



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Danielle Barkhouse

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First Session

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Danielle Barkhouse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Nolan Young

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

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: I beg leave to present a petition, which reads this way:

Whereas over one 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 wait-list for public housing, with an average wait time of two 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 has been signed by a number of citizens on Jubilee Road, Quinpool Road, and Pepperell Street in Halifax Chebucto, and I have signed it also.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition signed by residents of Joseph Howe Manor and MacKeen Manor in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. It reads:

Whereas Nova Scotia has the highest rate of poverty amongst those over 65 of any province in the country; and

Whereas this is directly related to the fact that Nova Scotia is one of only two provincial jurisdictions that does not have a program directly supplementing the GIS of low-income seniors;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly direct the Standing Committee on Community Services, at the earliest opportunity, to summon witnesses and provide an examination of the advisability of instituting a seniors' income benefit in Nova Scotia on the model of that received by a majority of GIS-eligible seniors in the country.

I have affixed my signature.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The late debate for September 11, 2024 is submitted by the MLA for Halifax Needham:

Whereas renters are struggling to find places to live that they can afford as the average rents increase beyond the rent cap every year since it has been in place; and

Whereas fixed-term leases are creating stress and instability in the lives of renters because such leases are being abused as a loophole for landlords to get around the current 5 per cent rent cap; and

Whereas the number of people experiencing homelessness across the province continues to grow at an unprecedented rate as average rental costs are exceeding what Nova Scotians can afford;

Therefore be it resolved that this government's inaction on

protecting renters is dangerously leaving clear pathways to homelessness open.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I beg leave to table a report entitled *Government of Nova Scotia - Service Nova Scotia Residential Tenancies: Compliance and Enforcement Unit Playbook*, dated March 2023.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

As Speaker of the House of Assembly and pursuant to Section 18(4) of the Auditor General Act, I am tabling the following reports of the Auditor General to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly: *Follow-up of 2019, 2020, and 2021 Performance Audit Recommendations; Health, Safety and Well-Being of Children Placed in Temporary Emergency Arrangements and Child and Youth Care Homes, 2024*; and *Preventing and Addressing Violence in Nova Scotia Public Schools*.

The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction before my Notice of Motion.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TORY RUSHTON: It's my pleasure to welcome Judy and Thomas Mailman to the House today. Judy and Thomas are from Bridgewater, and they're this year's provincial winners of the Woodland Owner of the Year Award. They won this award because they're doing their part to maintain healthy forests in Nova Scotia.

Just a couple of examples: They partnered with NSCC to host classes, and they've teamed up with the Western Woodlot Services Cooperative to promote the woodlands. Also joining them today is Todd Burgess, the serving interim Executive Director for Forest Nova Scotia, and Stephen Freeman of our Lunenburg office. Welcome to the House today.

(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Congratulations. We hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,144

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

Whereas most of Nova Scotia's woodlands are privately owned, and managing them in a sustainable way is key for a healthy forest, good jobs, and a healthy forest sector and business activity that supports our rural communities and provincial economy; and

Whereas the Nova Scotia Woodland Owner of the Year Award recognizes private landowners who practice ecological forestry on their land, and highlights how important they are to forestry and sustainability in Nova Scotia; and

Whereas this year's provincial winners are Judy and Thomas Mailman of Bridgewater, Lunenburg County, and the regional winners are Julia and David MacMillan of Tatamagouche, Colchester County in the Western Region, and brothers Brian and Steven Eadie of Clydesdale, Antigonish County in the Eastern Region;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House join me in congratulating this year's winners, and commending their hard work to support a healthy and sustainable forest for our futures.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver. Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,145

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

Whereas the Department of Public Works employees were busy this Summer building and maintaining the province's highways, roads, bridges, government buildings, courthouses, and museums, and operating ferries; and

Whereas in July the province saw severe flash flooding in Kings, Digby, Annapolis, and Hants Counties that devastated communities and damaged provincial infrastructure; and

Whereas Public Works staff and private contractors quickly responded, working around the clock to rebuild infrastructure and reconnect communities;

Therefore be it resolved that I would like to thank Public Works employees and private contractors for their hard work this Summer, building, maintaining, and repairing infrastructure to ensure Nova Scotians are connected and able to travel around the province safely.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver. Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,146

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

Whereas connecting children, youth, and their families to appropriate and timely mental health and addictions care is a priority of this government, our health care system, and members of our communities; and

Whereas Myron and Berna Garron's historic \$25 million to the IWK Foundation is an incredible demonstration of their ongoing commitment to supporting the health and well-being of Nova Scotians, and ensuring children, youth, and families receive the mental health and addictions care they need; and

Whereas their donation will support this goal through the development of a reimagined therapeutic environment for IWK Mental Health and Addictions intensive services, the final piece of an all-inclusive ecosystem for children and adolescent mental health and addictions in the province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in recognizing the Garron family for their incredible generosity, and offering our most sincere appreciation for this gift that will have a lasting impact on many generations to come.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver. Is it agreed? It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 478 - An Act to Increase the Heating Rebate Program. (Hon. Patricia Arab)

Bill No. 479 - An Act to Secure Fairness for Renters. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 480 - An Act to Amend Chapter 36 of the Acts of 2022, the Housing Supply and Services Act. (Suzy Hansen)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

[1:15 p.m.]

RESOLUTION NO. 1,147

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

Whereas in April and May this year, 1,610 Nova Scotia seniors, recipients of the Seniors Care Grant, received formal notice from the provincial government that their Seniors Care Grant was being audited, requiring them to produce receipts for the grand amount of \$750; and

Whereas notice of an audit of one's receipt of government benefits can be particularly unsettling for low-income seniors, to whom the Seniors Care Grant is targeted, particularly when the notice contains in bold type, as in this case, an admonition that failure to comply with the audit will impact one's application in the next program year; and

Whereas the audit is meaningless from a cost-control point of view, since eligible program expenses include both power and phone bills, such that by definition it's virtually certain that every Seniors Care Grant recipient does, in fact, have receipted expenses amounting to \$750;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly instruct the Standing Committee on Community Services to examine the harmful effects of the Seniors Care Grant audits on recipients and further instruct the committee to make recommendations to ameliorate these harmful effects or, failing that, to prohibit the conduct of the audits altogether.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed? I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

TWILA GROSSE: In the gallery, I am honoured to introduce members of the Nova Scotia U18 Male Flag Football team. Joining us today are Kamden Brooks, Mack Clement, Brayden Drake, Drew Kinley, Eric Klemm, Karter Melvin, Dylan Reynolds, Madden Ross, Rowyn Sanford, Landon Tomlin, and Steve Tomlin. I would ask you all to rise and accept the warm welcome of the Legislature. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome to the House. We hope you enjoy your time here. Congratulations on your fantastic achievements.

The honourable member for Preston.

U18 MALE FLAG FOOTBALL TEAM: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. TWILA GROSSE: I rise today to recognize and congratulate the Nova Scotia U18 Male Flag Football team. Twelve Nova Scotian young men aged 15 to 17 travelled to Kingston, Ontario, in May of this year to participate in the Canadian national flag football tournament. These talented men won the gold medal.

This gave the team the right to represent Canada as Team Canada at the 17U international flag football tournament in Los Angeles, California, from July 9th to 13th. The team fundraised all the monies to help them get to the world competition. The team competed against Mexico, Panama, the United States, and Japan, to name a few, and returned to Canada wearing the silver medal around their necks.

This is an amazing group of young men who represented not only our province but our country and held themselves to the highest of standards. Team Nova Scotia would like to thank all those who helped them get to the world championships to bring home the silver medal.

I ask all members of the Legislature to please join me to congratulate and give the Nova Scotia U18 Male Flag Football team and their coaches the appreciation and recognition they deserve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, before I make a member's statement, may I make an unrelated introduction, please?

THE CHAIR: Please do.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'd like to bring the House's attention to the West Gallery, where we are joined by Elizabeth Booth, candidate for our party in the next provincial election for Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank. I ask the House to join me in welcoming Elizabeth to today's proceedings. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

N.S. ATHLETES: OLYMPICS PERFORMANCE - CONGRATS.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the incredible achievements of our Nova Scotia athletes who proudly represented Canada at the Paris 2024 Olympics. Ten athletes from our province competed on the world stage, and I would like to recognize them by name: Ellie Black, Antonia Lewin-LaFrance, Georgia Lewin-LaFrance, Riley Melanson, Wyatt Sanford, Michelle Russell, Sarah Mitton, Connor Fitzpatrick, Courtney Baker, and Kamyille Frenette. A special congratulations to those who brought home medals.

Their dedication, hard work, and perseverance have certainly inspired us all inside this Chamber and outside. What stands out even more is the impact that they've had on the next generation of athletes here at home in Nova Scotia. They've shown our youth that with passion and determination, the sky's the limit on what we can achieve in this province. These Olympians have made all Nova Scotia proud and we can't wait to see what they accomplish next.

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

MARTELLY, R./MACNEIL, S.: *LADYBUG BLUES* - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, reading before bed is an important nightly tradition in our house, and we are always looking for new books to read to the kids. Today, I want to recognize author Robyn Martelley and illustrator Sarah MacNeil on their beautiful book *Ladybug Blues*. Robyn is from Whitney Pier and is a visual artist, writer, and poet. Sarah is from Mira Road and is also a visual artist, farmer, wife, and mother.

Their book follows Ladybug Blue as she navigates growing up being different in Unama'ki, Cape Breton, building a special friendship and learning to accept herself. *Ladybug Blues* is a beautiful story for children that will grab their imagination and, hopefully, open them to conversations about what makes each person special.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, before I begin, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, up in the gallery, we have a young gentleman with us today, Kohen Wainman, who is making his mark in the world of barrel racing. Joining Kohen here today are family members Craig Wainman, his dad; Jane Tracey, his grandmother; Joan Pemberton; Mike Maynard; Kim Maynard; Sharon Maynard - all here to join us today. I would like to give them a warm welcome. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Congratulations and welcome to the House. I hope you all enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Hants West.

WAINMAN, KOHEN: HORSE RIDING COMPET. - RECOG.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I rise today to celebrate the recent success of Kohen Wainman.

Kohen is only 16 years old, but he has already made a mark in the horse-riding world. He recently arrived home from the National Barrel Horse Association World Championships that were held in Perry, Georgia this last July. With his dad, Craig, by his side and his horses, Steady and Nelson, they headed to Georgia to compete in a class of over 1,400 racers. The championship ran over four days, resulting in Kohen as the only Canadian finalist.

Speaker, in only two short years of riding, Kohen's success is unprecedented. Not only will he be showing off his brand new, shiny qualifier buckle, but he and his younger sister will both get another crack at the world championship in Georgia next year after officially qualifying this past weekend.

Our whole community is so proud of Kohen.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

KINGS SOUTH MLA: PUBLIC SERVICE - THANKS

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, I stand today to pay respect to the man on my immediate left, the honourable member for Kings South. I had three years as his constituency assistant, three years as his MLA colleague, three days or thereabouts as his benchmate, and I hope many years of continued friendship into the future. I've learned a great deal from this man. I'm grateful for his guidance and his leadership, his service to his community, and his unwavering support for me and my family.

I'd also like to pay respect to the member's partner, Katherine Trumper, who has

been alongside him every step of the way, providing support, valuable insight, and the occasional piece of constructive criticism. They are an amazing team, and I welcome all members of the House of Assembly in joining me in thanking the member for Kings South for his 11 years of service to his community and the province. (Standing ovation)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

BUXTON, JASON: *SHARP CORNER* IN AIFF - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Tonight, the red carpet will roll out and the best and brightest of Nova Scotia's incredible film industry will be out to celebrate the opening of the Atlantic International Film Festival. I want to congratulate filmmaker Jason Buxton on his new feature film *Sharp Corner*, which premiered at TIFF last week and is the opening gala film at the festival tonight.

Sharp Corner follows a man who becomes obsessed with car crashes that happen at a sharp corner by his house. It's a dark thriller based on a short story of the same name, and it features many local actors in supporting roles as well as the work of a large crew from the Nova Scotia film industry.

Sharp Corner is Jason's second feature film, the first being the acclaimed *Blackbird*, which debuted in 2012. I've known Jason for many years and love his movies. They're thoughtful and beautifully created, with design features and camera angles working as characters and storytellers.

As the film festival gets under way, I want to wish everyone involved a great eight days of watching, networking, and learning and wish all the actors, creators, crews, and producers, from Nova Scotia especially, a wonderful celebration of Nova Scotia film.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou Centre.

MACDOUGALL, KATHY: NURSE SERVICE - THANKS

HON. PAT DUNN: Kathy MacDougall's 38 years of exceptional service as a registered nurse exemplifies enduring dedication, commitment, and passion that has touched countless lives.

Over the past 38 years, Kathy has been a cornerstone of the operating room at the Aberdeen Hospital, demonstrating unwavering expertise and compassion. Her last seven years as a First Assistant represent the extra roles an RN can embrace with the proper training, showcasing her ability to evolve and excel in her profession.

Kathy's legacy is one of extraordinary care, inspiring all who have had the privilege to work alongside her. Her contributions have left an indelible mark on the field of nursing,

and her dedication to her patients and profession will be remembered for years to come.

She stands as a shining example of how a well-trained registered nurse is invaluable to our health care system. Although she has not retired at this point, we would like to thank Kathy for her incredible service and for setting a standard of excellence that will continue to inspire future generations of nurses.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HODGSON, CONNOR: ART WORK - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise to celebrate Connor Hodgson, a 27-year-old neurodivergent artist who has turned his passion for art into a business. Growing up in Prospect, with a stunning view of Shad Bay from his room, he would draw the things he loved the most.

He was diagnosed with autism in his teens, and art was one way he could express himself. He is self-taught and has adopted different techniques and styles from watching other artists on YouTube. He began to experiment with style and themes, sketching and then hand-painting his favourite pop culture and art subjects: Marvel, DC, and Star Wars superheroes.

After finishing high school, Connor pursued a career to showcase his talents and turn his strengths into opportunities. Connor's parents have played a key role in their son's business, A Piece of Art by Connor, by assisting him with booking craft shows, ordering art supplies, and providing transportation, and helping with marketing and finances.

He also won an award for a piece of his artwork called *Chasing Tails*, which features his favourite colours from the ocean and the movement of waves and suggests fish chasing each other in the tide. I ask the Members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Connor Hodgson on his successful business career and his courage to follow his passion.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

PEKELES, TESSA: MERRITT AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: I'd like to direct the congratulations of the House to Tessa Pekeles on her being honoured with the Stage Manager Award at the Merritt Awards earlier this year, in recognition - in the words of the award citation - "of her outstanding work on professional productions in Nova Scotia in the area of stage management."

The Merritt Awards, presented annually in Nova Scotia since 2002, celebrate exceptional talent in Nova Scotia theatre and highlight the wealth and calibre of theatre

creation and production in the province. Tessa is a stage manager with rich and varied experience, having managed shows for Neptune, Festival Antigonish, Eastern Front, Opera Nova Scotia, Villains, and the Fountain School of Performing Arts, amongst others. Most recently, she has stage-managed the workshop of *Mind the Light*, a new musical by Gabrielle Papillon.

Tessa is also President of the Halifax Chebucto NDP, who join the Legislature in celebrating this important and noteworthy recognition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

[1:30 p.m.]

SMITH, FIONA: ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENTS - RECOG.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: I rise today to recognize Fiona Smith, an outstanding Grade 12 student at Park View Education Centre.

Fiona has made her mark as an assistant volleyball coach. In 2023, she volunteered with both the Smash 15U volleyball team and the Bridgewater Junior High Vikings Tier 1 team. This year, she stepped into the role of assistant coach with the 14U Smash club team, working closely with head coach Deanne Oickle-Conrad. Deanne describes Fiona's coaching style as "leadership by example."

Fiona is deeply involved in every aspect of the team. She attends all South Shore Smash practices, tournaments, and provincial championships. She's known for her technical demonstrations, positive corrections, and feedback, all the while creating a safe and respectful environment for the players.

Fiona's contributions don't stop there. She also plays a key role as an assistant instructor for VolleyGirls, a Bridgewater Recreation program focused on developing skills in young female athletes. Beyond volleyball, she spent the Summer as an instructor with the Bridgewater Tennis Club.

I ask the members of the House to join me in thanking Fiona for her dedication, leadership, and the positive impact she has on our community.

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

PETERS, CAROL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, today I rise to honour the memory of Carol Peters, a cherished resident of Fairview for nearly 60 years, whose dedication to her family and community has left a lasting mark on all of us.

Carol was a devoted Registered Nurse at the Halifax Infirmary and Camp Hill Hospitals recognized for her caring and compassionate nature. Her commitment to helping others extended far beyond her profession, though. She volunteered at the Fairview Food Bank for over 40 years and canvassed for the Canadian Cancer Society for more than 20 years. As one of the first Block Parents in our community, Carol ensured the safety of neighbourhood children and regularly contributed to the SafeArrival program at Halifax West High School. Additionally, she was involved in the Church of Christ, where she taught Sunday School and vacation Bible School.

Carol's contributions to Fairview are many and her spirit of service touched countless lives. Carol Peters's life of dedication and compassion will forever be remembered. We celebrate her lasting influence on Fairview and beyond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ORGANIZERS: CONNECTING TO AFRICA - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Connecting to Africa (CTA), an organization that provides learning journeys to Africa to connect Nova Scotians to their roots. The group has been doing this work for over 25 years.

This year, the Dalhousie University African-Nova Scotian student group and the Decade for People of African Descent Commemoration Group travelled to Ghana on a cross-cultural learning tour organized by the Connecting to Africa Society of Nova Scotia and a Youth Bridge Foundation based in Accra. The Dalhousie University student group had a 19-day international development experience under the auspices of Youth Bridge where they observed and learned about their work related to civic engagement, youth and environmental initiatives as well as agricultural and health projects in Ghana.

The DPAD Commemoration Group participated in various events and took a pilgrimage to a few sites in memory linked to the transatlantic slave trade era and the forced enslavement of over 20 million people of African descent from West Africa in commemoration in honour of their ancestors.

I would like all members of this House to join me in recognizing the organizers Wayn Hamilton, Dr. Barbara Hamilton-Hinch, and Dr. Karen Hudson for their hard work and dedication for over 25 years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

UNCLE, REID MACKAY - BIRTHDAY WISHES

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I rise today to wish Reid MacKay a happy 80th birthday. Reid is my great uncle, my nanny's baby brother. There are many

remarkable things about Uncle Reid, not all of which are appropriate to share here today. I wish to share that at the young age of 80, Uncle Reid continues to work full-time at the Department of Public Works in Baddeck. He is a Winter dispatcher and he is on the Summer maintenance crew. His dad, my great-grampy D.J. MacKay, retired at the young age of 75.

Reid absolutely loves his job and has said that supposing he has to go to work with EHS, he is still going. His work and colleagues keep him young. Tonight his wife Jean, their children, and my extended family will celebrate Uncle Reid. Happy Birthday. I wish I were there to get one of your big hugs. Here's to many more years of health and happiness. We love you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

GAUDET, ODETTE: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

RONNIE LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to extend my best wishes to Odette Gaudet on her well-deserved retirement after a remarkable 30-year career as a paramedic. Throughout her career, Odette has consistently gone above and beyond in serving our community and supporting her colleagues. For the past 17 years, she has volunteered with the Peer and Family Support service team, providing vital support to fellow paramedics after particularly stressful calls. Additionally, she has been a dedicated mentor to the next generation of female paramedics during her involvement with Camp Courage First Responders Society.

As Odette approaches her final shift, she reflects on how much she will miss caring for her neighbours and working alongside her colleagues. However, she is looking forward to enjoying more time with her grandchildren.

I ask all members to join me in thanking Odette Gaudet for her outstanding 30 years of service and wishing her a long and happy retirement. Merci.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make introductions relevant to my member statements.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Today in the gallery we are joined by David Wolpin, David Moravcik, and Sam Skorobogatov. I'm going to tell you a bit about their work in the next few minutes.

