



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

## DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

**Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain**

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**First Session**

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2021**

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House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2021**

**Sixty-fourth General Assembly**

**First Session**

**9:00 A.M.**

**SPEAKER**

Hon. Keith Bain

**DEPUTY SPEAKERS**

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

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

**PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS**

**PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

**TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I'll be making a statement connected to my role as Minister for Gaelic Affairs this morning.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Gaelic Affairs.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the celebration of Halloween is rooted in the Gaelic tradition of Samhain and has influenced the Christianization of Gaels in Scotland and Ireland. Fifteen hundred years ago, Christianity was brought by people like Saint Patrick, to Ireland, and Colum Cille, or Saint Columba, to Scotland. They recognized the need to relate to the people with whom they were sharing the story of Christ. For example, Saint Patrick used a shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity as it already held some significance amongst the Irish Gaels.

Samhain marked the end of the harvest and the beginning of Winter. It was also a time when pre-Christian beliefs held that the boundary between this world and the next was quite thin. The spirits had the ability to be closer to us. Samhain was an opportunity to explain Christian belief in the afterlife, and is why we see All Saints' Day celebrated on November 1<sup>st</sup> and All Souls' Day celebrated on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, just after Samhain.

In Gaelic culture there is a strong faith and belief in Christianity, but also a strong belief in the supernatural, in things like the second sight, forerunners, and drokes.

Tha mise creidsinn - tha adhbhar agam - thachair rudan orm fhìn.

I believe - I have reason to believe - I have had experiences myself.

Tha mi dol a dh' innse naidheachd dhuibh - mar a thachair do mo sheanair - Eoghainn Peutan. Se gobha a bh' ann.

I'm going to tell you a story about something my grandfather experienced. His name was Hughie Beaton, and he was a blacksmith. One Christmas, he shod 18 horses. That's about one shoe, or hoof, every 10 to 12 minutes during a pretty long day in the shop. He made other things, too. He put the wrought-iron and steel tires on wagon wheels, and he also made coffins.

One night he heard a noise downstairs and he sat up in bed. It sounded like hammering. He didn't know what it was and he didn't go to look. Then there was silence.

A week or two later, something tragic happened. A woman in the community and her baby girl died of what was then described as "milk fever," but may have been puerperal fever, which was the result of infection contracted during childbirth in an age when antibiotics weren't as common. It did not come to him until he was in the act of building the coffin that he had heard these sounds before.

Smaoinich e an deidh sin; nach robh e deanamh sin sa chidsin?

He thought afterwards, wasn't he doing that in the kitchen?



I am hesitant to add my own commentary, but I think he would build coffins in his shop. But for the child, the coffin was so small that he made it downstairs in the kitchen, which is not something he would typically do.

He did not understand what it meant at the time, but he experienced a forerunner - a premonition of what was to happen.

What are the purposes of these experiences? How can they be explained?

In times of sadness or wonder about where our loved ones go when they pass on, these experiences may give us hope that we live on in the afterlife - messages that our efforts here in this world are not in vain.

There is something beyond the world we see around us. That is the belief for many Gaels - and not just at Halloween.

But at Halloween, the distance between the world we see and the other world is not far. You can actually reach out and touch it - or it can touch you.

So beware, those of you who would say that these things don't happen, that it's just people's imagination, for it is the one who does not believe who believes most earnestly after they see or hear for themselves.

Oidhche Samhna shona dhuibh uile - Happy Halloween. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition. Top that, please.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I don't know whether to say thank you for the remarks that I received last night from my honourable friend across the hall.

I'll rise as the Critic for Gaelic Affairs and read my statement.

I believe too, although my stories are too scary for this crowd. It is important, and I thank you for recognizing the value of this traditional day to the Gaels and a broader crowd these days. Halloween blessings to you all.

Tha mise ácreidsinn cuideachd tha stòiridh no dnà agam fhin ach tha iad ro eagallach airson an t-àite seo. Tapadh leis á mhinistear airson an latha aithneachadh, is cho cudromach sat ha I dh ana Gàidheil, is tòrra bharrachd, sa latha an-diugh. Beannachdan na Samhna oirbh uile, agus cumaibh sàbhailte. Tapadh leibh.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Although I will not speak Gaelic today, Mr. Speaker, I will give you a highland fling later. I want to thank the minister for not just sharing his own culture, but our shared culture. In fact, I am also a Beaton from Mabou so there might be some relations here.

We from the NDP caucus also wish Nova Scotians a happy Halloween and a reminder to everyone that no matter how supernatural things get out there this weekend, we have to remember to protect ourselves, our families, and our communities from COVID-19.

Public Health recommends leaving your treats at the door, sanitizing surfaces, wash your hands regularly, and stick with protocols around gathering limits, including the goblins and the ghosts and the faeries.

Thank you. Happy Halloween.

