



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Danielle Barkhouse

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First Session

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024

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House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

9:00 A.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Danielle Barkhouse

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Lisa Lachance, Nolan Young

THE SPEAKER: Order. Daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would like to introduce some guests who are here for my petition. Could we revert to petitions afterwards, when guests are in the gallery?

THE SPEAKER: Yes, please do.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, may we ask for unanimous consent to revert, in five minutes, to Presenting and Reading Petitions so that our guests who are here for petitions will be present for that?

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed? It is agreed.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS****STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,148

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

Whereas Atlantic Open Farm Day is marking its 24th year with tours of farms, ranches, and agri-tourism businesses throughout Nova Scotia and the other Atlantic provinces this Sunday, September 15th; and

Whereas this province-wide, well-loved and free event is an opportunity for Nova Scotians to meet their local farmers and learn about farm life in person, and get a close-up look at the animals, equipment, crops, and hard work that are all part of making a living in agriculture; and

Whereas people unable to visit a farm in person on Atlantic Open Farm Day can enjoy the educational experience of a virtual farm visit online with all the details about participating farms available at atlanticopenfarmday.ca;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House join me in thanking the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture for coordinating the Nova Scotia portion of Atlantic Open Farm Day, and encouraging all Nova Scotians to take part this Sunday, September 15th.

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.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

BRIAN COMER: We have a special guest in the Speaker's Gallery today who I would like to introduce. Joining us today is Holly Carr. Holly is a talented author and artist whose exhibit, *Light in the Forest*, will be on display in the Museum of Natural History for the next two months.

Holly has also published a new children's book, *The Comfort Tree*, which is a companion book for *Light in the Forest*. *Light in the Forest* brings art, nature, and mental wellness together through an immersive display that includes interactive stations, and the journey through an animated world where guests are introduced to the forest and its inhabitants through music, art, dance, and spoken word.

I would ask my colleagues to give a warm welcome to Holly to the Legislature.
(Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

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

RESOLUTION NO. 1,149

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

Whereas world-renowned Nova Scotia artist Holly Carr's newest exhibit, *Light in the Forest*, shines a light on youth mental health and wellness; and

Whereas *Light in the Forest* is a perfect example of the healing power of art by helping to guide people to mental health support and resources in their community in an engaging, interactive way; and

Whereas Holly's exhibit is currently on display at the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History before it continues its travels throughout the province, spreading a message of hope;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in congratulating Holly on her exhibit and offer a sincere thank you for her continued work to show us that there is always light and hope.

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

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

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

GARY BURRILL: I want all members of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly to be sitting up straight this morning because you're in the presence of Noura Archer Yasin-Saied, my eight-month-old granddaughter, who is with my daughter-in-law Alia Yasin-Saied. We're awfully glad to have you here this morning. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Absolutely adorable. Welcome to the House. I hope you enjoy your first time.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, I'd like to draw everyone's attention to the Speaker's Gallery where I'd like to introduce Nick and Heather Samuel of the Salvation Army. They're the new captains who run the Salvation Army in Spryfield. Welcome to Spryfield. We thank you for all you do. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome and thank you for your service.

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I ask that we revert to Presenting and Reading Petitions.

[PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I want to introduce a few guests in our gallery associated with this petition. In the gallery, we have some members of the Coastal Coalition representing citizens of Nova Scotia. I ask that you rise when I read your name to accept the warm welcome of the House. We have Lil MacPherson, Karen Eileen Robb, Marnie Gail Reynolds, Sandra M. Martin, and Lindrus Scherzinger. I ask that all members give these coastal crusaders the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Speaker, I beg leave to introduce a petition of signatures collected from across the province, the operative clause of which reads:

Therefore we the residents of Nova Scotia call upon the Government of Nova Scotia to proclaim the Coastal Protection Act and complete the associated regulations to ensure consistent enforcement of the provisions set out in the Act.

The petition has 2,719 signatures, and my signature is affixed accordingly as per the rules.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

Do we have any more petitions?

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, I would like to present a petition which reads as follows:

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 petition has been signed by several residents of York Street and Cedar Street in the constituency of Halifax Chebucto, and I have also signed it.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 485 - An Act to Amend Chapter 3 of the Acts of 2019, the Coastal Protection Act. (Lisa Lachance)

Bill No. 486 - An Act to Amend Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2011, the Fair Drug Pricing Act, to Expand Access to PrEP. (Lisa Lachance)

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

RESOLUTION NO. 1,150

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

Whereas the Coastal Protection Act was passed through third reading with unanimous, all-party support, then received royal assent in 2019, making Nova Scotia the only province in Canada with an environmental protection act specifically focused on the coast but was not subsequently proclaimed by the government, with the result that the Act, though duly passed in every aspect by the House of Assembly, has never become part of the law of the Province of Nova Scotia; and

Whereas other duly passed legislation in Nova Scotia has met the same fate, most notably the Security and Investigative Services Act of 2010, which was only discovered to have never been brought into force by proclamation with the death in 2022 of a second citizen in the very circumstances that the 2010 Act, following a parallel tragedy, had been originally designed to prevent; and

Whereas citizens have every fair right to expect that, when an Act passes all the stages of legislative acceptance in the House of Assembly, it thereby becomes, or is reasonably close to becoming,

the law - and further, when that expectation is not met, citizens have every right to be democratically aggrieved;

[9:15 a.m.]

Therefore be it resolved that this House set aside a period of not less than two hours on Tuesday, September 17, 2024 to consider the proposal that when a piece of duly passed legislation has been left unproclaimed for a period of three years, the government must either introduce measures to repeal it, or seek the permission of the House for its continued non-proclamation.

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 Pictou Centre.

HARTLING, COREY: ANCESTRY & SPORTS RESEARCH - RECOG.

HON. PAT DUNN: Speaker, Corey Hartling, a retired teacher from New Glasgow, has made significant contributions to the fields of ancestry and sports research. His dedication to uncovering and preserving family histories has provided invaluable insights into lineage and heritage.

Additionally, Corey's meticulous research on sports teams and individual athletes over the past few decades has enriched our understanding of sports history, highlighting the achievements and stories of countless athletes.

His work not only celebrates the legacy of sports but also ensures that the stories of both families and athletes are remembered and honoured. These stories and legacies might have otherwise been forgotten. Hartling's efforts have had a lasting impact through his research, and his commitment to excellence continues to inspire others in the research community.

The ultimate aim of research is to generate measurable and testable data. Corey's contributions are truly invaluable and deeply appreciated by all who benefit from his research.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

NSCC SYD. WATERFRONT CAMPUS: OPENING - RECOG.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the exciting opening of the new NSCC Sydney Waterfront Campus. This project, announced by the previous government in 2019, marks a significant investment in Cape Breton's future. As students begin their first week of classes at the state-of-the-art facility, we are reminded of how important bold investments are in shaping our communities for generations to come.

This incredible campus wouldn't have been possible without the advocacy and hard work of the member for Sydney-Membertou, who was a champion at the Cabinet table for this, as well as the member for Northside-Westmount, who was principal of the former Marconi Campus and very involved in this project. It also wouldn't have happened without the work of former minister Geoff MacLellan, as well as the vision of former Premier Stephen McNeil, who championed this project from the start.

The benefits of this investment will be felt not only by students and faculty this year but by the entire Cape Breton Island for years to come.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, may I introduce the guest who is the subject of my statement?

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

GARY BURRILL: I would like to introduce the House to Polly Gallant-McLean. Polly, if you'd like to stand. Polly, at the age of 10, is going to be making her feature film debut this evening at the Atlantic Film Festival. I ask the House to give Polly a warm round of applause. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome, Polly, and congratulations on your roles.

The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GALLANT-MCLEAN, POLLY: FILM DEBUT - CONGRATS.

GARY BURRILL: Speaker, we celebrate a young resident of the constituency of Halifax Chebucto. Polly Gallant-McLean will be making her feature film debut as a

principal performer in *Monica's News* this evening at the Atlantic International Film Festival.

In *Monica's News*, which is directed by Pamela Gallant - no relation - and produced by Terry Greenlaw, Polly plays Casey, an intrepid nine-year-old girl who wages a battle for her own equal rights, but sees her idealism crushed when her beloved feminist cousin is murdered.

Polly has been acting on sets throughout Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in the last year or so, appearing twice on *This Hour has 22 Minutes* and in five episodes of *Sullivan's Crossing*, to name a couple. The daughter of theatre director and writer Alex McLean, who is with her this morning, and health care worker and cellist Claire Gallant, Polly comes by her artistic talent honestly and, like her parents, is also kind and generous and very funny. I ask all members of the House to join me in congratulating Polly and the entire cast and crew of *Monica's News* on the achievement of this new feature film.

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

INT'L DAY OF DEMOCRACY: VALUE - RECOG.

LARRY HARRISON: Speaker, this Sunday, September 15th, is the International Day of Democracy.

Since it was first established by the United Nations in 2007, governments from all over the world recognize the importance of democracy. Democracy ensures that governments derive their power from the votes cast by citizens, enabling a system that is accountable, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the people.

In Nova Scotia, we can proudly say that this is the birthplace of parliamentary democracy, freedom of the press, and responsible government in our country. This has helped shape Canada's democratic institutions and secure the rights and the freedoms that Canadians enjoy today.

Let us recognize the symbolism of September 15th, reminding us of the value of democracy in our province and also our country.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

PATRICIA ARAB: In your galley are Captain Nicholas and Major Heather Samuel from the Halifax West Community Church Fairview Citadel. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

The honourable member for Fairview-Clayton Park.

SAMUEL FAMILY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I'm pleased to welcome Captain Nicholas and Major Heather Samuel and their family not only to the House today but to the Salvation Army Halifax West Community Church in Fairview.

Since arriving in July, the Samuels have quickly become integral to our community, making a significant impact on Day 1. They jumped right into community activities, playing a pivotal role in the success of the Fairview Family Days event that I had the honour of co-hosting. With their leadership and gathering volunteers, they served over 400 guests at the barbecue, providing a memorable day for many families in Fairview-Clayton Park. Their energy and dedication already make them valuable members of our community and their kindness and generosity set them apart.

I look forward to ongoing collaboration as we continue in our shared goal to support and uplift the residents of Fairview-Clayton Park. Their active involvement promises to bring more positive changes to our community.

Speaker, please join me in extending a warm welcome to the Samuel family and expressing our excitement for what their leadership will bring to our community and to an already blessed and honourable legacy that is the Fairview Citadel.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I beg leave to make an introduction.

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us in the West Gallery today, we have Ken Clark, Jane Woodworth, Tory Clark, and Michael Citroni. I would ask that they all rise to receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

CLARK, KEN: UNIV. DEGREE COMPLETION - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: I rise today to honour Ken Clark from the Class of 2024 at Dalhousie University. After beginning his studies in 1961 at Dalhousie University, Ken put his studies on hold when he got a job at CBC-TV Halifax. His career in media and journalism was off and running. Over the years, he produced variety and news shows for CBC Halifax and helped launch the channels that became CTV News and Global News. After that, Clark moved to Winnipeg; New Zealand; Fiji, where he introduced an evening news broadcast and received the Order of Fiji; and Papua New Guinea, where he bought a TV station.

When he retired in 2020 and returned to Halifax, he hadn't forgotten about his degree, and he asked Dalhousie University how he could finish up. He then completed an economics course to finish his degree.

I ask that we all take Ken Clark's words to heart: Follow your dreams, never give up. It's a cliché, I know, but it's the truth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

TERRY FOX RUN: CANCER RES. CONTRIB. - RECOG.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: This Sunday, many of our communities will host the Terry Fox Run. So many Nova Scotians have been impacted by cancer, and this day allows us the opportunity to fight back, but it's much more than that. It's our chance to honour Terry Fox, a Canadian hero who set out on a journey running across Canada to raise awareness and funds for cancer research.