We are also joined by Justin Beaver, who is up there as well.

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

WOLPIN, DAVID: CONTRIBS. TO N.S. - THANKS

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to recognize the work of David Wolpin in supporting economic development and fun in the province of Nova Scotia. Dave has had a lifelong commitment to the farming community that is inspired by a vision of empowering Atlantic Canada's local growers and food enthusiasts to foster a vibrant, sustainable, and sovereign food system.

Through his experiences managing a CSA program and owning a market in New Brunswick, Dave gained valuable insights into the unique needs of Atlantic Canada's agriculture sector. He now runs Wolpin Enterprises, which has supported 300 farms across the province and the Atlantic region with sustainable approaches to season extension, a major challenge and priority for our farmers.

His work in agriculture is just one sector where his entrepreneurial spirit shines. In the earlier 2000s, Dave was known as Driver Dave, where he developed a door-to-door shuttle for students and other frugal souls from HRM to the airport into an affordable transportation option employing over 20 people and carrying 30,000 people a year. He also led the development of Splashifax.

I ask all members to join me in thanking Dave for his contributions to the well-being of Nova Scotians.

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

MLA FOR PICTOU WEST: FARMERS WALK RECORD - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: This weekend at the Pictou North Colchester Exhibition one of our own committed record-breaking feat of strength. The member for Pictou West set a record of 486 feet in the Farmer's Walk. Part of the Strong Man Competition, it consists of carrying a 200-pound weight in each hand. The second-furthest distance was an impressive 304 feet.

In case members think this record-breaking distance was the result of becoming an MLA recently, not to worry: The member for Pictou West also broke the record in 2019 and his father Alex broke the record in the late 1990s.

Speaker, I ask all members in the House to stand and join me in congratulating the member for Pictou West on continuing a family tradition of breaking records in the Farmer's Walk.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

STAFF: CARDIAC REHAB. PGM. - RECOG.,

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, today I rise to celebrate and talk about a program that's available through Nova Scotia Health, called the Cardiac Rehabilitation Program. I hope none of you has the opportunity to attend this program, but I attended this program this year and am happy to say that I am a graduate of this program.

It's a great program and it's very well done and very well run. I would like to give a shout-out to the staff at the Cardiac Rehabilitation Program: Megan and John, who are physiotherapists extraordinaire, keep us moving every day; Sherri, the dietitian who teaches us how to eat properly; Kim, Melissa, and Rebecca, the nurses in the program who are there to make sure we're okay; Crystal, the nurse practitioner; Tracey and Angie in Administration. We also had an opportunity to speak with psychologists and pharmacists about our medications.

It's a program that I highly recommend. It's really well done, and I hope that we continue to move this program forward.

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

BEAVER, JUSTIN: HRM MAYORAL CAND. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to introduce the work of Justin Beaver to the House today. Justin Beaver has thrown himself into the HRM mayoral race with a bunch of interesting policy ideas. One of these is the proposal to dam the harbour to free up more space for housing, but I think most residents of Nova Scotia have made clear their desire for true, collective protection of our coastline.

Earlier today, I had a hard time convincing him that while we call the Legislature the People's House, this does not mean that we all live here. But Justin Beaver has one message that I think we can all get behind: We need people to vote. We need people to feel engaged and connected to their representatives at all levels - municipal, provincial, and national.

You can check out what Beaver has to say about voting at @Beaver4Mayor. I ask all members to thank Justin Beaver and all those working to engage Nova Scotians in the democratic process.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

EDMOND, W. & A.: 70TH WEDDING ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I rise today to share an incredible milestone rarely achieved by couples. Wilfred and Annie Edmond of Donkin celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on August 19th. I was so pleased to attend a party at Phyllis and Blair's on August 17th to join in the celebration of 70 years of love, commitment, and shared memories. What a remarkable milestone. Your journey together is a testament to the power of love, patience, and dedication. I invite all members of this House to congratulate the Edmonds on this very special occasion.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

K-TOP TAEKWONDO: COMPET. PERF. - CONGRATS.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to recognize coach Master Andrew Jo and his club, K-Top Taekwondo in Clayton Park West, for their excellent performance at this year's nationals, held over the Summer. Master Jo took six athletes from K-Top Taekwondo to Winnipeg for the 2024 Taekwondo Canada National Championships, representing Nova Scotia.

This strong group came home with three medals, capturing one gold and two bronze. The gold medal was won by Anna Jo, Master Jo's daughter, who will be representing Canada in the World Taekwondo Junior Championship in Korea this October. Additionally, Master Jo was named a trainer for the national team at this event. The level of competition in Clayton Park West never ceases to amaze me.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating K-Top Taekwondo for their recent and amazing performance at nationals and wish Anna and Andrew Jo good luck at the World Juniors this Fall.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MANSOUR'S MENSWEAR: 100TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I'm honoured to celebrate a momentous milestone in our community. Mansour's Menswear is proudly marking its 100th anniversary.

Founded in 1924 by Mike Mansour, who emigrated from Lebanon, Mansour's Menswear began with humble beginnings. Mike walked the countryside selling goods to make a living and eventually established a physical store at 27 Church Street in Amherst. In 1926, his great-nephew, Theo Mansour, took over the business at just 16 years of age and was later joined by cousin Norman. Together they worked side by side for 50 years, continuing the legacy of excellence.

In the early 1990s, Theo's son Robert Mansour took the helm and guided the store through evolving times, further shaping its success. Since 2015, Mikhial Mansour, son of Robert Mansour and world-famous rug hooker Deanne Fitzpatrick, took over the store, expanding the business into the digital realm. Mikhial's dedication to modernizing the store while maintaining its cherished values has ensured Mansour's remains a cornerstone of our community.

I extend my deepest congratulations and heartfelt thanks to Mansour's family for their unwavering support for quality and service over the past century.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

STAFF: HALIFAX PUBLIC LIBRARIES - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize our Halifax Public Libraries' staff. Libraries are valuable to our community. You can drop in and grab a book, have a chat with staff, get a coffee. It's a warm place for folks to get in and out of the cold. It is way more than just books. It's an educational centre, support centre, and a social connection resource.

Frontline staff at our public libraries stepped in when COVID hit this province hard. They extended their work day, and provided food, programming, and a warm place for folks to shelter during the day. They are expected to do two to three times more work, yet continue to be paid the same, sometimes even less, than before.

We need to acknowledge these massive changes in workload and the essential services these workers provide to our community. Wage increases are a basic step toward ensuring that these employees can maintain a decent standard of living while serving our communities effectively.

The library serves all of the community. Unfortunately, the salary and labour practices are not keeping up with the community service agenda.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

COOKE, IRENE/GAMBLE, MADELINE: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

TOM TAGGART: On Friday, I spoke in this Legislature congratulating Irene Cooke on her 105th birthday. Regrettably, Irene passed away the very next morning. Saturday was a very tough, very difficult day in our small community. Madeline Gamble, who had recently celebrated her 104th birthday, passed away as well. These two strong women, who have lived long and active lives and who have contributed so much to their families and our communities, will be greatly missed by so many people. On behalf of this Legislature, I offer our sincere condolences to the families and friends of these wonderful

women.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

NSCC SYD. WATERFRONT CAMPUS: OPENING - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise on my feet because it's been an exciting week for Sydney, particularly in the downtown area. After years of advocacy and years of construction, students are now attending the new NSCC Sydney Waterfront Campus. It has absolutely changed the community. At the same time, the development of Charlotte Street is complete.

We've seen a major facelift in the downtown core, and a lot of people put a lot of work into it, whether it was the staff at NSCC, the folks who were building the school, everybody involved with the planning and the design, everybody involved with CBRM regarding the Charlotte Street redevelopment, and the Downtown Development Association and their board. I rise in my place today because Sydney, because of that work, is a very different place. The reports of people now travelling through downtown and supporting local businesses are absolutely amazing. I rise in my place proud to be the MLA for the area, with big thanks to everyone for helping to change our community.

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

BLANCHARD, PATRICIA: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I rise to recognize an outstanding community volunteer, Patricia Blanchard. Trish was one of the organizers responsible for the community efforts in plowing and shovelling people out of their homes after the major February snowstorm. She has also been a long-time volunteer with Girl Guides. On June 1, 2024, she was presented with her 25-year pin and the Girl Guides community service pin. I ask the House to join me in thanking Patricia for all of her years of service to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

VOLS.: SCOTSBURN COM. FOOD FOREST - THANKS

MARCO MACLEOD: Speaker, I rise today to commend a unique Pictou County project that teaches people how to grow their own food sustainably. The Scotsburn Community Food Forest was founded by Raina McDonald five years ago as a part harvest stand and part renewable landscape. McDonald came up with the idea and partnered with the SchoolsPlus program and community volunteers.

Food forests are modelled after woodland ecosystems and designed to be sustainable and regenerative. Although ever-changing, it is permanent in that the soil is not dug up every year to restart the season.

The Scotsburn Community Food Forest has offered classes. They host local experts and conduct workshops, as well as tool swaps and work parties. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Raina and the Food Forest team for this true grassroots volunteer-based initiative focused on nurturing an edible learning space for current and future generations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

STAFF & STUDENTS: RETURN TO SCHOOL - BEST WISHES

HON. TONY INCE: The students, teachers, and support staff at Cole Harbour returned to classes last week. The new school year always brings excitement, trepidation, and the fun of getting up early again. I wish for all the students a wonderful year. I hope you learn some new things, ignite a passion, have some fun, and stay safe.

To the staff, support staff, bus drivers, and all those who support the students in their journey for learning, I hope this year is a rewarding year. The work you do to help educate the next generation is vital, and I hope you have the supports you need in place as well.

Speaking of support, I would like to thank those who dropped off school supplies and snacks to my office for us to provide to the schools. Your generosity is appreciated.

Finally, I would like to wish a special friend, Aaron, a happy and productive Grade 8. Bonne chance, mon ami.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

ATKINSON, MERVIN: DONATIONS - THANKS

NOLAN YOUNG: I rise today to recognize 91-year-old Mervin Atkinson of Cape Sable Island. Mervin spent his life in the fishing industry. He began as a fisherman, and in the early 1950s he started Stoney Island Fisheries and later purchased other plants.

Following the wildfires in our county last year, Mervin made a generous financial donation to each of the nine volunteer fire departments in our county. Recently, he has donated a family room in the Yarmouth Regional Hospital in memory of his son and one at the Roseway Hospital in memory of his wife. These rooms are beautifully appointed and will provide a peaceful retreat to patients and family members.

Speaker, I respectfully ask all members to join me in thanking Mervin for his continuous generosity in supporting our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

EMPLOYEES: HFX. SHOPPING CTR. - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: I would like to acknowledge the hard-working employees of the Halifax Shopping Centre. These individuals contribute daily to the vibrant atmosphere and the seamless operation of this essential hub in our community, Halifax Armdale.

Halifax Shopping Centre is more than just a place for buying and selling. It is a space where people connect, gather, and enjoy and share their experience. The dedication of the staff makes all this possible.

Speaker, I want this House to join me in expressing appreciation to all Halifax Shopping Centre employees for their valuable contribution to our community and our local economy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

FESTIVALS OF MAHONE BAY: COORDINATION - RECOG.

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Speaker, we've all heard the phrase - and actually it's a proverb - that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, in the Town of Mahone Bay, it's also the secret to their fantastic slate of annual festivals and celebrations.

In fact, over the course of the past year, organizers of the much-loved Scarecrow Festival, the Father Christmas Festival, and other treasured events have joined forces to form a new group, the aptly named Festivals of Mahone Bay. By bringing all the players together, the group can now better coordinate not only event marketing but resources, including the oh-so-important people power, to ensure these celebrations flourish and grow.

Speaking of marketing, may I point out that the always delightful Scarecrow Festival begins later this month on September 27th, running through October 14th. I hope that many Nova Scotians will venture down. I guarantee it will put a smile on your face.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

CROMWELL, ZACH: VOL. OF YR. AWD. NOM. - CONGRATS.

CARMAN KERR: We're lucky to have so many exceptional volunteers in Annapolis County, and each year a number of them are nominated by local organizations

to be honoured at the Annapolis County Volunteer Recognition Ceremony.

This year, the Annapolis Royal Volunteer Fire Department has named Zach Cromwell as their volunteer. Zach has been a dedicated member of the Annapolis Royal Volunteer Fire Department for nearly a decade. He currently serves as a second deputy chief. He has been involved with fundraising events, training, and many other activities all over the community.

Speaker, I ask all members of the Legislature to join me in thanking Zach Cromwell for all that he does for our community and congratulate him on being nominated.

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

ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH: 150TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, I rise to celebrate the 150th anniversary of St. George's Church in Dutch Settlement. On April 23, 1874, St. George's Day, the church was dedicated as St. George's Anglican with its first clergyman, Reverend Robert Haire. It has been serving Dutch Settlement and surrounding communities ever since.

I want to express my admiration for the effort to keep the church open and for the ministry to continue. Back in 1873, it was a community effort to move the school, sanctify the lands, and build their own church. It continues to be a community effort to maintain the church and keep the ministry running smoothly.

Congratulations to the parish of the St. George's Church on achieving the significant milestone of 150 years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

SMITH, JEANETTA: SCHOOL SUPPLIES DRIVE - THANKS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I rise to recognize Jeanetta Smith and Elle Dance Academy. Jeanetta Smith, whose daughter attends Elle Dance Academy, teamed up with the dance academy to support residents struggling with the financial burden of back-to-school costs. Together, they organized a school supply drive to ensure that students in our community have the tools they need at school to be successful. We're all aware of the financial strains that families are facing right now, and how important it is for children to return to school prepared. Having school supplies needed to learn keeps children motivated and eager to head back to school. Studies have shown how having their own school supplies can improve grades, develop creativity, and improve attitudes towards learning, peer relationships, and self-image.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Elle

Dance Academy and Jeanetta Smith for their concern and work to ensure that children in our community will have a successful start to their school year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

RODGERS & DECOFF: 50TH WEDDING ANNIVS. - CONGRATS.

HON. GREG MORROW: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate two very special couples from Guysborough Interval who recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversaries.

Danny and Mary Theresa Rodgers and Neil and Mia DeCoff are next door neighbours and lifelong friends. On August 3rd Danny and Mary Theresa celebrated their anniversary with family and friends at the Guysborough Interval Hall. One week later, on August 10th, Neil and Mia celebrated at home with their children with a family dinner and a surprise drop-in with extended family and friends.

Both of these couples are very community-minded and have been volunteering on various committees for many years. They are also all members of the St. Patrick's Church Choir. They have paved the way and set an example for the next generation to take over some of these important volunteer roles within our community.

Danny and Mary Theresa are proud parents of Mark, Adam, and Christopher as well as their two grandchildren. Neil and Mia are proud parents of Michelle, Troy, Nadine, and Amanda as well as their eight grandchildren. There's never a dull moment in either home as they are always surrounded by music and the love of family and dear friends.

I ask that all members join me in wishing Danny and Mary Theresa Rodgers and Neil and Mia DeCoff a happy 50th anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DEVEAU, KENNETH: NEW UNIV. CHANCELLOR - CONGRATS.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Madame la présidente, je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour féliciter Kenneth Deveau, récemment nommé recteur et vice-chancelier de l'Université Sainte-Anne. M. Deveau a consacré une grande partie de sa vie professionnelle à l'université, d'abord en tant que professeur au Département des sciences de l'éducation, après avoir terminé ses études doctorales en 2004. En 2011, il a été nommé vice-recteur à l'enseignement et à la recherche à l'Université Sainte-Anne, un poste qu'il occupait jusqu'à 2023. Depuis juillet, M. Deveau occupe le poste de recteur et vice-chancelier à la même université où il a obtenu son baccalauréat en éducation il y a près de 40 ans. Comme il a fait pendant des années, il continue d'être un leader dans le système éducatif et pour la communauté acadienne. Je demande à tous les membres de se joindre à moi pour féliciter

Kenneth Deveau et lui souhaiter beaucoup de succès dans ce nouveau chapitre de sa carrière.

Speaker, today I rise to congratulate Kenneth Deveau, who was recently named president and vice-chancellor of Université Sainte-Anne. M. Deveau has dedicated much of his professional life to the university, starting as a professor in the department of education after completing his doctoral studies in 2004. In 2011, he was appointed vice-president, Academics and Research at Université Sainte-Anne, a position he has held until 2023. This July, M. Deveau took on his new role as president and vice-chancellor at the same university where he earned his Bachelor of Education nearly 40 years ago. As he has done for many years, he will continue to be a leader in both our education system and the Acadian community. I ask that all members join me in congratulating Kenneth Deveau and wish him much success in the new chapter of his career.

[2:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. It is now time for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. The time is 2:00 p.m. We will finish at 2:50 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: TENANCY REPORT DISCREPANCY - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, as the Premier successfully doubles the population, as rents continue to shoot up in Nova Scotia, and vacancy rates are near zero, issues between tenants and landlords are increasing.

Despite the fact that this party has called for a tenancy enforcement unit and others have called for this from the landlord sector, as well as tenants, this government has not moved forward with it. Yesterday in the Chamber, the minister responsible for this said that the government did not get a recommendation from the Davis Pier Consulting report to have a tenancy enforcement agent.

We got the report tabled today. Recommendation No. 1 is to bring that in. How does the Premier explain the discrepancy between the minister's statements and the report?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I thank the minister for tabling that report. Listen, the issues we have in this province right now are because of a shortage of housing. That's why we're focused on more housing. More housing means . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The clock's not working.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: The issues we have in this province are because we need more housing. More housing means more choice for tenants, for homebuyers - it just means more choice for everybody. Choice is a good thing. That's why we're continuing with our plan to build more housing, increase the housing stock.

Speaker, the plan is working. Housing starts are up, things are happening in this province. We'll continue to push forward in that fashion.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Not only are we not getting more housing in Nova Scotia, we have people who are currently living in rental units who are being unjustifiably evicted. We have seniors who are living in tents. We are talking about protecting tenants who currently do have housing from being kicked out of their apartments in an unjustifiable way, and also protecting landlords from tenants who are acting poorly.

The government paid \$300,000 for a report done by Davis Pier Consulting. The minister yesterday said that report did not recommend having a tenancy enforcement unit. Recommendation No. 1 in that report is to do that.

My question to the minister is: Why is there a discrepancy between what the minister said and what's in the report?

THE PREMIER: Obviously there are lots of reasons to commission reports. We commission reports, we get information, we assess information. Just because you get a report doesn't mean you double down on a bad idea.

We have a bill before the House that is being debated in this Chamber over the next couple of days, I guess. We believe we've struck the right balance, a balance that protects tenants, a balance that protects neighbours too. You know, bad tenants are not just bad tenants, they're bad neighbours. They're disruptive to entire buildings and communities as well.

We think we've struck the right balance with the bill that's before the House for debate. I'm sure the member will stand up and take his place and debate on that bill and have his say on that bill. For Nova Scotians right now, we believe we've struck the right balance.

ZACH CHURCHILL: It's incredible that this Premier would say that having a group to enforce the law to protect tenants and landlords is a bad idea. At a time when this Premier is doubling the population, we are hearing stories of seniors over 75 living in tents, tenants being evicted without reason, and landlords dealing with challenging tenants as

well.

The fact is that if we don't have enforcement of the laws there are going to be people on both sides who break them. We have a recommendation here to move forward with a tenancy enforcement unit. It's recommendation No. 1 from that report.

Yesterday the minister told this Chamber that that was not a recommendation. I want to know why there's a discrepancy between what the minister said and what's in the actual report.

THE PREMIER: I'll just be very clear for the member. We're not moving forward with that recommendation at this time. We believe we've struck the right balance. We will continue to remove barriers to the construction of housing. Housing starts are up, we continue to push for more housing.

We just don't think - the member opposite can have his opinion on that, but in this case with the situation, we don't think that spending millions of dollars in creating another layer of bureaucracy is what is needed at this time. What's needed is more housing.

