide solutions. This is an example of why we need to do the transformation that we're doing in child care. I understand the concern that families have when there's uncertainty around their child care, whether it's because their existing child care is at risk or because they are having difficulty getting spaces. That is why we have created over 3,800 spaces since we have done this work. That's why we're increasing our ECE wages. That's why we have embarked on a five-year, over-\$600-million investment to transform child care - so parents don't have to face this uncertainty.

SUZY HANSEN: The uncertainty is because of the department's lack of action and not building the school on time. Child care spaces are hard enough to come by. We know that. We certainly do not want to see spaces disappear from Halifax Needham.

Janessa Williams, executive director of the Needham Early Learning Centre, emphasized earlier this year that her centre's wait-list had nearly 500 names on it. If the North End Community Day Care Centre does not find a new place to operate, parents simply will not be able to secure a spot at another centre. This department dropped the ball on SJAM, and now it looks like they're going to drop the ball on the North End Community Day Care Centre.

My question to the minister is: Can the minister tell the North End Community Day Care Centre and their families that they will have a new space to operate before this July?

BECKY DRUHAN: I want to assure families that the department is working with the centre and doing everything within the department's power to support this issue, and to support the families, and to support the operator, too, to ensure that we have the spaces. In terms of the question of whether any ball has been dropped, I would like to remind the member that it was our government that actually added a child care centre to SJAM so that this would be an opportunity for those families in that area to have child care within their school. We're continuing to work on the building of the school. We're continuing to work to support the transformation of child care. These are decades - decades - of inaction that we are dealing with right now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

MAH: RENT SUPP. QUALIFICATIONS - CHANGE

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, the outdated rent supplement thresholds are severely impacting those living in the Annapolis Valley. The current threshold is \$686 for the Valley. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing knows all too well that these rental thresholds don't match reality on the ground. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: Does he think that any Annapolis Valley resident can secure a place to live in the Valley for \$680 a month?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Again, these thresholds are part of the federal government, through Statistics Canada. We recognize that it's tough on the ground. That's why we're working in all parts of Nova Scotia. We continue to work. We recognize the housing crisis is severe in every part of the province, not only here in the HRM. We continue to work in every part of the province. It remains a concern of ours.

CARMAN KERR: I understand the federal component, but the minister and the department have changed provisions within their own program. It's much more difficult for people to get a rent supplement. There's required documentation now, and the qualifications have changed from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. Essentially, no senior in Annapolis whom I know on GIS or OAS can qualify for this rent supplement. The government could and should change the program. My question to the minister is: Why won't he make these changes?

JOHN LOHR: We continue to make changes. One change we did make was where seniors were disadvantaged, I think, by a small percentage in the formula originally provided by the federal government. We changed that. We changed the requirement that you had to be on - you could not be both waiting for public housing and on the rent supp at the same time. You had to choose one or the other, which was the policy of the previous

government, which has led to a significant increase in the number of people on the rent supp program.

We continue to make changes. This continues to be a partnership with the federal government. We have, in fact, and I've said it before - probably don't have time - but when I hear from my colleagues across the nation, they're not spending all their rent supp money. We're putting in about five times as much provincial money as federal money. That's the reality.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

SLTC: SENIORS CARE GRANT THRESHOLD - RAISE

FRED TILLEY: I've asked this question before, and I will continue to ask this question. Seniors in my constituency are struggling to meet their day-to-day responsibilities, and the fact that we, as a government, didn't raise the threshold for seniors to access the Seniors Care Grant this year, in my mind, is just appalling. We've indexed all kinds of things, but indexing the threshold for seniors to be able to access this grant is really important. My question to the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care is: Is there a change of heart, and can we raise the threshold?

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I'm always happy to learn that the Liberal Party is in favour of the Seniors Care Grant that our government brought in - one of the first actions that we took. It was \$500. It was for yard work, lawn maintenance, and snow shovelling in the first year. This year, it was for \$750. It's a \$30 million investment that previous governments did not do, so I'm grateful that the member brought it up. It is helping all Nova Scotian seniors who are eligible for the grant to provide things like power bills, a chiropractor appointment, an eye examination. These are financial investments that are making it easier for Nova Scotian seniors.