On May 20, 1980, Terry Fox came to Dartmouth. In his journal he wrote, and I quote: "Then I ran to the Vocational School with 50 students - they had raised \$3,000. A great group of kids!" No doubt Terry was referencing what we call NSCC Akerley today.

His marathon's purpose, raising money and awareness, remains vital today. In just over 40 years, the Terry Fox Foundation has raised more than \$800 million for cancer research. Terry Fox's determination continues to inspire Canadians. This Sunday, let us honour Terry's legacy as we continue to support cancer research at our local Terry Fox Run.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

HEBERT, MARK: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

CARMAN KERR: Each year exceptional volunteers are honoured at the Annapolis County Volunteer Expo and Volunteer Recognition Ceremony. This year the Clean

Annapolis River Project, otherwise known as CARP, nominated Mark Hebert. Mark has been heavily involved with CARP for the past 16 years. He has chaired various CARP committees and been the driving force behind the River Festival since 2018, as both Vice-President and President.

His contributions to his community go well beyond his work with CARP. He has given his time and efforts to the Annapolis Royal Pool Association, the Association francophone de la Vallée, L'Association des Familles Acadiennes de Port-Royal, and the Bridgetown Lions Club Monthly Breakfast. I ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Mark Hebert for all that he has done for his community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

AUBA: 171ST ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize the AUBA, the African United Baptist Association. In August the AUBA celebrated their 171st Annual Sessions at New Horizons Baptist Church. The messaging was very powerful throughout the whole weekend. Spirits were definitely lifted.

I was reminded of the story of Nehemiah: God blesses the work of those who work faithfully. The AUBA has worked hard over the years to grow the vision, and this year's theme for the sessions was: "Now is the time. Rebuild, Restore, Revive," which is so fitting because now is that time. I would like all members to join me in congratulating the AUBA for such a wonderful session and celebrating 171 years. We wish them many more to come.

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

BRD.: FALL RIV. DRAGONS MIN. FTBL. ASSOC. - RECOG.

HON. BRIAN WONG: I would like to recognize a very special Board of Directors in Fall River. The Fall River Dragons Minor Football Association resumed activities last year, after several years of inactivity due to COVID. In April, a new volunteer board was elected and developed a plan to restore the organization to full operation.

Under the leadership of Dale Stewart, a former RCMP officer, the new board has worked diligently to create a welcoming and safe environment for all children while trying to maintain affordable costs for families in the Waverley-Fall River-Beaver Bank communities.

It is community members like these that not only bring the community together but create an incredible foundation for our children to thrive.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

REFUGEE CLAIMANTS: NEED FOR SUPPORT - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I want to recognize the plight of refugee claimants, internationally known as asylum seekers. These are folks who cannot go back home for fear of persecution because of their race, religion or political beliefs. Some of the hardest workers that I know are people whom I have actually hired myself when I was Director of Operations in Ottawa when I volunteered with the Matthew House there - people from places like Rwanda or Haiti, some of them tradespeople who went on to be doctors.

[9:30 a.m.]

Talking about better management of our population growth is different when people are actually coming from different provinces and countries. It's different than targeting a subset of newcomers, and statements made by Conservative premiers on their social media do nothing but divide Canadians, tapping into unfounded assumptions about people they know nothing about.

Whether Nova Scotians who came from Syria or Ukraine or a long list of other countries, I want to say thank you for your contribution to Nova Scotia. You are welcome here.

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

GREEN FAMILY: SCHOOL SUPPLIES PURCHASE - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Green family and their team of volunteers at the Annual Minnie Bazaar in honouring Valerie Green Andrea. This year they changed their fundraising efforts. Rising costs are affecting people's ability to make ends meet and back-to-school costs are expensive. This year they decided that instead of awarding their bursary to one graduating student, they would spread the love a bit more and help multiple students get back to school.

The raised money from the bazaar was used to purchase school supplies, including a backpack, a lunchbox, water bottle, one back-to-school outfit, and lunch money for the first day. With gratitude and appreciation, I want to thank the Green family and their team of volunteers for a successful event and the help that they have provided some families with their back-to-school costs.

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

SAMPSON, MURDOCK: BASKETBALL COACHING - THANKS

JOHN WHITE: Speaker, for more than 20 years, Murdock Sampson has been a driving force behind various sports teams. His is a life dedicated to improving the lives of his athletes. His passion for coaching is evident in his relentless commitment to his players' development. He teaches not only the skills needed to win, but the values of discipline, teamwork, and perseverance.

In basketball, he's known for his strategic mind and ability to inspire his players to give their all in every game. On the baseball diamond, his deep understanding of the game helps his players excel in every aspect. In the bowling alley, Murdock's keen eye for technique and his motivational coaching style has led to many personal bests and league titles.

Coach Murdock's legacy is one of dedication and each season adds another glorious chapter to his unwavering commitment to his players. Thank you for all you do for our community, Murdock, and for our youth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

RUTHERFORD, TREVOR: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize a wonderful young man whom we lost in our community a few years ago, Trevor Rutherford. Trevor comes from a wonderful family. His parents, Walter and Cathy, are well known in our community and, as well, his brother and his best buddy, Mark. The community knows Trevor. Nothing could keep him down. He was a big part of the sports community in Cape Breton. You would find him at any basketball court or tennis court, he was a lifetime member of Cromarty, any sporting event, but particularly he had season tickets to the Cape Breton Eagles. He loved the Eagles, he loved going to the hockey games, and I can tell you that the community loved him very much.

He was a big part of many lives around the Sydney area and I rise in my place to send my love to Walter and Cathy, and to Mark, and remember a great guy whom a lot of people in our community really miss.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

COOK, BARBIE: N. CUMB. HEALTH CARE CTR. - THANKS

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, today I am very pleased to rise and recognize registered nurse Barbie Cook and thank her for her unwavering commitment to the delivery of health care in our area. Barbie is currently the Northern Zone director of Integrated Rural Health with the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and for several years she

was the site manager for both North Cumberland Memorial Hospital in Pugwash as well as the Lillian Fraser Hospital in Tatamagouche. With that role came responsibility for leading the team that built the new North Cumberland Health Care Centre.

Working with colleagues from Build Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and various contractors, Barbie and physician lead, Dr. Brian McFarlane, worked tirelessly for months and, in fact, years, to take the vision of a combined primary health care clinic, emergency care, and acute care facility and design it to serve the community of Pugwash and area now and into the future.

Please join me in congratulating the staff and physicians and, in particular, Barbie Cook on the opening of the new North Cumberland Health Care Centre.

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

LISA LACHANCE: Joining us in the West Gallery today are Dr. Kathy Russell, her father Leslie Russell, family members Aiden Russell and Sarah Pollard, and I invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House. (Applause)

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

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

RUSSELL, DR. KATHY: AAO AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

LISA LACHANCE: Speaker, I rise today to honour Dr. Kathy Russell, who will be the 2025 recipient of the American Association of Orthodontists Humanitarian Award. Dr. Russell has been selected to receive this award because of her exceptional contributions towards improving the quality of life, extending beyond the usual scope of private practice, academic functions, or organized dentistry.

Through her work as a professor at Dalhousie University's Faculty of Dentistry, Dr. Russell conducts research on the support of patients with craniofacial abnormalities, with a particular focus on cleft lip and palate. Dr. Russell currently holds the position of chair and orthodontist of the Cleft Palate Clinic at the IWK Health Centre and works with a number of organizations, including the American Cleft Palate Craniofacial Association, AboutFace, Operation Smile Canada, and the Nova Scotia Cleft Palate/Craniofacial Program.

Dr. Russell has treated both of my children, so I can personally attest to her patience and determination in the face of even the most challenging of patients. I'd like to conclude by congratulating Dr. Russell on this outstanding achievement and by thanking her for all the valuable work she has done in our community to earn it.

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

KITPU AVIATION: WILDFIRE RELIEF - RECOG.

HON. KEITH BAIN: On July 22nd, while residents and visitors on Potlotek Island were preparing for Mission to Saint Anne, a fire broke out. Five cabins caught fire, and because it was such a windy day, the blaze seemed impossible to contain.

Jennifer Jesty, the emergency resiliency manager for the Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq, received a call from Chief Wilbert Marshall and was able to use her years of training as a paramedic and firefighter to know what needed to be done. She sent out an emergency alert to all the communities on the island, telling everyone to evacuate immediately. Seeing pictures of the fire, she was sure the entire island would be devastated.

Calls were then made to the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, whose staff sprang into action. The next call went out to Chief Norman Bernard in Wagmatcook First Nation for their assistance. Wagmatcook had recently formed a partnership with Breton Air to create Kitpu Aviation. Kitpu tracked down a pilot who was able to find a water bucket, as theirs was being used for fires in Labrador. In less than an hour, the helicopter was dumping buckets of water on the island while another helicopter was evacuating people from the far end of the island.

So many people helped put out the flames that day, whether on the ground or in the air. Fortunately, because of the amazing work of everyone involved, the fire didn't get beyond these five cabins. For Kitpu Aviation, it was an opportunity to use their equipment to save and protect a sister community. As Jennifer Jesty said, their selfless actions will not soon be forgotten.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

FRIENDS OF CLAYTON PARK ASSOC.: COM. SERV. - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, today I rise to recognize the contribution of the Friends of Clayton Park Association. This association was started 18 years ago by P.J. Kapilan with a vision to help youth learn the value of volunteering and giving back to their community. I especially want to acknowledge the hard work of President Matthew Semaan, Vice-President A.J. Kapilan, and Treasurer Essa Hashem for their tireless efforts in bringing our community together.

This year, they not only organized the 18th annual free community barbecue at Veterans Corner with over 1,200 attendees, They also played a pivotal role in the success of our annual Heritage Day event at the Canada Games Centre. Thanks to their dedication and hard work, both events were resounding successes, providing free entertainment, fostering community spirit, and celebrating our rich cultural heritage.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing the Friends of Clayton Park Association for their unwavering dedication.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ORGANIZERS: SPREAD THE LOVE DAY - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: Speaker, I rise today to recognize a day in August called Spread the Love Day. Each year, for over the past ten years, youth from Phoenix Youth walk the streets downtown and in their community, spreading the love with sweet treats for folks with messages like “Life is a gift, cherish it” and “Be awesome.”

The day originated when a group of youth in the Mulgrave Park community were tired of hearing the negative narrative of their community by the media, and they wanted people to see the good that comes out of Mulgrave Park. They changed the narrative by creating Spread the Love Day, donning bright T-shirts and carrying candy, sharing their love with each passerby with a lovely message, for over 10 years.

I would like all members of this House to join me in thanking Naykia Hum, Nykeala West, and the staff of Phoenix Youth for starting this day and, as well, the participants of the program at Phoenix Youth for continuing to spread the love year after year.

The honourable member for Richmond.

NIECE, JADE RICHARD: NURSING HOME VISITS - RECOG.

HON. TREVOR BOUDREAU: Today I’d like to give a shout-out to someone who is very special to me - my nine-year-old niece, Jade Richard. Jade lives in a busy household with my sister Jessica, her mom and her dad Craig, and her three sisters, Layla, Emily, and Ellie.

Jade has a lot of skills, but one of her greatest is to connect with people. For the last number of months, Jade has been visiting the residents of the St. Anne Community and Nursing Care Centre, the nursing home in Arichat, close to her home. She makes it her purpose to go multiple times a week to visit her friends. Often Jade will go alone, but sometimes she brings some of her friends with her. I know her cousin Brooklyn and her cousin Grace go with her. Just last week, Jade took my daughter Kate with her to visit the residents.