There is a process for tenants and for landlords to go to the board and have their case adjudicated. That's a process that works, and Nova Scotians should be aware of that. The member opposite should be aware of that as well. We think we have struck the right balance and will continue to make sure we build more housing in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the NDP.

PREM.: CORE HOUSING NEED - ADDRESS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We found out yesterday from CMHC that 25 per cent of Nova Scotian renters are in core housing need. That's well above the national average. The definition of core housing need is those who "live in housing that is unaffordable, inadequate, or unsuitable," and "couldn't afford alternative suitable and adequate housing in their community."

Young people, seniors, working people, health care workers, these people need stable housing, and we do need to increase supply to meet this need. In this case, we need truly affordable, non-market housing supply.

Will the Premier commit to matching the number of Nova Scotians in core housing need with the number of non-market truly affordable housing starts?

THE SPEAKER: I ask that all questions are directed through the chair to the member opposite.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: We have made incredible investments in housing across the spectrum: student housing at NSCC campuses, working with some of the universities, affordable housing, public housing - the first investments in public housing in this province in decades. We will continue to bring down barriers to the construction of new housing. Speaker, the plan is working.

There are more housing starts. Housing starts are up, and we're moving towards 40,000 new units in this province under a housing plan by 2028. We will continue to move forward on that plan.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We've heard announcements, but we haven't actually seen any of that public housing. Yesterday, an organization representing many of Canada's biggest landlords said: "We're not tasked with building deeply affordable or social housing. We can't be there. We're in business. Let's draw a line between these two."

Developers don't want this responsibility, but non-profit providers do. The YWCA, with \$2.9 million from this government, has in the space of under a year housed over 30 families in the Mount Hope area. Meanwhile, the original plan from this government, \$22 million to a private sector developer, resulted in zero housing in over a year and the eventual return of the funds.

Will the Premier commit to giving the remaining \$19 million to non-market providers so that they can . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: . . . quickly build the housing we need?

THE PREMIER: I thank the member for recognizing some of the investments that we're making in affordable housing and in public housing, and again, I would say the first investments in public housing in decades. We know that the prior government wasn't interested in supporting housing and investing in housing.

We know that the prior NDP government sat on - literally, Speaker - tens of millions of dollars from the federal government to invest in housing. If the NDP had invested those tens of millions of dollars in housing instead of sitting on them, maybe we'd be having a different situation with housing in this province today.

Yes, the member is seeing announcements. Yes, the member is seeing shovels in the ground. Yes, as the member is quite right, we said we're seeing people moving into housing as well in just a couple of short years.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Even this government acknowledges that trickle-down housing won't solve the problem. In the 2023 Nova Scotia's Provincial Housing Needs Assessment Report: "Most of this report focuses on market housing . . . However, these effects alone are insufficient to guarantee affordable housing for everyone in need. Even a well-functioning market will not be able to adequately address the needs of individuals or households earning lower incomes."

The vacancy rate when the NDP was in government was at least quadruple of where we are now. We are in a crisis and yet we hear this government giving more and more money to private sector developers for social housing who don't want it.

Will this Premier finally acknowledge that for this government to address the housing crisis they need to build and incentivize housing that people can actually afford?

THE SPEAKER: Order.

The honourable Premier.

THE PREMIER: This government is investing in housing: record investments in affordable housing, record investments in public housing. We are removing barriers for the construction of new homes. We want housing built. The solution to the housing crisis is more housing across the spectrum: student housing, public housing, affordable housing, and even high-end condos. It involves housing across the entire spectrum. We're trying to strike that balance, and we're seeing that balance with the changes we're making on the rent cap, with the changing relationship - the opportunities for tenants and landlords.

We're doing all that, and we're still seeing cranes and construction, because as a government it's our responsibility to find a balance, and we're finding that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DCS: HOUSING LOST - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We're seeing a disturbing trend here. Yesterday, the Minister of Service Nova Scotia said that a recommendation - that's Recommendation No. 1 - in the report wasn't in the report. We also have a Premier saying that his government is building more housing despite the fact that, if you look at the stats according to the Department of Finance and Treasury Board - the Government of Nova Scotia's own statistics - Nova Scotia in the last quarter lost 300 houses. We are the only province in the country that actually lost housing supply at the same time that the Premier is doubling the population and telling everybody who will listen he's building more.

Why are there continued discrepancies between what we hear the government say and what the facts are?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It gives me an opportunity to recognize some of the great work that's being done. I know that the NDP had just referenced some of the investments that are happening. What we're seeing now are investments in the private sector, but most importantly, investments in our non-profits, shareholders, and stakeholders.

What we've heard and what we've seen from the CBC article on the YWCA - you don't have to listen to us, you can listen to non-partisan service providers who said the investments from this government have decreased the By Name List in Halifax by a third. (Applause)

ZACH CHURCHILL: Another thing that's non-partisan are numbers. We've got a Premier who's telling people in this province - telling this House - that he's building more houses while he's doubling the population. According to the statistics of the Department of Finance and Treasury Board, those numbers have gone down in the last quarter by 300. The only province to lose houses in the last quarter was Nova Scotia.

If you look at the housing per capita in this province, it is in freefall under this government because of two reasons: doubling the population at the same time that they are not increasing the supply of housing. Why would the Premier say one thing when the opposite is actually happening?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It gives me another opportunity to stand up and talk about the record investments when it comes to homelessness and housing. On the homelessness file, let's be honest, under the two previous governments, pretty much no money was invested. No money was invested. Over the last two years - listen (Interruption) - the members have an opportunity to stand up . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. Please stop the clock. Order. We are trying to keep a sense here of calmness, and it doesn't help when a member says something that makes all of you jump out of your skin. I ask that you please stay calm.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I hear all kinds of things, and I'm not jumping out of my skin. What I will say is that the budget on housing has increased drastically. The budget on homelessness has actually increased 360 per cent in the last two years - a \$200 million investment. We want to talk about numbers. Let's talk about numbers. Two hundred shelter spaces were available in this province two years ago. Eight hundred are now available with another 200 coming online . . . (Interruption)

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

[2:15 p.m.]

DCS: HOUSING CRISIS - ADDRESS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: It really concerns me that the only thing this government has to brag about is how much money they're spending. Of course they're spending more money on homelessness; it has tripled under this government. Of course they're spending more money on poverty; poverty is shooting through the roof in Nova Scotia. This government, if they look at the facts, in the last quarter, we've lost 300 houses. If you look at the overall trend over the course of this government's tenure, houses per capita have been in decline. We have fewer houses for the people that the Premier is bringing in. Despite these facts, despite that we have a homelessness crisis from one end of the province to the other, this Premier is hell-bent on doubling the population when we don't have houses. Does he not see that this is a root cause...

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Admittedly, I don't have the best memory. I'm not the smartest person in the room, but I've been here for a long time, and I remember that member stood on his feet and proudly talked about immigration, proudly talked about Nova Scotians coming here, and has done a complete 180. Now they don't want immigration. So which health care worker do they not want to come here? Which tradesperson do they not want to come here? The member should stand up on his feet and say whom, specifically, he wants and whom he doesn't want.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm the descendant of immigrants to this province. My family, for three generations, have been able to succeed in this province because when we came here, we had a place to live. We could access medical care that we needed. We had schools that our kids could go to and continue to go to.

We are not setting up people who live in this province - or newcomers to this province - for success if they come here and can't find a place to live. We have fewer houses per capita. The government, despite what they tell this House, is building fewer houses, at least over the last quarter. And they are still doubling the population when these things are happening. Does the government really think this is good for newcomers who are coming here?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I appreciate the member and the story around immigrating, and I know that his family did immigrate here. I immigrated here when I was five years old. I know that it's different for me than it is for most people. I understand the beauty of this province and I understand everything it gives. But he talks about immigration and how successful and unsuccessful immigration should be or isn't.

Do you want to see how good immigration looks? Come to Spryfield. See how much it has changed because of the immigration. See how much it has changed because of the culture. See how much beauty is now and continues to be in that community. I just

don't get it, Speaker. He talks about immigration on one hand being a good thing, and on the other hand he stands in the media and says, We don't want it.

Which health care worker? Which elected official? Which tradesperson do you not want here?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

DHW: HOUSING & HEALTH CARE SHORTAGE - ADDRESS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: We are not setting people up for success if we are encouraging them to come here and there isn't a place where they can live. We heard stories in the media: families of six, hotel-hopping. I've met with immigrant communities - parents who are telling me they can't get their kids English as a second language training.

I spoke with an individual yesterday who can't find a family doctor. I've talked to people whom this government is recruiting here who say, We're going to go back home - even to developing countries, because they can't access housing, and they can't access the services they need.

If we are going to be pro-immigration in Nova Scotia and set people up for success whom we're recruiting here, they need to have a place to live. They need to have a doctor. They need to go to schools that aren't bursting at the seams. Does the government understand that?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I just would like to speak briefly about how folks who move to Nova Scotia are actually part of the solution, part of the way in which we can expand and grow here.

Twenty-eight per cent of the 185 doctors who came in 2023-24 were international medical graduates. Hundreds of nurses, close to 500, are internationally educated nurses. They are filling shifts, keeping places open, helping us deliver care. We are working in community with community-based organizations who are recruiting CCAs. Thirty paramedics from Australia have come and settled and moved here. Almost every clinical associate who helps deliver care in a specialty environment in this province is someone who has immigrated here.

These individuals are so necessary and important to fixing the health care system. We welcome them and we welcome communities settling them.

ZACH CHURCHILL: This government talks about building 40,000 houses in Nova Scotia - 278 public housing units. Does the government know how many houses we need to build to double the population and ensure that people can live here? It's 450,000 units that need to be built in this province.

Of course we want to grow. Of course we want skilled people to move here. We also want them to have a place to live. We also want their families to stay here so the other stories of success of immigrants that are represented in this House can be replicated for generation after generation after generation.

My question to the Premier is: How is he going to build 450,000 houses to help him . . . ?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to share that in our population growth strategy, we're also looking at retention. We know for the first time that we're looking at youth and staying in the province.

We've also made significant investments in the Apprenticeship Agency because we know that we need workers, not only internationally, but here at home. We know that folks who've decided to work in the skilled trades need to have that wraparound support to make sure that they start their apprenticeship journey and get all the way to completion because, we know - and I have said this in this House multiple times - that people are part of our solution, and we are growing our province strategically.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: SENIORS' PRESCRIPTIONS AFFORDABILITY - ENSURE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Speaker, last week, the Minister of Health and Wellness stated that this government is very focused on the Seniors' Pharmacare Program, and I will table that. Despite this focus, the number of late enrolment penalties being applied are rising at a startling pace. Last year, there were over 2,500 late enrolment penalties compared to just 1,452 three years earlier. These penalties are, in part, because seniors can't afford Pharmacare. What is the minister doing to ensure seniors can afford the prescriptions that they need?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We are very watchful of our Pharmacare programs. We certainly know that there are seniors we work with on a regular basis to support them in having access to medications. Over the last three years, we have absorbed over \$9 million, not only in additional medications added to the formulary but also in order to keep completely the same our co-pay and premium payments.

We know that some seniors are experiencing cost of living issues, which is why we've introduced the Seniors Care Grant. We are looking at innovative ways to support seniors, not only through the Pharmacare program but through other programs in government.

SUSAN LEBLANC: The Seniors Care Grant, while it is helpful, does not cover the cost of medication. Too frequently, Nova Scotians are faced with a trade-off between either paying for food or prescriptions. In 2023, the government's own Housing Needs Assessment Report found that one in four people do not take their medication as prescribed because they can't afford to.

Feed Nova Scotia has reported that 56 per cent of food bank clients surveyed have had to sacrifice buying food to pay for prescriptions. When will the government support the health of Nova Scotians by ensuring that all can access the medication they need?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I've indicated before, the Pharmacare programs in this province are very important to all of us. Certainly, we support seniors. I would like to say, as an example, we recently introduced the Sensor-based Glucose Monitoring Program, which is an incredible investment in Nova Scotia. We also extended and expanded the Insulin Pump Program as well.

I have heard from individuals who said that this program alone - those two things, those two investments - have increased their household income by \$600 per month. When we look at these programs, we look at very innovative ways in order for us to make sure that Nova Scotians who need the care that they deserve will get it, and we'll continue to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

RTA: ENFORCEMENT UNIT REPORT - CLARIFY

BRAEDON CLARK: Yesterday, the minister responsible for Residential Tenancies said, "Now that we've made a decision as a government to not proceed with a compliance enforcement unit, I would caution the members of this House, and others who have perhaps twisted leaked versions or documents of that report, that it did not recommend that government do so."

I will draw the minister's attention to Slide 10 of the document he tabled today, which has a big bold word at the top that says "recommendation" and a subhead that says, "recommended option to implement a CEU." Page 19 says it would help "in high urgency situations such as illegal evictions/lockouts, disconnection of vital services." Does the minister agree with the Premier's contention that this was a bad idea?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I wonder how today's response will be twisted by the Opposition tomorrow. Let me be very clear for the members opposite: The question that was posed to Davis Pier was not a question of whether the government should do this. It is a question: If government were to decide to do this, what could it look like? Of course, there was, Yes, this is the option, the pathway, if government were to decide to do this.

We continued that work. We did a jurisdictional scan. I spoke at length about that. The outcomes that were desired by tenant and landlord groups are not being met. In other jurisdictions, they have a compliance enforcement unit. We are not interested in more red tape and more bureaucracy.

BRAEDON CLARK: The minister is really stretching the bounds of the English language this afternoon, because a recommendation is a recommendation is a recommendation, and I quoted the minister verbatim - what he said yesterday. I apologize for that.

Let's just summarize where we are right now for renters in Nova Scotia. We have a 5 per cent rent cap, the highest in the country, with no explanation as to where that number came from. It was plucked from the ether. We have a fixed term lease loophole canyon that this government acknowledges and refuses to close, and now we have a good idea, despite what the Premier might say - but this government said they weren't recommended. Now today: Well, maybe it was recommended, but we just didn't like it that much, so we are not going to do it.

I would ask the minister to justify: How is life for renters in Nova Scotia any better under this government?

COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, if only the members opposite, especially the member from Yarmouth, the former Health Minister's passion for this report was shared with the Fitch EHS Report that he sat on and didn't do anything. If only we wouldn't be discussing and having to get things done under the leadership of this minister. The fact is, when you are presented with a bad idea, it doesn't mean that you have to take it.

We are making decisions in the best interests of Nova Scotians, and that we do not believe that more bureaucracy, more red tape is going to lead to earlier resolutions for tenant and landlord disputes. We have a program in place. We have changes on the floor of the Legislature, we are making other changes in the program, and I hope the members opposite can stand behind that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader for the Official Opposition.

RTA: ENFORCEMENT REPORT RECOMMENDATION - FOLLOW

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I really just wanted the minister to watch the tape back and wrap his head around the bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo that he is talking about right now. It is unbelievable. The report was pretty specific, actually. Recommendation No. 1: Bring in a tenancy enforcement unit. The cons of not doing so, contrary to what the minister will say, according to the report, would include missed opportunities to gain efficiencies in the residential tenancies process.

If the Premier and the minister look at other jurisdictions like B.C. that brought in tenancy enforcement, that actually reduced delays in the residential tenancies system, enforcing the rules, and protecting both tenants and landlords. These were findings in B.C. Why does the minister not think we can find those here for . . .

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Again, Speaker, the situations - the scenarios, rather - that have been presented by members opposite that they believe that a compliance enforcement unit would address would not be addressed by a CEU. The member opposite noted evictions. A compliance and enforcement unit would not deal with evictions. Those complaints would go through the conventional process of the Residential Tenancies Program. I do not think that anybody in this Legislature wants to see either a tenant or a landlord have to wait four to six months to have a dispute resolved. We have a program. It works. We are making changes and that is a fact.

[2:30 p.m.]

ZACH CHURCHILL: Maybe the reason the minister is saying the opposite of what is in this report could perhaps be because he hasn't read it. I got this report an hour ago and it is very clear: The report says that a tenancy enforcement agency would actually help with non-compliance and help prevent serious events. Without one, there is little to no deterrent for bad behaviour, which is logical. You can have laws, but if there is no one to enforce them, a lot of people will choose to bend those. The report also says that this would gain efficiencies in the residential tenancies process.

Speaker, why does the minister continue to say the opposite of what's in the report and what's found?

COLTON LEBLANC: I want to be clear so that it's not twisted tomorrow, or the next day, or the week after. Yes, I did read the report.

I will again remind the member opposite that the question that was asked to Davis Pier was: If government were to decide to go down the path to create a compliance and enforcement unit, what could it look like? Of course they were going to say, It could look like this. That's the recommended, I guess, if the member opposite wants to look at that.

Again, if the member opposite wants more red tape, to create more hoops for tenants and landlords to go through to have their disputes resolved, I do not agree with the member opposite. There's a program in place. It works. We're making changes. I hope the member can stand behind that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

RTA: COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT UNIT - IMPLEMENT

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I just want to be very specific and verbatim with what the report said. The first recommendation: that Service Nova Scotia implement a compliance and enforcement unit. That would improve efficiencies, ensure that non-compliance was dealt with, and put teeth into the law.

This report doesn't say: Well, if the government chooses to go forward with this, here is what we would. It says - the first recommendation - that Service Nova Scotia implement a compliance and enforcement unit.

With so many evictions that we have, with homelessness going up, does the minister really think anybody's going to believe that's not a good idea?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I guess we can continue to split hairs until I have none left or the member opposite has none left, but again, I will continue to say time and time again: We have a program and it works. Some of the scenarios that the members opposite have explained would not be dealt with with a compliance and enforcement unit. When there's an eviction notice presented to a tenant, a compliance and enforcement unit would not deal with that. A tenant should apply to the program. It stops the clock. That's a fact.

I would call on all members of this House, if we want to talk about the bill, please talk about the processes. Help educate their tenants and landlords in their communities about the processes that are in place to support both tenants and landlords.

ZACH CHURCHILL: If we have to split hairs to prevent more seniors from being evicted and living in tents, I'm happy to split those hairs. If we have to split hairs to ensure that people who are being kicked out of their units so that landlords can increase their rents - I'm happy to split hairs on that.

The facts are that the report that the government paid \$300,000 for - its first recommendation was to bring in a tenancy enforcement unit to protect tenants and support landlords. Despite what the minister says, it's clear in the report. It's clear in the B.C. example that doing that does a better job protecting tenants and protecting landlords, and actually increases efficiency in dealing with tenancy issues that go on and on and on.

Why won't the minister just listen to the report that he paid for?

COLTON LEBLANC: I don't assume that the member opposite is listening to me, so I will say this to you, Speaker, and to all Nova Scotians.

Eviction notices - I want to be very clear - would not be dealt with with a compliance and enforcement unit. I want to remind all tenants in this province that if they

are faced with an eviction notice, regardless of the situation, they should apply to the Residential Tenancies Program. It stops the clock on that eviction notice and it goes through the process.

If government were to go ahead, hypothetically, with a CEU, that would still be the same process. A tenant would still have to apply to the Residential Tenancies Program to deal with their eviction notice and have that dispute resolved.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RTA: FIXED TERM LEASE LOOPHOLE - CLOSE

GARY BURRILL: I would also like to question the Minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act, but by going back to the study from last week of ACORN about fixed term leases which uncovered a practice of landlords insisting on increases far in excess of the rent cap at the end of fixed terms, or the tenant, if they didn't pay it, would be evicted. The study didn't even ask about this practice, but 19 per cent of the tenants surveyed volunteered that this was something that had happened to them. One respondent said, "We moved units with our landlord and signed a fixed-term lease on the condition that we accept an illegal \$300 rent increase. Soon after, the landlord sold the building, and we were evicted."

Does the minister recognize . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I called order. For the last four days, since I've been in this Chair, I have been very strict with this part of the rules, and I called order.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I think all members in the House understand the tight rental market we're living in. We have a housing crisis in this province that has been on the rise for some time.

