



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Danielle Barkhouse

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First Session

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Danielle Barkhouse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER (Nolan Young): Welcome back, everybody. I hope you had a great Summer. It truly is good to see everybody here.

Order, please. I'll now recognize the honourable Premier, who will present to the House the newly elected member for Pictou West. (Standing ovation)

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Speaker, I present to you Mr. Marco MacLeod, the member for the electoral district of Pictou West. He has taken the oath, signed the rolls, and now claims his right to take his seat in this Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: Let the honourable member take his seat. (Applause)

As you know, we will be conducting an election for the new Speaker. I will now accept nominations for candidates for election as the Speaker of the House of Assembly.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: Speaker, I nominate the member for Chester-St. Margaret's for election as the Speaker of this House of Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Does the honourable member accept the nomination?

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: I do.

THE SPEAKER: Are there any further nominations?

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, I would like to nominate the member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

THE SPEAKER: Does the honourable member accept the nomination?

LISA LACHANCE: I do.

THE SPEAKER: Seeing further nominations, I recognize the honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I nominate the member for Clayton Park West for the election as Speaker of this House of Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Does the honourable member accept the nomination?

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I do. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Are there any further nominations? I'll now ask the Chief Clerk to conduct the vote for the election of the Speaker. I will ask members of the Gallery to remain seated throughout this process. Perhaps we'll take a small recess while we conduct the vote.

[1:05 p.m. The House recessed.]

[1:08 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE CLERK: Order. We are now ready to proceed with the election. We will now begin.

[1:09 p.m. Election of the Speaker began.]

[1:28 p.m. Election of the Speaker was completed.]

THE CLERK: We are now done with the balloting. The Clerks, accompanied by the House Leaders, will now retire to the Clerk's Office to count the ballots and we will be back shortly to announce the results of the first ballot.

We are in recess.

[1:29 p.m. The House recessed.]

[1:56 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The House will resume. The Chief Clerk.

THE CLERK: We have completed the first ballot, and we are ready to declare the election of a new Speaker. The new Speaker of the House of Assembly is the honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's. (Standing ovation)

[The Premier, the Honourable Zach Churchill and Claudia Chender escorted newly elected Speaker Danielle Barkhouse to the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER (Danielle Barkhouse): Thank you. Honourable members of the House of Assembly, I do thank the House for the great honour it has bestowed upon me. I will do my best to uphold the prestige and high tradition of the Speaker's Office. I respectfully ask the assistance and co-operation of all honourable members.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor, is without.

THE SPEAKER: Let him be admitted. It's my first day.

[The Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Arthur J. LeBlanc, preceded by his escort and by the Sergeant-at-Arms, bearing the Mace, entered the House of Assembly Chamber. The Lieutenant Governor then took his seat on the Throne. The Sergeant-at-Arms then departed and re-entered the Chamber followed by the Speaker, the Honourable Danielle Barkhouse and the Chief Clerk of the House, James Charlton. The Speaker, with the Clerk on her left and the Sergeant-at-Arms and Clerk on her right, took up their positions at the foot of the Speaker's Table.]

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: It is the wish of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor that everyone present be seated.

THE PREMIER: May it please Your Honour, the House of Assembly, agreeable to Your Honour's command, has proceeded to the choice of a new Speaker and has elected Danielle Barkhouse, member for the electoral district of Chester-St. Margaret's, to that office, and by its direction, I present her for the approbation of Your Honour.

[2:00 p.m.]

THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: I approve of the Speaker whom the House of Assembly has chosen.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: The honourable Speaker.

[The Speaker took the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Your Honour's ready approval of the choice with which I have been honoured by the House, having constituted me in due form Speaker of the House of Assembly, it has now become my duty in the name of the representatives of His Majesty's loyal subjects, the people of this Province, respectfully to demand all their accustomed rights and privileges, and that they shall have freedom of speech in their debates, that they may be free from arrest during their attendance in Parliament, and that I, as their Speaker, may have free access to Your Honour's person.

THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR: I most cheerfully grant your request.

[The Lieutenant Governor left the Chamber, preceded by his escort and the Sergeant-at-Arms.]

THE SPEAKER: You may be seated.

I'm assuming it's customary to do a little bit of a speech before you start. All I want to say is that you've all worked very hard to be here. You should all be very proud of yourselves, and I hope that I can make you all proud by sitting here. I'm proud to have had my name put forward and to have won. I am proud to be the second female Speaker and to walk in the footprints of Karla MacFarlane. If she's watching, or when she watches, I just want to say hello - we all say hello - and we respect and adore you.

Take it easy on me. It's my first day, if you didn't know. You all get to see my nerves.

We will start with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your election. I was wondering if I could make an introduction before I present my petition.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

SUSAN LEBLANC: In the gallery opposite there are four members of the Ocean Breeze Residents Association, or OBRA. These folks, as you probably know, have been facing some untenable circumstances in their community. The Ocean Breeze community was purchased by new conglomerate owners and is facing a redevelopment.

All of the 1,000 residents of Ocean Breeze will eventually have to leave the community while their homes are demolished and then redeveloped into new housing. The Ocean Breeze Residents Association and these folks who are here today have been supporting each other, advocating for tenants' rights while this process happens, and working very hard to make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen to more people in this province - especially with the fact that we're facing such a terrible housing crisis.

I'd like to welcome Julie Daye, Stephanie McNabb, Celine Porcheron and Jenn Laverty and to thank them, welcome them to the House - first of all, welcome - and on behalf of all MLAs, I would say thank them for their very hard and tireless work on behalf of their community, their neighbours, and themselves. May they be an example to others in the province, so thanks very much. I'm going to read the petition now. The operative clause reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Ocean Breeze Village, urge the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to engage the human, financial, regulatory and political resources and powers of his department to ensure that the more than 1,000 long-term residents of the Ocean Breeze community, including seniors, children, veterans and persons with disabilities, not be rendered homeless on the minister's watch, as a result of the demolition and redevelopment plans of Basin Heights.

Further, given that we residents of Ocean Breeze face imminent eviction at the hands of a corporate developer with close political ties to the government, we call upon your government to work with other governments and agencies to ensure that all residents of Ocean Breeze be provided access to truly decent, affordable and accessible housing before we are obliged to vacate our homes.

Speaker, there are over 200 signatures on this petition, and I have affixed my own, as per the rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled. Welcome, and I hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I was only waiting, Speaker, to see if you needed to say that the petition, in fact, had been tabled.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

Are there any other petitions?

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Before I present a petition, Speaker, may I say a word of introduction?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

GARY BURRILL: This introduction is unrelated to the petition I wish to present. I would like to welcome this afternoon Cheryl Ann Blackie and Blaine Blackie to the Legislature. They are guests in the gallery behind me. Cheryl Ann and Blaine are the parents of Skyler Blackie, a Nova Scotia firefighter whose life was lost in a tragic accident at the Nova Scotia Firefighters School in 2019. Cheryl Ann and Blaine are very involved in working for improved safety in firefighters' training in our province, and we welcome them to the House today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: The petition I wish to present is also on the matter of residential tenancies. It reads this way:

Whereas over a quarter of those who are homeless for the first time are over the age of 60; and

Whereas nearly 6,000 people are on the waitlist for public housing, with an average wait time of 2 years;

Therefore be it resolved that the provincial government ban evictions of seniors whose incomes would qualify them for public housing, until there is a place in public housing for them to go.

This petition has been signed by numerous residents of Rosebank Avenue and Beech Street in the constituency of Halifax Chebucto, and I have also signed it.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled. Are there any other petitions?

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: In the East Gallery today, we are joined by Heather Mulligan and, more importantly, Hilary Richardson-Murphy from beautiful Herring Cove. Both are here on behalf of the Canadian Cancer Society. I ask for a warm welcome from the House.

THE SPEAKER: Please enjoy your time.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,109

HON. KIM MASLAND: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment.

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

Whereas everyone is busy these days and there is never enough time, but speeding is not the answer; and

Whereas speed limits are set to make sure people can get where they need to safely; and

Whereas students are back in school and it is important to slow down and drive with extra care especially when you are in school zones;

Therefore be it resolved I would like to remind all Nova Scotians to slow down, take a little extra time, and do their part to help keep our roads safe.

I ask for 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 Education and Early Childhood Development.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,110

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment.

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

Whereas today marks the beginning of the school year for most of Nova Scotia's 135,000 students, an exciting day for youth, families, staff, and communities; and

Whereas our students will be guided in their learning journey by over 20,000 dedicated teachers, principals, and education staff across the province; and

Whereas this year brings a renewed focus on learning with new approaches to literacy and math, expanded course options in skilled trades and life skills, classrooms free from the distraction of cellphones, and, in October, the introduction of Nova Scotia's School Lunch Program;

Therefore, be it resolved that all members of this Legislature join me in welcoming our students and staff; thanking educators, families, and all others who support our students to learn and grow; and in wishing our school communities all the best for a successful year.

I ask for 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.

[2:15 p.m.]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 459 - An Act Respecting the Continuation of Certain Health Professional Associations. (Hon. Michelle Thompson)

Bill No. 460 - An Act Respecting Free Public Transit. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 461 - An Act Respecting the Down Payment Assistance Program. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 462 - An Act Respecting Border Community Equity. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)

Bill No. 463 - An Act to Amend Chapter 217 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Income Tax Act, Respecting Renters' Relief. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 464 - An Act Respecting Stronger Workplaces for Nova Scotia. (Hon. Jill Balsler)

Bill No. 465 - An Act to Reduce the Harmonized Sales Tax. (Hon. Zach Churchill)

Bill No. 466 - An Act to Provide Students with Required School Supplies. (Hon. Patricia Arab)

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Premier.

N.S. ATHLETES: OLYMPICS PARTIC. - CONGRATS.

THE PREMIER: Speaker, today I rise to recognize and congratulate the talented athletes who represented Nova Scotia as part of Team Canada at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

Basketball, boxing, canoe/kayak, gymnastics, sailing, shot put, and swimming each featured amazing athletes from our beautiful province. I want to take a moment to individually recognize each Olympic athlete who represented our province: Ellie Black, Shay Colley, Connor Fitzpatrick, Antonia Lewin-LaFrance, Georgia Lewin-LaFrance, Sloan MacKenzie, Riley Melanson, Sydney Pickrem, Sarah Mitton, Michelle Russell, and Wyatt Sanford.

All Nova Scotians and all Nova Scotia are incredibly proud of each of you. The hard work and determination it takes to compete at an Olympic level is remarkable, and the effort you displayed at this year's Olympic Games is absolutely incredible. We can't wait to see you. We can't wait to see what is next for each one of you. Your success is truly inspiring. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ESTABROOKS, BILL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I rise today to honour and pay respects to my predecessor, former MLA of Timberlea-Prospect and cabinet minister Bill Estabrooks, who passed away on June 4th of this year. The adoration around the communities I represent - and in many places of some of my colleagues - transcends politics, from teaching and time as principal in schools and volunteering with groups such as the St. Margaret's Bay Lions Club.