I am very proud of Jade. This is something that really matters to her. I would say Jade is going to be going places. She plans on being an actress in Hollywood and I told her I will be her personal chiropractor when she does so.

I just want to let Jade know that Nokie, Trevor, and her whole family are very proud of her and to keep doing what she's doing and be the best person she is.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

GAUDET, PHILIPPE: COUNCIL SERVICE - THANKS

RONNIE LEBLANC: I rise today to recognize Philippe Gaudet, a dedicated municipal councillor from the Municipality of Clare, who will not be reoffering in the upcoming municipal election. Philippe, a Clare native, returned home after graduating from St. Francis Xavier University in 2011 and obtained his chartered accountant designation.

In 2020, he successfully ran for District 3, representing Church Point, where he resided at the time. During his tenure on council, Philippe served on several important committees, including the Planning Advisory Committee, the Audit Committee, and the Personnel Committee. He was also a member of the board of directors of la Villa Acadienne.

Beyond his work in municipal governance, Philippe is an active community leader, serving as president of the Atlantic Canada BBQ Championship society and vice-president of the Canadian BBQ Society.

I ask that all members join me in expressing our gratitude to Philippe Gaudet for his years of service to the municipality of Clare. Merci.

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

NDP MEMBERS: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: I rise today to recognize four people who are incredibly dear to me: Alex MacIsaac and Deanna MacIsaac, John O. Wilson, and his wife, Sandra Wilson.

Deanna and Sandra are the long-suffering wives of the two great NDPers in Cape Breton, Alex and John O. Instead of becoming widows to the Nova Scotia NDP, they decided to join with them, including Deanna allowing their honeymoon to take place during a big NDP convention.

Speaker, they do so much for our community. They do so much for the Nova Scotia NDP and for my EDA. They keep me steady and steadfast, and I want to shout out to all four of them for just being in our lives, being dear friends and dear champions. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

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

THE SPEAKER: Please do.

[9:45 a.m.]

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Speaker, in your gallery we have my family: my beautiful wife, Christine Doyle; my sister Nora Donnelly, who has been one of my biggest supporters since birth; and my daughter Sophie Halman. We have Emma Myatt, my stepdaughter; my stepson, Christopher Myatt; and we have my daughter Ella Halman. I ask my colleagues to please offer a warm welcome to my family to the House of Assembly. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Welcome, and we hope you enjoy your time here.

The honourable member for Argyle.

D'ENTREMONT, PAULINE: ARCHIVIST WORK - THANKS

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Speaker, I rise today to recognize Pauline d'Entremont of Lower West Pubnico on receiving the Anna Hamilton Award for her outstanding volunteer service to the Nova Scotia archival community.

The Anna Hamilton Award was established by the Council of Nova Scotia Archives in 2004 to honour one volunteer each year who has served the Nova Scotia archival community with sincere dedication and in an exemplary fashion.

Pauline has long demonstrated a keen interest in the Council of Nova Scotia Archives. She gives freely of her time to the archival community, spending countless hours volunteering at the Musée des Acadiens des Pubnicos, and is a role model for others.

I ask all members of this House to join me in thanking Pauline for her work as an archivist, and for her outstanding voluntary contribution to the Musée des Acadiens des Pubnicos and to our community. Félicitations, Pauline. Congratulations, Pauline.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MUN. COUNCILLORS: ELECTION - RECOG.

FRED TILLEY: Speaker, as we all know, municipal elections are happening in our province in October. In the area I represent, there are four municipal districts, and three of the four of those councillors have been elected by acclamation: Gordon MacDonald, Earlene MacMullin and Steve Gillespie. I just wanted to wish them some congratulations and best of luck. I look forward to working with them. In the fourth district, best of luck to all contenders, and remember to get out and vote and exercise your voice.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

JACKLYN, MERLE: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Speaker, I rise today to congratulate local barber Merle Jacklyn on his well-deserved retirement after 51 years in business. Merle kept his customers looking sharp in his quaint little barber shop that has been a staple in our community since the 1970s. His fingers work his clippers like magic, but they also do a fine job on his Ovation guitar.

After Merle announced his retirement this past May, social media was abuzz with stories about the incredible person that he is, making him a bit of a local legend. These stories range from him rescuing folks trapped on icy roads to making home visits when people were not well enough to visit his shop. Not only did Merle show up for work, but he showed up for members of our community in more ways than one.

I ask that all members join me in wishing Merle a happy and joyful retirement with his wife Sharon.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

PIERS, DAVID: 90TH BIRTHDAY - CONGRATS.

BRAEDON CLARK: Today I want to wish a happy 90th birthday to a constituent of mine in Bedford South by the name of David Piers. David turned 90 on September 7th. He was originally from Truro and is a true gentleman. I had the chance to talk to him last week, and I learned that he was and is one of the best tennis players Nova Scotia has ever produced. He was known as the King of Clay. His prime years were in the 1950s and the 1960s when he was undefeated for 15 years in a row.

His accomplishments include 58 Nova Scotia Open Championships, 46 New Brunswick Open titles, and 21 championships on Prince Edward Island, which is hard to believe but true. He played until he was 84 years old, actively playing tennis. He was inducted into the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame in 1988. He's a true gentleman and a

great athlete, obviously, among his other accomplishments. I just wanted to wish David a very happy 90th birthday.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

TRENDYS CLOTHING: 30TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I rise today to recognize Trendys Clothing store of Antigonish, which recently celebrated its 30th anniversary in business.

Michelle MacDonald opened her business on May 9, 1994, on Main Street in Antigonish. What started off as a women's and children's clothing store has grown to offer men's clothing, accessories, and home décor. In 1998, a new store was built where her father's business used to operate. Later, Trendys Clothing made one final move across the road to its current location.

I can tell you from first-hand knowledge that shopping at Trendys is a total shopping experience. You are always greeted warmly when you walk through the doors. Michelle and her team are there to help make sure you look and feel your best, offering up styles that suit customers best. Trendys celebrated this milestone with a sold-out brunch and fashion show this Spring. This event showcased the store's fashions and were modelled by customers.

I also want to mention that Michelle herself also celebrated a milestone birthday this year. Michelle, I hope you had a wonderful birthday. I ask all members of this House to congratulate Michelle and her staff on 30 years in business.

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next person, I noticed that it was starting to get a little loud in here. I would just ask that people keep to a quiet whisper.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

ORGANIZERS: CCPAC CONFERENCE - THANKS

LORELEI NICOLL: Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the importance of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees and the role they play in ensuring transparency and accountability in governments across Canada. From September 8th to 10th, I had the privilege of attending the annual conference in Quebec City as the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee for Nova Scotia. This conference brought together Public Accounts members and legislative auditors from across Canada to discuss key topics such as government accountability, auditing practices, and sustainable development. The discussions were invaluable in strengthening the oversight of public finances, and ensuring government operations remain transparent and efficient.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the organizers in Quebec City for putting together an enriching and insightful event. Their dedication to improving public accountability is deeply appreciated.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I don't know if anybody noticed the look that was given to me by the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, but over there, it's been very loud, and it's disrespectful to the person who is speaking. When you're speaking, I hope others do the same. Please, I ask that everyone keep to a whisper to respect the person who is speaking.

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

N.S. STAMPEDE: INAUGURAL EVENT - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: Speaker, I am proud to rise today to congratulate the great folks at the Central Nova Scotia Sports and Entertainment Group on hosting the inaugural Nova Scotia Stampede at the Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition grounds in Bible Hill.

This exciting event will be taking place Thursday, September 26th through Sunday the 29th and promises a thrilling blend of pro rodeo performances, featuring bull riding, barrel racing, and more, sanctioned by the International Pro Rodeo Association. Attendees will also enjoy authentic Nova Scotian foods and vendors.

The musical lineup is stellar, featuring Canadian talents like Natalie MacMaster, Donnell Leahy, George Canyon, and Tom Cochrane. With various options and experiences, the Nova Scotia Stampede is set to be an unforgettable celebration of East Coast culture. I invite everyone to come to Bible Hill, saddle up, and join in on the fun.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

GILLIS, DEBBIE: VOL. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

CARMAN KERR: This year, the Paradise Community Hall has nominated Debbie Gillis for the Annapolis County Volunteer Recognition ceremony. Debbie has given back to the community of Paradise for three decades. This includes mowing the grounds of the community hall, watering the hanging baskets of petunias, being a member of the Paradise Historical Society, and serving as president of the Paradise Community Hall. She has generously given her time and efforts as a 4-H leader, as a pony camp instructor, and as a hockey volunteer. She frequently took on volunteer roles at the schools where she taught family studies.

Speaker, I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Debbie Gillis on being celebrated this year at the Annapolis County Volunteer Recognition

ceremony. I thank her for all she does for our community to make it a better place to work, live, and play.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

AMHERST DBA: FAMILY NIGHTS - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, today I'm delighted to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Amherst Downtown Business Association. Their dedication and efforts have significantly contributed to the vibrancy and success of the Town of Amherst.

One of the highlights of their recent initiatives has been the success of family nights, organized by the Amherst Downtown Business Association and held on Thursday nights throughout the Summer. These events have brought together residents of all ages, creating memorable experiences and fostering a strong sense of community. Family nights have not only supported local businesses but also provided a valuable opportunity for families to connect and enjoy our downtown area.

I also would like to recognize Jeff Bacon, who is the Business Development Officer with the Town of Amherst, and all the staff of the Town of Amherst who helped with the Amherst Downtown Business Association in pulling off these successful family nights.

I want to extend my sincere congratulations to all involved. I'm very proud of their family nights this Summer in downtown Amherst.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

SLAUNWHITE, LINDA: VOL. AWD. RECIP. - CONGRATS.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Speaker, I rise to recognize Linda Slaunwhite of Terence Bay. Linda is serving as the chair of the Terence Bay Community Hall Association and received the 2024 Halifax Volunteer Award this past Spring. The award signified a well-deserved acknowledgement of Linda's hard work and community spirit.

Linda is recognized within the community as the definition of a go-getter and someone who is able to deal with any situation that comes her way. Trust me, she has my office on speed dial.

Linda has spent countless hours securing funding, recruiting volunteers, managing renovation projects, and hosting community events. She devotes hours to creating and nurturing a lively, dynamic place where people feel welcome, respected, and a vital part of the community. Linda has also been instrumental in organizing events to raise donations

for the Prospect Food Share program that has sustained countless families in our community.

I'd like the members of the House to join me in thanking Linda Slaunwhite for her dedication, commitment, and positive impact at Terence Bay and surrounding communities.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

MACMICHAELS, BETH: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

TOM TAGGART: I'm very happy today to tell you about a wonderful community-minded person. Beth MacMichaels is a retired high school teacher who was the IB Coordinator teacher and served as the head of the department, and is a past member of the board of regents at Mount Allison University.

After Beth retired, she recognized an opportunity for seniors to get more involved in her community, so she took on the role of organizing activities for seniors and other community members. Beth decided to centre her efforts around the Debert Legion, using the facility for activities.

Beth has been involved in teaching computer skills to seniors, which has aided citizens to be able to fill out applications online, including the Seniors Care Grant and the heating rebate. She has also set up a cyber café at the Legion and has initiated and/or participated in clean-up days and bottle drives. Beth is always willing to share a helping hand to others in need. She has a wealth of knowledge which she willingly shares with others.

Speaker, Beth has rejuvenated the senior population in Nova Scotia.

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

WINCHESTER, C./LANGILLE, H.: CITRUS SHACK - RECOG.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Speaker, I rise today to recognize two young entrepreneurs from Fairview-Clayton Park, Chase Winchester and Hayden Langille, who started their own lemonade business, Citrus Shack, this past Summer.