FRED TILLEY: The fact that this minister would make light in an answer to a question by just saying "Liberal Party, we're glad you're in favour of it" - well, we are in favour of helping seniors. The minister said something in her answer: those who are eligible for it, it's helping. Well, those who aren't eligible, and who aren't eligible because of a very slight increase in the OAS - it put them a couple hundred dollars over the \$37,500 - makes them ineligible for this amount. We've seen them do things outside the budget. Will the minister make this change and make seniors whole in all of Nova Scotia?

BARBARA ADAMS: What I can say to the member is that the investment in seniors in this province over the past two and a half years is relating to the Seniors Care Grant: 5,700 new nursing home rooms across the province; a 23 per cent pay raise for continuing care assistants; free tuition for 2,000 CCAs, almost a thousand doing the prior learning and recognition; retention bonuses; and a new nursing school for the community. The investments are unending. The CAPABLE program is for low-income seniors. It's a

new program, the first in Canada, and we're very proud of these investments for seniors in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DOJ: DRUG ABUSE TREND - ADDRESS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Justice. Earlier this week, a resident came into my office in the Town of Amherst with a bag full of dirty used needles. The staff estimated there were at least 400 dirty used needles in this grocery bag. They immediately called law enforcement, who took them away for us.

Unfortunately, illicit drug use is too common throughout all of Cumberland County. In recent conversations with municipal police as well as RCMP, it's very clear that they're frustrated. There is a definite trend toward lawlessness, and if law enforcement detains someone on drug-related charges, there's a very good chance they will not be prosecuted. The court system is over capacity, and Crown prosecutors are encouraged not to prosecute. My question to the minister is: What is he doing to help these hard-working police officers in their efforts to address this trend toward lawlessness?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Of course, we acknowledge that drug abuse is an issue across the province. I want to take a moment to commend the RCMP locally, who just had - I think it was - a \$1.6 billion bust at the harbour when they got the container pier full of cocaine. What I would suggest, through you to the minister once again, as I've suggested in the past, is that this is really a local issue between her municipality and her local policing. I have encouraged her in the past to raise that with them, and I would do so again right now as well.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: This isn't just a local issue; this is a widespread problem. Law enforcement are frustrated because, when they do arrest someone, rarely does it result in charges, and the Crown prosecutors are being told not to prosecute in many cases. The public expects law enforcement, but law enforcement, Crown prosecutors, and the courts are not able to keep up with the problem. I will also add there are not enough mental health and addictions supports for those who need help. My question to the minister is: Will he make a commitment to coming to our area, meeting with the Attorney General and Minister of Justice for New Brunswick, and working together with our cross-border communities in addressing . . .

BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, through you to the member, I would note that Crown prosecutors in this province review cases individually. If they don't feel there is a probable chance of winning that case, sometimes they won't prosecute. That is their independent decision. I would also suggest to the member - I talk with the Attorney General and Minister of Justice for New Brunswick on occasion, and I am certainly open to having a discussion with him to see if there is something we can do.

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

EMO: EMERG. RESPONSE VOL. ORGS. - SUPPORT

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, across the province, local communities are struggling to keep emergency response volunteer groups operational. One Cape Breton fire department has decided to close its doors for good. I'll table that. Another fire chief in the Western Zone has warned that without greater support from this government, they are going to see the department start to shrink and disappear. I'll table that as well. Search and rescue groups are facing similar struggles and fear that this government's creation of a new volunteer force will further decrease their numbers. I'll table that. My question to the minister is: What is this government doing to ensure emergency response volunteer organizations are well-staffed, well-supported, and there for us when we need them?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, we've made unprecedented investments in search and rescue and in fire services across the province in the last two years, with a \$10,000 per fire, per department, per organization fund. We've been very committed to supporting these organizations as a government. One of the outcomes and one of the lessons learned from the incredible number of emergency events that we've had in the past year and a half is that when the event happens, Nova Scotians step up and want to volunteer, but managing those volunteers in that event is a challenge. Staffing up the Nova Scotia Guard - standing up that will enable us to do that, but it is in no way meant to take away from the incredible work that search and rescue and firefighters do for us.

LISA LACHANCE: We all know that with the extreme weather events in recent years, we have relied heavily on our emergency response organizations. They were there for us every step of the way, through hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. That is why Paul Service from Halifax Search & Rescue was surprised that this government made this announcement without consulting existing emergency response volunteer organizations. I'll table that. My question to the minister is: Can the minister please explain why this government decided to create a new volunteer force without consulting the emergency organizations we have relied on for so long?