Before he moved to Alberta, I would often visit Bill in Upper Tantallon to chat about how our Bruins were doing, the importance of door-knocking between elections - which I continued on Friday afternoons as Bill did - and how best to stay above the petty political partisanship we see in this House far too often. I appreciated his invaluable insight and how he prescribed a new book to read, often on Mondays, in this Legislature on budget estimates.

Bill did a lot for Timberlea-Prospect, and what people will remember most is how he helped people, often on their worst days. A bit of advice was: Do not automatically say that it is either a federal or a municipal issue but help them or find them help or the contact that they need. He was a formidable cabinet minister involved in creating the five-year capital plan and the first efficiency utility in Canada.

Bill, however, was a constituency MLA first - something I believe we all should be in this House. After all, those are the voters whom we report to - no matter what office we have the privilege to have. I ask the House of Assembly to join me in a moment of silence

...

THE SPEAKER: Order.

IAIN RANKIN: . . . to remember and pay tribute to Bill Estabrooks for his public service and many contributions to Nova Scotia. My thoughts are with his family. Bill Estabrooks, outspoken and direct.

THE SPEAKER: We'll have a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. You may be seated.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction prior to my statement.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

KENDRA COOMBES: Today we are joined by our friends in the labour movement and officers of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, Danny Cavanagh and Melissa Marsman; Hugh Gillis with NSGEU; Nan McFadgen with CUPE; Kevin MacMullin, paramedics union; Sandra Mullen, NSGEU; and Mat Whynott with the CLC.

I welcome them all to the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome. I hope you enjoy your time.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

LABOUR DAY: WORKERS' RIGHTS - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Thank you, Speaker. Congratulations on your appointment.

September 2nd was Labour Day, and I had the opportunity to celebrate the hard-won rights that were fought for and won by union members. It was also an opportunity to renew our resolve to continue to fight for better wages, safe working environments, and an end to employers being able to use scab labour to prolong strikes and create tensions on the picket line. It was a day of solidarity. We continue to renew our solidarity every Labour Day.

Thank you to everyone who celebrated Labour Day. Thank you to all the District Labour Councils.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

BALSER, GORDON: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, on the first day of the Fall 2024 session, I want to rise and recognize the accomplishments and legacy of my father, the honourable Gordon Douglas Balsler.

Born in Digby on February 24, 1954 to my grandparents, Seddie and Hartley Balsler, Dad passed away on April 10, 2024 at our home on Shelburne Road. Not only was Dad an incredible father, but he was also a devoted husband, grandfather, uncle, cousin, neighbour, friend, MLA, and minister. Dad was the original Minister of Everything, and during his time in government, was responsible for very prominent portfolios, including Sydney Steel, Economic Development, Transportation, and much, much more.

Although I was so adamant to introduce or even mention Dad in the House, he wouldn't have it. Instead, he told me, "It isn't my time anymore. It's yours." I will forever carry on his legacy here in this House and at home.

As long as I have the privilege to represent Digby-Annapolis, Dad's accomplishments and his ties will be forever remembered. I love you, Dad. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, I'd like to congratulate you as well, and I would like permission to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CARMAN KERR: I draw everyone's attention to the West Gallery, where we have one of my constituents, the former mayor of Annapolis Royal and the current Police Complaints Commissioner, Mr. Bill MacDonald.

Bill, I'd ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Yarmouth.

O'HANDLEY, TOM: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I rise today to remember a former colleague and a dear friend to many in this House and outside of the House, Tom O'Handley, who passed away suddenly.

Born and raised in Glace Bay, Tom brought a positivity and warmth to every room that he entered. He was a loving husband to Heather, and a proud and loving father to their son, Ellis. He was a genuine person full of warmth and fun, and always made time for those around him.

Tom's career was dedicated to service, working as an executive assistant in the provincial government along with meaningful work with the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Easter Seals, and the QEII Foundation. His joy for life, kindness, and humour will be missed by all who knew him, especially his incredibly strong wife Heather, his son, his best friend Geoff MacLellan, and the crew from Glace Bay, who knew him affectionately as "Gooch."

[2:30 p.m.]

I ask this House to join me in extending thoughts and condolences to Tom's family at this difficult time. I do know his memory and legacy will live on in the hearts and minds of all those whose lives he touched, particularly his son, Ellis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

STUDENTS & STAFF SCHOOL RETURN - BEST WISHES

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I rise to welcome all students, educators, support staff, and families back to school for the 2024-25 school year. Fall is always an exciting time as we mark the return to routine, cooler weather, and hopefully, learning and fun. As I sent my own three off this morning, I was reminded of what a momentous moment it is to move into a new year and a new classroom with teachers, peers, and environments to navigate.

For all of the students out there, I wish you a year of learning, fun and adventure. For the educators and staff, I hope you have a fulfilling year of doing the vital work of mentoring and supporting the children of this province with the resources and supports you need to do the job well. To the parents in here and out there, stay strong.

I ask all members of this House to join me in wishing everyone a safe, fun and fruitful school year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

MACLEOD, ALFIE: CANCER FIGHT - BEST WISHES

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I rise today to send my very best wishes to a true friend and mentor, a dedicated public official, and a former Speaker of this House, the

honourable Alfie MacLeod, and his family. This past Summer, our friend Alfie was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive form of cancer.

Despite the difficult diagnosis, Alfie continues to live life. You can find him auctioneering at the Tarabish game. He is certainly a great example of strength in times of adversity.

Alfie has dedicated much of his life to public service, not just as a politician but in his volunteer work on various boards and raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for communities across Cape Breton as an auctioneer.

After years of serving others, we should take some time to think of him and his family. Alfie will certainly be in our thoughts and prayers.

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

NADEAU, BECKETT: ATHLETIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Today I rise to celebrate the outstanding achievements of Beckett Nadeau, a remarkable student athlete from Halifax West High School. Beckett has distinguished himself not only in academics but also in athletics, finishing his Grade 12 year with honours as a multi-sport student athlete. Beckett was honoured as the basketball MVP, a testament to his skill, leadership, and dedication on the court.

In addition to his basketball prowess, he excelled in cross country, earning the Cross Country 100% Award, which recognizes his commitment and excellence in every race. His most notable accolade last year was the School Sport Nova Scotia Award for exemplary participation, which is awarded to a male student athlete who embodies the core values of the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation. Beckett has demonstrated exceptional sportsmanship, respect for others, and academic dedication - qualities that make him not only a leader in sports but also an exemplary student and community member.

Speaker, let us applaud Beckett Nadeau for his achievements and the high standards he has set as a student athlete. His example is an inspiration to his peers and a source of pride for our community. I wish him well as he starts his post-secondary journey at another of my alma maters, the University of King's College, this week.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

OCEAN BREEZE RESIDENTS: HOUSING CONCERNS - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, the community known as Ocean Breeze Village in Dartmouth North houses a vibrant array of people - seniors, young families, veterans, people with disabilities, people from the queer community, newcomers, and people of

many faiths and cultures. It's a place where kids can play safely, where neighbours know each other, and where rents have been affordable for the 1,000 or so people who live there.

The last couple of years have been extremely stressful for the residents of Ocean Breeze, as the land and apartments there were sold to a new owner who plans to redevelop the area and can't guarantee affordable housing options after the redevelopment. Late last month, townhouses in Ocean Breeze began to be demolished as the corporate owners of the area began the phased redevelopment.

It's a very sad thing to watch perfectly good housing and a neighbourhood turned into rubble in one part of my community while in other parts, hundreds of people are struggling to find housing, living in tent encampments, hotels, and in shelters. Something's wrong with the picture. As we begin this session, I hope this government will show some leadership and understanding of the complex and massive investment needed to make sure everyone has a permanent, safe home that they can afford.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

BLACK, ELLIE: OLYMPICS PARTIC. - CONGRATS.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Thank you, Speaker, and sincere congratulations to you.

Today, I would like to congratulate Ellie Black, a gymnast who represented both Canada and Nova Scotia in Paris at her fourth Olympic Games. You can tell from Ellie's performances on the floor, balance beam, bars, and vault that she is an athlete who displays tremendous determination, courage, and strength.

But Ellie's strength is more than just physical. Her strength of character is just as remarkable. People around the world watched as Ellie consoled an athlete from France, showcasing her sportsmanship and compassion. It was a moment that brought all Nova Scotians together with tears of pride in our eyes.

For this and other remarkable moments, Ellie was honoured with the Paris 2024 Fair Play Award. Her continuous acts of generosity to her fellow gymnasts, along with her empathy and compassion for others, is something that truly makes us all so proud.

Ellie, I know all members of this Legislature congratulate you on all your hard work and leadership at this year's games.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

MILLER, PASTOR MIKE: BACKPACK GIVEAWAY - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Congratulations, Speaker.

I rise today to recognize Pastor Mike Miller and his congregation at the Nova Church in Clayton Park West. I'm thrilled to share the incredible success of the backpack giveaway organized by Nova Church on August 25th at Halifax West High School. The turnout was amazing, with so many families showing up to receive much-needed school supplies.

I'm beyond proud of Pastor Miller and his congregation for the tremendous impact they've had for several years on our community. Every year, many families in Nova Scotia, including right here in Clayton Park West, struggle to afford the supplies needed to send their children back to school. Recognizing this challenge, Pastor Miller and his team filled 1,000 backpacks with essential school supplies and distributed them to families across our community.

I would like to ask that the House join me in recognizing the positive impact that Pastor Miller and his team are having on the people who have been touched by his generosity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

CAPE BRETON MLA: MARRIAGE - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I'm sure that all the members of the House join me in extending congratulations to the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier on her marriage to Matthew Brown on August 17th in a ceremony at the Horizon Achievement Centre in Sydney.

The newly married member has explained here several times how she has one sibling, her brother Adam. Adam, who has Down Syndrome, is in fact employed at the Horizon Achievement Centre. Anyone who saw the bride and her brother as he walked her down the aisle and was not moved is probably beyond the reach of help.

May all the House join in extending every warm wish for all the wonderful days to come to Matthew Brown and - you will allow me this once to say - Kendra Coombes Brown.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

PARISEE, JIM: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Speaker, it's with a heavy heart today that I rise to honour the life and memory of a constituent and long-time personal friend of mine, Jim Parisee. On my constituency days, Jim, whose house was just behind my office, would often make his way over on his scooter to sit and have a good conversation.