These two friends met in Primary in their French Immersion classroom at Burton Ettinger Elementary, and have been great friends for the last seven years. Their lemonade venture took them from their neighbourhood stand to Cleveland Beach where they were warmly welcomed by beachgoers and even received a visit from the local radio station Summer cruiser.

Through their hard work, Chase and Hayden brought refreshing lemonade and smiles to our community, showing entrepreneurial spirit well beyond their years. Their lemonade season may have come to an end, but the friendships and experiences they've gained are sure to continue growing as they start their Grade 8 year at Fairview Junior High.

Let us celebrate these young entrepreneurs for their initiative and success. Chase and Hayden have shown us the power of friendship and determination, and we look forward to seeing what they're going to accomplish next.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Speaker, a very quick introduction here. We have the Warden of the Municipality of the County of Inverness, Bonny MacIsaac, and the CAO, Keith MacDonald, with us in the gallery.

THE SPEAKER: Welcome and thank you for your service.

The honourable member for Pictou West.

MARSHALL, ANDREW: COM. SERV. - THANKS

MARCO MACLEOD: I rise today to acknowledge a hard-working, humble man who has beautified the Town of Pictou over the past year.

Andrew Marshall owns and operates North Shore Ballast on Browns Point Road in Pictou, and through this, he repurposes broken and old lobster traps at his shop. The rope is reused, and the trap wire is repurposed as rebar.

Andrew has recently built a fence along a 250-yard section of the road near the entrance to the Town of Pictou. The repurposed lobster trap frames are pieced together in a truly mesmerizing fashion which is not only aesthetically pleasing but symbolizes how strong and important the fishery has been to the community.

Speaker, it is an honour here to thank Andrew Marshall for his commitment . . .

[10:00 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time allotted for Statements by Members has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: POPULATION TARGET - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Every single week we are seeing the harms of the Premier's efforts to double the population without a plan. We are seeing that in exponential growth in homelessness, in exponential growth in costs for housing and rents, in overrun hospitals and overcrowded schools. We're told this is to ensure we have health care workers. We know that less than 3 per cent of the folks coming are for health.

We're told it's for skilled trades. We know the numbers that the Premier set targets for are twice as much as the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration is saying we need. We have to ask ourselves: Why is the government going beyond the targeted numbers that their own Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration is saying is sustainable and needed in the province?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Premier.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I would pose a question back to the Leader of the Official Opposition: How would he see the government preventing people from coming to the province, many of whom, after the pandemic, came from southern Ontario? They're Canadians. Are we to stand at the border of the province and say: "No, you're not allowed in"?

ZACH CHURCHILL: The minister knows that the department and the government have control over who's being nominated. If the minister would look at the documents in the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, he would see that his provincial nominations, according to the department, far exceed the target that's in the business plan. They far exceed the numbers that the department says are sustainable. We have to ask ourselves why.

I think the member for Kings West gave us the answer: You need to get taxes from somewhere, he said. The best option is having more people pay taxes. Is this government overexceeding their population growth targets beyond our capacity, beyond our housing, simply to get more revenue in their coffers?

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

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you to the member opposite for the important question. It gives me an opportunity to be able to reiterate that our department has a strategic plan for population growth. As the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board had also indicated, yes, in 2021 we grew as a province to hit that one million mark. That was significant. That was a turning point as a province to see growth and opportunity in the right way.

We know that before the pandemic and after the pandemic we saw the surge of interprovincial migration. That was something that wasn't necessarily planned for there, but we also know that supporting individuals to attach to housing, to attach to jobs is all, again, the focus of our department. We will continue to do that work, not only for folks . .

ZACH CHURCHILL: It's this Premier who said he had a target to double the population. It's this Premier who's hitting that target of over 28,000 people a year. It's this Premier and government that is exceeding the targets that their own Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, and the Department of Advanced Education, that minister's department, said we can accommodate.

We are seeing the impacts of that. On this side of the House, we see newcomers to this province as people, not revenue sources. Another example of that is last night - there's another example of this government not looking at these people as people. What did the Premier say last night? We want everybody but asylum seekers, assuming that asylum seekers fleeing persecution and war don't have the skills to support our economy here. My question to the government is: Why can't they defend their own plans to double the population and not attack asylum seekers at the same time?

THE SPEAKER: Order. When I say order, that means we're done. So I ask that there is no screaming out afterwards.

JILL BALSER: As a province, Nova Scotia, we have a humanitarian responsibility to be able to support those who are fleeing violence. In Nova Scotia we have a strong history of supporting refugees. Working hand in hand with the federal government, we know that through that process of sponsorship, community organizations step up.

I can speak to my own experience when I think of a Syrian family right in Digby who had stolen my heart from the day that I met them in 2015, when I was the YMCA settlement worker. We know that families like this are all across the province. It takes a whole community and a whole government approach to support newcomers to settle and stay and thrive.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the NDP.

ECC: COASTAL IMPACTS - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Nearly 90 per cent of our coast is privately owned, but we are coastal people, and we all have an interest in its protection and conservation. A recent study between researchers at Dalhousie University, Saint Mary's University, and McGill University looked at the impact of development on the Bay of Fundy and found that if coastal management was centred on individual property owners and infrastructure like seawall, the long-term impacts could include the loss of biodiversity and destruction of

coastal neighbourhoods from more intense storms. My question to the Premier is: Why is he willing to leave our ecosystem and our coastal neighbourhoods at risk?

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

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Our Coastal Action Plan is a fundamental overall component to us adapting and mitigating the realities of climate change. We know through the risk assessment that more intense storms are going to become more and more problematic. That is why we have the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, that's why we have the Nova Scotia Climate Plan, that's why we have the risk assessment, and that's why we now have the Coastal Action Plan. All of this working together will help support municipalities. Municipalities are responsible for zoning. As the provincial government, we are there to help support our municipalities as they work with their key stakeholders to ensure residents do not build in unsafe areas.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We also have, and have passed in this House, a Coastal Protection Act. A strategy is not an Act. Last winter, municipalities expressed deep frustration and confusion with this government's abandonment of the Coastal Protection Act, and this sentiment remains. As Councillor Larry Turner of the Municipality of Pictou County recently explained, "There's species at risk, there's nature that is going to be changed by coastal erosion. There's a whole dynamic that's happening other than human activity." The scale and complexity of the issues facing our coastlines require a province-wide act and regulations set by this government. Why is this government foisting what should be provincial responsibility for coastline onto municipalities?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: We have a shared responsibility to ensure the protection of our coastline. We have 49 municipal units that encompass 13,000 diverse kilometres of coastline. They know their communities best. Our role as provincial government is to be there to empower, to support. I am pleased that we now have a coastal coordinator in place with the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities to work with our municipalities to ensure that they develop the bylaws to ensure residents do not build in unsafe areas. This is a very granular issue. In some areas, we may have to retreat from the coastline. In other areas, other solutions may be required, and that is why we will work with our municipalities to ensure our residents are protected.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: This Act was designed to empower and support, and the consultation on the regulations reflected that granularity. In April, following this government's decision to abandon the Act, the results of the consultation with property owners from Fall of last year were finally released. These results showed a majority of respondents were in favour of rules to regulate development on the coastline and believed that these rules should come from this government. On the subject of this consultation, the Premier told us, "We listen to Nova Scotians very intently." My question is: Which Nova Scotians did the Premier listen to? If not the respondents to this or other rounds of

consultations, not the municipalities, not the hundreds of emails to the department, then who?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: I've been consistent over the past six months. There is a diversity of opinion on this, and we have arrived at an action plan that is balanced and comprehensive, that supports informed decision-making, that supports municipal leadership, along with deploying resources immediately.

I want to take this opportunity to correct the record. This morning when the NDP press release went out, it indicated the government refuses to release the results of its most recent public consultation. That is categorically false. On April 19th, we released the results of that report. We posted it on our website. I will table that report that was released April 19th, along with the information that is still available on our website today.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

LSI: POPULATION GROWTH PLAN - EXPLAIN

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, I think it is very clear that this government's population growth targets, which are double what the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration provincially says we can handle, are about the revenue. It isn't about the people. If it was about ensuring that people could be looked after when they got here, we would ensure we have a housing plan that is going to keep up with population growth.

Housing per capita isn't fruitful. Doctors per capita are in freefall in this province. Our schools are overcrowded. This Premier brags about housing starts - 6,000 this year. That's good, but we are going to hit his target to double the population this year. We need 13,500 new homes to do that. My question is: Why is this government targeting more people to bring into our province when we have not enough houses to look after people?

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

HON. JILL BALSER: Speaker, we have said all along, since the day that we'd taken office, that people are part of our plan. We completely agree. People are part of the solution so we can grow our population and build the housing and the infrastructure that's needed. When I say that our population growth strategy is strategic, just over the course since 2021 until now, we have increased immigration numbers in health care and construction workers by almost 90 per cent, making sure that we've got targeted efforts to make sure that we are processing candidates that we need. We also know that we are going to continue to grow in other ways through interprovincial migration and retention.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Less than 3 per cent of folks who have been brought in have been for our health care system. The other 97 per cent need more health care. If this Premier actually cared and prioritized the people, he wouldn't be taking cheap shots at refugees and

asylum seekers. He'd be defending his own plan for ROE. The fact that the Premier has assumed that, because people are fleeing war and persecution, they don't have the skills to be applied here in Nova Scotia, I think is shameful.

I will remind the Premier we have a refugee in this Chamber. We have descendants of refugees in this Chamber. I wonder if he's met Tareq Hadhad up in Antigonish, who is employing people. My question to the Premier is: Why can't refugees contribute to our economy as well?

JILL BALSER: Speaker, Nova Scotia has a very rich and important history of supporting refugees, immigrants, and newcomers of all kinds, and that is at the heart of what we do at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration. It is such an important topic when we are supporting people. When an individual chooses to come to our province, they deserve the wraparound supports, everything that they need to be able to thrive. Of course it's been clear we know that not everybody who comes to Nova Scotia came by their own choice, so when someone is fleeing unimaginable circumstances, we are going to continue to open up our hearts and open our homes and everything we can to support them in the best way possible.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

CCTH: MINERS MUSEUM PLAN ENTRY - ADMIT

FRED TILLEY: Mining is important to the culture, the history, and who we are as a people, not only in Cape Breton but also in Nova Scotia. From Glace Bay to Springhill, mining was a big part of all our communities. This is a personal thing for me, as my family was involved in mining. My grandfather, Fred Tilley, was the Miners Museum underground manager when it was built. This is a really important issue to me, and I would like to ask the government if, at some point, we are going to admit the Miners Museum into the Nova Scotia Museum plan.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: We certainly know it well in the constituency of Inverness with mines in Inverness, Port Hood and Mabou coal mines. My own grandfather was a miner as well. In fact, my father was born in Ontario because my grandfather was a miner, and he was mining there.

I think this is an important question. I think what they want at the Miners Museum is to be able to have the kind of revenues that they can lower ticket prices. I think that's what their real ask has been. That's what I have been hearing through the media.

I know my colleague, the member for Glace Bay-Dominion, is actually going to be meeting with the board on Monday, and I'm looking forward to hearing about how that conversation goes.

[10:15 a.m.]

FRED TILLEY: That's great that we're meeting with the museum because I think we'll get discussion going and improve things. I just want to bring to your attention that my understanding is there is a petition on the go, and it will be presented by the member for Glace Bay-Dominion next week. Will that change the direction? Will that move the government forward to bring this solution to the Miners Museum?