JOHN LOHR: What I can say is when we were faced with challenges, when we brought in resources from other provinces like Team Rubicon Canada, and when we looked at what Team Rubicon Canada costs and what it offers - which is a great thing, no discredit to them - the question is: Can we build that internally or something similar to that? There always were extra resources coming in. This is part of the national model which we're a part of. We share resources with other provinces; they share resources with us. We know that we have people who will volunteer, will step up, have resources, can provide help, which is not the same as firefighting and search and rescue, which is very - we really respect our volunteers and our career people in those fields, but we recognize that this is something that we can do to add to our . . .

[12:45 p.m.]

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

MAH: PROPERTY TAX INCREASES - ADDRESS

HON. BEN JESSOME: I've been raising the property tax issue that I referenced last week with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing as early as January 3rd of this year. We're all MLAs in here first, and when our community members go through something as traumatic as a wildfire, it's our job primarily to be their voices. I wonder if the minister has taken the time to consider how he would act if he were in the position to represent wildfire victims. He is now a minister of the Crown who has the ability to make a demonstrable, effective, important change for these people. I'm wondering: Now that he's had more time to reflect, will he make those changes?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'll remind the member that when we were debating Bill No. 329, we made a change in the bill at his request that enabled HRM to make changes in how they treated taxes for businesses. He didn't ask for it for housing at that time because it was fairly clear in the Charter. I've recommended to the member: Talk to your municipal councillor.

BEN JESSOME: I must have forgotten my crystal ball at the time at home. Property tax bills didn't come out until January of this year. With respect, I am grateful for that change that the minister made; make no mistake about that. What I am saying today is that there is a change that can be made to have an impact not only on my constituents, but for all Nova Scotians who go through this type of crisis situation. If the minister will not commit to making that change today - he has referenced that the municipality may have some capabilities, he referenced that there's a long-standing Property Valuation Services Corporation policy that he's been leaning on - will the minister sit down with me, representatives from those two bodies, and a member of our community who's gone through this to sort this out and make a demonstrable change?

JOHN LOHR: I'll take issue with the crystal ball comment, because housing was being discussed at that time, and it was quite clear that HRM had the ability to do that with housing. The member may have forgotten that, but that was definitely on the table at the time. I will stand by my comments, and I'm disappointed that you didn't vote for Bill No. 329 when we made those changes for you.

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

DAE: HOUSING UNAFFORDABLE FOR STUDENTS - ADDRESS

LORELEI NICOLL: According to Student Housing Nova Scotia, 80 per cent of students spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. We've continued to ask on behalf of university students whom we hear from in our communities about student housing, and we keep hearing that the cost of rent is having a negative impact on these students being able to afford groceries and focus on their studies. My question to the Minister of Advanced Education: Does he think that it's acceptable that 80 per cent of students are paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Students are so important to this government. That's why we've invested in seven Nova Scotia Community College student housing projects right across this province. We continue to invest. We put \$5 million in the Tartan Downs. We continue to invest in students. We continue to invest in housing. The more housing we have...(interruption).

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

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, 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.

[12:54 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Nolan Young in the Chair.]

[2:54 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Nolan Young resumed the Chair.]

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

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered the following bill:

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

without amendments, and the Chair has been instructed to recommend this bill to the favourable consideration of the House.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Public Bills for Third Reading.

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 404.

Bill No. 404 - Energy Reform (2024) Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: I move that Bill No. 404, an Act to Reform the Law Respecting Energy and Electricity, be now read a third time and do pass.

I'm pleased to rise to speak about Bill No. 404 again. It's making bold changes to our electricity system. It's one of many steps we're taking to make sure ratepayers have clean, reliable, and affordable electricity.

This legislation stems from recommendations of the Clean Electricity Solutions Task Force. We asked them to examine our electricity system. We asked them for recommendations to help modernize it and to make sure it has capacity to reach the climate change goals. They gave us their report on January 31st. It came with detailed advice for legislation. That was the first and by far the largest part of the recommendations.