Jim was born in Smooth Rock Falls, Ontario, and took an oath to serve his community regardless of his age or the tasks that he faced. He initially served with the Royal Canadian Navy for 10 years before returning to Nova Scotia and settling down in Middle Sackville with his wife Gee Gee.

Jim worked for various organizations to continue serving others, including Hudson's Bay, as well as the Halifax Regional School Board, and then retired from the school board in 2001. In addition, Jim enjoyed spending much of his free time volunteering at the local Sackville Heights Community Centre.

I'd ask that members of the House join me in sending sincere condolences to Jim's wife Geraldine, and their family and friends. Rest in peace, Jim.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DOUCET, NIL: COM. SERV. - THANKS

RONNIE LEBLANC: I rise today to recognize the retirement of Municipal Councillor Nil Doucet of St. Bernard for his dedicated service to the Municipality of Clare. First elected in 2004, Nil has served his district for the past 20 years. Throughout his tenure on council, Nil played an active role on several key committees, including the Planning Advisory Committee, the Public Works Committee, the Doctor Recruitment Committee, the Clare Firefighters Association, and the Highway No. 101 Task Force.

Nil's commitment to his community extends beyond council. He has consistently volunteered with numerous organizations and frequently attended local ceremonies and events. Recently Nil announced that he will not be seeking re-election at the upcoming municipal election.

I ask that all members join me in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to Nil Doucet for his many years of dedicated service to the municipality of Clare. Merci.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

STUDENTS & STAFF: SCHOOL RETURN - BEST WISHES

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment.

I rise today to wish all students, staff, bus drivers, parents, and caregivers a happy first day of school and a great school year to come.

The first day of school is highly anticipated by the kiddos, and parents mostly - the hustle and bustle of getting ready, new or clean clothes, hair being done or cut, clean sneakers, and the plethora of school supplies. As a parent to many at home, getting ready is like a marathon, where getting on the bus is the finish line. Waving them off was filled with excitement and possibly claps and cheers as they went along.

I would like all members of this House to please send warm wishes to everyone preparing to see their kiddos off today and wish them a happy and healthy school year to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West, for his very first member statement.

WATT, DR. MARGO: BOOK AWARD - RECOG.

MARCO MACLEOD: Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to my friend, constituent, and St. Francis Xavier University psychology professor Dr. Margo Watt for her recent book *Cases in Clinical Forensic Psychology*. Dr. Watt's book received the 2024 Significant Contribution Award, presented by the Criminal Justice Section of the Canadian Psychological Association. This award recognizes a recently completed work "that makes a significant contribution to the application of psychology to criminal behaviour, criminal justice, and/or law."

In addition to meeting the eligibility criteria, the nominated contribution is assessed on measures of quality, innovation, and potential impact. Each chapter of Dr. Watt's book is written in collaboration with students and colleagues and serves as a model of meaningful collaboration and partnership.

I ask that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature join me in recognizing Dr. Watt's work, which casts a clinical forensic lens on important Canadian criminal cases that warrant analysis and study. Bravo, Dr. Watt.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MACDOUGALL, SAMMY: UNIV. CAREER STARTED - RECOG.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, September is a time for new beginnings as we see all the students going back to school today, but I want to bring special recognition to our student, Sammy MacDougall, who started his university career this week at Cape Breton University.

Sammy has been with us since he was 15 years old. My constituency assistant Joanne and I call ourselves his work parents. We've seen him grow into a fine young man who is going to do amazing work for this province and this country. I can just see it coming.

Congratulations, Sammy. All the best. Great job this Summer. Enjoy your university days and we look forward to working with you in the future.

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

[2:45 p.m.]

WORLD ACADIAN CONGRESS: SUCCESS - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Madame la présidente, c'est le jour où on souligne le grand dérangement des acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse. C'est aussi une bonne occasion de reconnaître le grand succès du Congrès acadien mondial 2024 de l'août passé. J'invite tous les membres de cette Assemblée ainsi que tous les néo-écossais de me joindre en donnant un gros remerciement à tout le monde qui s'impliquaient afin d'accueillir des milliers de personnes aux certains événements. J'ai eu le plaisir d'assister au Forum économique et au Sommet des femmes; une soirée chez le Wedgeport Legion, menée par Acadian Embassy; le grand concert de 15 août; et bien sûr le grand Tintamarre. On ne l'aura pu le faire sans de gros efforts des bénévoles. Vive l'Acadie.

The day where we commemorate the great upheaval of the Acadians in Nova Scotia is also a great day to recognize the success of the Acadian World Congress this past August. I ask all members of the House and all Nova Scotians to join me in sending a big thank you to everyone who got involved in hosting thousands of guests at hundreds of events. I had the pleasure of attending the Economic Forum and Women's Forum, an evening at the Wedgeport Legion with Acadian Embassy, the big 15 août concert, and, of course, the Tintamarre. We couldn't have done it without the extraordinary efforts of all the volunteers. Vive l'Acadie.

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

STANFIELD, TOM: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

DAVE RITCEY: Congratulations on your election as Speaker.

I rise today to recognize the remarkable life of Truro business and community leader and family friend Tom Stanfield, who passed away peacefully at 81, surrounded by his loving family on July 23, 2024.

A lifelong resident of Truro and nephew of former Premier Robert “Bob” Stanfield, Tom's dedication to his family, community, and business was unparalleled. As Chairman, President, and CEO of Stanfield's Limited, he led the company for over five decades, leaving a lasting mark on the industry.

Beyond business, Tom was a committed community leader, serving in various roles that shaped Truro and Nova Scotia. His legacy of leadership, generosity, and humour will be cherished by all who knew him. Tom's impact lives on through his family, friends, and the countless lives he's touched. My thoughts go out to his wife Beth, their children Jennifer, Jill and Jon, and their immediate families.

Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in a moment of silence.

THE SPEAKER: Please stand for a moment of silence.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated. The honourable member for Bedford South.

STUDENTS & STAFF: SCHOOL RETURN - BEST WISHES

BRAEDON CLARK: As today is the first day of school, as we know, I wanted to extend my best wishes to all of the students, teachers, administrators, staff, everybody who is involved with the schools that are either in my riding or serve kids in my riding of Bedford South. That would be Charles P. Allen High School, West Bedford High School, West Bedford School, École secondaire du Sommet, École Beaubassin, Grosvenor-Wentworth Park Elementary, and Rockingham Elementary as well.

The first day of school is exciting, nerve-wracking for some, but all in all, it's the beginning of an amazing journey over the next 10 months as our students and teachers move forward. In particular, I want to give a shout-out to the two students in my household: my son Beau, who started Grade 2, and my daughter Heidi, who is very excited to start big school in pre-Primary. I hope they had a great day. School just ended. I'm sure they did very well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

LOCAL STUDENTS: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPS. - CONGRATS.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to congratulate two young women from Cumberland North who were recently awarded the first Kait Saxton Memorial Scholarships.

Kacey Brown, a graduate of Pugwash District High School who will attend NSCC Truro campus in the criminal justice program, and Amherst Regional High School graduate Samantha Wood, who will be attending Acadia University to study neuroscience, were both selected to receive the scholarships in June of this year. In their applications, both young ladies demonstrated a clear vision of how they see themselves accomplishing their goals and ultimately helping others.

As many of you know, Kait Saxton was my legislative assistant who passed away in 2022. Kait had a passion for politics and for encouraging other young people to pursue their dreams. To honour Kait, members of our community established a scholarship fund that will assist young women from Cumberland North constituency to pursue further education in a field focused on improving our world.

I would ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Kacey Brown and Samantha Wood, and to wish them the very best on their future endeavours.

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

ANDERSON, HAROLD: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, this past Summer, Nova Scotia said goodbye to an iconic resident of Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. Most folks who spent any amount of time in downtown Halifax in the past 40 years will recall a gentleman in a sensible pinstripe suit blazer paired with a skirt and bright red pumps. Not everyone knows that this man's name was Harold Anderson, but he was, and will remain, a true pioneer of self-expression in Halifax.

Harold held a wide variety of jobs over the years including bookkeeper, public servant and debt collector - but his true passion was country music. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of country music from the 1940s through to the 1960s, and anyone in his life knew he could find the perfect song for any occasion.

Over the years he became known for his sense of style and, as Tuma Young puts it, simply being at the vanguard of gender fluidity. In an interview many years ago, Harold mused that "My likes and dislikes should not be governed by my gender. Women weren't called cross-dressers for wearing pants, so why is there a double standard for men?"

I ask that going forward, as a means of carrying on his legacy, we all try to live our lives and embrace each other's differences through Harold's lens of inclusivity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BROOKS, CHAD: CANOE/KAYAK COACHING - CONGRATS.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations.

Speaker, I am proud to recognize Chad Brooks for his outstanding work as coach for the canoe/kayak team at the Paris Olympics. His dedication and leadership played a crucial role in guiding our athletes to perform at their very best on the world stage. Chad's commitment to excellence and his ability to inspire make him a true mentor in our country, our province, and our community.

The team's success in Paris reflects all their hard work and the high standards Chad upholds. I congratulate Chad on his and the team's achievement. I look forward to a continued positive impact in canoe/kayak and beyond. Thank you for all you do, Chad.

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

CAVUNITY: SCHOOL CULTURE WORK - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Thank you, and congratulations on becoming the second female Speaker of the Nova Scotia Legislature.

I stand today to recognize Cole Harbour District High School's volunteerism club, CavUnity. CavUnity was created this past school year by the then-grade 12 students Nathalie and Gin, along with Grade 10 IB student Isaiah, who will lead the group this year. Its goal is to unite students and make a positive impact both within the school and our broader community.

CavUnity provides students with the opportunity to engage in public relations, host events, volunteer, and receive guidance on post-secondary education and scholarships. I was invited to speak at their Women in Politics seminar and organized the trip to tour Province House with this group this past Spring. Before the school year ended, CavUnity had conducted a food drive for Out of the Cold Community Association Halifax and embarked on a major initiative for the IWK by hosting a bingo night, bottle drive and raffle and planned a movie night.

I ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating CavUnity and wish the student organization much success in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

STUDENTS & STAFF: SCHOOL RETURN - BEST WISHES

SUSAN LEBLANC: I just wanted to also take the time today to wish a bonne rentrée - a welcome back - happy return to all the students, teachers, bus drivers, support

staff, everyone who's returning to school today for another year of learning and growing. I especially wanted to shout out the schools in Dartmouth North or just on the cusp of Dartmouth North and Dartmouth South: Dartmouth High School, of course, École secondaire Mosaïque, John Martin Junior High, Bicentennial School, École Shannon Park School, John MacNeil Elementary, Harbour View Elementary, Crichton Park School.