That said, our government - we are making significant historic investments to create the ecosystem to create more housing. That is the absolute solution to the housing crisis - more housing, more places that Nova Scotians can call home.

We have a plan. It's working. We'll continue to build on that plan - 40,000 units over the next five years. That's moving in the right direction.

GARY BURRILL: If the fixed term lease loophole were closed, these kinds of things wouldn't be taking place. The study is also very clear about the negative impacts on maintenance and repairs when tenants are living under the threat of the expiry of their fixed term lease. One tenant says, "I am anxious to even bring maintenance requests to the

landlord to avoid seeming like a problem and getting evicted at the end of the fixed term.” My question to the minister is: Is the minister even aware of the negative impacts on the daily lives of renters that come from the predominance of fixed term leases?

COLTON LEBLANC: I am aware of the impacts the very low vacancy rate in this province is having on renters across the province. That’s why we are moving forward with our housing plan. We’re taking this head-on. We’re making historic investments. We’re removing the provincial portion of the HST on new builds.

We’ve expanded the More Opportunities for Skilled Trades and Occupations program. We’re rolling out skilled trades programs into our schools to encourage the next generation of Nova Scotians to become skilled trades workers. We can go on.

The fact is that the true, absolute solution to the housing crisis is more supply. As a government, we are focusing on getting that done.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

RTA: ENFORCEMENT UNIT RESPONSIBILITIES - EXPLAIN

BRAEDON CLARK: I know the minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies earlier said that he had read the report, yet he said in a previous answer that a compliance and enforcement unit would have nothing to do with evictions. Yet I would draw the minister’s attention to Page 19 of his very own report, and I’ll read from it: “The compliance and enforcement unit should be a separate stream becoming involved in high-urgency situations such as illegal evictions.” That is the first item listed under high urgency situations.

I am trapped in Neverland here. My question to the minister is: Would a compliance enforcement unit actually deal with evictions or, as he said one minute ago, not at all, despite what his report says?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: There are a number of situations that the Opposition has presented that they believe would create - that this compliance enforcement unit would be streamlining resolutions.

There are a number of amendments on the floor of the Legislature that we’re debating or will be debating. There are a number of changes that were under way in the department to make the program better and fairer, whether it’s regarding evictions - evictions for pets, renovations, or whatever it may be. Bad behaviour. I could go on.

The fact is that we have a program in place. There are 5,000 applications a year. The staff work very hard to get those hearings done as quickly as possible. We’re going to continue that work.

BRAEDON CLARK: Ministers across the aisle here love to talk about how much money is being spent and investments that are being made, yet when it comes to a compliance and enforcement unit, which would help 300,000 Nova Scotians, all of a sudden money is an issue. It's odd. If you read through the report, you'll find - we hear about red tape in bureaucracy. You'd think there are hundreds of new FTEs required to build this system. Not at all. There's \$1 million in startup costs, \$1.5 million in annual operating, and a grand total of 10 FTEs.

I'd ask the minister: Why is that too much bureaucracy and red tape?

COLTON LEBLANC: The bureaucracy and red tape that I'm talking about is making tenants and landlords wait four to six months for dispute resolution. That's what we see in Ontario. Right now, our average wait time is either 5.3 or 5.8 weeks to have a hearing resolved. That said, we are going through a process where we're starting to triage different cases based on the urgency as it's been outlined in the report. That's something that doesn't necessarily require a compliance and enforcement unit to do.

Again, the continuum of compliance and enforcement starts with education. The education campaigns that we started in the Fall of 2021 are continuing. We'll continue that work in the future and we'll continue on this file.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

RTA: REPORT DISCREPANCY - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Words matter, facts matter. We have a government that tells us they're building more houses when we have 300 fewer houses - according to the Premier's own Department of Finance and Treasury Board - than we did last April. They say they're building more housing to keep up with population growth. Housing per capita has been in freefall. We have a Minister responsible for the Residential Tenancies Act who is telling us the opposite of what's in his report, and then has the nerve to say it's the Opposition who are twisting the facts.

My question to the Premier is: Why are we hearing the opposite things said by the Premier and minister than are actually the facts in evidence in the reports that have been tabled today?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: We have another eight minutes, so I'll repeat that answer again, and perhaps for the next eight minutes. The facts matter - I'll agree with the member opposite. The fact is that we asked Davis Pier to do a report, provide government with an approach if government wanted to do this - not a question to answer yes or no if government should do this. They're going to say this is the pathway you could take if you wanted to take that path.

Upon further review, we looked at C&E units across the country. The outcomes are not that great, so why would we as a government want to create more red tape and more bureaucracy for longer wait times for tenants and landlords in this province?

ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister said that this wasn't a recommendation. It's Recommendation No. 1 in the report, explicitly referenced as Recommendation No. 1. The minister says that this would delay and impact efficiencies in a negative way. The report itself says that not doing so would ensure there's less efficiency found in dealing with tenancy issues.

The minister said that a tenancy enforcement unit would not deal with evictions and supporting emergency situations that tenants find themselves in. The language in the report is also very explicit about the recommendation to ensure that it does. Why is the minister saying the opposite of what's in this report?

COLTON LEBLANC: There are a number of outcomes and objectives outlined in the report, whether it has to do with balancing a tenant and landlord's rights and responsibilities, accessibility, addressing urgent and emergent situations. I will once again remind the member opposite that those outcomes are being met with changes that are on the floor of the Legislature, in addition to changes that we're bringing forward inside of government, modernizing our landlord and tenant information system.

The member can try to twist my words for the rest of this session, but I recognize that we have a tight rental market. I also recognize the solution to the housing crisis is more supply.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

AMH: MOBILE MENTAL HEALTH CARE TEAMS - IMPLEMENT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Communities across Nova Scotia are in the midst of a mental health crisis, yet the resources available are woefully inadequate. The lack of mobile mental health teams leaves many Nova Scotians without urgent medical care when they need it in their most vulnerable moments. Emergency rooms are not able to meet the needs of persons who are having a medical mental health crisis.

Will the Minister of Health and Wellness commit to establishing mobile mental health care teams 24/7 to provide immediate, compassionate care to those experiencing a mental health crisis?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Addictions and Mental Health.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mobile mental health support is something we have committed to as a government. There will be an announcement shortly, in the coming

weeks, with the first location of that service. Eventually, the goal will be to roll that out across the province.

[2:45 p.m.]

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I think that will be welcomed by so many people across the province. It can't come soon enough. Just this morning, I had a meeting with people about human trafficking, and they said the No. 1 thing that would help them in the province is mobile mental health care teams, units. This Summer, I was curious - I stopped by a Nova Scotia Health Authority mobile unit parked outside of the fire department. I stopped in to meet the staff - there were three of them - and asked them what they were up to. None of them were health care professionals. I was so disappointed. I thought, Here's an opportunity to use this mobile van and staff it with health care professionals. They told me their task was simply to tell people how to use the health app.

Once again, can the minister give us a timeline of when these mobile health care teams will be implemented?

BRIAN COMER: I can't speak to that specific situation. I'm not aware of that specific service. I would say providing universal mental health care is something we're deeply committed to as a government in a variety of different ways. Mobile supports are certainly one of those ways. There will be an announcement in the coming weeks about the first location, and we'll continue to roll that out across the province.

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

CCTH: MINERS MUSEUM - SUPPORT

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. The Cape Breton Miners Museum in Glace Bay offers a unique underground visitor experience highlighting the generations of mining history in the region. It has been recently reported that the museum is at risk of closing due to decreased revenues and stagnant funding in the province. Will the minister commit to supporting this museum and assure Cape Bretoners that it will not close down?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, this funding has certainly not been stagnant. I can tell you that in 2022-23, the province gave the largest capital infusion ever into the Cape Breton Miners Museum. It was to the tune of \$975,000. Another thing I can say is that what our government has done is given an operating increase to all of these museums across the province - first time in 15 years. Which museum gets the most of any museum in the province? The Miners Museum.

KENDRA COOMBES: In spite of all that, they're not in the family of museums. Despite having 28 locations across the province, the Nova Scotia Museum's family of

museums only has two locations in Cape Breton. The Miners Museum was recently denied entry into this family of museums, which has been called, and I quote, a “slap in the face”.

Will the minister direct his department to revisit this unfortunate decision?

ALLAN MACMASTER: We have 28 museums in the province. We have a lot of museums in the province. These are part of the Nova Scotia Museum’s family of museums. I will tell you the last three museums that have been started in the family have all been done for cultural reasons. There was no museum to represent the African Nova Scotian culture in this province. In 2014, the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre was opened in Birchtown. The Historic Acadian Village of Nova Scotia in Pubnico opened in 2006. Way back in 2001, Highland Village in Iona to represent . . .

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: It’s my first chance. I never had a chance to congratulate you on becoming Speaker. Public Accounts Committee just won’t be the same without you. Anyway, I want to congratulate you on receiving the position. We’ve known each other for a while - back in your Council days as well. So congratulations, you.

Moving onto Opposition Business: The first bill we’re going to call today is Bill No. 460, the Free Public Transit Act.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

Bill No. 460 - Free Public Transit Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I move that Bill No. 460, the Free Public Transit Act, be read a second time.

I think this is a bold idea worth debate in this House. I first heard the commitment when we were discussing our ideas for how to tackle the affordability issue within our caucus. What I would say first is that it’s very rare that we’re even talking about transit in this provincial Legislature. I would say also that I do believe that the Province needs to take a bigger role in transit in all communities across the province because transit’s in trouble, not only in our province but actually across our country.

In every major urban place - whether it's Edmonton, Ottawa, or Toronto - you can look at the challenges that are taking place with both investing in the infrastructure required and growing ridership, ensuring that we have a more predictable, consistent transit system, especially in our urban centres, but also how we connect the rural communities to the towns across different provinces but certainly here in Nova Scotia, which is a predominantly rural geographic province.

This is an idea I think will stimulate, and has already, some debate on how the Province may assist with the subsidy for transit users. The idea of subsidizing to the extent that there's no fee at all, I think - in the context of an affordability crisis that I think we all have admitted that we are in now - is worth pursuing. The idea of it in the long term may be a different story, but this is something I can get behind today.

When we have free transit for our students, and we don't have the comparable free transit for working families - some people who may be just above the income assistance cut-off, whom I would submit perhaps need more assistance with transit than a lot of our students. Not all of our students would be at the income or have the same socio-economic circumstances as a lot of people whom I see using transit - whether it's in Beechville, Lakeside, or Timberlea - at the bus locations, at the bus stops. I would support, in this context of an affordability crisis, one way of relieving a substantial amount of a budget for everyday working families is no longer having to pay for their transit fee when they need to go to critical appointments or when they need to go visit, maybe, the income assistance office, which is actually all the way out in Sackville from the Timberlea area. That's why I think it's worth discussing.

I hear the criticism that - and these are from very well-respected policy thinkers around why transit needs to be improved but not necessarily giving a free user fee. If a province is going to give money, then it should be given to the infrastructure and ways that we can improve transit. Fair criticism, but I would say: Why can't we do both?

I think, a lot of times in politics, that is the argument far too often, and it reminds me of a saying from a good book that members may have read called *Good to Great*. It's a business book by Jim Collins. There are lots of good principles in there, but a saying that I often think about is "the genius of the AND" rather than "the tyranny of the OR." We should not be looking at how we can't do something because we're doing something else, if they are related.

In the context of an unprecedented affordability crisis where I see people using transit who need our help perhaps more than anybody - some of them do have exemptions with income assistance - students obviously have an exemption to get on the bus - but I think we need to help more people.

We can subsidize fares, we can invest in better routes, we can invest in infrastructure that towns and cities and rural communities need to move people around.

The province hasn't been in the game in transit in a meaningful way in decades. In fact, the first time that the province invested in a meaningful way was in 2013 in the election campaign in my first year. The McNeil government came in committing to \$1 million to assist with the Lacewood terminal upgrades, a brand-new terminal. Another \$1 million went outside the HRM to help with community transit organizations.

Subsequently, during my time I helped with the city's proposal to bring in 60 new electric buses, a substantial investment of over \$100 million from all three orders of government. These are the kinds of investments that we need to make now. We can do these kinds of investments while helping people who are actually using the transit system every day, who are struggling with their power bills, their groceries.

Why not give them some relief so they no longer have to choose between potentially even medication or buying groceries that evening? Why not give some relief to people who are using a system? Why not help the HRM with their potential capacity to expand routes, make it more predictable, make it more consistent, and make sure that we have buses going to places like the grocery store, which I don't have in my community. Nobody can get to Sobeys, the one grocery store we have in Timberlea, via bus.

I think we can look at a whole range of ways to support transit in this province. I strongly believe - and my comments, I think, are very clear - that the province needs to get into the game, not only in this province, actually every province in the country. This is a national conversation that's going on right now.

If we are going to look at expanding routes out towards the areas like Prospect that have no transit at all, this is a way we can actually make the case. There's a commitment to actually grow the ridership to 20 per cent, is what we're budgeting, to look at the free transit concept, but it's my understanding there is no cap. So literally if ridership doubled in the HRM, the Province would commit to that subsidy for everyone in the context of this affordability crisis.

That's the caveat of why I support this as a measure to help people who need some help right now, today. Yes, we need more buses; yes, we need more electrification. These electric buses cost a lot more than they did when we announced those 60 in 2021. We're going to need to subsidize bus purchases for potentially hydrogen and diesel hybrids because not all electric buses will be able to take the mileage that is required on some of the vast routes throughout the HRM.

We are going to need more dedicated bus lanes, certainly in the HRM but potentially in other urban areas in the province - CBRM probably. All of these things need all three orders of government. Development should be in transit-oriented areas, as well, to create those complete communities.

This is just one aspect. I think by supporting, in the context of an affordability crisis,

relief for transit users doesn't mean that we don't support those kinds of investments that are needed. It doesn't mean that we didn't support, and indeed started, the study to create the Bedford ferry system, which is also important.

There are going to be tough discussions on how we approve routes, new lanes that disrupt communities. That's also a policy conversation across the country right now. I was dismayed when I heard about signs - this is relevant to that concept when I drove in this morning and the HRM has signs up saying you can't turn right in certain communities. They happen to be in the South End off Quinpool between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. or something like that. And that's new.

[3:00 p.m.]

So we're listening to people who don't want to see traffic on their roads and create bottlenecks through major areas like Quinpool Road, compounding the issue of traffic. We need better transit for that traffic, but we need to have tough conversations with people who like the idea of change but don't necessarily want to participate in that change.

A lot of people say we need housing, and housing is a human right, but they may not want housing in their area. They may not want to build robust transit systems and infrastructure required, whether that's light rail, whether that's something else. But those are going to be tough decisions that have to be made, that may disrupt some people. They may hear more traffic on their road. But that's just one thing that I was dismayed at.

In the context of the affordability crisis, in the context of the climate crisis, how we move people around with less emissions and get people out of single-occupancy combustion engine vehicles, which we're reliant on here in Halifax, certainly, and in Nova Scotia, this is a bold idea that I think is worth debating on the floor of the Legislature. But my primary belief is that the Province is not involved in the way that it needs to be in operating expenses for transit in the whole province. That's where I'll leave my comments today.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I am pleased for this opportunity to speak to our party's response to Bill No. 460, the Free Public Transit Act. We know that affordability is top of mind for many Nova Scotians as the cost of basic necessities from housing to groceries continues to rise. Too many are being stretched way too thin. That is why we support the efforts to make things more affordable for Nova Scotians.

We have championed affordability measures that would make meaningful impact on day-to-day expenses: measures like rent control tied to units to suppress rental costs; removing tax from food items; and providing free school lunches to all children. We welcome this new effort to make life more affordable by providing free access to public

transit.

We also welcome this measure as a way to support our climate goals. Increasing public transit ridership can decrease our carbon footprint. This is especially the case if our public transit fleets are transitioned to zero-emissions vehicles. Yet, without major improvements to our existing public transit infrastructures, we're left questioning how many Nova Scotians would actually be impacted by this affordability measure and whether it would have meaningful impact on our climate goals.

Recent figures from Statistics Canada show that 65 per cent of Halifax's population lives within a convenient distance of public transit. This is well below most cities such as Quebec, Ontario, B.C. and the Prairie provinces. Some parts of Halifax Regional Municipality completely lack access to reliable transit service. Buses either come too infrequently or too far away to benefit residents. We've heard stories of residents walking in unsafe areas without proper sidewalks to try to access public transit. In my community, that's everyday life.

I often come here and I hear people complain about Halifax Transit, and I'm thinking, well, come to my area. There is none. There is some, but it doesn't access the whole CBRM. And the rest of Cape Breton, with regard to the Strait area that is trying to do transit, but most of us in rural Cape Breton, in rural Nova Scotia, spend most of our time walking on unsafe sidewalks or unsafe roads, trying to find public transit anywhere. Even taxis are hard sometimes to come by.

It is surprising when the HRM, the most populated area of our province, is also having these same issues in their outer areas of the former city of Dartmouth and the former city of Halifax. Those with limited mobility face even steeper challenges navigating unsafe routes to access public transit.

Despite the faults of the public transit system in Halifax and elsewhere, access to public transit is significantly better in Halifax than in rural parts of Nova Scotia, as I've just mentioned. This raises the question: How does this bill define "eligible municipality"? Will the efforts not be made to ensure that public transit is available across municipalities in this province? Or will the free transit pass simply benefit the municipalities that have pre-existing public transit infrastructure?

We cannot blame municipalities for the dismal access to public transit across our province. We know our local municipalities are working hard to ensure that their public transit infrastructure meets the basic needs of residents who rely on these services. However, as I've stated many times in this Chamber, municipalities are stretched too thin. Too many downloaded responsibilities. Too many other things that they need to focus on and put their money towards, that they often don't have time for public transit. They don't have the money for public transit, even though they want to do it.

The fact of the matter is that significant work remains to ensure that Nova Scotians across the province have reliable access to public transit within and across their communities. We need a government that will step up and help build a comprehensive high-speed public transit network with provincial-committed dollars.

The member before said that this is a bold idea. It's not that it's a bold idea; it would be bold action if it were taken. This is an idea that has been around for a while, but bold action is what is needed.

For instance, in the HRM and the CBRM, they are working hard to implement and improve transit plans to better serve both residents and the environment by adding new routes, streamlining existing routes, and transitioning to zero-emissions buses. Yet progress has been slow, and we're hearing that this is not due to a lack of planning but rather a lack of funding.

"Lack of funding": I feel like that's becoming my saying in this House, but it is very much true. Without the proper funding, municipalities cannot provide the transit that is needed for their communities.

In 2020, the HRM approved Halifax Transit's proposed Rapid Transit Strategy, the BRT Network. Four years later, the estimated cost of the strategy has increased by tens of millions of dollars and significant work remains.

If our largest city, which has existing infrastructure, requires this much work, we know that smaller communities that need to ensure that free public transit has meaningful impact on their day-to-day affordability concerns - we know that the work for them is even more expensive because they do not have the infrastructure required. Who would have thought Halifax was the canary in the coal mine for transit?

This affordability measure is good in theory. It provides cost reduction to Nova Scotians while also moving us toward a smaller carbon footprint by removing cars from the roads. In practice, it is going to come at a high cost and involve significant effort - bold action. Without a comprehensive plan on extending public transit routes to reach more Nova Scotians, we can only imagine that much responsibility will fall unreasonably to the municipalities.

The previous Liberal government refused to get involved with municipal plans to improve transit, and we've seen only the tiniest commitment by the current government to cost-share a new ferry in Bedford. How can we trust that this promise will be partnered with adequate supports for municipalities to improve the public transit infrastructure?

Thus, while our party supports this measure in theory, we will require much more detail on how the initiative will be delivered.

With those words, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

CHRIS PALMER: Before I begin, I would just like to say it's always a privilege and an honour to stand in the House and to speak to bills. Sometimes we have unanimous support as all parties, and sometimes we stand to speak about some differences of vision. This is one of those times that I would like to stand.