We turned it around quickly with our staff in the Department of Justice and the legal team. Because we didn't want to miss the window for this session, we did table this legislation. We're actively looking at all the other recommendations as well. None of them requires legislation such as this. They could be approached in other ways. We're just moving the recommendation for the legislation first to get the groundwork done.

I do appreciate that it is a large bill and it is complex, but over the last three weeks, I am sure members and the public have had a chance to observe it. We have received a lot of positive feedback.

This bill is doing some very important things for the electricity system and for a sustainable future. First, this bill will create the Energy and Regulatory Board Act. It will split the NSUARB into two new boards: one to focus on energy and the other to manage

the remaining matters. The new utility energy board will focus expertise to regulation of the public utilities and the energy sector.

Further, we're giving the energy board a mandate to consider our climate change goals in their decision-making. For the first time, the regulator will not only be empowered but be required to make decisions that will help us reach these goals. We anticipate they will engage more expertise and support that is required.

The other major change to this bill is the More Access to Energy Act. It will pull the system operator function out of Nova Scotia Power and make it an independent energy system operator. That means this will be independent from both Nova Scotia Power and the government. This new system operator will procure new clean energy for the grid. They will do this independently, always seeking the lowest-cost options for our ratepayers.

The bill will also update other legislation required to allow these Acts to go forward. A key change in the Public Utility Act is removing a barrier to Nova Scotia Power owning a nuclear power generation station. That will allow the utility to consider the use of small nuclear reactors in the future. Projects of that nature would have many regulatory requirements to meet before they could be built, including robust public consultation.

Ultimately, Bill No. 404 will help us reach our climate change goals, and while protecting ratepayers, it will give them the lowest-cost options for the power in our system.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I'm going to keep my words to few. I feel like I have exhausted all the concerns that I had with this bill in Committee of the Whole House on Bills. It is a large bill, and overall, a positive bill. Our intention as a caucus during Committee of the Whole House on Bills was to have two things enshrined in the legislation, which was making sure that access to this energy remains affordable and that the procurement process is public and fair. Both things were defeated by government.

What we're left with is to take the minister's word that there are not going to be any unintended consequences when it comes to the proclamation of this piece of legislation. There is nothing in it that protects ratepayers. We are left to be hopeful that the establishment of these two boards will do that and it won't be on the backs of Nova Scotians - that any costs that are incurred by this change to the way our grid is divvied out and by new providers coming on aren't going to be off-loaded to Nova Scotians. That has really been the only major concern that we have had as a caucus with this enabling legislation.

The bottom line is that energy poverty is real, and climate change is real. I guess my only words left to say on this are that we need to make sure that access to green energy remains affordable and that the creation of this new energy board doesn't stall the progress for the coal phase-out. As the minister knows - and as many of us know - 2030 is rapidly

approaching. The purpose of this legislation is to help us reach that goal, and again, my hope is that nothing in here will stall that progress.

[3:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I will also just say a few words about this bill. I'm happy to get up and speak in third reading.

There are several parts of the bill that we are concerned about. In some areas, we fear that the bill is going too far, and in other areas we feel like it's not going far enough. I'll start with the former, and I'll speak to where we feel the bill is going too far.

Of course, a lot of these things we did talk about in the Committee of the Whole House on Bills process and tried to make changes - or spoke on some of these issues. I'll just reiterate them quickly here.

Clause 52 removes the prohibition on Nova Scotia Power Incorporated constructing nuclear energy plants, a ban that had been in place for over 30 years, and for good reason. The change, of course, opens a door to mining uranium. As a result, the Ecology Action Centre and East Coast Environmental Law have both raised serious concerns about the environmental impact of this change, and I can table those again. A representative from the EAC emphasized that "we must approach nuclear energy with heightened scrutiny due to its associated risks." I'll table them all at the end.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables assured us during Estimates that this government is not looking to establish a plan to invest or approve nuclear developments for decades, but it begs the question, then: why are we rushing to remove the prohibition on the construction of nuclear energy plants if this government is not exploring possible expansions into that area? It doesn't make any sense. Why aren't we taking a more cautious approach that involves measuring the associated risks before we decide whether lifting the ban is a good idea? And why aren't we looking at this massive change in a single piece of legislation? Like we've seen with the many proposed changes in the FMA, which we've just been talking about, this provision too is buried within a massive piece of legislation and may not be getting the public attention it deserves.