I want to wish my two, who are now in Grade 5 and Grade 7 - both in middle school, we've said goodbye to elementary school this year - a very happy year full of fun, discovery, adventure and learning and to thank all their teachers, who will no doubt have their work cut out for them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

COLLEY, SHAY: OLYMPICS PARTIC. - RECOG.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment as Speaker of this House.

I rise today to recognize and celebrate the remarkable achievements of Shay Colley, who has once again demonstrated her exceptional talent and dedication on the global stage. Shay recently competed on the Canadian Women's basketball team in her second Olympic Games.

Shay's journey to this point has been one of relentless hard work, perseverance, and unwavering commitment to her sport. As a key player on the team, Shay has not only represented our country with pride, but has also inspired countless young athletes across the country.

Colley averaged 12.3 points per game, including a team high 17 points against Nigeria. Her performance in Paris was a testament to her skill, her leadership, and passion for the game. Competing at the Olympics is a pinnacle of athletic achievement, and to do so twice is a remarkable accomplishment that speaks to Shay's consistent excellence as a basketball player.

Let us all join in congratulating Shay on her outstanding accomplishments and wishing her continued success in her career.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

LABOUR DAY: HARD-WORKING NOVA SCOTIANS - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment to this seat.

On September 2nd, we had a long weekend to celebrate Labour Day. I would like to recognize the hard-working Nova Scotians who make our province a good place to live.

I would like to ask the members of this House to join me in thanking the hard-working Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

LUCAS FAMILY REUNION: SUCCESS - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate the Lucas family reunion that happened on July 25th to 28th this year. Lucasville was founded in 1827 by Black Loyalists James Lucas and Moses Oliver who immigrated as free slaves from the United States. At the reunion, descendants from all over North America come home to Lucasville for a celebration of culture, history, and family.

The theme, Honouring Our Heritage Past, Present, and Future, is so significant. Looking back into the past and learning from it are essential steps to taking control of one's destiny, as well as finding success in the present. The Lucas family reunion is a time to come together to connect and reconnect with family, learn about the lineage of folks, and have a good time while being in great company.

I would like all members of this House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the Lucas family and the community of Lucasville for continuing the legacy. Thank you to all the families for your hard work and dedication in making this year's family reunion a success.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

ZWICKER, TRACY: TRACY'S PLACE OPENING - CONGRATS.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARDS: Speaker, as a former seatmate of yours, I am going to miss you in the seat beside me, but I am very proud and honoured to see you there today. Congratulations.

I rise today to congratulate Tracy Zwicker on the recent opening of Tracy's Place in Windsor. Tracy, along with her CEO, Michael, and team members Kelly and Paulette, are offering care for adults living with intellectual disabilities. She has created an incredible space filled with tons of natural light, many activities, sensory rooms, quiet places, gathering spaces, and so much more. Not a detail was missed.

From the moment I walked in the door and met Tracy and her team, it was easy to see that her vision has come from a place of love deep within her heart. Tracy's Place offers

respite options for our community where I know participants will receive excellent care in an inclusive, safe environment.

I ask that all members join me in congratulating Tracy on creating such an amazing space and offering a service in our community that is much-needed.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

REID, DONALD: FOSSIL NAME - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Speaker, I want to congratulate you as well on your new position. I know you will ensure that the voices of members will be heard.

There once was a boy with rocks in his pockets. That's how Donald Reid was introduced when he was inducted into the Order of Nova Scotia. He was known locally in Joggins as a Keeper of the Cliffs. He was born near the cliffs that shaped his life and fuelled his passion for fossil hunting. With no formal training in paleontology, he gathered an extensive collection of fossils which now form the heart of the Joggins Fossil Centre. His work was essential in securing the cliffs as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

[3:00 p.m.]

Don passed away in 2016, but now his name will live on forever because he has had a fossil named for him - *Pygocephalichnium reidi*. It is a huge honour for his loving family in remembrance of his life's work. Congratulations, Don.

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

STUDENTS & STAFF: SCHOOL RETURN - BEST WISHES

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, over the past weeks, teachers, support staff, custodians, bus drivers, and admin staff have been preparing to welcome students back to school. It is no easy task getting schools ready - cleaning and decorating hallways and classrooms. They also include a fresh coat of paint, reviewing those bus routes, and so much more.

Today the anticipated moment arrived. Our children entered their schools, welcomed by smiling faces. My oldest, Rory, walked confidently into Primary.

I want to thank all those who are working in our education system, and I wish everyone a happy, safe, and successful year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

PERRY, ANNE: CANCER AWARENESS EFFORTS - RECOG.

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to recognize Anne Perry and her efforts to raise awareness about colorectal cancer, with the goal of reducing deaths. This is a very treatable disease if caught in time.

Sadly, Anne lost her husband Toby in 2019 at the age of 49. Since then, Anne has worked on many fundraisers, including bringing the Push for Your Tush Run to Shelburne. This is the third Summer in a row for the run, and in its inaugural year, it was the only location in Canada outside of four major cities.

This year, Anne's event raised over \$24,000. That's the fourth-highest amount raised in the 12 events in Canada.

Along with her children, Anne created Test for Toby on Facebook and Instagram where people can become informed about symptoms and the importance of regular early testing and checkups.

Speaker, I respectfully ask all members to join me in thanking Anne for her commitment to increasing awareness and changing the narrative regarding colorectal cancer.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

ORGANIZERS: LOCAL FESTIVALS - RECOG.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, this Summer was a very busy time in Northside-Westmount. I just wanted to bring recognition to a couple of organizations that put on some amazing festivals in our area: the Highland Games was in July - well-attended, a beautiful ceremony, and lots of activity; the Heritage Festival in Sydney Mines for three days, with music, food and fun; and also the Northside Boys annual Show Your Ride car show, which had over 500 entrants, and thousands of people showed up in the town.

It was a wonderful Summer. Congratulations to those groups for keeping things alive in Northside-Westmount.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I would ask the House to acknowledge my husband, Darren, who's here with me today. We celebrated 30 years of marriage this Summer.

Darren's seen me debate in other areas of our life, but today he gets an opportunity to see me debate here.

Welcome, and it is a bit nerve-wracking having you here, so I hope I'll do you proud.

THE SPEAKER: We hope you enjoy your time here. We also hope you enjoy Question Period.

Order. The time allotted for Statements by Members has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: FAM. PRAC. REG. - UPDATE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, it has been three years since this Premier was elected to be Premier of this province. He was elected on big promises to Nova Scotians, but so far, on health care, on housing, on coastal protection, it's been all promise with no progress.

I'll point the Premier's attention to the Need a Family Practice Registry wait-list. More than 90,000 Nova Scotians have been added to that list over the last three years. When the Premier was the Opposition Leader and that number was below 70,000, it was a health care crisis. That number is now over 160,000 people without a family doctor - that we know of.

My question to the Premier is: Does he understand, and would he agree, that the more patients in Nova Scotia who are not attached to a family doctor, the worse the health care crisis is going to get under his leadership?

THE PREMIER: We certainly want people to be attached to primary care providers. There's no question about that. We're taking action to improve health care in this province. Our plan is working. There are 300 more doctors today than there were in 2021. Today in this province there are over 2,000 more nurses than there were in 2021.

Just yesterday we announced a partnership with Google Cloud, which means Nova Scotians will have access to the same technology as the Mayo Clinic. Our plan is working.

We know there is work to be done, and we will keep doing it.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The outcomes in the things that matter to people in health care are getting worse. We have over 160,000 people in Nova Scotia without a family doctor; ER closures unlike we've ever seen before; wait times increasing for ambulances - tripling in some parts of the province.

The government hasn't even shared the most updated numbers for the Need a Family Practice Registry. The last we heard it was 160,000. This Premier has hidden the most updated numbers from Nova Scotians for the last three months. We are supposed to get updates every month on how many people need a family doctor.

My question to the Premier is: Why is he hiding the numbers for the Need a Family Practice Registry wait-list?

THE PREMIER: We have a plan. We have a website people can go to see. They can actually see what's happening in the health care system. They can see the data and understand it because we are gathering the data. We know how the systems work, and we know there's work to be done, but I'll tell the member: more doctors, more nurses, more homes. These are the things that are happening in this province right now.

Our plan is working, and we will continue to work.

ZACH CHURCHILL: We are not seeing progress on the things that matter in housing, in homelessness, or in health care. This Premier has held critical data for Nova Scotians to understand the state of our health care system: how many people don't have a family doctor. That number has been hidden for three months because the Premier thinks that being able to do a Google search and having a phone app is going to replace family doctors for Nova Scotians. That's not the case.

Why is the Premier withholding this information from the public?

THE PREMIER: More doctors, more nurses, more homes - our plan is working. Don't take my word for it - the honourable member may be familiar with Jane Philpott. The honourable Jane Philpott was in Nova Scotia, and she tweeted out: "I had breakfast with the Premiers yesterday in Halifax, also had a fantastic afternoon with the leaders of Nova Scotia Health. They are leading the way with an ambitious, detailed plan." That's from Jane Philpott. That's the person I look up to. I'll table that for the House.

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

PREM.: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY - ADDRESS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We speak to Nova Scotians every day for whom housing costs are the biggest stressor in their lives. In 2022, the Provincial Housing Needs

Assessment Report by this government found that 78 per cent of Nova Scotians were struggling to find housing they could afford - 78 per cent.

We've seen no evidence of improvement, with many people from one end of the province to the other facing housing insecurity, inability to afford housing for the very first time in their lives.

When will the Premier acknowledge that affordability is something that this government must meaningfully address?

THE PREMIER: We know that the best way to tackle the cost of living is by driving down the cost of homes and by driving down rental costs. This is the largest expense most people have. That's why we're bringing down barriers to home construction.

Our plan is working. Housing starts are up. Our plan will create more than 40,000 new units by 2028. The solution to the housing problem is more housing, and our plan is working. We've just continued to announce record investments in affordable housing.

We will continue to get that work done, Speaker, but the plan is working.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This government announces programs created and dollars spent every day, but what we don't hear about are the results of that. We hear about housing starts; we don't hear about housing completions. Take Happipad, which after a \$1 million investment resulted in 23 leases signed. That wasn't an announcement. That was the result of a FOIPOP.

The fact that despite the 5 per cent rent cap, actual rents increased this year by 18.2 per cent - Nova Scotians will know that the measures are working when people aren't being evicted into homelessness, when encampments aren't lining our streets, and when people across this province can actually find housing they can afford. Right now, none of that is true. It's not working.

THE SPEAKER: Question.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: When will Nova Scotians be able to find housing they can actually afford?