I would like to thank the member for Timberlea-Prospect and the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier for their comments. I think it's very important that we have a conversation around transportation. I think this is a very good opportunity to share maybe a different vision of what this side of the House sees for affordability, transporting people, and having people move around the province.

I'm pleased to say a few words about Bill No. 460, the Free Public Transit Act. It's a piece of legislation, I would like to remind everybody, that was announced by the Official Opposition at a campaign-style event announcement just over a week ago. The announcement the Liberal Party made projects this initiative will cost over \$65 million, to be paid for by Nova Scotians across the province, whether they currently have access to transit or not. It's a bill that will leave Nova Scotians in Yarmouth, Shelburne, Canso - it will make them subsidize a bus ride for potentially a lawyer in Halifax who takes the bus from the suburbs to downtown. It's a bill that will destabilize transit in the province by shifting the cost away from those who use the transit system in the province on to the general tax base.

The fact is much of the province does not have transit, simply because there are too few people over a large area in many communities to make it feasible. Now those people without transit service will be paying to foot the bill for these services that they do not use and cannot access. In theory, the policy just doesn't make sense for thousands of Nova Scotians. In Kansas City - how many people would have ever thought we would have referenced Kansas City on the floor of the Legislature? In Kansas City, it's not just a theory, it's a bit of a cautionary tale, if I could say.

Let me talk about the Kansas City example. Kansas City is the example that the Liberal Party points to in their backgrounder for their campaign-style announcement. Kansas City implemented a fare-free transit system just a few years ago. Now the transit operator is considering reinstating fares. A local media article written this year said, "The [Kansas City Area Transportation Authority] for months has discussed the possibility of ending the zero fare program it began in 2020" - four years ago. "The KCATA has warned city officials that it's standing at the edge of a fiscal cliff." I will table that article here for the House.

This was something that was left out of the backgrounder created by the Liberal

Party. Just a few years after fares were eliminated - only four years - the transit system in Kansas City says it's standing at the edge of a fiscal cliff. The fact is the system in Kansas City is becoming unsustainable after only four years. Now the Opposition wants to replicate that here in Nova Scotia.

I would just suggest that if we're going to model policy off another jurisdiction, I don't think it makes any sense to model it off a jurisdiction that has failed and is going to overturn what it had previously done. I don't think that's a good idea.

[3:15 p.m.]

Think about this: The Opposition wants to drive our province to the edge of a fiscal cliff in a bus - all for the sake of a campaign-style press release. It's something that has not been thought through with a lens for what is good policy but instead is being made as a political announcement to try to boost poll numbers.

The article continues: "The agency would have to make service cuts if it doesn't find new revenue to fill that gap by next year."

There's a real risk of transit systems across this province being destabilized because of this bill as the government restricts the ability of the transit systems across the province to manage themselves and raise revenue, I guess the Opposition here with this bill is asking thousands of Nova Scotians who don't have access to public transit to put the system at risk for those who do have access.

What is the feedback on the Halifax transit system? This announcement seems to be very targeted to Halifax, with 70 per cent of the estimated \$65 million cost going towards subsidizing fares in this city. With that, it is worth focusing on the feedback as to why more people do not use transit in this city.

A report from a few years ago on traveller opinion of Halifax Transit found that cost is not one of the top issues with the service. I will say that again: It was found that cost is not one of the top issues with the service. The No. 1 reason voiced by 49 per cent of respondents as to why they didn't take Halifax Transit is over the length of the trip. They found it took too long to get from Point A to Point B. The second reason was unreliable transfers between bus routes. Finally, 34 per cent of respondents responded that they do not take transit because they prefer to drive a car. Of the people who do not take the bus in the city, the cost was not listed as a top barrier. I will repeat that: Of the people who do not take the bus in Halifax, the cost was not listed as a top barrier.

Respondents also had their suggestions on what would encourage greater transit use and I think it is important that we listen to what those respondents are saying about transportation. The No. 1 suggestion was improving the frequency of service, followed by creating a more reliable service, and then finally creating shorter travel times. The fact is

this isn't a top priority for people who take the transit system.

Our government has heard the feedback from riders and we are making investments to improve transit. One of those investments - and I would like to share a couple - one of those investments is the ferry that will take commuters from Bedford to downtown Halifax - how about a clap from the member for Bedford? Just kidding - announced on March 4th of this year. This investment will include five electric ferries with two terminals. This is an investment that will actually encourage more people to take public transit because it makes it easier for folks to get back and forth to work.

The investment from the Province in this initiative is \$65 million, which happens to be the same annual cost projected by the Liberals for this piece of legislation. Actually, in the Valley, this province invested \$3.9 million into Kings Transit, which serves the Annapolis Valley. It's not that the conversation about transit and transportation is not a good conversation. We just have a fundamental difference in how we are looking at this through a different lens. We have to make sure we are investing in underserved areas in much of the province and not make it a political announcement.

Our government is actually taking action to improve the transit system in Halifax where the Liberals are looking to address an issue that hasn't even been identified as an issue to riders. It's the difference between good public policy and a poorly researched campaign promise - the difference between something that will improve the lives of Nova Scotians and an attempt to improve poll numbers.

Before I go any further, obviously the Opposition has criticized this side of the House for the Student Transit Pass Pilot Program which provides bus passes to Grade 7 to Grade 12 students in the province, asking how we can support that program while opposing their legislation to eliminate fares for everyone. Governments in this province have taken a targeted approach. Our government has taken a targeted approach to help individuals access transit when they may not be able to afford it. I'd like to point out to the Opposition that the free HRM bus pass was made permanent under their former government.

This makes sense to provide those who can't afford transportation with a bus pass. The same goes with students, where we are helping students gain their independence and also become more comfortable with public transportation to make them more comfortable with using it once they graduate from school. This program for students is an investment of \$1.2 million by the province targeted to students who largely don't have an income. In contrast, this Liberal proposed bill will cost over 5,300 per cent more and have a smaller, weaker impact.

I'd like to ask: How much consultation has been done? Have they spoken to municipalities and operators? The affordability issues we face are not caused by the provincial government, I don't believe. I believe they are federal initiatives, federal policy, international spending policies.

We as a provincial government have to respond to these things. Our government is taking action on affordability - we talk about it every day in this House - while balancing the need for investing in health care and infrastructure across Nova Scotia. In fact, affordability is a priority across all departments, by all the ministers represented over here.

In this year's budget we announced we are indexing tax brackets to inflation going forward, doing something the NDP and the Liberal governments both failed to do. That's a big deal. Improving the Seniors Care Grant - we're going to be speaking about that bill maybe today - increasing the threshold, making life more affordable, capturing more seniors - we increased that threshold to a \$45,100 household income.

I'd like to share again the idea of the School Lunch Program. I want to thank all advocates around this province, especially in Kings West. I think of the Kings County Community Food Council, who were such strong advocates for that program.

Speaker, this government is doing a lot for affordability, there's no doubt about it. I'd like to ask the Opposition one thing, something we've been talking about for a long time: that is to join our Premier's fight against Justin Trudeau's Liberal carbon tax. It's expected that Nova Scotians will pay nearly \$400 million this year in carbon taxes.

We need the Opposition to join us in supporting our province's plan, the Still Better than a Carbon Tax plan. I've spoken about that on the floor of this House previously. That reduces emissions without the burdens of a consumer carbon tax.

I'd like to just conclude by saying we see from the Opposition a confusing narrative. We see free bus passes, free school supplies, but we also see a 2 per cent sales tax reduction. I'd like to explain, or maybe just remind everybody, that you have government services, you have a tax base. If you add more to the services, you need to get the taxes from somewhere or else you need to cut, or you need to charge those who are already paying taxes more money. That's how it works.

There's a third option. There's having more people pay tax. There's having more people come to our province to help us out and have a targeted approach to immigration. I'd like to ask the Leader of the Official Opposition to come to the Mid Valley Region Physician Recruitment and Retention group in the Annapolis Valley. They just had an African cultural event promoting their local physicians who have come, and health care workers - I'd like to ask him to talk to them and say . . . (interruption). Sorry, Speaker? And talk to those physicians and say which one he would like to not have.

It's not about bus passes. The people of Nova Scotia are confused by the Opposition. They don't know what they stand for. They stand for free bus passes, they stand for reducing sales taxes - they don't know what they're standing for. They're confusing to the voters of Nova Scotia.

The people of Nova Scotia appreciate the straightforward approach of this side of the House. We can responsibly and realistically tell them what is and what is not possible. They can rest assured that they will continue to get responsible and thought-out policy, where there is good stewardship of the public purse. That's what they'll get now, in the weeks to come, and then going into the future. I can you assure you of that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'm happy here to speak today on Bill No. 460 about investing in public transit. The member for Kings West was talking about being clear and how confusing the Opposition is. He said that, and then he said two very clear things that we stand for, which is a reduction in the HST from 15 to 13 per cent - that's pretty clear, pretty easy to understand - and free transit, which is also pretty clear to understand.

What I don't understand, and what is very odd to me, is the contention - the argument - that we are going to be driving Nova Scotia off a fiscal cliff in a bus with a \$65 million investment. Explain that to me, because the math does not come close to adding up.

The member for Kings West said: I don't want to invest in something that's going to subsidize a lawyer in Halifax to go on the bus. Okay. Then he says: We'll invest \$65 million in a ferry.

The Province invests billions of dollars every year in projects that, in many cases, have no impact on anyone's individual life. That's called a society. That is called good government. The government is investing hundreds of millions of dollars every year in roads that 95 per cent of us may not drive on. That's okay. I'm good with that. That's called doing the right thing to the benefit of other people, even if it doesn't benefit you personally. That's the kind of society we want to live in.

It's such a bizarre, weird argument to say, Well, you're going to invest \$65 million in free transit - which is good for congestion and for the environment. In our proposal, we also want to put forward an expansion of transit - not just in HRM. Of course, HRM does the lion's share of transit, but in CBRM, Kings County, which has a transit system, and down along Yarmouth, as well - all over the province, there are opportunities to have good transit systems.

It's just a very weird argument to say, Well, it's bad because I can't use the bus. That's like me saying, "Well, we shouldn't build a new hospital in Cape Breton because I don't live in Cape Breton," or, "We shouldn't invest in schools in all parts of rural Nova Scotia because my kids don't go to schools." Yes, it is the exact same argument, and it makes no sense. There is no logic attached to it whatsoever.

If you want to say, on the government side, we don't believe in free transit, just say

that. Just have a clear, simple argument instead of working yourself into a logic pretzel trying to explain why just because I can't use it, it's bad for everybody else. Maybe that's what I'll go as for Halloween this year: a logic pretzel. I get frustrated by arguments like that that make no sense and really have no basis in logic or fact.

The government invests \$15 billion a year in a whole bunch of things, the vast majority of which an individual person doesn't use. That doesn't make it a bad investment. This is a good investment. This is Step 1.

As the member for Timberlea-Prospect rightly pointed out, this is not the endpoint for transit. We do need to work on reliability. We need to work on expansion. We need to make sure that, almost no matter where you are in Nova Scotia - and certainly in all population centres - transit is an easy, reliable, and efficient way to get where you need to go, and I think this bill does that. I'm disappointed in the comments from the government.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm happy to stand and speak in favour of this bill. This is a reasonable spend that could potentially have a really positive impact in people's lives, as well as our community overall.

The member for Kings West says that people aren't worried about the cost of transit, but if you ask Nova Scotians if saving them a thousand dollars a year - for current commuters - if those thousand dollars matters to them, I think every single Nova Scotian will say yes. If you walk up to someone and tell them you can get out of your car, into public transit, and save \$5,000 a year, I don't know many Nova Scotians who aren't going to be happy about saving \$5,000 a year.

This is good public policy from an environmental perspective. The jurisdictions that have done this have seen a drastic decrease in emissions. We've referenced Kansas City; I think they saw a 43 per cent reduction in emissions. There is a reduction in traffic congestion, and in case any of these members haven't noticed, Halifax has become one of the most congested cities in this country over the course of the last three years.

We can tackle these issues by actually making the province a true partner in operating public transit, which it has not been to date. Yes, the government has and will continue - under us, if we are elected as government - to invest in capital expansion to public transit from one end of the province to the other, but the Province has never been an operating partner. That is one of the issues that is creating financial stress amongst municipalities and jurisdictions that are struggling under the increased cost weight of public transit.

Having provincial investment ongoing in this tied to growth, tied to ridership, and therefore the rural communities as well as HRM and CBRM to expand can change public

transit for the better from one end of the province to the other while making it more affordable for Nova Scotians. It's really laughable to hear any member of this government talk about fiscal responsibility. We in this House have a demonstrated track record in government of being the most fiscally responsible party in this province dating back to the 1990s. This party is the one that makes tough decisions, that doesn't say yes to everybody. We make smart investments that the Province can afford.

[3:30 p.m.]

I want to put this \$65 million investment - which again would make transit free for everybody and help municipalities expand in a perspective against the money that this government is spending. Eighty million dollars on a half-built hotel that experts said couldn't accommodate patients. This government sneezes out this amount of money every day of the week. Millions of dollars to Sobeys to buy six dollars' worth of Scene+ points every year.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that the honourable member stay on topic, please.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: I'm responding to the comments made by the member that this is something the Province can't afford. I think if you compare this cost, \$65 million, to the tens of millions of dollars this government has wasted, it's not even comparable. The Auditor General, again, in response to the member's comments, pointed out . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. You are to be responding to the Bill No. 460, not to others' comments. Although I appreciate that and understand that, I ask you to stick to Bill No. 460.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

ZACH CHURCHILL: The debate led by the member opposite has become about being fiscally responsible. The member opposite said we're creating a fiscal cliff for the province. I have to be able to respond to that. Half a billion dollars gone out in a nursing bonus that was supposed to bring back 2,000 nurses that brought back 148.

The Auditor General highlighted that there has been half a billion dollars that she looked at that had no demonstrated need for the spend from this government. They have spent \$2 billion outside of their own budgets, for God's sake. Excuse me if I'm not going to take lectures from anybody on that side of the House who doesn't care about dishing money out the door for things that don't even matter, like \$1 million for Happipad to help 27 people get a \$60,000 a lease.

Tens of millions of dollars in phone apps as if they're going to replace the need for

doctors. Give me a break. This is not a government that invests wisely, and the record is very clear on that. We could have taken the money spent on the nursing bonus that failed to bring more than 2 per cent of the promised nurses back into practice and cut the HST for working-class families from one end of the province to the other. Put those costs into perspective and the member will see how reasonable these figures are compared to the money blown on that side of the House that they brag about every day - "we're spending more, we're spending more" - and outcomes are getting worse for Nova Scotians.

This bill is about good public policy, helping people save thousands of dollars a year, helping address the growing issue of congestion - particularly here in HRM, and helping reduce emissions here in the province. This is based on sound public policy, research, and looking at jurisdictions that have implemented free public transit where commuters reported in survey data that they had more money to spend on food, on their bills, and on the necessities of life. There's not a Nova Scotian in this province right now who doesn't need more money in their pocket.

I will contest the member for Kings West's assertion that the Province has had nothing to do with this. The member for Kings West contested that the Province has nothing to do with affordability. In response to those comments, I have to say that nothing could be further from the truth. Look at the affordability of housing. Public transit will actually help people have more options for housing.

Imagine if you've got people who can buy more affordable properties or rent more affordable apartments on the rim of HRM who work downtown. The price difference is pretty serious. Imagine you have hop-on public transit to get downtown and go back home. That opens up more affordable housing options for people. So public transit - better public transit, free public transit - actually helps people also find more affordable housing options.

But let's talk about the cost of housing. We've got a government that is successfully doubling the population when we have, at least in the last quarter, fewer homes in Nova Scotia - 300 less. This is a supply-and-demand issue. When you increase the demand on housing, like the government is doing by doubling the population - we have a zero per cent vacancy rate - guess what? Costs are going to go up.

That policy has a direct impact on the inflation of our housing costs. In fact, we've had the highest increases in rent in the country, year over year, for the last three years. The fact that people's property taxes have shot up more in Nova Scotia than in other jurisdictions, and the fact that housing costs to buy a house - mortgages - have gone up, is a supply-and-demand issue. If anybody on the other side does not understand the economics of supply and demand, look at the outcomes that we're experiencing here.

This policy, free and expanded public transit - not just here in HRM, but supporting every single community organization and small municipality that provides public transit - will help individuals find more affordable housing options outside of our town centres and

outside of the city centre here in HRM. To suggest otherwise, I think, would be quite contrary to the evidence.

I will say that the cost for this is minimal compared to the money that this government has thrown out the door - as identified by the Auditor General - by the fact that they spent \$2 billion outside their own budget, and that every single day ministers stand up in their seats and brag about how much money they're spending when things are getting worse.

This is a reasonable expense that can save individuals thousands of dollars, and that can help reduce congestion in the city, which is becoming a big problem over the last three years, and which will continue to become a big problem. This can help reduce that issue. It can help reduce emissions and make sure people have more money in their pockets to spend on the things that matter: food on the table, power bills that have gone up double digits every year under this government, and the highest rent increases that we've had in the province.

The money that they save on public transit can go towards those necessities of life that people are having a hard time dealing with right now - and that is whether I talk to a fixed-income senior who can't even downsize and save money because rents have gone up so high in this province, even in rural Nova Scotia, or whether I'm talking to a young person who's graduating and looking at the housing market or the rental market and thinking, "How am I going to build a family here in this province?" It matters to the newcomers who are coming here who might not even have their licences, who have to go further outside of our urban centres to find a place to live. Free public transit would help them.

I know that because we have consulted with people on that. This can help all those groups who are struggling to make ends meet and keep more money in their pockets. This, on top of the HST, can save close to \$10,000 a year for people. If the member for Kings West doesn't think that's significant, then he doesn't know what's going on on the ground with individuals and families who are making tough decisions every single day on whether they can or cannot afford a car, put the fuel in it, whether they can send their kids to ballet or to hockey.

This is a smart policy that has demonstrated success in other jurisdictions that can make a difference in the lives of people here. The fact that the best the government members can do is blame everything on the Prime Minister I don't think is good enough. I'm sorry, but the Premier and the members opposite are not the Official Opposition to the federal government.

They have a majority government here in Nova Scotia and control of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money. The fact that we have the leadership and members of this caucus that spend more time attacking the feds than doing their own job and helping people

here at home is a big part of the problem, and why things are getting worse and worse for Nova Scotians.

By the way, we did oppose the carbon tax. We voted on a government resolution here in the House. What did that do? Nothing, because this government is all show and no action. It's actually up to this government to negotiate an alternative that can save people.

If they actually took that responsibility seriously - as the member for Halifax Atlantic knows, as he pushed the government to do when on this side of the House - that could actually save Nova Scotians a lot more money too. Because of the fact that they did that, we are now pushing ideas that can help get people out of their cars and save them up to \$5,000 or more a year. It makes sense no matter which way you look at it. With those few comments, Speaker, I'm happy to take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm just going to take a few minutes to provide a few comments and then I'll adjourn debate, if that's okay with everyone, and move on to the next bill. I wanted to get up because I just want to give an example. There is lots of good conversation around the bill, and this is something that we're talking about in CBRM as well.

We actually did this before in the CBRM - we did a trial where we provided free transit to the community. This is a few years back now. The community was very different then - we were actually in population decline at the time - but the city made the decision to offer free transit as a pilot, and it was very successful. We saw folks who never took the bus, who never looked at the ability of taking the bus as a viable option, take the bus.

We saw it was easier for people to move around the community. It gave CBRM the ability to expand some options around people who need to travel to Louisburg or communities that traditionally don't have buses. It wasn't forever, but it was something that worked. It was something for me at the time that said there's a tangible expense that you can take away. That's really what this is about.

If you look at over the years - regardless of who was in government - the breakfast program, it was a decision made because we wanted to make sure that every child had breakfast. It also took expenses away from families. It was a tangible cost that we could reduce, so we did it.

You look at all the advocacy around the lunch program. It's the same thing. You're giving kids lunch, but you're also taking a tangible expense away from families that they would have to pay for.