Now I want to talk just for a moment about the areas where we think the bill is not going far enough. I'll start by recognizing that we were very happy to see that the mandate of the Nova Scotia Energy Board is now expanding to allow the consideration of climate goals and sustainability. Our caucus has been advocating for a sustainability mandate for years. You may remember Bill No. 98, which was tabled in Spring 2022.

Again, this bill should have gone further - or should go further - to include a sustainability advocate, similar to the existing consumer and small business advocates who represent their respective interests in board hearings. We heard similar expressions of disappointment at Law Amendments Committee from environmental advocates like the EAC and East Coast Environmental Law. Creating a sustainability advocate role would have enhanced accountability and ensured consistent and thorough considerations of climate goals and sustainability.

Of course, another massive area where this bill certainly should have gone further is affordability. Energy poverty is a very real and increasing problem across the province. We don't have a clear picture of the impact that this legislation will have on power rates. The legislation is missing a critical lens toward energy poverty to make sure changes are made to ensure affordability.

Nova Scotia has one of the highest proportions of families living in energy poverty in the country. A recent report released by EfficiencyOne found that an estimated 43 per cent of households in Nova Scotia were experiencing energy poverty as of early December 2023. Those are pretty recent data. In some communities, as many as 87 per cent of households are experiencing energy poverty, and as I said, the problem continues to grow. Earlier this month, many people saw their power bills more than double, despite their energy uses not doubling.

The 12th recommendation made by the government's Clean Electricity Solutions Task Force was to find a practical way to address the energy poverty problem. We also spoke in Committee of the Whole House on Bills at length about the transparency in procurement, an issue that has been top of mind following recent Auditor General reports. We spoke in support of an Opposition amendment that would have required all procurements by large-scale public utilities to be tendered and go through the government procurement process, yet this government has failed to act on that.

We've been calling on this government for years to address energy poverty. This bill certainly doesn't go far enough in that area. It is a major missed opportunity. At this time, when the regulatory system is undergoing a massive transformation, we would have liked to have seen this finally addressed. With those few words, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, just from a perspective specific to the residents I represent in Cumberland - and I apologize to the minister. I didn't have this information at the time to present an amendment, but I do want to raise a concern that was brought to me. There is something in Bill No. 404 that will potentially cause harm to wind farms that currently exist in the province. There is a piece in this legislation that will provide protection for new wind farms around curtailment - I guess up to 5 per cent of curtailment. After that, they will be subsidized. The new wind farms will be subsidized by

government or by someone, but existing wind farms - there's nothing in the bill to protect them.

There are some wind farms in the province right now that can sometimes have curtailment costs up to 30 per cent when they are shut down, whether it's for maintenance, because the winds weren't too hard, or they don't need the energy. I did want to raise that as a concern here in the Legislature, and I hope the minister and the department can take a look at protecting the current wind farms we have in the province around curtailment costs. It's also an opportunity to look at the ability to store the energy.

I was kind of surprised to learn that up to 30 per cent - that there is this curtailment cost of up to 30 per cent because of either the lack of the need of energy because there's an oversupply or because the wind farms are being shut down for other reasons. I hate to know that there's this energy that could be captured if we had proper battery storage here in the province. I did want to make sure that is on the record, that there are issues around curtailment between existing wind farms in the province and there's a bit of unfairness in this bill pertaining to any new wind farms that will be built. That's all I'll have to say on this.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables, it will be to close debate on third reading.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Just a couple of quick comments: The issue about the windmills - the existing windmills previous. That's what the amendment at Law Amendments Committee did - cancelled that out. The windmill companies came to us before the Law Amendments Committee and spoke to us about that. We recognized there was a bit of a flaw, so that has been corrected already. We've already heard from the windmill developers. They are very happy that the change has already taken place.

Just a few closing remarks: Last Fall, we released the 2030 Clean Power Plan to show our pathway to reach our climate change goals. Then we released the Nova Scotia Offshore Wind Roadmap for the Green Hydrogen Action Plan, and we did an RFP for five more wind projects that are taking place right now. We launched the Green Choice Program, and we put programs in place for commercial and community solar.

We also invested over \$250 million from our department to assist in efficiency programs to help residents reach their climate change goals to achieve reduced energy costs. With that \$250 million that we've invested in the last two and a half years, it also leveraged an additional \$100-million-plus from the federal government to assist in those programs.