THE PREMIER: It is true, we're not shy about trying new things - absolutely. I know the Opposition wants us to keep trying the same old tired solutions to things that just didn't really solve the problem. We will try new things. Nova Scotians have a right to expect that. Housing starts are up. That is a good thing. There are more doctors, there are more nurses, there are more homes. That is evidence that our plan is working. We know there's work to be done. We will continue to do it, and we will not be shy to try new things on behalf of Nova Scotians.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: New thing: Invest in the non-market housing sector. The creation of truly affordable - as in the person looking for the home can afford it - housing is key. It must be prioritized over things like failed apps and luxury condos. Truly affordable housing is best created by non-market providers who keep that housing affordable forever.

However, funding and support for non-market housing remains piecemeal and insufficient. We have non-profits eager to build more of this type of housing, and they say they could start tomorrow if the support was there. My question is: Where are the results? Why is this government failing to incentivize and build the truly affordable housing that Nova Scotians need?

THE PREMIER: The reality is that unlike past Liberal and NDP governments, we are making record investments in affordable housing. The Liberals refused to invest when they were there. The NDP actually, Speaker, just sat on tens of millions of dollars. They literally sat on cash from the federal government.

We are not sitting on cash. We are investing in affordable housing. We are investing in Nova Scotians, and we will continue to act every single day on their behalf.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: PHONE APPS INSTEAD OF DOCTORS - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I really do believe that with this Premier, everything is about optics; it's not about outcomes. We've seen that in health care where the Premier's response to a health care crisis is a phone app. We've seen that with housing. The Premier's response: a phone app. With coastal protection, I'll give the House one guess. There's an app for that too. The Premier even travels to Silicon Valley, where I think he's going to find more apps to fix all the problems that we have here in Nova Scotia.

He has spent tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money in untendered contracts for these apps at a time when the people who need a family doctor have doubled, when homelessness has doubled, when wait-times have doubled. Does he really think that phone apps and Google searches are going to replace family doctors for patients in Nova Scotia?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I will say is that we've had hundreds of thousands of downloads of the app. We've had over one million views of people's health records as a result of that app. People are feeling more empowered. It's allowing them to have conversations with their families, with their physicians, with their nurse practitioners. It allows them to navigate the system in a very different way.

The past is not the future, which is exactly what is wrong with health care. They sat inert, waiting for something to change, when we came along. We are the change, and we are transforming health care.

ZACH CHURCHILL: This government talks about downloading the app and how many people are doing that as a good thing. This is a sign of how desperate Nova Scotians are to access medicine in this province. People are not going to fix their complicated health challenges that they have because they have access to an app. We don't need more phone apps in Nova Scotia; we need more doctors who are attached to patients. That is the only thing that's going to work.

[3:15 p.m.]

My question to the Premier - he made a big promise to fix health care. We're also hearing that doctors are leaving the province because the NSHA is not helping keep them there. Does he really think that these phone apps and Google searches can replace family doctors for patients in this province?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: We have net new 300 physicians in this province since 2021. If the member opposite was concerned about physicians leaving the province, perhaps they would have paid more attention to the HHR plan. There have been no health resources under them.

We have been working tirelessly to get out of the hole that we're in. We have 2,000 more nurses. We have increased the number of nurse practitioners. There are 840,000 more appointments per year for people to access primary care in this province.

We have settled contracts. We have reinforced our paramedicine. We have done everything. We will continue to work very hard because we will transform health care. It is happening right now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DED: NOVA SCOTIA LOYAL MONEY TO SOBEYS - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, what the government doesn't share is that there are fewer doctors per capita now in Nova Scotia than when they started. Their own numbers say that. Again, this government makes big promises. It's all about optics and no delivery, no progress.

We have seen that with their economic plan as well. This government - under this Premier - promised Nova Scotians that a Nova Scotia Loyal program would contribute an estimated \$1.4 billion to our province's GDP - \$1.4 billion.

My question to the Premier is: How many Scene points have to be bought with taxpayer money to get to \$1.4 billion in GDP growth in this province?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: With Nova Scotia Loyal, we have delivered, and we have delivered a program that was built by - and built for - Nova Scotians. Nova Scotians told us what they needed, what would help them to better identify and be able to do more purchasing of locally made and grown products. They, in fact, told us that they didn't need another card in their wallet. That is why we looked to the existing points programs. It is not a one-legged stool - it is multifaceted - and it's just rolling out.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I'm sure one thing that Nova Scotians didn't tell this government to do was to give Sobeys more money in Nova Scotia - more taxpayers' money. I'm sure that when Nova Scotians actually look at what they're getting for that money, they're going to be a bit perplexed.

The Premier announced that you get 50 Scene points for buying something local. I went into Sobeys on the week that this was announced, and I could have got 100 Scene points for buying Mr. Noodles - I'll table that. Now, if I bought a package of Dunkaroos, I would have got 500 Scene points. That's equivalent to 10 months' worth of the Nova Scotia Loyal incentive.

Will the Premier please admit to this House that the Nova Scotia Loyal program was more about his loyalty to the Sobeys corporation than helping people buy local products in Nova Scotia?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: He's starting to get it. It's true: Big corporations and big producers - the Dunkaroos - are able to pay extraordinary fees to have the corner shelves and to have special incentives, to have additional Scene points.

We are offering 50 cents worth of points - value of points - on every Nova Scotia product, and already, for the first time, there are products that people are discovering, the vast array of Nova Scotia products. The Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture has asked to please put politics aside. This is a good thing.

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

MAH: LACK OF COASTAL PROTECTION - COMMENT

LORELEI NICOLL: On July 26, 2022, the Premier appointed Tom Hickey as the head of Invest Nova Scotia. A mere two weeks later, Mr. Hickey resigned. I'll table that. Tom Hickey, as one of the Premier's many friends, is the owner of Atlantic Road Construction & Paving, which is planning to infill Dartmouth Cove and has, without permission, encroached on public land partially administered by the very organization he

had been appointed by the Premier to lead. For the record, does the Premier support his friend's plan to infill Dartmouth Cove?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, in reply to that question, I will say that this is an area of federal and municipal jurisdiction. To my knowledge, there's no role of the Province in any part of this infill question. That's the answer.

LORELEI NICOLL: I was told when I started not to expect answers during Question Period, so I'm not going to expect that to be an answer. The Premier has promised that he'll protect our coastlines, but he has not yet made any progress. The government has failed to proclaim the Coastal Protection Act; therefore, it has no ability to manage development and infilling along our coastlines. To the Premier: Have your friends and donors influenced your decision to not enact the original all-party approved Coastal Protection Act? What has changed?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, congratulations on your election as Speaker of this House.

Despite the misinformation that's being put out there with respect to our coastal action plan, we have made huge inroads in the past number of months. We have 15 actions in that plan. Four out of those 15 have been accomplished. We are continuing our work with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities to design the example bylaws. We have to ensure, working with our municipalities - as they know their communities best - that residents do not build in unsafe areas. We are moving forward with a strong, comprehensive plan that all Nova Scotians can be proud of.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: NEED A FAMILY PRACTICE REGISTRY - UPDATE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, here we are embarking on yet another month without any update to the Need a Family Practice Registry. In June, when the list was last updated, 16.2 per cent of the population - more than 160,000 Nova Scotians - were on the waiting list, waiting to be attached to primary care. I can table that. This government can play around with the data all it wants, but the fact remains that the health care crisis in this province is worsening, and people want to know when things will get better. We didn't hear an answer from the Premier, so I'm going to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness.

To the Minister of Health and Wellness: Why won't this government release an update to the Need a Family Practice Registry?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: As we did last Summer, we have undertaken a validation exercise. The people who are currently on the Need a Family Practice Registry are now being called to have their information validated. We want to understand whether

they have already been attached, because the functionality of that list needs to be improved. We continue to do that. We're understanding their health status. We're understanding all the situations that lead them to be on that registry. It is moving from a list that was never looked at or managed to a registry that allows people to connect to primary care, to connect to chronic disease management and pre-natal care. It cannot be rushed, and we're doing a wonderful job through the Nova Scotia Health Authority. When those numbers are ready, they will be released.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Last Spring, the Premier indicated his government might scrap the Need a Family Practice Registry altogether. Now the Nova Scotia Health Authority has been reviewing the registry for months, trying to remove people from the list. The last time this government reviewed the registry, most were removed because of invalid health cards, and many others were mistakenly removed. Can the minister explain why this government is spending more time hiding and downplaying the list than it is working to attach people to care?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I don't think calling all the individuals who are on that registry to find out more about their health care is hiding. I would say that is patient-centred care, and I'm very proud of the work that's happening around validating that list. What's important to understand about that list - to quote the honourable Dr. Jane Philpott again, "Nova Scotia leads the way on access to primary care, literally calling everyone on the registry to validate details, assess risk, provide interim measures as they recruit and build primary care teams with the end goal of a health home for every community. Other provinces take note."

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: COASTAL PROTECTION ACT SCRAPPED - EXPLAIN

HON. IAIN RANKIN: That entire party voted in 2019 for the Coastal Protection Act. Not only that, in 2022, the minister said: "The Coastal Protection Act and its regulations . . . will give us the action plan and tools we need to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change." I'll table that.

Because, you can only conclude, some wealthy landowners want to actually build in unsafe areas along our coastline, that Act was scrapped. All promise and no progress when it comes to protecting our sensitive coastline. When will this government keep the promise to Nova Scotians and proclaim that Coastal Protection Act?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Nova Scotians love our coastline, and that is why we came forward with a balanced, comprehensive plan to protect our coastlines, to work with our 49 municipal units to ensure we have coastal protection.

I'm very proud of the Action Plan that we have put forward in this province, that now, six months later, we are seeing tangible results. Four out of the 15 actions have been implemented. We have now a Coastal Coordinator attached to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities. They are getting to work with the municipal units to develop the example bylaws to ensure our residents do not build in unsafe areas.

IAIN RANKIN: I want to talk about a real-life scenario. They're talking about choice for landowners. What about the scenario where a landowner wants to build in an unsafe area next to the coastline, wants to build right up to the high-water mark, wants to limit public access? Maybe right on top of a wetland. I just want to understand the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, his position on this.

If a municipality does not have a bylaw preventing that landowner from building right there in an unsafe place that damages the environment, is the Minister of Environment and Climate Change okay with that wealthy landowner, possibly a PC party donor, building on that land?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: The Coastal Action Plan is designed to serve all Nova Scotians, to protect all Nova Scotians who live, specifically along the coastline. We need to ensure, as we move this province forward, that we are climate-resilient, and that is why the Action Plan is a key component of our overall response with the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, with our Climate Change Plan, and with our risk assessment.

All of this working together has positioned Nova Scotia as a leader on sustainable prosperity, on climate action. Don't just take my word for it, take the word of the Pembina Institute, which has ranked Nova Scotia third in climate change policy and sustainable development. We are a leader on climate policy. I'll table that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

MAH: HAPPIPAD INVESTMENT - DEFEND

BRAEDON CLARK: I want to talk about Happipad today, again. We've seen the government has invested \$1.3 million into the Happipad app, to produce an astounding total of 23 leases. Now do a little math here, that works out to \$56,000 of taxpayer money for each and every lease that has been signed.