ALLAN MACMASTER: As I say, I'm looking forward to hearing the member for Glace Bay-Dominion and having an opportunity to sit down with him. I know this Summer I actually intended to take my own family to the museum. I just couldn't pull it off. I would like to get there because I know it offers a great experience.

I want to say that we want to work with the board there. I also want to acknowledge that of well over 90 museum sites in the province, the Miners Museum in Glace Bay ranks in the early 20s in terms of funding. If you look at community museums and provincial museums, they are actually ranking quite high on the list right now. We have to be cognizant of all museums in the province, but I want to work with the Miners Museum.

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

MAH: HALIFAX WATER ACCESS - IMPROVE

HON. BEN JESSOME: A few weeks back, the community of Upper Hammonds Plains was made aware of an issue with respect to access to the water that's in their community. Specifically, in the past they had to take the city and Halifax Water to court to get access to that water from the source that's in their backyard. They were having issues with water pressure. They met with Halifax Water and came to find out that the pipes are too small, and they can't even use the hydrants for fire suppression in that community - pretty shocking. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: Is a project to improve the situation like this possible through the critical infrastructure program?

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

HON. TONY RUSHTON: In my previous life as a fire chief, I can say that the hydrant systems are the responsibility of the municipality. Absolutely, there are projects that are out there through different levels of government, including provincial, that can be applied for. I'd encourage the local municipal council - I know elections are on right now. Certainly, this is a conversation that can be entertained by different levels of government, but it does lie on the responsibility for the municipality to make the application.

BEN JESSOME: I appreciate the response from the acting Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I know that Halifax Water is currently undertaking some reviews to

look at the situation. I know that in the coming weeks they will reach back out to the community to discuss the next steps. I just wanted to clarify whether this is something that, if necessary, funding could be leveraged through the provincial government to support getting this problem fixed. I will pass that information along to the community about applying, and I appreciate the minister's response.

TORY RUSHTON: I thank the member for the comment on that. I will advise the minister upon his return about the conversation. I can't stress enough, just in case there might be miscommunication there, that it can't be the community group - it has to come from the municipality applications.

I know there have been different projects since my time in the Legislature. Over the last six years, there have been improvements in water systems, sewer systems, roadways. Hydrant systems would be included on that. I look forward to sharing with the minister that conversation can be had in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

ECC: ENV. RACISM PANEL REPORT - TABLE

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. The recommendations from the Environmental Racism Panel were due to the province at the end of 2023. Nine months later, not only do Nova Scotians have no idea of this government's progress, but we also don't even know what the recommendations are. My question is: Why has there been no update from the minister on the panel's recommendations?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: This is an issue of great importance to Nova Scotians. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the panel who worked on this. Government has a draft report on this. This report encompasses Environment and Climate Change, the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, African Nova Scotian Affairs, and L'Nu Affairs. I want to assure the honourable member that the work is ongoing internally within the government for a final draft report. Once we have an update, we'll be providing that.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm glad to hear that there's a draft report. It would be nice to have some eyes on that so we can make some recommendations as well.

Lack of clean water, a lack of proper sewage, somebody having some kind of municipal dump next door to your community, or there's a factory. This is how panel member Augy Jones has described the experiences of many Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities. We have waited the better part of a year now for this report. These communities deserve to know what the panel found and what this Province is doing in

response. How much longer do we have to wait? Will the minister commit to tabling this report in this House within the next week?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Augy Jones for chairing that, along with the co-chair Lisa Young and all the panelists, for all the work that they've done. Absolutely, this is a province that has a history of environmental racism. That is why this government accepted that amendment in the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act.

I can assure the member that the work is ongoing on this final report between Environment and Climate Change, the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism, L'Nu Affairs, and African Nova Scotian Affairs. When that work is complete, we'll have an update to Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DED: CAPE BRETON RAIL LINE - SAVE

HON. DEREK MOMBOUQUETTE: This conversation came up in the last session of the House. It's something that's important and something that's talked about at home, and that's rail - what the future of rail is for the island.

We did hear some preliminary conversations about the line that connects Sydney to St. Peter's potentially in jeopardy of being dismantled. We also heard about light rail that CBU is actually looking at, which I would encourage up here as well. My question to the Minister of Economic Development is: Can I get an update on the conversations with the owner of the rail to date?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Connectivity, whether it is digital connectivity or whether it is physical connectivity of our transportation system, are key factors toward the economic success of Nova Scotia. I inquired earlier this week as to whether I could get a little info, particularly on the progress of the light rail study. I am still anticipating receiving news of that study later this Fall. I am waiting on that too. We continue to monitor the overall situation.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: It's something that we are monitoring as well. We know that CBU is doing the study on light rail. We know that there are other community groups that are looking at the trail system for a piece of the rail that is along the harbour. Ultimately, my question is about that connectivity from Sydney and beyond. During our time in government, when the current government was in Opposition, they were very aggressive towards the government when it came to protecting that critical piece of infrastructure because businesses wanted us to protect it. In a community that is now growing, it matters more than ever. My question to minister is: Does she feel that it's the end of the line for that piece of rail?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: There is a very clearly delineated process set by the federal government for the abandonment of a rail line when the owners of a line choose to do so. That process - there have been no notifications to date of that. The owner of the line has made it clear that it will depend on whether there is a business case. The Government of Nova Scotia agrees that is a thoughtful and correct way to proceed. If there becomes a business case, we would look to developments, but it rests in the hands of the owners.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

DOJ: VIOLENT INCIDENTS INCREASE - ADDRESS

CARMAN KERR: Speaker, over the last number of months, there seems to be a troubling increase in violent incidents in Annapolis and surrounding areas. In Kings West, we have a missing person case. In Digby-Annapolis, we've had a recent homicide. In Annapolis, we have had several serious crimes throughout the county. Annapolis residents are frightened. They have raised serious issues about concerns for their safety and the safety of the public in general. Despite the vital role that municipalities play in managing police services, it seems crystal clear that more supports are needed. My question to the Minister of Justice is: What specific steps is the provincial government taking to enhance safety in Annapolis and throughout rural Nova Scotia?

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: The expectation of all Nova Scotians is to be safe in their communities. I have had a number of conversations with various MLAs from across the province, especially down in that particular area. The violent crimes that are occurring in those communities have increased. I know that our Department of Justice, both with the existing municipal policing units as well as the RCMP, are in constant communication. There are some actions that I'm not at liberty to share, but I'll reference some of the other actions in my supplementary.

CARMAN KERR: I look forward to hearing more specifics. It's evident that the current approach isn't enough. A recent review by H Division of the RCMP highlighted that more officers are needed throughout Annapolis and beyond. I know that in Annapolis and beyond. I know that in Annapolis, there are several vacant positions within the RCMP. It makes this problem far worse than it should be. I'm wondering how the minister plans to ensure that provincial resources are effectively allocated to municipalities and what specific measures are being implemented to ensure our police departments have the support they need.

BARBARA ADAMS: Policing is a responsibility for the Province that we take very seriously. Working with the RCMP, especially in terms of their staffing issues, is something that we have regular meetings on every week. There is progress in terms of hiring across the province, as we did down in the Clare-Meteghan area. We doubled the policing in that area as well, going from 7 to 14 police officers. That's just one of the responses that's ongoing.

Of course, each of the municipalities reviews their own policing levels. One of the other things that we do is we continue to support the additional officers program that provides funding to police that directly respond to the local issues.

[10:30 a.m.]

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

DHW: SENIOR WAIT TIMES - EXPLAIN

LORELEI NICOLL: I was contacted by a constituent who shared her troubling experience seeking medical care for her 84-year-old husband in a walk-in clinic in Dartmouth. With a population of approximately 100,000 people and growing, they found there was only one clinic open, and after hours of waiting, many patients were turned away due to the limited availability of doctors. This is not acceptable, especially for our seniors who need timely and accessible care. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness is: How can this government justify the severe lack of health care resources in Dartmouth with one walk-in clinic forcing seniors to wait for hours - often with no guarantee of being seen?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Across the province, we are building health homes, collaborative care centres, and looking at how we can support individuals in creating more access of evenings and weekends. For the most part, physicians are private individuals. They have private businesses. The majority of them are incorporated and, as such, set their own hours of work and the model of care. We continue to work through the recent contract to incent physicians for attachment. We incent them for having hours outside of regular business hours.

We are looking at improving the quality of the services they are able to provide through team-based care, so we are working across the province to look at how we expand services. There is sometimes little that we can do about the model if people are incorporated.

LORELEI NICOLL: This situation is not isolated. Residents across Dartmouth are struggling to access basic medical care due to the shortage of doctors and clinic hours. For an entire population to rely on one single clinic with unpredictable availability is putting undue stress on both patients and health care providers. Seniors, especially, cannot endure these conditions. What is the minister's plan to immediately address the health care needs in the Dartmouth area to ensure residents without doctors, particularly seniors, have access to the in-person care they need without sitting on the floor and being turned away?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: There are a number of options that are available. In a walk-in clinic environment, that would tell me that this is likely episodic care that the individual requires and, as a result, there are a number of options. There certainly is virtual

care that is available to folks, whether you are on the Need a Family Practice registry or not. In the event that you need to see someone in person, you can be referred quickly. Additionally, we have very highly trained pharmacists across this province who can offer primary care through the pharmacy walk-in clinics and through appointments. There are a number of options that are available to folks. If individuals are not using the app - we know the majority are between 50 and 80 - certainly 811 is also an opportunity to navigate the system.

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

DCS: INDEPENDENT MONITORING REPORT FINDINGS - EXPLAIN

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Community Services: In the first annual progress report on the *Review and Remedy for the Findings of Systematic Discrimination Against Nova Scotians with Disabilities*, this government claimed that they were making significant progress. The *Independent Monitor Report on Implementation of Disability Remedy* disagreed. While this government claimed that 53 items were in exact compliance, the *Independent Monitor Report* found only 17 items were. Can the minister explain why this government vastly overstated their progress on the remedy?

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We're meeting every day with the proponents. We're working through the remedy. Disability Support Program Services - we've reduced the wait-list by 13 per cent. This is not a 100-metre dash; this is a marathon. We have five years to get this done. We're moving forward. In fact, if the member had read the entire report, there were a lot of complimentary things in that report about what the government is doing. There's more to do, there are more things to improve on, and that's why we're meeting with our service providers right across this province each and every day.

KENDRA COOMBES: I did read the report. That's how I know it was vastly overstated of their accomplishments. The *Independent Monitor Report* made 14 recommendations for this government to move toward a fulfillment of the obligations to Nova Scotians with disabilities. These recommendations range from enhancing transparency and consistency in reporting to improving collaboration with the Disability Rights Coalition. Given that this government has had the experts' report for over a month, will the minister stand and commit to implementing all 14 recommendations?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: We're committed not just to the 14 recommendations but to the entire report. That's what we're doing. As for transparency, we are meeting with our service providers, we're talking to individuals who are impacted, we have staff on the ground, working with people that are impacted. Not just the people who are impacted, but their families, to make sure that they have the choice when it comes to remedy.

What I would say to that member is we now have a website up that's available to everyone in the public, that shows our progress. There's lots to do over the five-year process, and we're on our way.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

ECC: SAULNIERVILLE WHARF - CLOSE

RONNIE LEBLANC: The United Fisheries Conservation Alliance is calling on the provincial Department of Environment and Climate Change to work with its partners to close the Saulnierville wharf due to an oil spill in the harbour. This poses a major threat to the environment and the safety of our seafood. The Alliance is calling for the immediate closure of the wharf to prevent further damage and contamination. My question to the minister: Will the Minister act now to shut down the Saulnierville wharf to ensure that a full environmental cleanup begins immediately?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: As the honourable member knows, this is an issue I follow very closely given my personal connections to that region of Nova Scotia, which I consider my second home. I'm certainly aware of the Alliance's recommendation. In point of fact, on the regulatory side, it's DFO and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency who are regulating this.