Then you look at school supplies, what we've been pushing for, and I've been

pushing for myself. Again, other jurisdictions are doing it. The government's doing it at a certain level, but if you did it consistently across the board for kids and families, that is another expense that you're going to take away that is tangible that is something that people are going to need to pay for.

Now you look at this. You look at the idea of free public transit across the province - and I'll get into the smaller communities. I don't want to call everybody rural because communities are changing and growing so fast. That definition, to me, doesn't suffice. That's CBRM's problem: They keep being considered that, and they're a 100,000-plus municipality. You look at all these tangible costs that we all know and some of us have paid. We know family members and friends and we deal with constituents in our offices who are paying these bills every day that we can take away.

[3:45 p.m.]

Ultimately, that's how I see it. Again, I have seen this as an example in the CBRM when they did provide free transit. Of course, there are going to be infrastructure needs that municipalities are going to look at, and that is something that we, given the privilege to become the next government, would look at. That's no different from any other decision we made when we were on the government side. I just wanted to take a few minutes to say that.

I will say this, to the comments from the member across: I don't know what they would do if the carbon tax didn't exist, because really, any time there's an issue on the government side - even debating this bill, to stay on topic - this is about public transit and supporting families. It's about saving money - "carbon tax."

Interestingly enough, the federal leader of the Conservatives was in town, and I don't see any pictures of the government with him. "Just in case," I call it. Just in case.

But when I sit here, and I hear the debate - and it was in Question Period again today - this idea of growing, of doubling, the population, that the Premier has continually talked about. You cannot do that. This is another example. How do you grow - double - the population, which is ultimately going to grow every community within the province, and not think and have the mindset to say: We need to expand transit in those communities? Because, like this government always does: big talk, no action.

This is another example of the government coming out and saying: Oh, the Opposition didn't plan, and they don't know what they're doing, and "fiscal cliff." I come from a government of six balanced budgets and built social programs. I also come from a time in government when power rates weren't even close to the increases that this government has seen. Again, there's good public policy, but the government wants the fight. They want the fight with the feds because of the carbon tax. They picked a public fight with Nova Scotia Power, and power rates went up 15 per cent. They haven't won a

fight yet. They haven't won a fight yet because they don't look at good public policy and say, You know what, this is something that could really save people money.

Actually, I shouldn't say that. They did look at good public policy - good public policy from the Opposition. For whatever reason, they get into a debate about public transit and get up and say, Well, Justin Trudeau and the carbon tax are the problem, when they have received the largest federal transfers any government has ever seen from the feds - the biggest transfers in history came to this government, which has allowed them to spend millions on an app for housing that nobody used. It's a disaster. It's a complete - Happipad, Scene points, all of these things. The Better Pay Cheque Guarantee - where's that? You know what I mean? Give me a break. We're talking about a bill on public transit, and their response is, Well, we're on a fiscal cliff, and it's Justin Trudeau's fault, and it's the carbon tax. Blame them. Blame them for everything, because they don't . . . (interruption). Yes, I agree.

Back to the bill, we have presented numbers in this bill that will save people money, but the government's only numbers that they're looking at are poll numbers. That's all they're looking at. It's all they're looking at: polling numbers. That is the most important number for this government. Make decisions - they've received more money than any government from the federal government to operate Nova Scotia. They have. They can't deny that. You know what they do? They take the money, and they throw the grenades. They don't care about public transit. They care about one thing: polling numbers.

They get up in here and bring the carbon tax up in a conversation about trying to help people move around their communities when they want to double the population. It's just ridiculous to me.

With that, Speaker, I will adjourn debate on this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 460.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable House Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, we're going to move on now to Bill No. 465, the HST Reduction Act.

Bill No. 465 - HST Reduction Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable House Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I am happy to speak in favour again of this bill that would cut the HST by two points - two points that were added by the NDP back in the early 2000s when they took office.

We now have the highest sales tax in the country, among the highest taxes in other areas, too, including on income. This is a measure that would save Nova Scotians on average over \$1,300 a year. This is a measure that can provide broad-based support to working-class families for the necessities of life that they pay the highest taxes on, from telephone bills to home repairs. It can really make a difference for individuals. Again, this, along with other measures that we have brought in, could put thousands of dollars back in the pockets of Nova Scotians, at a time that the Province can actually afford to do this.

We no longer have to have the highest taxes in the country here in Nova Scotia. This government takes credit for population growth. The reverse of that trend began in 2014 and until recently, that trend was sustainable and was good for the province because more people - when there's housing, when there are government services that can be provided to them - is a good thing.

The tax was increased when the population was in decline; the government still had to pay for services. We now have revenues that have increased in the billions under this government, which I think is why the Premier wants to double the population at a time that we can't accommodate it to get more revenues. We are actually in a fiscal position to give some of that money back to Nova Scotians, to help working-class people save more money when they are paying their bills and when they are shopping at small businesses, grocery stores and paying for the necessities of life.

This is also about ensuring that our province can be competitive and about retaining people who move here. Having the highest taxes - sales taxes in particular - is really challenging for small businesses. At a time when consumer spending is shrinking, this could be a measure that would be very valuable to our small business community - that's what they're telling us.

We've met with the CFIB on this, we've met with Chambers of Commerce on this. This is something that is generally supported by people who want us to be a more competitive province.

New Brunswick is now looking at reducing their HST. Again, that is going to create a real competitive disadvantage for our province if our neighbours have lower sales taxes than we do. No one knows that better than the member for Cumberland North, who lives in a border community to New Brunswick where people already are travelling into New Brunswick to buy goods and pay for services there instead of doing it here at home, because things are cheaper right now in New Brunswick.

This is about giving money back to people, putting more money in their pocket at

a time when people really need it and working-class people need a bit of tax relief. It's about ensuring that we have a more competitive province so that the young people who are coming and graduating into the workforce here aren't facing the highest taxes on top of facing the highest increases to rent, housing, and power in the country.

The cost of this is reasonable. This government has brought in, I think, \$2 billion more in sales tax over the last three years. We're talking about giving a percentage of that back - half a million.

To put that into perspective, this is around and would cost the same as the bonus that was given to nurses and health care providers, which didn't do what the government thought it was going to do. It didn't help retain staff. We were promised that 2,000 nurses would come back to the system, and less than 2 per cent of nurses did. We could have used that money to give broad-based tax relief to Nova Scotians and put thousands of dollars back into people's pockets and the economy at a time that it really makes sense to do that.

I think this is good policy. Sales tax is also a regressive tax. We need people to be consumers, and they get dinged every time they are a consumer here in Nova Scotia. We can afford to do this. It will make our province more competitive and help individuals save more money and have more money for the necessities of life. This, along with the other measures that we have brought in, can help save people thousands of dollars, which is good for them, good for our economy, and good for small businesses. I think over the long run, it will have a really positive impact on the competitiveness of this province.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I welcome the opportunity to talk about the cost of living challenges that Nova Scotians are facing and the ways that this government could be, but isn't, helping. As we know, since 2021, costs of all essentials in Nova Scotia have been rapidly rising, from power to food to fuel to housing to rent. Of course, some of the inflation is the result of the convergence of a lot of international factors. At the same time, this government has made policy choices and continues to make policy choices that don't actually help the average Nova Scotian make it through. We think people need a break.

We have been putting forward ideas for years now, policy choices that this government could make, that would help the Nova Scotia family fight rising costs - fight food costs, housing costs, energy costs - and deal with the fact that wages just aren't keeping pace. Some of the ideas that we have talked about that would help people afford their lives these days are: a full system of rent control and other rental protections, such as the removal of fixed term leases; the banning of seniors evictions; the implementation of a living wage in sectors; free birth control; low-income power rates; banning power disconnections; a seniors income benefit; paid sick leave; stopping tip theft and wage theft; and increasing and indexing the home assistance program.

We think there's a lot that this government could be doing that would make a better time for Nova Scotians and help people weather the impact that many years of inflation are bringing forward.

We also think this government could spend better and more transparently. We have talked a lot about the amount of additional appropriations that we're seeing year over year from this government in the face of economic growth and revenue growth - \$1.6 or \$1.3 billion of spending outside of the legislative process and with limited accountability in the orders-in-council process. We also think we could be doing more and better for Nova Scotians and more transparently.

[4:00 p.m.]

We're also really concerned about the trend, the approach of this government, to undertake untendered contracts. In recent memory, we could talk about Google, Shannex, and Sobeys - all these contracts that aren't subject to competition within the province and that aren't subject to review are the result of an untendered contract.

We also think that this government could do a better job of making financial decisions based on outcomes. With that, I'm thinking about Happipad. I'm willing to accept that we all have to have a bunch of ideas to help Nova Scotians, particularly in this cost of living crunch. Absolutely, we have to try new things. I got it. You're right.

What I don't understand, however, is the government doubling down on a program that is actually not working. I think we gave it a good go. We've given it two years. We've talked about it way too much for \$1 million or so in this Legislature. At the same time, we're still fewer than 40 leases. Think of what you could have done for housing - to support student housing if that's the focus, to keep people housed in other focus areas - if you had actually spent that money in a different way.

When we're not seeing the outcomes from the things that we're trying, we need to go back and accept that things didn't work and look for the next new idea, the next thing we might want to try. It would be better if it was a tendered contract that's part of the public procurement process, and if it was part of the appropriation process that happens in this Legislature.

We think that there are lots of ways to help Nova Scotians with this cost of living crisis: spending better, more transparently; making policy decisions that will actually move the needle on a number of core issues, such as rent control; and investing differently. We've had a lot of conversations, and we've heard it several times today during Question Period, about the concept that of course we need housing, and we need to increase the supply of housing. When we increase the supply of housing, what I think I hear various members of the government keep saying is that housing costs will decrease, or somehow housing will become more accessible for folks.

I think people should take a pause and consider that. On the first hand, it is clear that there's a need for housing support across all levels of salary and income and family structure. We do need to really see the investments that work in non-market housing and to work with non-profit partners, absolutely.

On the other hand, I query what you're saying when you're saying that increased supply will result, I think, in decreased cost. In fact, what we want is a stable housing market - for folks who are buying their first home, or they own a home, for developers who are in this game. I'm sure that the government is not suggesting that because the supply of non-affordable housing increases, prices would actually fall in this province, that people would see their housing investments actually decrease, that developers would not see a return on their profit.

The logic about trickle-down economics in housing just does not hold true. The idea of supply and demand works when you're talking about things that are quite flexible and quite liquid. If the cost of bicycles goes down, I would argue that people would invest more in bicycles. If the cost of pens goes down, maybe people will buy more pens. If the cost of certain grocery items was decreased, again, maybe people would buy more. Housing is not very liquid. You can't actually cash in your house and get the income from it the next day. That's not how the housing market works. It's quite inflexible. We just don't hear the depth of complex solutions that we need to be hearing from this government to support Nova Scotians in the current cost of living crisis and in the current housing crisis.

We feel like we've talked a lot about different ideas of how we could better support Nova Scotians, how we could make a difference literally tomorrow. We, the Nova Scotia NDP, have talked about cutting HST entirely off all grocery products. As you know, right now, there is a division between the size of the serving and what gets taxed and what doesn't. I think Nova Scotians in general really would love to see it, whether they're buying for one person's groceries or five people's groceries, that their grocery bill would be cheaper. We could take HST off grocery products tomorrow.

We know this works because it's why the Nova Scotia NDP government removed all provincial tax off family essentials like children's clothing, footwear, diapers, and all provincial tax off power bills and home heating. The Liberals were largely unsupportive of these measures. We would take the Official Opposition to task for this rather simplistic recommendation to decrease the HST without actually thinking about what is needed now to stabilize the housing market, to get people homes, to keep people in the homes they have.

If we think back to the Liberals' time in power, time and time again - eight times, in fact - they voted to tax home heating and energy. The Liberals promised a gas tax since 2009 and then started to bring it up in Opposition, but it could have been done. We also think that, as the Leader of the Official Opposition referenced, this really is a regressive measure that doesn't actually support low-income folks. It doesn't actually support people

who need housing.

I think that if we are looking at changes to taxes and removing the provincial tax, we need to look at things like removing the provincial tax from other essential services and products the way the Nova Scotia NDP did on power bills. This would help people more directly. As I said, remove the HST from all grocery products so that folks will be able to see a real change every time they go to the grocery store. Take what we have in terms of revenue generation from the provincial HST and put it in places that would really make a difference for Nova Scotians. Also make those policy choices that will keep people fed and housed in terms of ensuring that Pharmacare isn't costing too much, and folks aren't making choices between medications and groceries - ending fixed term leases and bringing in a real system of rent control.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I am pleased to say a few words this afternoon about Bill No. 465 - the HST Reduction Act. Of course, everyone wants to lower taxes. Nova Scotians work hard. They are not EI folks. It is only natural that they want to keep more of their money they work so hard to earn. Like all Nova Scotians, we are concerned about affordability. We are working across government with communities and with our partners on a variety of solutions. For example, everybody should realize we passed the budget in January, and on January 1, 2025, Nova Scotians will finally have income tax relief when they see less money coming from their paycheques so they can land more in their pockets.

Provincial income taxes will be indexed. The basic personal amount will also be indexed, and several non-refundable tax credits will be indexed to lower the income taxes that people have to pay. Very soon, thousands of students in our province will benefit from our universal School Lunch Program. We have indexed income assistance rates to inflation, increased rent supplements in support of housing, lowered child care fees, and made a \$10 million investment on initiatives to combat food insecurity. Nova Scotia also gives back a portion of the HST on the new purpose-built rental housing. Those are responsible affordability measures. We must find the appropriate balance so we can continue to invest in health care and housing or the investments we have made in Nova Scotians. We have to get our financial house in order before we can consider an initiative like this.

I just wanted to raise a couple of items that I made some notes on. If we were to do this, we are going to have to cut services and I don't know, maybe most of the people on the other side don't live in rural Nova Scotia, but I have a lot of gravel roads that actually aren't gravel anymore, from previous governments not maintaining them. We started with \$20 million, went to \$40 million, and now \$55 million a year for the Gravel Road Program. No other government has spent as much money to try to get our roads back in shape.

For the housing rebate, that is \$80 to \$100 million dollars. Which ones does the Opposition want us to remove? Maybe it is getting rid of the MOST program - \$27 million

to keep youth here. I have been fortunate enough that there are a fair number of residents in my area who have been able to benefit from that. The Seniors Care Grant that everybody enjoys getting - \$26.5 million. Should we cut that? There's \$18 million for seniors for helping them with provincial income tax rebates and of course, as I mentioned, the Lunch Program - \$19 million. A cutting of this would take \$250 million out of the revenue.

Speaker, there is a way to give Nova Scotians a tax break - it's removing the carbon tax. It's 14.3 cents on the price of fuel. In rural Nova Scotia, most people have to drive hundreds if not thousands of kilometres a week. On this side of the House, we fought for it. We proposed a made in Nova Scotia solution that achieved the same ends as the carbon tax without punishing the hard-working Nova Scotians who have no choice except to drive to work because they're not EI folks.

I understand the member of Yarmouth attended a fundraiser for Prime Minister Trudeau a few weeks ago. I hope he raised the point of the carbon tax, how it's hurting Nova Scotians.

In closing, I would like to ask the members of the Opposition to join our fight against the carbon tax. This will have a meaningful impact without jeopardizing the investments we have made for Nova Scotians. With these few words, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I'll just speak to this bill for a few moments. Speaker, I believe this is a good bill. I stand in support of this bill.

One thing that I hear from my constituents on a regular basis is that they feel they're paying too much in taxes. When you look at HST, when you look at escalating property taxes, when you look at how we're paying the highest income taxes in Canada, when you look at how we have the lowest basic personal tax exemption in the country, people are paying too much in taxes here in the province of Nova Scotia. When you look at the fuel taxes that we pay, and you look at the HST that we pay on a form of tax - on government fees - we're paying tax on tax.

I think we can all see that Nova Scotians are paying too much in taxes, and we're hearing that from people. People are hurting. Years ago, people could go to work, work a good job, and be able to have enough money to pay their house mortgage, put food on their table, buy clothes for their children, and have a little bit left over. Now people can't. One of the reasons for that is because the large amount of money they're paying in taxes.

On a funny note, one of my children got into the workforce not too long ago. He had worked since he was 16 but never really made a lot of money, and now he's got a good paycheque. He said, "Mom, there's something wrong - they're making a mistake". He said, "I need you to help me look at my payroll stub and help me understand." He said, "I really

think they're making a mistake."

We sat down, and we looked at his payroll stub, and I went through with him all the deductions. He just couldn't believe the difference between his gross income and the amount of money he thought he was going to be taking home versus his net income and the amount of money that actually got put in the bank. It was quite eye-opening for him, and he was like, "This is just wrong," and "Government takes so much of the money that I earned."

[4:15 p.m.]

I think, in general, there's anger growing in our communities about how much money the government is taking from people, and we're seeing it also with escalating property taxes both in residential and commercial. I'm happy to see the Leader of the Official Opposition bring up the unique issues that people living in the border community have because we do, and unfortunately, the people living in our area year after year, decade after decade, seem to be forgotten by very centralized governments.

This is an issue that will be very important to the people that I represent. As the Leader of the Official Opposition mentioned, Premier Higgs next door in New Brunswick has made that an election promise if he gets re-elected. I believe they're going to an election in October, just next month, in New Brunswick. That is one of his election promises, that he will be lowering HST in New Brunswick by 2 per cent, so down to 13 per cent.

I believe that the province of Nova Scotia should be working in collaboration with our neighbouring provinces. There is a - it used to be called the Maritime Council of Premiers. Now it's the Atlantic Council of Premiers. They should be working on this together. There should be conversations between our four Atlantic premiers around HST and taxation. We should be ensuring, as a Maritime region, as an Atlantic region, that we pay similar taxes so that you don't have huge discrepancies, especially in border communities.

If Premier Higgs is re-elected and he lowers the HST, and if our government does not lower the HST, it will significantly harm, once again, the people living in our border community. For close to 30 years - 27 years - people in our area had to pay an extra tax in the form of a toll going to the city if they had a medical appointment or went to see a family member or anything else. No one else in the province had to pay that. But our businesses - people who were trucking fish, seafood, manufactured goods, lumber, forestry - all had to pay this extra tax that no one else in other parts of the province - Cape Breton or South Shore - had to pay. That one thing alone, on top of many other decisions that have hurt our border community, has caused huge financial and economic hardship for the people living in our area.

I believe that decisions should be made by the government, and future governments,

to invest in border communities and invest in our area, in infrastructure. I was listening to the debate from the member opposite representing the government, using the example of roads, and I will say that may be a number on paper, but we have certainly not seen repairs on our roads. In fact, I'm hearing from people on a regular basis about the poor condition of the roads and the roadsides and the bushes on the sides in the ditches, and the roadsides not being cut.

Quite frankly, it's a bit embarrassing. We used to have beautiful roadsides and beautiful tourist areas. I have to explain to people that our Public Works department is doing their very best. Sometimes there are equipment shortages, equipment breakdowns, or staff shortages. But we're not seeing an improvement in that.

I know the member opposite gave the example of increasing the budget of Public Works, but certainly the people in our border community are not seeing that money translate into actual action. I'm not sure that that is the best example.

I will just say emphatically that I support this bill. I believe Nova Scotians are paying too much in taxes, HST being one of them. We need to increase the basic personal tax exemption in this province. Indexing - what was done last session - had been called on by members in the Opposition, me as well as others. I was very happy to see that happen. But more needs to be done to support Nova Scotians, and I support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm just going to take a minute and provide some comments before I adjourn debate on this bill.

It's an important discussion. It's something that we hear a lot of feedback around, and ultimately, it's about saving money for families. That's the real issue here. As my Leader and others said, you're seeing this also talked about by the Premier of New Brunswick.

Again, it's something important to debate. The government doesn't agree. That's okay. They say that what will be cut doesn't matter because they're just borrowing money anyway, so they're not cutting anything. Ultimately, they're getting the largest transfers in history from the federal government - in history.