I wanted to ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Is it a good sign that he and the Minister of Advanced Education have mentioned Happipad more times in this House than leases that have actually been signed?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I think that you could say that they brought it up more. The reality is that we're making unprecedented investments across the housing

spectrum. We realize the housing prices in Nova Scotia have many facets. We're working very hard as a government. When we came into government, we were at about \$120 million a year; now we're well over \$600 million a year investment in housing. We're starting to see that take hold. Housing starts are up in 2023 by 25 per cent.

[3:30 p.m.]

We're working very hard across the spectrum. This is one aspect of that work. I'm proud of every part of the job that we've done, and we will continue to work hard on housing.

BRAEDON CLARK: I think what would be unprecedented in Nova Scotia would be \$56,000 a lease. I'm just guessing, but I imagine that would be unprecedented.

So \$1.3 million on this app. This is money that, in my view - and in the view of many, I think - would have been much better spent going to non-profit housing providers, for example, to provide permanent, affordable long-term housing, or that could have rented 66 average two-bedroom units for a year. Now the government is sending out flyers about Happipad - I will table that - in a last-ditch effort to save a sinking ship.

I would ask the Minister: How much is the government spending on this advertising, and when will we actually see some results from this program?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Happipad continues to make the Opposition unhappy, and the thing about Happipad is that it is a home-sharing program. It is innovative, but it's not new. It's been around forever.

What we are asking all Nova Scotians for is to look. If there is an empty room - we have over 30,000 empty rooms across this province. We have over 500 people who have registered with Happipad who are interested in their rooms. Happipad and other home-sharing programs will actually vet the person who has the house; it will actually vet the person who is looking for a place to rent and make a perfect match. It's still there. They're promoting it more and more. I believe the number is now 33 matches. Those 33 people are pretty happy.

We'll continue to do things that are innovative and creative.

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

NRR: ENERGY COSTS - EXPLAIN

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, in the 2021 PC party platform, the PCs committed to lowering energy bills and making life more affordable for Nova Scotians.

Three years later, power bills have never been higher. Once again, the Premier is all promise and no progress.

Can the Premier tell us why he hasn't reduced energy costs for Nova Scotians?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Quite frankly, I disagree with the statement. Speaker, there are more than just electrical costs that are energy costs to families. This government, in the last three years, has invested more than \$250 million in energy costs. I'll just speak about a couple of them.

The Heating Assistance Rebate Program: \$77.6 million to 129,000 families to assist with an energy cost. Your Energy Rebate Program: \$144 million that we invested in 2024-25 to help 450,000 homes. I've got a few more I'll speak about later.

PATRICIA ARAB: I'm glad that the minister mentions the Heating Assistance Rebate Program, because we have been long advocating for this Heating Assistance Rebate Program, and an increase in such that would make a real difference in Nova Scotians' lives, but instead, his government has actually decreased that program by 40 per cent.

My question is actually not my question - it comes directly from the member for Halifax Atlantic at a previous Public Accounts Committee earlier this year. I will table that quote: "How can you reasonably and ethically decrease the HARP by 40 per cent for people whose money is not going as far as it used to?"

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Listen, facts matter. The facts are that since we took office, we've increased this budget sevenfold. We've gone from \$10 million to \$77 million. We're supporting almost three times the number of households in this province. The previous Liberal government failed to touch this program. We know this program matters so much to Nova Scotians. We look forward to sharing more program details in the weeks ahead.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the NDP.

DPW: BUILD NOVA SCOTIA EASEMENT - DENY

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'm lucky to represent the area that includes Dartmouth Cove. Dartmouth Cove is a beautiful trail along the waterfront that borders the Centre for Ocean Ventures and Entrepreneurship, which is home to millions of dollars of government investment, as well as Maritime Search and Rescue operations, all of which - the trail, the neighbourhood, the centre - would be imperilled by the proposed infill in the pre-Confederation water lot adjacent to that path.

The Minister said earlier there is no provincial angle. That is inaccurate. In fact, Build Nova Scotia owns a parcel of land over which this developer would require an easement to undertake any dumping operations.

Now Build Nova Scotia has publicly stated that they would not entertain an application for that easement until all approvals were granted - federal and CN and municipal.

My question to the minister is: Now that this developer has acted in such bad faith, blocking that trail, will the minister commit to directing Build Nova Scotia to finally and permanently deny the easement?

THE SPEAKER: I asked that everybody stay within their minute - sorry, 50 seconds. I slipped a little bit today, but I won't again. I will cut off people if they don't have the question out in time.

HON. KIM MASLAND: As the member knows, when those blockades were put up on Build Nova Scotia's property, we acted immediately and asked the contractor who was in there to remove those. If they wouldn't remove them, we would remove them and charge them for the cost of removal.

As far as the easement goes, as we stand right now their application is still in with the federal government and until we know what they're doing, this is where we stand.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: That marks almost two years, essentially, of inaction on this file that is so important because it represents a Wild West approach to infilling.

This government is presiding over a building boom. We have a new hospital being built. We have lots of cranes in the sky. The Premier likes to talk about this and yet we have no plan for the pyritic slate that needs to be sequestered.

The Port of Halifax will dispose of that slate for a fee, but this leads to people like the developers in question here buying pre-Confederation water lots in the middle of downtown Dartmouth and deciding to turn them into a dump.

My question to the minister is: Will this government take a proactive stance against this kind of behaviour, prevent this project permanently, and regulate infill and come up with a plan for what we're going to do with this slate?

KIM MASLAND: I appreciate the question. The thing is that infilling into our water comes from a federal government application - a regulatory approval from the federal government. It's the federal government's jurisdiction, not ours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MAH: RENT SUBSIDY PROGRAM - JUSTIFY

FRED TILLEY: Last year this government made a significant number of Nova Scotians ineligible for the rent subsidy program by increasing the income threshold to 50 per cent of gross income from 30 per cent. Then a couple of weeks ago they announced they were expanding the program and changing the threshold once again. Since this government came to power, Speaker, the department has changed it from 30 per cent to 50 per cent and now back to 40 per cent. Does the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing still think that this program should be called an expansion?

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, as I've said previously, we are working in many different aspects of the housing file. The rent supplement program - we recognize the importance of that. Since we came to government we've added thousands more people to the rent supplement program. It's gone, I believe, from an \$11 million-a-year program to a \$69 million program.

We continue to see that program grow. We know we're going to continue to add more people and we make changes as necessary to see the program become more effective, more in line with other programs across Canada.

FRED TILLEY: Reading between the lines there, it's not an expansion, it's a reduction in the program. Fewer Nova Scotians who were previously eligible for the program are now ineligible.

Families across this province are having a difficult time under this government. Over the last year, the average rental price in Nova Scotia jumped by 17.1 per cent. I will table that. Families need relief. Will the minister commit to going back to a 30 per cent income threshold on this very important program?

JOHN LOHR: As the members know, and I've said before in the House, we have one of the most effective programs in the country. We recently made changes, as the member alludes to, and we have gone from 50 per cent threshold to 40 per cent threshold. That means more Nova Scotians will be eligible. We continue to see the importance of this program in the suite of programs and things that we do across the scope of Housing to address the housing crisis.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

DHW: MAMMOGRAPHY TECH - ACQUIRE

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, this Premier promised to fix health care but the wait times for mammography screening have gone from 45 days two years ago to more than 70 days now. In some parts of the province, the wait time is longer than five months. I can table that as well. It is clear that this Premier is not taking women's health seriously.

My question to the Premier is: Is he willing to commit to invest in contrast-enhanced mammography technology just like B.C., or abbreviated MRI, just like in Ontario, where both can find four times more cancer than we do here?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Over the Summer, as I have committed to do, I did have the opportunity to speak with the Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program. We continue to work with the individuals in that program that is led by Dr. Siân Iles. Those are the clinical experts. We know that we have a very effective breast screening program and our rates are good. We do have a high-risk breast screening program.

We want to work with the clinicians. We cannot change clinical pathways on the floor of the Legislature, as I have told the members opposite before, but we will continue to listen and work with our clinicians to understand how best to serve women and all Nova Scotians in terms of health care delivery.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: The Minister of Health and Wellness recently spoke about the staggering deficit that was affecting this government's ability to pay for health care workers. If her government is worried about the cost of the health care system, there is a much better way to cut costs - by investing in early screening and diagnostics for breast cancer. We literally can save millions and avoid putting women through the hell of chemotherapy by expanding breast cancer for Category C and Category D. It has been proven by other provinces. Why wouldn't the Department of Health and Wellness make this change that makes economic sense and health sense?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: At no point have I ever indicated that this is a money issue. This is not a money issue. What we have done is worked directly with experts. I am not an expert and so I work with and depend on the experts in our province who have a nationally recognized breast screening program. We will continue to work with them. I will not change clinical pathways on the floor of the Legislature, nor should any other politician. But I will continue to keep track of that program, listen to the experts, and understand what resources they require. This is not a money issue.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DPW: CHIGNECTO ISTHMUS - PRIORITIZE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. I believe, and many believe, that the greatest threat to all Nova Scotians is the risk of our province becoming an island. The rising sea levels and increased incidence of destructive storms have hastened the timeline of the threat of the flooding of the Chignecto Isthmus. It used to be projected as the year 2100, but now experts say it could happen at any time.

[3:45 p.m.]

While our province's Minister of Finance has not budgeted any money for the repair of the dikes, our neighbouring province of New Brunswick - and the Minister of Finance, Ernie Steeves - has budgeted at least 750 thousand. My question to the Minister of Finance is: Can he tell all Nova Scotians why his government is not making this a priority?

HON. KIM MASLAND: We are making this a priority. We made an application to the federal government for DMAF funding - Disaster Mitigation Adaptation Funding - back on July 19, 2023. We still have not received a response from them. We've also put forth a legal case where we believe the federal government is responsible for this.

We saw what the federal government did for the Quebec bridge - think about that - one billion dollars over 10 years for the same reasons they should be funding the Chignecto Isthmus. We truly understand the importance of this Isthmus. We know it is a safety concern. We have not stopped the work on this file.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The Prime Minister was here recently. I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance or the Minister for Public Works can let us know here in the House: Did they initiate a meeting with the Prime Minister to talk about this?

I know the words that the government loves to use are "faster" and "stronger," but we're not seeing that with the case of the Chignecto Isthmus and the risk of flooding. We're seeing zero work. There has been not one shovelful of dirt moved, yet we need these dikes repaired yesterday.

Experts continue to talk about that. Leaders in the Town of Amherst, the Town of Sackville - we all know this is a risk to the province. Can the minister please let us know when this will be taken out of the courts and put into this Legislature?