My Inspection, Compliance and Enforcement Division has been in contact with those agencies, and I want to assure the honourable member, while we don't have a specific regulatory role, my ICE division - Inspection, Compliance and Enforcement - has been in contact with those agencies. We continue to monitor the situation, obviously, given the importance of the fishery in that part of Nova Scotia.

RONNIE LEBLANC: I want to thank the minister for that response. The oil spill not only threatens St. Mary's Bay, but it also jeopardizes the reputation of Nova Scotia seafood exports. We cannot allow contaminated lobster to be sold or consumed. The UFCA have footage of lobster being floated at the wharf where an oil spill is present. Will the minister commit today to working with his federal counterparts to close the wharf and protect both our fishery and the livelihood of those who depend on them?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. KENT SMITH: Thank you to the member opposite for raising this concern here in the House. We share the concern. We know that lobster is our largest export. I don't know if anyone has heard me say it before here in this House, but \$1.2 to \$1.3 billion worth of lobster is exported from this province every day. The people whom I talk to worldwide compliment the quality of the product that we produce.

Certainly, when there are concerns of contamination, we take that very seriously. The full responsibility to verify that falls on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Our compliance officers have been in contact with them to ensure that they're doing what they're supposed to do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

ECC: NET ZERO GOAL - ENSURE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: HRM is asking the Province to adopt the 2020 National Building Code and National Energy Code to give Halifax just a chance of achieving its goal of net zero by 2030. These code changes would lower emissions, lower long-term energy costs, and it's estimated that by making these changes, the Province would create 15,000 jobs a year. Will the Minister of Environment and Climate Change ensure that his government updates the Provincial Building Code to align it with national standards that were created four years ago?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: That is a significant lift. That National Building Code, I believe, is the first modernization in 35 years. The Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing engaged in consultation in the Summer of last year, and at this juncture I can tell you the responsibility of adopting the National Building Code rests with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and more time is needed to effectively plan and adapt to the new code required. The department is committed to adopting the code, but they want to ensure that the timing is right for that. I want to take this opportunity to also commend HRM and all our municipal units. There are so many great climate initiatives taking place among our municipalities.

IAIN RANKIN: Yes, it is a responsibility of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing, but it is a commitment from the minister's own climate plan released two years ago - the same plan that committed to a Coastal Protection Act, which was first delayed and then ultimately scrapped. The changes are good for the environment and affordability, saving Nova Scotians money on their power bills, yet we have a delay. Is this minister still committed to the changes of the Building Code, and if so, when?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: We have in Nova Scotia the first fully funded climate change plan since 2009. We have 68 goals in that plan that are helping us reduce greenhouse gas emissions, that are helping us transform how we produce and use energy, that are helping us achieve our 20 per cent land and water conservation targets. We have 28 goals legislated. I'll remind this House we have been ranked third in Canada after British Columbia and Quebec in terms of our climate change response. I will provide for the House our annual update to Nova Scotians, which is our third annual update. I'll table that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DHW: HEALTH CARE CEO FIRING - EXPLAIN

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Yesterday here in the House, I reminded everyone that one of the first things the Premier did when he came into his role was fire the CEO medical doctor running our health care system as well as the board of directors that provided proper governance and oversight. Every time I see decisions made in our health care system that are leading to poor health outcomes, I always wonder if there's a correlation that a lawyer is running our health care system and not a medical doctor or professionals.

I'll give an example: Before the pandemic, or when the pandemic happened, rapid testing for strep A was removed from our emergency departments and from doctors' offices and have not been replaced, leading possibly to unnecessary deaths. Can the minister explain why rapid testing for strep has not been replaced in our ERs?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I find that quite insulting - that the member would think that anybody who is running the health care system would withhold any type of testing or any type of treatment from Nova Scotians. I find that quite insulting and quite dangerous, in fact. We have invested an incredible amount of money. Our health care system has leading experts in the world in our health care system. We adhere as health care professionals to standards of practice and a code of ethics, and as a former registered nurse, I think that individual should understand that very clearly.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The fact is it is irresponsible for this government not to have rapid strep testing in our emergency departments. In fact, I'll table articles where strep A is on the rise here in Nova Scotia. We know that. The incidents of rapid strep have killed more people this year than in the previous year. The numbers have more than doubled.

If strep A is on the rise, why would you not put that rapid test, where you could have the results in 45 minutes - now doctors do not get the results for 72 hours, and then sometimes people don't have a family doctor and the person goes undiagnosed. People are dying in this province, possibly unnecessarily. I think it's a valid question to ask: Does a lawyer have the ability to lead our health care system?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I've worked with a number of health care . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that the member for Cumberland North wait for the response to her question.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As the member would know, yes, testing is an important part of the clinical treatment plan, but there are other things that physicians, nurse practitioners, and our health care workers use in order to diagnose and treat some patients. That is one single data point.

Yes, a rapid strep test can provide information, but we know that there is also lab-based care. There is a physical assessment by the physician. There is nothing being held back in this province by our clinicians. We give them every opportunity to provide care. Again, I think it is incredibly insulting for a former registered nurse to insinuate that our health care workers are influenced by anything other than their standard . . . (Interruption)

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

DCS: VACANT LAND TAX - IMPLEMENT

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. While many Nova Scotians are struggling to find a place they can afford, there are far too many examples of unrestricted land banking - vacant lots sitting undeveloped instead of becoming desperately needed, affordable housing. My question for the minister is: Will this government do the logical thing and commit to a vacant land tax to put more homes within reach for Nova Scotians?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Speaker, as the Minister of Community Services, what I would say to that member is, you know, we don't want the cost of living to go up more and more. We don't want new taxes. The last time the NDP were in government, they raised taxes. Now they are in opposition saying, If we get back in power, we are going to raise taxes again. Nova Scotians are faced with an affordability crisis. We are working on it. We've raised DSP payments by 300 per cent. We've indexed income assistance. There are lots of things we've done that they voted against, but I guess we now know where their mindset is.

KENDRA COOMBES: Speaker, we know this government doesn't want to raise taxes on their developer friends. Earlier this year, HRM council explicitly requested that the Province provide them with the legislative authority to tax vacant land. I will table that. Such a tax could not only increase development but also raise funds for affordable housing projects. My question to the minister is: Why is this government sitting on an idea that would spur development and create more funding for more affordable housing?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'll tell the honourable member that I don't have developer friends. I barely have friends, so you can shoot that one down. (Laughter) That's the truth. That's the truth.

Speaker, there is this myth from the Opposition that housing is not happening. Let me read you this:

More new homes being built in N.S. this year than any 1st quarter since the 1940s.

“When we compare the new construction that's happening in Nova Scotia to the rest of the country, we are way ahead,” said Kelvin Ndro, a senior analyst with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's market insights team.

“And I think that HST rebate . . .” (not a tax increase) “. . . is quite a factor,” he said, because the province “has kind of matched what the federal government is doing, but we haven't necessarily seen that in other provinces.”

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Speaker, in March of this year, 70 women joined us here in the Legislature to request changes to breast cancer screening. The minister spoke with the women and promised to do her best to look into it. I requested a meeting with the minister in April to work collaboratively with some outside experts. I received a response from the minister, which I will table, basically saying the minister and Dr. Siân Iles would not meet with us.

My question to the minister is: Today is she willing to commit to a meeting with myself, Dr. Siân Iles, Dr. Paula Gordon, and Dense Breasts Canada, who have much-needed information? They've moved forward, but our province is stuck in the past (interruption) on this.

THE SPEAKER: Order. The time has elapsed.

The time allotted for Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers has expired.

The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Speaker, I'd like to rise on a point of order. Twice during Question Period, the Minister of Health and Wellness questioned my code of ethics. That is questioning my integrity. I should be able to stand in this House and ask a question, a medical question, for the people and on behalf of the people of this province, without having my character defamed.

I will also add to that that I am still a registered nurse, and I am proud to be, and I am proud to say that I have a strong code of ethics and I believe it is ethical to ask the question why rapid testing is not available so people can be diagnosed in four to five minutes.

THE SPEAKER: Order. Thank you for raising your point of order. That is what you do but I do not find that this is a point of order. I do not feel that anything has been breached and I thank you.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Would you please call Bill No. 459, the Health Professional Associations Continuation Act.

Bill No. 459 - Health Professional Associations Continuation Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Speaker, I do ask that Bill No. 459 be read for a third time.

As we briefly talked about in this House before, this is really a housekeeping bill supporting our licensed providers in having accompanying associations as we move towards the Nova Scotia Health Professional Regulations Act.

We've worked very closely with the associations involved and I feel that this is simply a housekeeping item and will help us modernize and transform our health care system.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I am happy to rise and briefly speak to Bill No. 459, the Health Professional Associations Continuation Act. As we continue to understand, this is a simple administrative bill that on its own is uncontroversial. Nothing has changed since

the last time we spoke to this bill. We did not hear from anyone from Law Amendments Committee and no new revelations have emerged about this piece of legislation.

Our caucus is happy to support these changes that improve public safety, enhance oversight, and standardize approvals and licensing of dental and vision providers and have the support of the professional bodies in question. Yet we would be much more energized if we were able to stand up and speak to the efforts to make dental and vision care more affordable for Nova Scotians.

With the rising costs of goods like housing and groceries, we know that too many Nova Scotians are struggling to pay for necessary appointments and prescriptions. Our province provides only a minimum coverage of these services. For a government supposedly fixing the health care system faster, we would expect bolder, more innovative actions in these two areas that are both medically necessary and hitting the pocketbooks of Nova Scotians hard, but all we have in front of us is an administrative piece of legislation.

As our party gives our support to this bill, we encourage this government to do better in ensuring that Nova Scotians have access to vision and dental care that they can afford.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I did speak briefly to this bill yesterday and I'm pretty much going to say the same thing all over again - this is good that we have a standardized process for associations to continue their work. I did note at the time the importance that both dental and vision care have to Nova Scotians and that, of course, there is a link between poor dental health and poor heart health, for example. This is important. It always does quite shock me that we expect people to pay for something so important up front, because if you don't have good dental health, you know it, and it can be excruciatingly painful if you don't.

I would note that I am pleased that we have seen that so many Nova Scotians - and again, I don't have a total number for Nova Scotia, I know what it is in my own federal riding - but 4,385 people are now covered under the new federal Canadian Dental Care Plan. It would be nice if maybe the provincial government stepped up and provided some vision care for Nova Scotians, because in the last year, my vision's declined quite a bit. I don't need glasses to see far off, but I do for reading. I went from a 1.50 to a 2.00 sort of over a couple of months.

If you can't see, it's hard to do a lot of tasks, and it's hard for Nova Scotians to have good overall health. If you can't see up close, you can't open your bottle of pills because you don't know which one it is. I would just say that both of these are important. If the government is focused on improving the health of Nova Scotians, as we hear over and over again, it would be good if they were looking at programs, in the case of dental

health, to augment the federal one, and in the case of vision health, could do our own program here. We did not hear, as my honourable colleague mentioned, any concerns with this particular plan at Law Amendments Committee, so our caucus will be supporting this bill.

THE CHAIR: If I am to recognize the honourable Minister of Health and Wellness, it will be to close debate on Bill No. 459.

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I move that we close third reading of Bill No. 459 - Health Professional Associations Continuation Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 459.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 464.

Bill No. 464 - Stronger Workplaces for Nova Scotia Act.