This piece of legislation, Bill No. 404, is our next step in what we committed to do for Nova Scotians during our mandate: 80 per cent renewables by 2030 and be off coal by 2030. The ratepayers will be protected through every step. This Bill No. 404 is just the starting stepping stone of about a year-and-a-half to two-year process to get this into place. This was the most important thing out of the task force recommendations.

Therefore, I am pleased to stand here and close debate on Bill No. 404.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 404.

There has been a request for a recorded vote. We will take a recess until the Whips are satisfied.

Ring the bells. Call in the members.

[3:10 p.m.]

[The Division bells were rung.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Are the Whips satisfied?

[The Clerk calls the roll.]

[3:25 p.m.]

YEAS

NAYS

Hon. Brad Johns
Hon. Tory Rushton
Hon. Barbara Adams
Hon. Kim Masland
Hon. Allan MacMaster
Hon. Twila Grosse
Hon. Michelle Thompson
Hon. John Lohr
Hon. Colton LeBlanc
Hon. Timothy Halman
Hon. Kent Smith
Dave Ritcey
Hon. Brian Wong
Hon. Brian Comer
Hon. Brendan Maguire
Hon. Jill Balser
Hon. Trevor Boudreau

Hon. Greg Morrow
Hon. Becky Druhan
John White
Nolan Young
John A. MacDonald
Hon. Keith Bain
Chris Palmer
Melissa Sheehy-Richard
Tom Taggart
Larry Harrison
Hon. Steve Craig
Hon. Patricia Arab
Hon. Keith Irving
Hon. Tony Ince
Hon. Derek Mombourquette
Hon. Zach Churchill
Hon. Iain Rankin
Claudia Chender
Susan Leblanc
Suzy Hansen
Gary Burrill
Ali Duale
Lorelei Nicoll
Hon. Ben Jessome
Braedon Clark
Carman Kerr
Ronnie LeBlanc
Fred Tilley
Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

THE CLERK: For, 46. Against, 0.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

Ordered that the bill do pass. Ordered that the title be as read by the Clerk. Ordered that the bill be engrossed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on April 5th between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. Government business will include Bills for Third Reading and Private and Local Bills.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do now rise to meet again on Friday, April 5th between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 3:29 p.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 1,058**

By: Hon. Iain Rankin (Timberlea-Prospect)

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

Whereas Deanna Stevens is the local owner of the Deanna's Eats and Treats Bakery and Cafe, a gem of a local business within our community; and

Whereas the bakery is run by a passionate individual who cares deeply about the community and is known for preparing delicious hot meals, ready-to-go lunches, and fresh, high-quality baked goods at affordable prices; and

Whereas the popularity and high ratings of this bakery and cafe would not be possible without the friendly knowledge of staff, excellent service, and tasty treats;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly join me in congratulating Deanna Stevens for starting a local business and for being an integral part of the community by creating jobs opportunities, supporting families, providing homemade treats, and boosting the local economy.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,059

By: Susan Leblanc (Dartmouth North)

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

Whereas Dartmouth North resident Jaylynn Woodman was selected to be on Team Nova Scotia's Youth Cheerleading Team; and

Whereas the youth team was selected from teams across the country to represent our country as Team Canada at the upcoming International Cheer Union (ICU) Cheerleading Worlds Championship in April 2024; and

Whereas the ICU Championships are located at the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex in Orlando, Florida, and the Youth Team Nova Scotia will be representing Canada in the Median Youth Co-ed division;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Jaylynn and her Team Nova Scotia teammates on being named Team Canada and competing in the Cheerleading Worlds Championship in April 2024.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,060

By: Susan Leblanc (Dartmouth North)

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

Whereas the Metro East Inferno U15AAA's 2024 roster included Dartmouth North residents forward Emily Hall, defense Gabrielle LaPierre, and goalie Lily Williams; and

Whereas the Metro East Inferno U15AAA team competed in the 2024 CCM Girls MLK tournament in Boston; and

Whereas the Metro East Inferno U15AAA team won gold in the 14U Jetspeed division;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly congratulate Emily Hall, Gabrielle LaPierre, Lily Williams, and the entire Metro East Inferno U15AAA team on bringing home the championship.