KIM MASLAND: To answer the question - Did I meet with Justin Trudeau? - no, I did not meet with Justin Trudeau. As the member knows, I did appear at the Senate committee. I did see her in the background there to support the Senate bill.

This is not about taking it out of the court. We believe the federal government should pay for the repairs that are needed to the Chignecto Isthmus. We haven't stopped.

I know you don't always see action there, but there are people who are doing background studies or geotechnical work. We have an MOU. We have a project engineer who should be hired within the next couple of days. Work is continuing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RTA: FIXED-TERM LEASES - LIMIT

GARY BURRILL: My question is for the minister responsible for Residential Tenancies whose department is surely aware of the *Understanding Fixed-Term Lease Use in Nova Scotia* report released a couple days of ago by ACORN. The report shows that over 99 per cent of those surveyed are on a fixed-term lease because that was the only option offered by their landlord.

It also shows that 36 per cent of the tenants in the survey had previously been evicted at the end of a previous fixed-term lease only three years ago. Just 6 per cent of tenants - not 36 per cent - reported having been previously evicted.

Will the minister finally recognize that fixed-term leases are being used by landlords across the board in Nova Scotia as a way to undermine security of tenure and undercut the . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, what we do recognize as a government is the solution to the housing crisis is more supply, more places that Nova Scotians can call home. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing outlined, our plan is working.

We are making unprecedented investments across the province, across the housing spectrum, whether it be for health care workers in modular housing, whether it be in student housing, whether it be the first time in 30 years that we're making a new public housing investment. We're focusing. Our plan is working. We're not stopping. There's more work to come.

GARY BURRILL: Look, the high rate of fixed-term lease evictions also has a lot to do with why rents are so far out of hand. Of tenants who have been forced to leave their homes in the last five years, 84 per cent report that they had to pay a lot more for their new place than they did for their old one.

Will the minister recognize that by not limiting the use of fixed-term leases and by excluding new tenancies from the rent cap, the government is, in fact, incentivizing landlords to evict their tenants, and that this has a lot to do with the fact that actual rents went up 18 per cent last year when the so-called cap is supposed to be just 5 per cent?

COLTON LEBLANC: We absolutely don't want to see anybody displaced from their home. That's why we're moving forward and actually trying to build more places. We're not going to let the negativity from the NDP get in our way. We recognize that there's a lot of work ahead to do, but we're moving forward.

As has been said today in Question Period, our plan is working, so that's it. Recognizing that there are challenges in the rental market today, yes, there were challenges when the member was in government and there will be challenges in the next few years. We are working hard, whether it be in the Residential Tenancies program, Municipal Affairs and Housing, across government, to move forward on the housing crisis in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DHW: SURGERIES VOLUME - INCREASE

HON. KELLY REGAN: In the 2021 election, the PCs spoke about increasing surgery volumes. While over the past five years surgeries have increased by 2 per cent, our population has actually grown by 10 per cent. That means that surgeries are not keeping pace with population growth, they are actually declining when compared to the population.

Now it looks like the Premier is still on track to keep his promise to double our population, but his promise to increase surgery numbers isn't keeping up. When will the growth in surgery volume match or surpass the growth in population?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I do want to acknowledge that there has been an over 25 per cent reduction in surgical wait-lists since we formed government, and also the number of individuals who are going on the wait-list is higher than people coming off, so we do see that there are big changes.

That's also why, when we looked at the Halifax Infirmary project, we took a common-sense approach. The other former government - their project was built on a declining population, where we saw that Nova Scotia is on the move and the population is increasing. Our capital expansion project in the HRM reflects that growth.

KELLY REGAN: That's really interesting, because the new Halifax Infirmary project is actually smaller. The square footage is smaller than the one that we had put forward. If they had just taken the plans that were already there, they could have already had the thing built and people could be getting the surgeries there.

Anybody who has been in a hospital recently knows that nurses are run off their feet, so where the 2,000 are, I don't know. I can tell you that there are not enough nurses in the hospitals working. We may have registered 2,000 more, but I don't know what the heck they are doing because they are not in the hospitals.

THE SPEAKER: I did not hear a question.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'll very happily talk a little bit about the health care redevelopment program. That project that was announced before by the former government is impossible. There was no way the market could accomplish that.

Now we have a plan . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers is now over.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Bill No. 455, the Nova Scotia Guard Act.

Bill No. 455 - Nova Scotia Guard Act.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Speaker, I move that Bill No. 455, An Act to Establish a Department of Emergency Management and Authorize the Establishment of a Nova Scotia Guard, be now read a second time.

I am very pleased to rise and speak to this important legislation today. Our emergency readiness as a province must reflect the realities of the world we live in today. That means being ready for all types of disasters.

There is no question that climate change is causing more frequent and severe wildfires, floods, and other emergencies that threaten the safety of Nova Scotians and the communities we live in. Over the past couple of years, unprecedented wildfires, floods, and hurricanes like Fiona have taken lives and destroyed homes and public infrastructure. Unfortunately, we can expect these extreme weather events going forward. The good news is we have an incredible resource in our people - everyone from emergency responders to volunteers - who show up for their communities. This legislation is about making sure everyone is well-prepared and coordinated when we need them most.

Through this legislation, a new department of emergency management will lead, direct, and support a coordinated response to help meet the immediate and ongoing needs of Nova Scotians when a crisis or disaster occurs. It will include existing emergency response teams from across government and take on expanded responsibilities, including better planning and preparation prior to an emergency and better communication and coordination during an emergency, all leading to faster recovery from an emergency.

The new department of emergency management will include all divisions of the current Emergency Management Office, as well as the public safety and field communication team and the business continuity team from the Department of Service Nova Scotia. As part of this legislation, we will also create the Nova Scotia Guard, which will be made up of volunteers from across the province who help their communities during and after emergencies.

The Nova Scotia Guard will match volunteers to areas in need based on their skills, interests, and qualifications. This will include everything from providing care and comfort, delivering food, and shoveling snow to operating heavy equipment or assisting with large animal transport, just to name a few possible examples. We are at a moment in time when we need to strengthen our approach to emergency management. This means working together to be prepared, ready to respond, and able to help communities as they recover.

The fact is, whenever an emergency happens, the first thing Nova Scotians do is step up to help. That's just the Bluenoser way. The Nova Scotia Guard will enable us to call those volunteers who are ready to help the moment their communities need support. The official registration portal for the Nova Scotia Guard launched earlier this Summer, and since then we've received great interest. To date, more than 1,100 Nova Scotians have registered for the Guard, and that number is growing daily. I want to express my appreciation for every Nova Scotian who has signed up for the guard.

As promised in the Spring, we spent the Summer consulting with emergency responders, volunteers, communities, and other partners. We heard lots of optimism and received great feedback. That's why, through the legislative process, we will introduce a few important changes to the bill to reflect on what we've learned. We also continue to meet with hundreds of Nova Scotians across the province, including community groups and teams that are already providing emergency response services, like ground search and rescue, volunteer fire departments, the Canadian Red Cross, United Way Maritimes, and the Salvation Army, to ensure we build strong working relationships with each of them.

This legislation captures a new direction for our province, one that's focused on keeping the people of Nova Scotia safe. At its core, it's built on the feedback we received after the wildfires and floods last Summer and continued through this Summer as we travelled the province. Nova Scotians have called for better communication, better coordination, and better volunteer management when it comes to emergencies. That is exactly what we do.

At this moment, I look forward to hearing from my colleagues on all sides on this bill.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I rise today because I listened, but I'm still not sure what the Guard is going to accomplish given the fact that, from my life as a municipal councillor, I know the great work that each municipality does with regard to emergency management. I think I recall the scrum with the Premier when he came up with the Guard and said, Of course, legislation would have to be done, so we're here with it. The public speaking on it was basically, well, we need people to make sandwiches and squares and things like that. As I stand here, I don't know if the Premier wants me to make date squares or something else.

[4:00 p.m.]

I have stood here many times and said the Province can lead in emergency management, and to start with a vulnerable persons registry would be a great place to start. Again, we're looking at reinventing the wheel and naming it something else and making it maybe look like it's going to respond in the dire need of times when climate change is going to flood properties. It will do it over and over again. It will flood our coastlines, but hey, we've got 14 out of 19 recommendations done for the Coastal Protection Act.

I don't see how the coordination of this is going to take place. Maybe sometime the minister will tell me. At a time of emergency, you want people leading the charge who know what they're doing. You do not want people with their good intentions coming to help you when they have no expertise on what they are expected to do.

I know, from working with the Nova Scotia Ground Search and Rescue Association in the past, it's a shame that the Guard and the Province doesn't provide funding for such a great organization. They get \$3,000 a year - \$3,000 a year. I can tell you personally, when I was on council, I gave district capital to ground search and rescue for them to buy their own equipment. That shouldn't be. It's not the way to go forward in a time of emergencies. There are going to be continual disasters. We've spoken to people in emergency. We've spoken to people who are responding - firefighters, ground search and rescue, as I mentioned. None of them know why this is being brought forward - none of them. In fact, many of them are actually very upset about it. They feel disrespected, and they don't feel that anybody consulted them on this. I don't know where it's coming from, but the discussion will continue, and I look forward to having that discussion continue.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, as I was listening to the minister speak, I was struck again that this government is going to bring in changes to a bill that's already on the table after they did their consultation.

Bad habits are really hard to break in this Legislature, especially coming from this government, which continually puts forward bills without doing the full consultation that they must do. I personally would like to see bills come before this Legislature that have been well-researched, well-consulted-on, so that these types of changes don't have to continually come up prior to this going to Law Amendments Committee. It is becoming quite ridiculous, and it is a very, very bad habit. It needs to be broken, Speaker.

I have to agree with my colleague on the fact that if you want to have a bill for emergency management, let's talk about a vulnerable persons registry to be put into this. That would have been fantastic. A bill that encapsulated all of our ground search and rescues, our fire departments, and all those other emergency organizations that we have in our province - to have them all together in one room and have a document that stated the full responsibilities of those departments and those organizations. That would have been a good use of this bill.

With the increase of the major storms and events across the province, it does make sense to discuss how to best ensure we as a province are ready to respond to emergency events moving forward. This is especially the case given what we have been hearing from firefighters and ground search and rescue folks who have been on the front lines of our responses to these events.

We've heard that there are critical safety concerns with the Nova Scotia Firefighters School, in part because of a lack of provincial oversight and funding. As a former firefighter explained, "You get what you pay for - and unfortunately, I think that's what we're seeing now." I'll table that.