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

HON. JILL BALSER: I rise today to move third reading of Bill No. 464, the Stronger Workplaces for Nova Scotia Act. It has been more than 20 years since the last comprehensive review of the workers' compensation system. Our review was long overdue.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to the hundreds of Nova Scotians who shared their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions during our consultations. Your input has been invaluable. I also want to thank the members of the Nova Scotia Workers' Compensation System Review Committee for their dedication. Additionally, I'd like to recognize all those who presented at Law Amendments Committee to speak to the bill. To my colleagues, and in particular to the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, thank you for raising your voices and offering thoughtful amendments throughout this process.

I'd like to take a moment to respond to the amendments and explain why we've chosen to move forward with the bill as it stands. First and foremost, I believe we all share the same goal: providing Nova Scotia workers with stronger protections and support. That's why we're acting quickly on the key recommendations from the review committee.

This bill addresses return-to-work provisions under the Workers' Compensation Act. This includes requirements for employers to develop policy to prevent workplace harassment. These changes will allow us to move forward with regulations needed and to add detail and clarity. For example, we've worked closely with partners to develop a clear definition of harassment. This definition will include bullying, sexual violence, and other forms of inappropriate conduct.

[11:00 a.m.]

These protections are critical to ensuring a safer and healthier work environment for everyone. Our Stronger Workplaces for Nova Scotia legislation is guided by the Meredith Principles, which are the foundation of the workers' compensation system. To maintain accountability, this bill mandates regular five-year reviews. We will ensure that the review committee includes a diverse group of qualified members.

The Workers' Compensation Board is already working on a strategic plan to improve service standards. We will hold them to high performance measures to ensure that these improvements benefit both workers and businesses.

We are also strengthening our commitment to protecting workers who are dealing with a serious illness. No one should have to worry about their job while battling a major health issue. We are introducing a 27-week unpaid leave for employees facing serious illness or injury. This will ensure that workers have the job protection they need, allowing them to focus on their recovery without worrying about job security.

These changes align with the federal government's employment insurance sickness benefits, providing a more comprehensive safety net. We've already heard from community partners who welcome these changes, and I thank them for their comments and their support. We've said that to improve job protection for those with serious illness or injury will make a real difference in people's lives.

We're also creating a streamlined approach should health documentation be requested by an employer for serious illness leave. Our goal is to support both employers and employees with clear, straightforward procedures.

This legislation will further amend the Labour Standards Code to provide five unpaid sick days for general illness. This is in addition to the three unpaid days already allowed for medical appointments and family illness leave.

We are taking a more balanced approach. Offering five days of unpaid leave is a significant step forward, and it's a change that is long overdue.

When I was first appointed as minister, I made a commitment to myself and my community that I would be - and I wanted to be - a minister of action. I would not shy away from making the changes that we needed to build stronger workplaces for Nova Scotia. The decisions we have made as a government and as a department are informed by the experiences and the feedback of Nova Scotians, and I take their concerns to heart. We are committed to supporting them.

This is just the beginning. With this bill, we are setting the stage for continued improvements that will positively impact all Nova Scotians. The bill will modernize the workers' compensation system. It will enhance the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include psychological health and safety. It will support workers dealing with serious illness or injury. It will strengthen our workplaces, and by doing so, it will make our province stronger.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: We know the decision to extend job-protected leave from three days to 27 days ensures that Nova Scotians facing a serious illness can take the necessary time off without fear of losing their job.

In Nova Scotia, we pride ourselves on its people - people who desire and deserve good policy. There is no room for politics when it comes to good policy, and as always, I acknowledge and thank those Nova Scotians who contact us on a regular basis to point out where policy needs improvement - in this case, Kathy MacNaughton of Westville, who contacted the member for Bedford Basin through the Canadian Cancer Society.

Nova Scotians look to their government representatives to lead our province with good policy, and I recognize the dedicated work of the Minister and the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration for engaging and consulting with community partners to form the bill that's before us for third reading today. Bill No. 464 will make such a meaningful difference in the lives of Nova Scotians during their most difficult moments, without the added mental stress of worrying about their job security.

In closing, I would like to ask the minister if she could, in her closing remarks, expand on the return-to-work provisions on your Clause 18 respecting workplace harassment. It was tried to be amended but for bullying - but I would like to get more information with regards to what it is implying with this bill.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I want to reaffirm the Nova Scotia NDP's support of this bill and of the step forward it is taking in protecting Nova Scotian workers and modernizing the WCB.

I said this in second reading and I want to acknowledge these people again: To every single worker who came before my office and my colleagues' offices, from the Liberals to the PCs, I want to thank them. It takes a lot of courage and a lot of strength to be able to tell your story, especially when the final words I would often hear in my office would be - especially for those experiencing trauma - "Not only have I experienced trauma in my workplace, but I've experienced trauma dealing with the WCB. I feel retraumatized." They would say: "The WCB gave me PTSD. If I didn't have it before, I have it now."

I want to thank every single one who came and told their stories because it is truly remarkable and the strength that they had to have - some of them had to build themselves up. Some of them fell apart and had to rebuild themselves back up after telling their stories. Every one of them was quite harrowing.

I want to thank the unions that pushed for this and the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour that also pushed for this review. I want to thank the review committee and I want to thank the minister for listening.

In my experience in this Chamber, when we put forward bills, you don't see them being read as they hit the minister's desk immediately. I always watch where my bills go and who is looking. I will say this: the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration always looks at the bills and she wants to talk to you about those bills.

I would come to her, when she became the minister, with all my labour - here's everything, here's the WCB, here's protection for workers issues and, if you don't mind, during one of our conversations: How do we fix it? I said, "Don't worry, minister, within a day I'm going to give you the road map in a bill." She said, "I'm going to watch for that," and she did.

I want to give this time to thank you because without a minister actually taking action, our bills could sit on the order paper with nothing happening. That hurts Nova Scotians, that hurts our communities. I want to thank the minister for being a minister who actually takes action and takes it quite quickly, especially on the aspect of when I talked about the WCB, so I thank you.

During the review I don't know how many of you had the privilege to go to the consultations. I did. I took advantage - I think I even showed up when I wasn't supposed to and tried to get myself into the room because I knew it was important and I knew so many people had a stake in it.

When I was in that consultation and I was hearing people telling their stories again - some of them I had already heard and some of them I was just learning - to actually have people in that consultation process taking notes and then asking follow-ups on those notes that they were taking - it was extensive. The consultation was great - as well as to the ministers for saying: "Anyone who comes in with their story, please send them my way. I want to hear them, and I'll pass them along." Also, the website - just keep sending them. They're going to be monitoring.

Thank you for allowing that extensive consultation because - please take no, or take some offence, I guess - not often do we have that side of the House doing this type of consultation that needs to be done before a bill comes forward.

There are positives in this bill. Serious illness leave - wonderful. The Canadian Cancer Society has been advocating for this. So have many others. This brings us in line, as the minister has said, with the federal employment insurance timeline. For people suffering from serious illness or injury, knowing that their job is protected while they take the necessary steps to heal is important.

Another positive is that it updates the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Workers deserve a safe workplace, free from harassment. I'm glad to see that this bill takes concrete action towards this by requiring employers to implement a harassment prevention policy. I will, though, say that putting bullying into the definition of harassment is probably not the best way to go considering they are two distinct things.

To all the ministers here: Bullying is something that is happening in your departments, especially the Department of Community Services. I hear about that department a lot from many people. (Interruption) Sorry, the minister is speaking there. They're too scared. They're too scared to talk about it, but they do, because guess what? There has been a committee struck to deal with that bullying.

THE SPEAKER: Order. There is a member speaking. I ask that everybody respect that that member is speaking.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: There has been a committee struck within the Department of Community Services to deal with that bullying. It is real. It is something that is happening. We need to change that culture. I ask the minister to please think about adding bullying as its own distinctive issue.

Another highlight is the move to regular reviews of WCB. The recent review was the first one in, I think, 24 years or so. That should never have been. The review should always happen with 5-year or 10-year cycles because it has just been too outdated.

I want to speak to the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour's comments from the news, because it was a good news story. The president of the federation said:

We are pleased to see the government taking steps to improve the workers' compensation system. We support the idea of reviewing the system every five years and look forward to collaborating with both the government and stakeholders. Injured workers would experience several benefits from improved awareness and understanding of the workers' compensation system. With a better understanding of their rights and the processes involved, injured workers can make more informed decisions regarding their claims, treatment options and return-to-work strategies.

I'll table that.

[11:15 a.m.]

Despite this, we have heard from the labour unions at Law Amendments Committee, representing thousands of Nova Scotians, that there were many clear and simple ways to improve upon this bill and ensure greater protection for workers. We listened thoughtfully through the several presentations, pored over the pages of submissions, and yesterday brought several changes in response as proposals to this House. This included adding a clear definition of serious illness that matches what is used federally for the Employment Insurance program. That made sense to us. If you need to take the leave for serious illness, and we're creating job protection, we should define serious illness as Employment Insurance does. It made perfect sense to us, and we thought that was an achievable amendment.

Clarifying and improving the documentation process - with that, we were just trying to basically do what this government talks about all the time, and that's streamline. Why burden an individual who is ill and going through treatments with having several documents that they have to have? Our concept was that Employment Insurance requires a medical certificate. That should just be good enough and accepted by all employers. If the employer didn't think it was good enough, they would have to pay for that employee to go and get a further document. That made absolute sense to us. It's streamlining, and it's also taking the burden off our health care system and off the individual who is going to be seeking treatment.

Including paid sick days, as the NSGEU noted in their Law Amendments submission, unpaid sick leave is a disincentive for people to stay home while ill, and creates more financial stress and disadvantage during a time when many families are already living through an affordability crisis. It was highlighted in the Law Amendments Committee by CUPE that no number of unpaid sick days is meaningful if workers cannot afford to take them.

The NDP has been championing paid sick leave for years. We have been championing 10 paid sick days since 2020 when we had COVID and it was recommended that 14 days was required for quarantine. Ten paid sick days made absolute sense. Our Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Strang, stated that was a good policy in many committees where he attended as a witness and was asked on this policy. He even expanded, saying that it's not just COVID-19, it's having the flu, it's salmonella poisoning. This just made sense.

We will continue to push for paid sick days because it truly is only those who can afford to take the unpaid sick days whom unpaid sick days actually has an advantage for. If you are a clerk in a grocery store, if you are a server at a restaurant, if you are a single parent trying to make ends meet, if you are someone who works as a custodian, it does not work for you. You are going to go to work sick because you can't afford to miss that paycheque.

It also makes sense to the employers of this province, because if one worker gets sick and comes into work, they're getting everybody sick. We've seen it in this Legislature. Someone comes in sick and, oh boy, does it go through this Legislature fairly quickly. It makes sense, when we tell people to stay home while they're sick, to give them the ability to do that by giving them paid sick days.

Expanding the inclusion of harassment in the OHS to also include workplace bullying. This was something that came to us in the Law Amendments Committee through the presenters. It is also something that many provinces recognize - the distinctness between what is bullying and what is harassment. We heard in Law Amendments how prevalent workplace bullying is and that many provinces already included this. We need to do that. It needs to be distinct from harassment because it is a totally different animal unto itself.

Nobody should have to go to work and be bullied. We tell our children not to bully. We wear our pink shirts, and we say no to bullying, and yet it is pervasive in the workplace - adults bullying other adults. It is just so pervasive and, like I said, I have had people coming into my office, calling me. They don't want to put it in emails. They want a phone call, or they want to see me in person in case it ever got out that they're being bullied at work.