I'll provide this example, because I know it's coming. We talked about the lunch program, an important program, and the feds are talking about the lunch program. The feds have money that they're going to have in the pot. I'm sure they're going to come to the province, and they're going to offer the province an amount of money for food and schools, and the government will happily take their money in one hand, and in the other hand, they'll criticize them about everything that's wrong in your life and blame them for the carbon tax. That's how this government operates. It's how they have always operated.

I said it in my comments before - that good public policy comes forward. This is another piece of it - no different from talking about public transit. The carbon tax conversation comes up again, and I would like to get on the record again. I was in the Department of Energy for three years, so I had a front row seat to all those conversations around the carbon tax when the federal government tried to bring it forward all those years ago. Somebody will probably try to clip me, Speaker, and put me on some Twitter page about talking about the carbon tax, and that's fine by me. I worked with incredible staff in Energy to build a lot of those programs that they put into their plan that they submitted to the federal government - good people doing good work all over the province, regardless of who's elected and who's not.

We never had a carbon tax. We never had it. That's right. The Liberal provincial government never had a carbon tax. We negotiated cap and trade, and we negotiated hard. There were a lot of difficult conversations, and the carbon tax was not here. I'm going to be clear about this. The carbon tax came with the current government. I know I have to talk about the bill, because it's about HST reduction, Speaker - but it came with the current government.

I give a lot of credit to the staff in departments and the Premier of the day who said the carbon tax is not coming to Nova Scotia, and he kept his word. It didn't come, but it came with this government. Let's be clear. We're talking about this bill on HST. The challenge for me becomes - listen, we debate issues, and people agree and disagree. That's fine, but there are facts too.

The government - when we talk about public transit, and they go to the carbon tax. We're talking about HST reduction, we're going to the carbon tax, and they're saying, Well, if you reduce the carbon tax, it saves us money. Well, let's play that game. If you reduce the tax on gas provincially, you could save that money and put that back in the pockets of people as well. So if you're saying reduce the carbon tax, why don't you reduce the provincial tax, the HST, on gas? Why don't you do it? (Interruption) Or yes, as my colleague said, the HST on the carbon tax? There are lots of options.

The government is being told, and they're being scripted: Whenever you can, mention carbon tax; we need to paint all the Liberals as the carbon tax champions. But they can't.

I personally am on the record, for my entire political career as an MLA, against the carbon tax. I just think it wasn't the right decision. Cap and trade was good. We invested millions of dollars in efficiency programs that allowed us to have the best programs in the country. It saved people money, like this bill.

The Minister of Agriculture finds it funny. That's okay. That's fine with me. This is a joke, right? We're trying to save people money, but it's a joke.

I'll close off my comments on this with: You can't blame the federal government for everything. There are things that all of us in here agree to disagree on with the federal government. The one thing that's for certain is you're taking all the federal government money. You're taking all those transfers in one hand, and consistently making every attack you can with the other.

That's really been the theme with these bills. I see announcements happening between federal and provincial government representatives, and then we get into this House and then it's all their fault. People are starting to catch on to that conversation. You're not going to be able to do it forever.

With that, Speaker, I will adjourn debate on Bill No. 465, the HST Reduction Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 465.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Just a reminder to the members not to refer to anyone as being present or absent in this House.

The honourable House Leader for the Official Opposition.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 472.

Bill No. 472 - Seniors Care Grant Improvement Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, I move the reading of Bill No. 472, the Seniors Care Grant Improvement Act.

I'm happy to stand and say a few words about the Seniors Care Grant. As we all know, seniors in our province built our province, and they deserve the respect and admiration that most of us have for them.

I'm a firm believer, as well, in giving credit where credit is due. The Seniors Care Grant was a great initiative put forward by this government. It's been well-used in my riding, and it's helped a lot of people. I was also pleased to see the income level raised this year to \$45,100. That's going to help some more seniors who desperately need this grant to survive the season.

Now, that all being said, the role of Opposition is to provide solutions, provide criticism when it's due, provide kudos when it's due, and also to suggest improvements to a bill. That's what this bill does. This bill suggests that the Seniors Care Grant be doubled from \$750 to \$1,500 annually.

Can you imagine the impact that this would have on a senior or a senior couple who are both getting OAS and CPP and that's it? We know the cost of living has gone through the roof. Seniors cannot afford to put groceries on the table, oil in the tank, pay the power bill, pay the water bill, and stay in their homes. Heaven forbid, if they move out of their homes, they absolutely can't afford to pay rent in this province. We've seen rent skyrocket all across this province.

[4:30 p.m.]

The Seniors Care Grant came out on September 1st, and in our office - and I know in all the offices of my colleagues on all sides of the House - we've seen so many seniors looking for this hand up. But it's September, and they need this money to get through the Fall. Heating season is about to start. Phone bills, power bills, groceries, medication - seniors are making the difficult choice heat or eat or medications. I've heard stories of seniors who are halving their medications in order to make them spread out so they can afford to put oil in their tank or can afford that power bill. Doubling the Seniors Care Grant would fill a senior's oil tank, provide oil for that senior for a number of months, and allow them a little bit of breathing room.

Going back to the stories that I hear from seniors - my CA in the office is processing these grants on a daily basis, and in the first week alone processed about \$300,000 worth of Seniors Care Grants, which is - it's great that we are there to do that, but it's also telling as to what seniors are dealing with in the community. They are coming to our offices, and they are basically crying for help. They are so appreciative of what we can do to help them, whether it be a Provincial Housing Emergency Repair Program grant or whether it be - when they're there, we go through the whole gamut with them: the Provincial Housing Emergency Repair Program grant, the Property Tax Rebate for Seniors, and the CBRM tax rebate. They often leave the office with more than they came in for, and they are so grateful for that.

I know that Joanne gets her daily dose of energy from the seniors who come into the building and leave with a smile on their face. Joanne gets those hugs that really break her heart and break - of course, she lets me know what's happening.

I think the fact that - I know we're putting this bill forward, I know we're not in government, and I know the members across the aisle are feeling the same pressures. We're all at the age when we have senior parents, senior neighbours, or senior relatives, or some of us are seniors ourselves. We know the pressures they are facing on a daily basis to make ends meet. In my opinion, this would be a way to alleviate some of that stress so they can

afford to do some of the other things.

I'm going to take it a step further, in case the government wants to take this bill and make it their own. In addition to recommending the doubling of this grant, I would recommend increasing that income threshold to \$50,000, because I think \$50,000 for two seniors living in their own home is a solid number. Anybody above that is probably getting by okay; anybody below that is struggling to get through.

I would tie that number to the Consumer Price Index. So set it at \$50,000 and then incrementally increase it to inflation. If we were to do that, we would help out so many seniors and give them the respect they deserve. At the end of the day, as I said in the beginning of my speech, seniors have built this province, and it's time that we give them their respect. They've worked hard their whole lives, so I believe doubling the Seniors Care Grant would do just that. With that, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: This Liberal bill - An Act to Improve the Seniors Care Grant - really sets itself a pretty low bar: improving on the present Seniors Care Grant of the present government. Improving on the present program ought to be a pretty easy thing to accomplish since Nova Scotia's current Seniors Care Grant is the most stringent and contingent seniors income supplement in the country.

I mean this precisely: Every single provincial and territorial seniors' supplement program in Canada is more generous than the Nova Scotia Seniors Care Grant. In eight provinces and three territories, the seniors income supplement programs in place are more generous in their fundamental structure in that, exactly the way that GIS works, your eligibility in those provinces and territories is based on your income tax return and your payment based on your income tax return, thereby, is automatic.

There's no place in those programs for receipts. There's no place in those programs for an application. And then in the only other province that follows the receipt and application system that we have in Nova Scotia, which is P.E.I., the maximum eligible amount that you can apply for is actually double Nova Scotia's \$750.

We can look to our neighbours in Newfoundland and Labrador, where the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit pays \$6,000 a year. We see the need for what this bill talks about: improvement. One Newfoundland and Labrador senior who had moved to Dartmouth in the past year in order to stay with her daughter and help her daughter was in Nova Scotia for the first time. I met her and had talked to her, and she said, I was so surprised to find out the difference between here and home. She said it's ridiculous.

We can look in the opposite direction towards Alberta. There, the program's called the Alberta Seniors Benefit program supplement, and that supplements. That's what it's

meant to do. Those who qualify for GIS have their GIS supplemented provincially. In Alberta, it's supplemented by \$3,600 every year, so no doubt this Liberal proposal passes its own test and would be an improvement.

It would double the amount that people would be eligible for. It would raise the income threshold. Certainly, both of these things are improvements, as would be any increase in the threshold or in the amount.

I want to submit that this is not the improvement that this program needs. The improvement that this program needs is to transform itself and, following the example of the vast majority of other provinces and territories, into a seniors income benefit, a provincial supplement to the incomes of those who have an income low enough that they qualify for GIS and that would be automatically received by those who have that federal program's eligibility as the vast majority of modest and lower-income seniors in Canada receive today.

I say that this is what is needed, and I use the word "need" advisedly because we really are talking here, when we talk about the incomes of seniors who make enough, that it's low enough that they qualify for federal GIS. We're really talking about need.

I want to think about the Food Banks Canada report from a few months ago, the *Poverty Report Card*. I'll table the particular page about seniors' poverty in Nova Scotia. It talks about how in Canada, in general, the rate of poverty for seniors is 4.7 per cent but strikingly, the rate of poverty for seniors in Nova Scotia is 6 per cent and more strikingly, the rate of poverty among seniors living alone in Nova Scotia is 13 per cent.

These, of course, are exactly the people whom the GIS targets. This is what the GIS was designed and invented for. They're exactly the people who need to receive GIS, and they're exactly the people, in eight other provinces and other territories, who are eligible for an additional provincial or territorial senior income benefit.

I think the inadequacy of operating a program like this on the basis of applications and receipts has been made, this year, particularly clear by the whole debacle that I was bringing up as a notice of motion earlier this afternoon around the government's audit this year of the Seniors Care Grant program. In April and May, the government sent 1,600-and-some Nova Scotia seniors who receive the Seniors Care Grant a formal notice in the mail that said to them that their grants would be audited and they would be required to produce receipts for that \$750. The letters really meant business. In bold type, the letter threatened that failure to comply with this demand to produce these receipts would impact people's next application.

Of course, this was very upsetting for a lot of people to get a letter: lower-income people receiving a letter from the government announcing an audit that is going to demand receipts and is going to potentially have an impact on their income as a consequence. The

worst of it was that it was an entirely meaningless exercise, because it didn't have any real cost control purpose. If you look at the Seniors Care Grant program, as the member for Northside-Westmount has spoken to it and explained it, eligible expenses for the grant include, for example, both power and phone bills. What does that mean? It means it would be practically impossible not to have \$750 worth of eligible expenses.

In other words, if recipients had to be audited, the audit should have been to verify their address and their existence on the planet Earth, but not their expenses, certainly not their receipts. This is a level of policy and program absurdity, and I think it's the kind of policy and program absurdity that a program can get twisted into when it is, in its fundamentals, basically misconfigured.

A key word here in this Liberal bill: improvement. Yes, sure, improvement, all right. But not just the sort of improvement that this bill is envisioning. In my view, the Seniors Care Grant needs the improvement that it must be replaced by a seniors' income benefit, one that is payable automatically on the basis of one's eligibility for GIS. This is exactly what seniors in Nova Scotia can expect from the next NDP government in our province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I am so excited to talk about a grant program that has unanimous support in the House. That is wonderful. It's one of the first things our government did. As a physiotherapist, I'm incredibly proud of the fact that one of the first things our government did was bring in something that no other government had thought to do.

I'm going to start out by addressing the comments that were made by the previous two speakers, just to clarify some facts, because we're all about the facts. The member for Northside-Westmount said that the role of Opposition is to provide criticism. When I was over there, I provided solutions. The government of the day didn't listen. When we got into government, I took those ideas from the Opposition side, and our government put them into action. What I want to say is that our government has improved the Seniors Care Grant. We introduced it, we improved it.

The member for Halifax Chebucto doesn't like the fact that the grant is audited. He should know, because I've said it more than once, if you don't audit it, it's taxable income that gets clawed back. That is not in the best interest of Nova Scotians. The member also suggested that there should be a seniors' income benefit. We have way more than a seniors' income benefit. I'm going to reference all of them. I don't have 12 hours to talk about all the benefits that we have in this province, but I'm going to make my best effort. The other thing is that the member said it was absurd that you would audit something. I guess that means that the member doesn't believe that there should be accountability for spending taxpayers' money. Speaker, this government believes in accountability.

Today I stand before you to address Bill No. 472, tabled by the Liberal Party, and to remind you of their long history of neglect when it comes to the seniors in this province. This bill, introduced by the Liberal Party, may seem like an attempt to repair their tarnished record, but let us not be fooled. It is nothing more, in my opinion, than a desperate attempt to rewrite the history that unfolded in front of my eyes in this House and across this province.

Let's talk about the Liberal track record on seniors. Under Liberal leadership, particularly during the Liberal leader's tenure as Minister of Health and Wellness, seniors in Nova Scotia faced chronic neglect. Under the Liberal Party, the hours of home care that seniors in this province - over 30,000 seniors in this province - the care they received through home care declined every year for five straight years.

[4:45 p.m.]

This trend cut home care across the province just as COVID-19 was running across the province, and we all know what happened in our long-term care facilities. The Liberal Party cut funding to long-term care two years in a row. I will table that document. When we took over, we didn't know how many long-term care beds there were. The Premier had to put it in my mandate letter as the first minister in Canada of Seniors and Long-term Care. The Premier actually had to put in my mandate letter how many long-term care beds there were in the Province of Nova Scotia. How did you staff long-term care when you had no idea how many long-term care beds you had? You didn't even know how many staff you had. You didn't even know how many staff you were short because the questionnaire sent to long-term care facilities on staffing was an optional thing that you didn't have to fill out.

I know how many long-term care beds there are now, but I also know that there were nearly 500 long-term care beds out of 8,000 closed in this province when I took over. Within a year they were all open, and we have added more than 400 and changed beds to the system above and beyond those 500. Not only did we do that, but by the increase in funding for seniors in this province, we also raised the staffing level in long-term care to the highest in the country. At 4.1 hours of care, we are almost to the point where every nursing home in the province is staffed at the highest level in the country.

Let's go back to what the Liberals didn't do. As a matter of fact, I am going to give credit to the NDP. They introduced the CCA bursary - 50 per cent off of tuition. What did the Liberals do when they got into power in 2013? Gone. Shame. The NDP are agreeing with me.

Then when the long-term care expert panel came in with their report - because we heard all about the Liberal Party today wanting us to enact recommendations that came out of the report. The long-term care expert panel recommendations that government got - did they listen to them? They did bring back the bursary. Guess how much they brought it back? Fifty per cent. Guess how many got it in the year before we took government? One

hundred fifty. Guess how many we did in our first year? One thousand. Guess what our CCAs had to pay to go to school? Nothing. If you want to talk about what this government is doing for seniors in this province, I can talk about it all day, every day.

Let's go back to what the Liberals did for seniors in this province. They cut the budget for long-term care. They didn't have a Seniors Care Grant; it's kind of rich that they want to double it. They wanted to double something they never came up with.

They also talked about the fact that they didn't want to build too many long-term care beds because the population was declining. I graduated 40 years ago as a physiotherapist. I knew when the tip of the senior bubble was going to be. It's when I turn 80. They thought the number of seniors was going to go down. I knew 40 years ago that the number of seniors was going to be at its maximum in 20 years.

Do you know what we're going to do? We're going to build 5,700 new and replacement nursing home beds in this province. There are so many nursing homes under development that I can't keep them all straight. When the minister across the aisle asked me about this, I said there are so many that I'm going to have to get you the update.

In addition to that - this is my favourite - I have been waiting for a chance to talk about this one. When I became the minister, I offered every MLA in this House an opportunity to meet with me for 30 minutes, one-on-one. I know some of you did and bless your hearts. I said, "Tell me what's going on in your communities. Tell me what you are hearing. I want to know about it. I want solutions. I don't care where they come from."

There were a lot of people who did that because we talked about what we needed for seniors and the investments. One member said to me, "I have been asking the last three Ministers of Health to invest in a program for seniors. They were Liberal ministers, and no one would listen."

Before that half-hour conversation was over, I had texted the Minister of Health. She had texted - I won't say who, but somebody else in government - to say, "Have you ever heard of the CAPABLE Program?" I hadn't. Before that conversation was over, the member for Halifax Atlantic - I had instructed my department to contact the university that had done that program in the United States to get costing and find out if it would work in Nova Scotia. Speaker, that was a Liberal MLA who gave me that idea. When reporters asked me, when we launched that pilot program, where I got that idea, I said, "I got it from a Liberal - oh wait, ND - PC MLA."

We also introduced the CORAH Program - the Centre for Rural Aging and Health - to address seniors. I can't tell you what else we are doing on that one. Sorry. Sometimes it's hard. We have so many investments coming for seniors that it's hard to keep track of what I am allowed to talk about and what I'm not allowed to talk about.

What I do want to say is that the heart and soul of looking after seniors is their families. It is the unpaid caregivers. Do you know what we've done for them?

I will give credit to the Liberals. In the middle of COVID, they started a direct benefits program. They gave \$1 million in that first year because they were desperate to provide care for seniors and their families because COVID ravished all of us. I forget the exact dollar amount. My staff is going to shoot me because they hate me giving out numbers, but it mushroomed into around \$30 million. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board - he knows how high it went.

That means if we can't get you home care through an agency, we will give you direct benefits. You can hire who you want, they can be family members, and you can have them coming when you need them, where you need them, and how you need them. Our budget has gone up every year.

Under the previous Liberal government, who want to talk about improving a grant that we brought in - I wish they had improved all of the other things that were going down the drain. Under our government, home care - which declined every year for five straight years - has gone up every year for the last three and a half years. I can't wait until budget debate next Spring to talk about those numbers because they're staggering.

We want to talk about staff. The staff in long-term care have the highest injury rate in the industry. Under our government, with the increase in staffing, with the increase in home lifts - Hoyer Lifts in the home, imagine that - and free home oxygen, we have reduced the injury rate three straight years in long-term care by over 15 per cent and in home care by 9 per cent. We are improving the care for our seniors, we are improving the care for their families, and we are making safer and better working conditions for everyone who works in the continuing care sector.

Speaker, back to the Seniors Care Grant: It is now eligible in terms of expenses, and because of the audit process, no one has been cut out of anything. We are working with everyone, and we are making sure every single one of them gets those receipts in to make sure that they are both accountable and that they're getting the funding that they need and that they deserve. You can use that money for cooking and meal preparation, grocery and meal delivery, health care services, eye exams, dental work, mental health services, physiotherapy - by the way, physiotherapists can now order X-rays under this government, just so you know - we waited 40 years for that one, by the way; your laundry services, outdoor work, phone calls, cellphone bills, small home repairs such as windows, doors, roof, plumbing, electrical, decks, fencing, siding, and painting; transportation, such as taxis, ride-shares, shuttles. It's one thing to throw money at something. We do spend money on this side of the house, but it is targeted, it is strategic, and it is working.

What I want to say finally is that when previous long-term care facilities and home care agencies and all the organizations in this province who were responsible for looking

after seniors were begging the previous government for any kind of money investment, the answer was no. All you have to do is look at Northwood. Northwood begged the Liberal government for funding. They asked them over and over again, and they did not give it to them. I will table that document.

The investments by this government for seniors - it started with the Seniors Care Grant, but by golly it didn't end there. We have the Seniors Community Wheelchair Loan Program; we have free home oxygen; we have free personal alert now; we have the meals program; we have the enhanced Home First program; we've got enhanced adult day programs; we've got home care benefits that didn't exist before. We have tax refunds for low-income seniors; we have the property tax rebate; the home heating rebate; the Your Energy Rebate Program; the senior citizen assistance program; the rental supplement for seniors; the home adaptations for safe senior independence; seniors housing; seniors Pharmacare program; the insulin pump expansion; increase to assistance; and changes to public housing.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I'm just going to finish off this Opposition Day. I will say it's an important debate and I know how passionate the Minister is about the work that she does, and I know a lot of the staff in her department, and they're good people, and they do a lot of good work. We all want to do whatever we can to support seniors across Nova Scotia however we can.