Likewise, fire departments across the province have reported a lack of funding for requested training, and I'll table that. It's hard to recruit new volunteers without funding to train them. A better use of this bill would have been, again, to talk money, to talk about training. I know in my constituency, I have several fire departments, all woefully underfunded, and all of the people who volunteer at these departments work the hardest they possibly can for their communities. Not only do they work within the community, but they open warming stations, they go out to help people with flooded basements. They go out to do what they're actually there for, and that is fires as well as rescue, yet they're still woefully underfunded. When it comes time to open the warming centres and when it comes time to deal with these major storms, there's not much increase in the funding to help them do so.

There are grave concerns being raised by firefighters and ground search and rescue folks that show these conversations urgently need to happen. This bill, as I said before,

does not create space for these meaningful conversations. This bill puts the cart before the horse. The solution was presented before the practical elements were considered. Again, consultation: a word this government needs to learn and now put into practice. In fact, the solution was tabled in the Legislature last Spring before the emergency response crews were even consulted. Again, why? Why not consult with these emergency response crews prior to tabling a bill? Was it showmanship? I don't know.

With the introduction of this bill last Spring, many felt, to quote former Deputy Chief Terry Canning, like the Province was "jumping into something without considering all of the ramifications of it." I'll table that. Others, such as Ron Jeppesen, volunteer president of the Eastern Shore Ground Search and Rescue team, felt the introduction of this bill was a slap in the face. Rather than acknowledging and strengthening the capacity of the important work already being done on the ground, this bill created a pathway to something else.

As we debate this bill today, we still lack critical details on how this bill will impact existing volunteer forces and what the actual long-term goal of the bill is. Instead, we're looking at reinventing the wheel once again in this Legislature rather than using the resources that we already have. There are a lot of details missing and a lot of relevant stakeholders that we need to hear from, both of which I'm hoping we can accomplish at the upcoming Law Amendments Committee.

With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I just felt I had to stand up because I'm listening to my colleagues on both ends here and it struck me: I'm saying to myself, yes, we need to bolster the emergency management services. We need to bolster those operations. There was feedback that was given after the wildfires, after a number of environmental changes that have happened that have had folks respond, so there's feedback. They're giving that feedback and they're saying they need better communication, better planning, better coordination, and all divisions should play a role in this. This is what the minister spoke to. I'm saying to myself, Well, isn't that your job, to make sure that they do this work and then make sure that all of those things, like the feedback that was given by the professionals and the experts are taken into context in creating something within the department itself, not creating something new which, in turn, is what we're seeing here?

I have a ton of questions because I'm thinking if we create another entity which would be, what is it, the Nova Scotia Guard? What does it do? What is its purpose? When I think of that, if we already are talking about ground search and rescue, our firefighters - all of our other critical people on the ground that are doing this work already - why aren't we funding them and listening to them when they say that they're in need of more training opportunities or they're in need of better communications when it comes to things like this?

It's really interesting, because I'm hearing from my colleague that they're feeling disrespected, they're not consulted, and we're putting forward things in a rushed moment to make it sound good for other people but not to actually do the right thing that needs to be done through the consultation of the folks that are actually doing the work.

I also heard the Minister speak about Nova Scotians stepping up to help. That is just what we do as Nova Scotians. We step up when we need to because sometimes the government doesn't do the work they need to do in a manner that's timely. We have to do that stuff, right?

I also want to say that, as I said, I have a ton of questions. Number one: We're asking volunteers to respond - who is this group of folks to respond? I heard from the minister that 1,100 folks have registered and they're anticipating more. How do you register folks without even passing a bill? That's a question for me. I don't quite understand how that works.

Then we're going to change the bill before we bring it forward again on third reading. Should we have done our homework and really dug deep into what it is that we want to put forward before we actually put it forward? Consulting with folks that are on the ground doing this work, connecting with people who are doing the critical work that's happening across the province already - including them in these conversations, getting that feedback and then as well bolstering your department to do the work that they're supposed to be doing based on the feedback that you've received and then funding those folks who are doing the work that is critical and crucial to our province so that we can actually not have to depend on volunteers and community members to pick up the slack.

Those are my questions. I will be listening at Law Amendments Committee for folks' feedback, but I feel like this is another way that we're passing the buck onto someone else. We have enough chains of command. I think we need to make sure that the minister's role - and the office and the department - is the one that's doing that work because when there are too many cooks in the kitchen you know what you get - bad food. I'll sit down on that.

THE SPEAKER: If I'm to recognize the honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, it will be to close debate on Bill No. 455. The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: It's with interest that I listen to my colleagues across the floor address some of the concerns that they have. I realize that there are certain things about the Bill that are not understood. I'll just address that briefly.

One of the things that we see - and this is a global phenomenon - is other jurisdictions doing similar things to address this, the reality of what could be termed "spontaneous volunteer." What happens in a crisis is you have people showing up who

want to help. We appreciate that that happens in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotians just want to help. It's the Bluenoser way. It happens in other jurisdictions too all over the Western world.

In a crisis, it's very difficult to know whether they are capable of doing what they want to do to help. It's hard to know who they are. It's hard to know if it's safe for them to do what we need.

For instance, after Fiona we saw a big need for chainsaw operators. Can someone who just shows up with a chainsaw really operate a chainsaw safely? I can tell you that in my 30-year career as a farmer, I knew the day that I had my chainsaw in my hand was the most dangerous day of the year for me on the farm. A chainsaw is an incredibly dangerous tool. In fact, I have a friend who passed away - I believe it was in 2011 - using a chainsaw. It's not an academic thing. This is a real issue.

What the Nova Scotia Guard will enable us to do is have people who know that if there was an issue in their community, they would volunteer. We ask you to sign up beforehand and tell us what you think you can do and what you're capable of doing. We want to do a criminal record check, an important thing to have. On a second tier of that, if you say I can handle a chainsaw or I have first aid or some skill, we want to do some verification or certification of those skills. We're working on that. That's important.

[4:15 p.m.]

What will the Nova Scotia Guard do? What we saw in the last couple of years was people who wanted to help. Let me give you an example. We opened comfort centres - the municipalities, in fact, opened comfort centres - the resources or the volunteers or the people that the municipality have to operate the comfort centre are burned out within about four or five days. You can imagine it's not easy. Who backfills those people? The Nova Scotia Guard will backfill comfort centres in a moment of need. This will be an important part of that.

What did we do? We dropped a bill into the Legislature last session and said we would spend the summer consulting. We had, and I don't have the exact number, somewhere between 40 and 50 different consultations this summer. In fact, our small number of staff worked incredibly hard.

I believe I can confidently say we reached out to every search and rescue and every volunteer firefighter group in the province, which is somewhere in the vicinity of 350 different groups. We reached out in numerous ways, in person, in many communities. We had extensive consultation. That process of extensive consultation has led to some changes, which we will introduce further in this process, in our thinking and how we did that.

We listened to our ground search and rescue and our volunteer firefighters, and in terms of those consultation processes, we're at a place where we understand how this is going forward. Our volunteer firefighters and ground search and rescue - we understand that and are happy with what we are doing.

They understand we're not replacing them. Just let me make that clear: The number one volunteer in the province is that volunteer firefighter or that volunteer ground search and rescue who is doing weekly training and doing events - in some cases, almost every day in some of our volunteer fire departments - almost every day a volunteer firefighter is being engaged.

No, the Nova Scotia Guard is not intended to replace them or duplicate that, or even reach that level of intensity. It's for the next-level-of-intensity-down volunteer who wants to respond but is not ready for that level of commitment. We know that some people who join the Nova Scotia Guard will want to move up to that. We know from other jurisdictions around the globe that this is the case.

This will be a way to bring more volunteers into our volunteer fire services and our ground search and rescue. We know that is the case. We look forward to that, and we can already see some of that dynamic happening. We've had a number of people sign up for the Nova Scotia Guard - a surprising number who said they were trained firefighters, but not actually attached to a fire department. We didn't think that number would be big. It's much bigger than we thought it would be.

It's a surprise to us, so we can see the opportunity to say: Well, maybe if you're a trained firefighter, rather than join the Nova Scotia Guard, maybe you should join one of your local fire departments, here's the contact. Maybe we can make that happen. That's something we're working on. There's still a lot more work to do.

We know that when we have a crisis, our first responders of all sorts will be there, but what happens when the crisis goes on for a week or two weeks or three weeks? The Nova Scotia Guard will be able to step in. What happens if the crisis involves moving large animals? We'll have people who have signed up for the Nova Scotia Guard who have that skill. That's a very specialized skill and not something that I would want to take on myself, to move a large animal in distress. It would also be, in my opinion, a very dangerous moment - you really need to know what you're doing.

We saw last year that, for the first time since 1984, we needed snowmobiles in Cape Breton. The Nova Scotia Guard will have a relationship with the Snowmobilers Association of Nova Scotia. We found those snowmobiles last year. Now we'll be able to access them through the Nova Scotia Guard.

There are many other ways that somebody, anybody with any particular skill at all - it may be something we need. So we're encouraging it. Whether you can make

sandwiches or you have large animal-moving skills or chainsaw skills or any other kind of skill you can imagine - we may need.

We know that during the moment of the emergency, it's very hard to manage that. Very hard. Somebody shows up, and in the moment of an emergency, we have to have a certain amount of groundwork done so we know that you're capable of doing what you say you want to do to help, that we know who you are, that we've done the criminal record check. All of those things are necessary.

It's not only our jurisdiction doing this; this is happening in different jurisdictions. In fact, we have feedback from the Red Cross that other provinces are looking at what we're doing here. I just want to assure the members I realize they don't have a lot of information. I will say also vulnerable persons registries are part of this, so they are in the bill. Vulnerable persons registries are included in this. I realize the member opposite from Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier didn't know that, but that is the case.

I think this is a groundbreaking bill for our province. It's changing the dynamic. Obviously, we've gone through a brutal three years in emergencies, a brutal three years that nobody would wish on anybody. There have been some very tough moments. This is a response to it. We know that this is a work in progress. Even as we're doing it, we're continuing to learn. We heard back very strongly from volunteer firefighters and search and rescue members about insurance. We've addressed most of those. I believe we've fully addressed those concerns in the program.

I'm very proud of the work that's been done, very proud of the staff. I want to give a shout-out to my staff, who have absolutely worked their tails off this Summer on this. A small number of people - they know who they are. I don't feel I should mention names in the Legislature. Maybe I'll have the opportunity to introduce them at a later date, but they have worked very hard on this. People across government, across different departments have worked hard. I'm very proud of the work that's been done, and this is something that is changing the dynamic in Nova Scotia on how we respond to emergencies. With that, I move second reading of Bill No. 455.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to move second reading of Bill No. 455.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, that concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Friday, September 6th between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Government business will include the second reading of Bill No. 459 and Bill No. 464.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Friday, September 6th, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned.

[The House rose at 4:23 p.m.]