One example is somebody who is sensitive to scents, scent sensitivity, and an employee - I think it was actually a manager - would wear their cologne very heavily every day, and that worker would have to be sent home every day. That's one example. Another example is somebody who was very sensitive to scents but also fumes. I forget if it was their office or their cubicle - it was moved to underneath the garage where they would smell the exhaust fumes every day. Others have been bullied by having their schedules changed. Somebody would go into their computer that morning and find that their schedule has been

changed from a week ago. All of a sudden, instead of working at 8 o'clock when they thought they were supposed to be working, they're expected to be at work at 7 o'clock.

Some people couldn't take cases because of conflict of interest, and they would continue to be put on those cases that they have a conflict with every day. They'd have to go back every day and say, "I have a conflict with this. I've already declared it." Guess what? The next time that case came up, they were given it again. That is part of bullying - when someone is telling you "I have a conflict," and someone is continuously trying to put you on that case. When your time changes - which, by the way, is against the collective agreements to actually change a person's schedule without telling them and without their permission within two weeks - that's bullying. It is pervasive and it needs its own distinctness.

The minister discussed that the Meredith Principles do guide WCB, but it's been a long time since any worker has seen those principles actually guiding WCB. Ask any worker: "Did you have to fully prove that you were injured on the job? Did you have to fully prove, show all the documentations, that your PTSD was due to your job?" How many times did that worker have to do it? Guess what? It went to tribunals and WCAT in order for them to finally prove that their injury occurred at work. One of the first things in the Meredith Principles states that it does not matter how the injury occurred. That is why the minister may say that the Meredith Principles guide WCB. But when was the last time we've seen those principles actually reflected? When has a worker not had to prove a hundred times over that their injuries occurred at work, and how they occurred?

Also, how many times have we said that WCB is not fully funded? That's part of the Meredith Principles of WCB being fully funded. That is why it must be enshrined within the legislation - so that the Meredith Principles can actually be reflected. Making sure employees' return-to-work plans are guided by the doctors' advice and meaningful and flexible work is offered as an alternative is incredibly important. As I've said in this Chamber a number of times, so many workers are being forced back to work because a WCB doctor who has never touched the patient, never seen the patient, never treated the patient, is saying that it takes this amount of time for that surgery or for that injury to heal.

That's it - WCB cuts you off. WCB will cut you off because it takes eight weeks for that bone to heal. Regardless of anything happening, there it is. You go back to work. You're cut off. You're forced to go back to work, and guess what happens? An injury re-occurs. Taking a doctor's advice, the physician, the person who is treating the injured worker must be taken into consideration, or else we're going to have more burdens on our health care system - as long as a doctor's advice goes unheard and ignored.

The return-to-work plan has to be meaningful so that workers feel like they are contributing to their workplace and not demeaning. That was one of the things that was raised by the presenters as well.

Finally, requiring that there's adequate employee representation in each of the WCB reviews going forward is incredibly important. The board makeup as it is now - we've heard that there are problems - that some of the employee representatives, over the past number of years have not been exactly employee representatives. The same with the review - we've heard the same thing. We know the president of the federation brought up that there were issues with the makeup and formation of the review committee - that some of the people who were put on there did not wholeheartedly reflect an employee. They weren't in that job description.

Also, going back to WCB, more often than not, WCB used to take into consideration what the Federation of Labour had put forward as their worker representative. That has not occurred. When they were talking about the review, it should be made up of one injured worker, one worker representative, and one union representative. It should be declared in the legislation so that there are no issues later. It makes sense. If you're going to do a review of the committee, the workers should be first and foremost on those committees. The injured worker is highly important to this process. The worker is highly important, and so is that unionized worker who has many job protections. Unionized workers want to see non-unionized workers lifted up and protected as well. That is one of the reasons why we think that was a good amendment.

It was disappointing that this government did not take these insightful ideas brought forward in Law Amendments and put them into the final piece of legislation during our Committee of the Whole House on Bills. It was very disappointing and I hope that at some point the government will revisit that decision.

I think there are lots of opportunities for future work to improve not just this bill, but workers' protections overall, and I hope to see continued action from this minister and from this government. With that, I take my seat.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I am just going to be quick. I just wanted to stand up and give another example of bullying: unfounded accusations against government employees by leaders, people who are supposed to be leaders. We just heard the member stand on her feet and make accusations against an entire department.

What I will say is take partisanship out of this, starting with the member for Bedford Basin to the former member for Pictou West, all the way to the member for Richmond. There was an emphasis on inclusion, on employee support, and wraparound services for the people who work in that department. They do a difficult job. It doesn't matter if it is this department or any department: If you are an elected official and an MLA who is a supposed community leader and stand on their feet to make unfounded accusations like that, and when asked to table something, said there is nothing to table . . .

We as leaders have to do better. Our words matter. These individuals work for us, they work for Nova Scotians, and they do a fantastic job right across this province. They

do some of the most difficult jobs where they go home at night upset, crying, sometimes feeling beat down, and the people in this House, no matter what we think our job is, it is also to support them because they support us. I just think it is kind of insulting. I think it is kind of insulting because that is a form of bullying. It certainly is a form of bullying. If you were in any other profession and you stood there and accused other employees of something and have no evidence to back it up, that is bullying and it does a disservice.

[11:30 a.m.]

You can say whatever you want about me as minister. I've got big shoulders, I can deal with it, but the previous ones who have come before me who worked very hard on bullying and work . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. I ask that you speak to the bill.

The honourable Minister of Community Services.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: The former ministers of this side and the former ministers on that side who work extremely hard to make sure that there was workplace safety, that their employees felt supported, that they dealt with bullying, that there was inclusion in the workforce. It is not perfect and we know there is more to do and that is why this minister is bringing these bills forward. That is why she is listening to the recommendations, but for somebody in a leadership position to stand up and accuse an entire department of being bullies shows zero leadership.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I am happy to stand and speak in favour of this piece of legislation. I do want to thank the government and give credit where credit is due to the minister on particularly changing the sick leave protection here in Nova Scotia. This legislation will change us from being the worst in Nova Scotia, only ensuring that people who are dealing with the most challenging sicknesses and illnesses that they can possibly deal with. Their jobs are only protected for three days. This will bring us in line with the federal government's Employment Insurance Program, which is 27 weeks. This is, of course, a major change for workers and certainly much greater protection for them, as well, during the most difficult fight of their lives for a lot of these folks.

I do have to mention that I am also proud of our team for fighting for this. Back in the Fall session of 2023, our caucus took a stance on this issue. We filibustered until midnight every night for close to two weeks until the government supported a resolution that was passed by our caucus, Resolution No. 826, that was moved by the member for Bedford Basin. I'll read the resolution and table it for the sake of the record:

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

Whereas the federal government changed employment insurance rules on December 2022 to allow persons who were suffering from illnesses to access employment insurance for up to 26 weeks; and

Whereas Nova Scotia labour law currently only guarantees employees working in provincially regulated industries a maximum of three days unpaid leave due to illness, which is insufficient for people with serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and MS; and

Whereas the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration will discuss the issue of leave for chronic illness during a meeting of our federal and territorial counterparts in the new year;

Therefore be it resolved that the House of Assembly direct the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration to consult and study this issue, discuss it with her provincial and territorial counterparts with the intention of providing Nova Scotians facing serious illness while working in provincially regulated industries with job-protected unpaid leave and report progress back to the Legislature by Spring session of 2024.

We, of course, missed that session, but this resolution was passed without waiver and without notice. Again, this is another example of the impact that the opposition can have when we are pushing for the right ideas in this province. Certainly, I do want to commend the member for Bedford Basin for another really important notch in her legacy belt of service to this province.

This idea was first brought to us by the member for Bedford Basin. She heard in her capacity as MLA from constituents who were not protected, who lost their jobs when they were fighting for their life. She certainly got our caucus on board, who again fought hard with long hours that were called by the government for, I believe, at least two weeks - if not longer - to ensure that this resolution was passed. On that day that this resolution was passed, the filibuster ended, but I know we would not have gotten this work done if we didn't have the support of the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration. I know that and I can speak about that minister's character.

That is a minister who cares deeply about service and helping individuals. She takes her role and responsibility seriously. We saw today that she is also going to show leadership within her own caucus and take stances that aren't necessarily in line with the government position. I want to commend her on that. I think this is another example of that minister

listening to Opposition members and being willing to move forward when ideas that we are fighting for are good and will be helpful for people.

I think this is a good day for the House once this bill passes third reading, and I think it's a good day for Nova Scotians when they see that sometimes co-operation does happen in this House and does lead to important changes, and certainly that's worth celebrating because this will help those dealing with the greatest challenges of their life: sickness, and in some cases, their own mortality. This will at least give them the peace of mind knowing that they're not going to lose their job at the same time because they didn't show up to work for three days. With those few words, Speaker, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: If I am to recognize the honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration, it will be to close debate on third reading of Bill No. 464, the Stronger Workplaces for Nova Scotia Act.

The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

HON. JILL BALSER: I want to thank the members opposite for their encouraging words, their supporting words and, of course, the emphasis on continued action, Speaker, I think will not be ignored. I again want to thank the Law Amendments Committee and others who brought forward recommendations to government. I know what we've brought forward is a strong bill for Nova Scotians. I am so encouraged by the collaboration and co-operation. Of course, when we work together wholeheartedly, positive things can happen. We've made significant change to come. We know we need a workers' compensation system that's going to be sustainable for years to come, and so the recommendations of the review committee will do exactly that.

We want to make sure - and I emphasize this because it was brought up, I know that folks were concerned about the safe return to work, and that will be so highlighted - that an injured worker is not being forced back, that it's safe return to work, which is another reason why that communication has to happen between workers and employers. Now, with this legislation, it's going to happen.

I also want to thank the members for their comments around serious illness, because we know how significant that piece is going to be. I recognize the resolution that was brought forward, and making sure in my commitment to myself to be a minister of action, that I listened. We delivered on that commitment through that resolution. I am so proud to be able to say that we are all going to get this one across the finish line.

I struggled a little bit to make it personal, but I think it's important to share it at this point in time. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I wanted to make sure that I used that experience to make the lives of Nova Scotians better. It was a conversation with my older sister, who said to me, Use this to do something. This is really what motivated me to

speaking to the department and ask: What can we do? Those conversations happened in 2022 after my diagnosis.

I know that I'm not the only one who has had a diagnosis, and we've spoken about this in this House. So many others have shared their experiences. But serious illness touches the lives of all of us in some way or another. Recognizing that, the Canadian Cancer Society has brought this amendment forward and asked for us to deliver, and we have.

I am just so proud to be able to say that workplaces in Nova Scotia will be stronger. We all can get behind that because it's the right thing to do. (Standing ovation)

With those words, I move to close debate on third reading of Bill No. 464.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading on Bill No. 464.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Tuesday, September 17th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Government Business will include Committee of the Whole House on Bill No. 455. Law Amendments Committee will be held on Monday, September 16th commencing at 9:00 a.m.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Tuesday, September 17th 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.

The House stands adjourned until Tuesday, September 17th at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 11:44 a.m.]

NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)**RESOLUTION NO. 1,151**

By: Hon. Tory Rushton (Cumberland South)

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

Whereas the original Springhill Arena collapsed in the Winter of 2001 during a youth hockey game, causing the community to be without a facility for 3 years; and

Whereas the community, in true Springhill fashion, bonded together to dream up, design, fundraise, and build a facility that houses an NHL-sized ice surface, seating for 800, a teen room, community room, and so much more; and

Whereas the facility makes its ice using a geothermal system from the existing flooded coal mines, being the largest facility in Atlantic Canada to utilize this technology and utilizing part of Springhill's rich past;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize the community of Springhill, the volunteers, and strong leadership that have driven this project to success and have carried this success to see many events and celebrations at the Dr. Carson & Marion Murray Community Centre and a very important celebration today as we celebrate the centre's 20th anniversary and look towards many more successes and celebrations.