With that, Speaker, I move to adjourn debate on Bill No. 472, the Seniors Care Grant Improvement Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to adjourn debate on Bill No. 472.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the conversation today from my colleagues. That concludes Opposition business for the day, and I'll pass it back over to the Government House Leader to announce business moving forward for tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes business for the day. I move the House do now rise to meet again on Thursday, September 12th between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Government business will include Committee of the Whole House on Bills No.

464 and No. 459 and Second Reading of Bills No. 471 and No. 476.

[5:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Thursday, September 12th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We have now reached the moment of interruption. The notice of the topic for the adjournment debate was submitted by the honourable member for Halifax Needham, and reads as follows:

Whereas renters are struggling to find places to live that they can afford as the average rents increase beyond the rent cap every year since it has been in place;

Whereas fixed term leases are creating stress and instability in the lives of renters because such leases are being abused as a loophole for landlords to get around the current 5 per cent rent cap; and

Whereas the number of people experiencing homelessness across the province continues to grow at an unprecedented rate as average rental costs are exceeding what Nova Scotians can afford;

Therefore be it resolved that this government's inaction on protecting renters is dangerously leaving clear pathways to homelessness open.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

GOV'T. (N.S.): NEED TO PROTECT RENTERS - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: The topic that I'm speaking about today is not a stranger to anyone in this room. For a long time, there's been a crisis of affordable housing in this province, and matters are only getting worse. All the parties here in this House recognize this, and we have all spoken to it.

More and more Nova Scotians cannot find a place to live that they can afford. Data recently released by CMHC shows that in 2022, 25 per cent of renters in our province were in core housing need, up from 18.7 the year before. This means that 25 per cent of renters' households in our province are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on their housing costs alone.

I know that we always throw around these numbers, and we talk about how it's incorrect and all these other things, but the numbers don't lie when it comes from those folks who are doing the work to tell us that there's something wrong. This is an indication that we need to do something right now. People in our province are spending more than 30 per cent of their income on their housing costs, leaving too little left to pay for other basic needs - needs like groceries and prescription medication.

From what we've heard from all our constituents - and I know all of us have heard this, and the fact that last month we saw a year-over-year average rental increase of 18 per cent - we know that the situation has only worsened in the more recent years. We're seeing the effects in the form of longer lines at our food banks. Between April and June, 36,000 Nova Scotians received support from our food banks, surpassing the record-breaking number set last year. It's a shame.

We're seeing the effects in the increasing number of unhoused folks we see living in tents, and some who are not in tents, some who are just living. We're hearing about the effects from service providers, who are reporting increasing calls from families experiencing hidden homelessness and desperate to find permanent housing to ensure their kids have the stability they need.

Even though not all instances are officially counted on the By Name List, we know that the number of people reported to be homeless in this province has quadrupled since this government took office. There are now more than 1,200 individuals identified as being actively homeless in the Halifax By Name List - and I have that here. There were only 300 individuals on the list. I know we will be talking about this later on, but on the By Name List, the date for the By Name List that I have is the By Name List Weekly Statistic September 4, 2024. So that is just days ago that over 1,200 individuals identified as being actively homeless. There were only 300 individuals on the list in 2021 when this government took office.

It doesn't matter what that number is. It is one too many. If we think about, Oh, the number's going down, it is wonderful, and it's good that we are figuring things out, but it's not fast enough for those folks who are living unhoused right now. Some of the reasons as to why we're seeing this rapid increase are very clear. Some people don't want to admit it, but it's very clear. For instance, this government's current rent cap is riddled with loopholes that landlords are all too eager to use. We've heard from the Minister of Service Nova Scotia about how those fixed term leases are used for reasons. Yes, absolutely. We don't disagree that fixed term leases can be used for travel nurses or for students, because there

is a timeline in which they need housing. Fixed term leases should not be used for year-to-year tenancy. I'll bring it back to explain to you why that is.

I'm really disappointed to see that when we come and sit here in the Legislature - and Nova Scotians are expecting a lot from us because we should be doing the work for Nova Scotians - not one bill is put forward about how to address the homelessness crisis and how to address housing insecurity for folks in Nova Scotia. There is not a bill that has been put forward on that by this government.

I'm going to go back to the rent cap. It's riddled with loopholes. Primary amongst them is the fixed term lease loophole. A recent report by ACORN shows that landlords are increasingly only offering tenants fixed term leases and not making periodic leases available, not even to long-term tenants. I can tell you that in my office, we receive - too many to count - calls from folks whose fixed term lease is now up. They didn't know they were on a fixed term lease, and now they have to find a place in 30 days or 15 days or two months. They've been long-term tenants, but they didn't know they were on a fixed term lease. Because of that, they no longer have stability in their rental, and it's not even for long-term rentals.

One tenant surveyed for the ACORN study stated: "I have been living in the same apartment in Halifax for almost 10 years. I have been a great tenant. There is no reason I shouldn't have a yearly renewing lease, yet every year I have to wait to find out if I will be offered another one-year lease." The fact is that by making only fixed term leases available to tenants, landlords are not restricted to the 5 per cent rent cap. They can raise rents as high as the market can handle.

I know that we all receive calls from constituents. It would be a disservice to our constituents if we stood here and didn't admit this fact. It would be a disservice to Nova Scotians to deny the fact that this is happening when it is. It is happening far too often, and it is harming way too many Nova Scotians, especially in this housing crisis. Another tenant explained, "I have asked for year-to-year leases, as I have proved to be a long-term responsible tenant" - responsible tenant. Not a bad neighbour, a responsible tenant - "but the landlords refuse. The rent has gone up more than the rent cap every year, but we are still staying, because where else can we go?"

That is our everyday reality right now. The uncertainty created by fixed term leases - both in terms of whether or not a landlord will renew the lease after 12 months and whether or not the landlord will increase the rent beyond what the tenant can afford - creates a considerable amount of stress. Some of us who have long-term tenancy, maybe on a periodic lease, we don't feel those stresses as often as someone who's on a fixed term lease. Fixed term leases don't create any stability. Imagine if you have a family, and you have a number of children, and every year you have to move your children into a new unit or a new space because your fixed term lease is up. That's the reality of folks in Nova Scotia.

This stress is directly connected to the fact that if a fixed term lease is not renewed, or offered only at a higher cost, a tenant can be forced into homelessness. I'm going to repeat that because this stress is directly connected to the fact that if a fixed term lease is not renewed, or offered only at a higher cost, a tenant can be forced into homelessness. This is what we're seeing.

There is an easy and common-sense way to end the abuses of fixed term leases and the negative effects that they've had on tenants, and that is to implement real rent control. We not only need to cap rental increases at the rate of inflation, but we also need to tie that rent cap to the unit. This move would effectively eliminate the current incentive to landlords presented by fixed term leases.

Tying the rent cap to the units means that, regardless of whether an existing tenant remains or a new tenant comes in, the rent can only be raised by a set percentage within a 12-month period. This would keep more tenants in their homes by reducing evictions, and it would suppress average rental costs to ensure tenants can afford their homes on a longer-term basis. It also can help tenants save up to become homeowners, which is what we want to see.

This sitting, we have one bill on the table that could directly affect housing negatively - no bill on creating affordable housing, no amendments to fix the loophole of fixed term leases, and no homelessness strategy legislation to create a plan to tackle this issue. What I've heard from this government every time is that their housing plan is working - they are building faster, and we need supply. When we ask, the answer to the housing crisis is supply.

When we ask what the timeline is, it's crickets. They don't know when something is going to be built, so folks who are unhoused right now won't ever know when that will be ready.

I want us to do one thing: We need to do better for Nova Scotians across this province, because they deserve it, so let's fix the things that need to be fixed and do this right in legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: I am happy to speak on this late debate topic today. I want to thank the NDP caucus and the member for Halifax Needham for speaking on this as well. While we don't agree on every single component of this, in general I certainly feel that the government is doing, on the rental side - and we've seen this over the last few days even - the bare minimum. It's unfortunate because, as I said the other day - and I want to hammer this point home because I think it's important for people to understand - to have a rent cap and to have fixed term leases as they exist today does not work. That's not just my opinion. There's a reason why fixed term leases have become something that everybody knows

about. Five years ago, it was not an issue, because five years ago, we had vacancy rates and affordable apartments, generally speaking, for people.

There's a reason why every other province in the country that has a rent cap system also has restrictions on the use of fixed term leases. As the member for Halifax Needham said, there are circumstances where fixed term leases make sense - where someone is here for a fixed period of time. They don't make sense for people who plan to be in their unit for a long period of time. That's why every other province, at the end of a fixed term lease, it converts to a month-to-month or year-to-year, if the parties agree to that, because there is an obvious incentive for landlords to try to get people out of units if the rent cap is at a reasonable level.

Five per cent, in my view, is not a reasonable level. It's the highest in the country, and there's no justification from the minister as to why that is. That's one of the things about this situation that's so frustrating. There are announcements made, there's legislation introduced, and there's hardly any explanation as to why these decisions are being made, which it's a pretty low bar that we are not meeting on issues around rent.

Just to talk about the things that aren't happening, nothing is being done on fixed term leases. Nothing. That's being left in a kind of don't look at it and it will just go away. That's not reality. It's going to continue to be a problem as we get into Winter here. A rent cap number that is plucked out of thin air, as far as I can tell - no justification and no effort on the part of the minister or anybody else in government to explain it, which is disappointing. Huge negative changes on the rent supplement program - of course, we all know it went to 50 per cent. Thanks to advocates, groups, Opposition members, renters, and everybody who were able to get that moved down to 40 per cent, which is still not as good as it was and not as good as it should be. Again, that's a negative move from this government, making it more difficult for people to be eligible for rent supplements.

Another thing that has come up in recent days is data and lack of data. We have no idea how prevalent the use of fixed term leases are. We can assume that they are being used very often these days. I think that's the truth, but I don't know that because we don't have any data. We should have in this province some kind of rental registry. The other day, the minister just dismissed that out of hand, very flippantly, as though well, why would we do that? That doesn't make any sense, but if you want to make good decisions, you have to have data, whether it's health care, whether it's schools, whether it's long-term care, community services, rent. It doesn't matter. You need good information to make good decisions.

On the side of rent, right now we have very little in the way of data and so that's another piece that has been dropped here on this government that is helping to contribute to our problem. We don't know how many fixed term leases are out there, how many periodic leases, or how many fixed term leases are not being renewed. This would be a really useful metric because we know if a fixed term lease is not being renewed, there is

one of two reasons: either the person is legitimately leaving the province for example, which would be a fairly small number, or landlords see an opportunity to substantially increase the rent, which I mentioned earlier this week, as many of us have dealt with.

[5:15 p.m.]

Tenants who are in a three-bedroom unit for \$1,795 that they started in 2017, small kitchen fire, they've been out of that unit for 14 months. They had gotten a judgment through the Residential Tenancies Program - which is not a perfect system, we all talked about that a lot already today. These folks managed to persevere, go through months and months of uncertainty living outside of their apartment, finally got a judgment from a Residential Tenancies officer in their favour telling them that the landlord had to allow them back into the unit in August, and then the landlord appealed to Small Claims Court and we are now stuck in that process for who knows how much longer.

I take issue with the minister's characterization of the Residential Tenancies Program kind of being a well-oiled machine because if it was, why would the department commission a study about enforcement? That indicates to me that something isn't right and something needs to change and unfortunately, as we have seen in far too many situations with this government, the choice is to do very little, to punt the ball down the field, to extend the rent cap for two years, to continue with a 5 per cent rent cap, to not collect data, and to not restore the rent supplement program back to where it is. What we will see is that we will see thousands of people on the edge of homelessness, thousands of people couchsurfing, stressed, anxious, with children in schools not wanting to move, with elderly parents, with grandchildren, whatever the case might be.

People's day-to-day lives are being absolutely shattered by the looming pressure of an expiring fixed term lease and the anxiety of booting up Kijiji or Facebook Marketplace every day looking for apartments that just aren't there. We know that is happening in every corner of our province and even small things that this government hasn't done - well, things that we haven't talked about a lot. Not small things, but things that are not getting a lot of attention, like the building code, for example. This government has chosen not to adopt a National Building Code of Canada, which would lead to much more energy-efficient buildings which would, in turn, save people more money on things like rent, which would allow them to stay in their units longer. This is another area where the government, for whatever reason, just says, Well, we can't do it yet. This is the National Building Code of Canada 2020, by the way. I think it is every 10 years or so that that's looked at. Okay, so we are almost in 2025 and maybe we'll just roll over to the next one and just pretend like the 2020 code never happened.

It is a pretty dark situation. I know that the homelessness situation is - we heard earlier from the member for Halifax Needham, 1,200 people, I believe I heard correctly, and as we get into Fall and Winter over the next little while, I know that the minister is working on the file. I know that there are Pallet shelters going into place, there are tiny

homes going into place. I really sincerely hope that those are successful. I think we all hope that those are successful and that the people who have been living outside in really, really difficult circumstances for far too long have a roof over their heads and a warm place to be at night, but I worry. I worry about not just those who are visible when it comes to homelessness and housing insecurity, but as I said earlier, the thousands and thousands of people who are invisible but are dealing with these problems each and every day. It's like an iceberg, right? You only see the tip of it, and what's below the waterline is what really concerns me. I think it's something that we should all be concerned about.

As far as I can tell, this government is not taking this issue on the rental side with the seriousness that it deserves. It's a matter of optics in a lot of cases and punting balls downfield and trying to move things forward without actually making substantial progress. It's distressing to me but also, more importantly, it's distressing to the people who are actually in those situations and who don't see any relief on the horizon and who don't see any hope beyond the end of what will be, for many of them, a fixed term lease, a possible eviction, and a housing situation that deteriorates all other components of their lives.

Again, I want to thank my colleagues from the NDP for bringing this late debate topic forward. This is a really important issue, and I certainly don't think that the government is meeting the moment on this topic.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I want to thank both members for their remarks. I wanted to stand for a moment on this, in particular on two specific parts of this late debate topic.

One of the things that's said here is, "Whereas the number of people experiencing homelessness across the province continues to grow at an unprecedented rate," which is factually not true. It's factually not true. The members can shake their heads, they can be upset about it, they can think that I'm standing up here and being partisan, but investments are being made. We're hearing from organizations like the YWCA - Miia who came out and said the investment that we made with them is going to cut family homelessness by a third.

We do know that just a few months ago there were 160 tents. Within a month, we were down to 116, and that was two weeks ago. We know that number has decreased. Welcome Housing & Support Services - another organization that does tremendous work right across the province - because of the work that we're doing with them, because of the infrastructure and the resources that we're putting in, last month housed 56 people and continue . . . (interruption). I'm speaking. Nobody interrupted them, Speaker.

The truth is what we're hearing from service providers - and I will let them know. We hear from people in this Chamber. We're meeting with the service providers across

Nova Scotia at least twice a week, which was unprecedented. They have never had that much access to the department, to the minister, to the deputy minister, the executive directors. They've never had that type of communication.

The reason why we're meeting with them so often is because we want to hear from them directly where the funds should go, where the resources go, and where we can make the most impact. What we're hearing from them is that what it used to be was patchwork. It used to be that if somebody was experiencing homelessness - and people around this Chamber want to act like homelessness didn't exist under the Liberals or under the NDP. That is absolutely 100 per cent not true. They may have thought it didn't exist because maybe they weren't paying attention, but it existed.

Like the member for Halifax Needham said - whom I have a great deal of respect for - one person experiencing homelessness is one person too many. Why was it not a priority under previous governments? Because it is a priority under this government: a 360 per cent increase in homelessness shelters, resources, transitional houses, pilot houses, tiny homes in the amount of \$200 million over the last two years and counting, which is more than all of those years combined and then some.

What we hear from Adsum for Women and Children, what we hear from Shelter Nova Scotia, what we hear from organizations right across Nova Scotia, is they have a voice at the table, that they know where the resources need to go. When they asked us for street navigators, we were there. When members of this Chamber asked for security, we were there. When they asked for more resources in their community, I stood in this last sitting and asked for everybody to be on side with the Pallet homes and the things that they were going to do. I asked members from both parties. One member from one party agreed with it - one member, the member for Annapolis Royal.

Other members refused to answer the question. We heard things like: They're not real houses, they're not real shelters, they're not dignified. Well, that's certainly not true. I have lots of quotes here from people living there, from service providers that are seeing amazing results now. People who just a few months ago were homeless are now living in these - not just the Pallet homes, the tiny homes - they're living in the resources that we put out and now are working full-time.

We're having people who just a few months ago - and I've said this all along, it cannot be patchwork. Enough is enough. We've seen it for too long, where it was reactionary. We have to create a path to success and that's what we're doing.

We have people who just a few months ago were homeless, who just graduated from The Bridge and now have stable, permanent housing and full-time jobs and resources around them. That's exactly what we want. We want those people to be set up for success.

I will say this: There are members here who have been extremely helpful and it

didn't matter what side of the aisle they're on. The member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island, the first few days I was in office, I think the member and I texted a million times about an issue that they were facing. They were extremely helpful for connecting with resources and being part of the solution. That's what I want and that's what this government wants.

I think people are tired of it. I will tell you that if you are homeless or if you are experiencing housing insecurity, you don't get up in the morning and go, Liberal, NDP, Progressive Conservative. I've said this a million times. People don't care about that. What we've said is we are creating a path to give people success, long-term success.

We've heard some of those members across say: Well, those are just words, facts, facts. They are just spending money and announcements. Well, here are some facts that they can take to the bank, okay? Two years ago, Speaker, there were 200 supportive housing units in this entire province, even though there was homelessness, even though there was housing insecurity, even though at that point two years ago before this government came in, we were in the middle of a massive housing upswing where the prices of houses skyrocketed.

Since that time, 600 new ones have come on board - in two years - with another 200 more by the end of the year. We went from 200 to 1,000 - facts. They can say what they want. They can stand up and use pretty words, but these are facts. These are facts. We are one year ahead of our supportive housing plan - one year ahead.

Why is that important? Being one year ahead means we have more supportive housing, we have more transitional housing, we have more resources on the ground, and it means more people live in safe and dignified communities and housing. That's what it means.

Housing comes in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes I listen to the words that are being said by some of the members, where they downplay, and the tone and the words they use towards some of this transitional housing is quite insulting. I've had people and organizations that support some of these parties, that bleed for them and love them, whose executive directors have reached out to me and said, I cannot believe that an elected official or a leader of that party would say something like that - cannot believe it.

What happens is I have to go and speak to those organizations and say that's not how we think. They have conversations behind the scenes with other elected officials who throw everything up in the air and then I have to go and clean up the mess and say, "No, no, no, this is the path we're on. We were told by so-and-so that you're going to pull this." That is not productive. It leads to fear, it leads to insecurity, and it leads to reactionary responses.

I have a lot of respect for everybody in this House, but the truth is, I don't see a

housing expert on that side of the House. You know who are housing experts? Shelter Nova Scotia. You know who are housing experts? Adsum for Women and Children. You know who are housing experts? Welcome Housing & Support Services. You know who are housing experts? Phoenix House. Those are the people we're listening to . . . (interruption).

[5:30 p.m.]

Again, if this was a reversed role, Speaker . . . (interruption). The member for Halifax Needham can laugh and make comments all she wants, but the truth is, we are meeting with them twice a week, and that is a fact. If they don't believe it, ask them.

THE SPEAKER: Order. This is twice I have had to state this tonight, but please do not refer to members with their presence or their absence.

I wish to thank all members who participated in the adjournment debate this evening. We stand adjourned until Thursday, September 12th from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 5:31 p.m.]