#### **GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION**

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

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 39**

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

Whereas Bert Doucette of Ingonish has been helping to keep his community clean and tidy by spending his free time picking up litter for 40 years; and

Whereas Mr. Doucette began voluntarily picking up litter in Ingonish in 1981 when he and his wife of over 60 years, Marion Doucette, opened a gas station and he noticed the area around it was littered with garbage; and

Whereas in December of 2013, Mr. Doucette was recognized by Victoria County as an exemplary citizen and his hope that his community service will inspire others, especially youth, to also be proactive in picking up litter;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House join me in thanking Mr. Doucette for 40 years of inspiring community service and that his leadership will encourage all Nova Scotians to take pride in their communities by keeping them litter-free.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

### **RESOLUTION NO. 40**

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

Whereas the principals, vice-principals, and system administration comprising the Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia, or PSAANS, play an essential leadership role in our provinces education system; and

Whereas PSAANS members help to ensure that our students and staff members feel welcomed and supported when they enter our school buildings; and

Whereas PSAANS members have demonstrated leadership and support that kept schools open during most of the pandemic, ensuring that children and families had access to friends, learning, caring staff, and supports for food and mental health;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House recognize and thank PSAANS members for the leadership they provide to school staff, students, and families and for their commitment to ensuring our students receive a top quality education that is inclusive.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Acadian Affairs and Francophonie.

**RESOLUTION NO. 41**

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, à une date ultérieure, je demanderai l'adoption de la résolution suivante:

Attendu que M. Jean-Paul Kalwahali est arrivé en 2016 à Clare en Nouvelle-Écosse afin d'entamer des études en administration des affaires à l'université Sainte-Anne; et qu'après ses quatre années d'études et plusieurs expériences dans d'autres provinces canadiennes, M. Kalwahali est revenu en Nouvelle-Écosse à Clare dans le but de redonner à la communauté qui l'a si bien accueilli; et

Attendu que la communauté de Clare en Nouvelle-Écosse a été choisi pour participer à l'initiative des communautés francophones accueillantes d'immigration réfugiée et citoyenneté; et

Attendu que présentement M. Kalwahali occupe le poste de gérant du centre de bienvenue Rendez-vous de la Baie, qui offre aux nouveaux arrivants et nouveaux membres de la communauté un accès à des ressources de l'inclusion des personnes immigrantes de la communauté;

Par conséquent, il est résolu que les députés de l'Assemblée législative se joignent à moi pour féliciter M. Kalwahali pour souligner son dévouement à l'intégration et l'inclusion des personnes issues de l'immigration dans sa communauté.

Monsieur le président, je demande l'adoption de cette résolution sans préavis et sans débat.

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

Whereas Mr. Jean Paul Kalwahali arrived in 2016 in Clare, Nova Scotia to pursue his post-secondary education at Universite Ste-Anne in Business Administration, and after four years of studies and several experiences in other Canadian provinces, Mr. Kalwahali returned to Clare with the aim of giving back to the community that has welcomed him so warmly; and

Whereas Clare was chosen as the community in Nova Scotia to participate in the immigration refugees and citizenship Welcoming Francophone Communities initiative; and

Whereas currently Mr. Kalwahali occupies the position of manager at the Rendez-vous de la Baie Welcome Centre, which offers newcomers and community members access to resources for the inclusion of immigrants in the community;

[9:15 a.m.]

Therefore be it resolved that Members of the Legislative Assembly join me in congratulating Mr. Kalwahali in recognition of his dedication to the integration and inclusion of newcomers in his community.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 42**

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

Whereas Nova Scotians of all ages deserve to be comfortable and well taken care of in their homes or in long-term care; and

Whereas dedicated staff, organizations, physicians, family caregivers, and volunteers go above and beyond to meet the unique needs of their residents and clients to ensure the highest quality of care, and help them live their lives to the fullest in the place they call home; and

Whereas Continuing Care Month is a time to recognize and celebrate the dedicated people who work and volunteer in long-term care, home care, and adult protection, and supporting Nova Scotians in communities across the province;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House take the opportunity presented by Continuing Care Month in Nova Scotia to recognize the many hard-working people who work in this sector and thank them for caring for our loved ones.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

**Bill No. 68 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 155 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Executive Council Act; and Chapter 376 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Public Service Act. (Hon. Tim Houston)**

**Bill No. 69 - Entitled an Act to Redress Environmental Racism. (Susan Leblanc)**

**Bill No. 70 - Entitled an Act to Ensure Compassion for Companion Animals. (Hon. Brendan Maguire)**

**Bill No. 71 - Entitled an Act to Dissolve Tourism Nova Scotia. (Hon. Pat Dunn)**

**Bill No. 72 - Entitled an Act to Support Local Action on Anti-racism. (Kendra Coombes)**

**Bill No. 73 - Entitled an Act to Strengthen and Protect the Chignecto Isthmus - A Key Section of the Atlantic Gateway. (Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin)**

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

### **NOTICES OF MOTION**

### **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

### **CHISHOLM, WILL: JOINING GATINEAU OLYMPIQUES - CONGRATS.**

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Hockey fans across Nova Scotia are elated to be back in the rink, cheering on our favourite teams. Perhaps no one is more excited today than members of the extended Chisholm and Myra families, who will gather at the Scotiabank Centre tonight as Lunenburg's own Will Chisholm takes to the ice with the Gatineau Olympiques.

A product of South Shore minor hockey, Will started his junior career with the South Shore Mustangs, scoring 44 points in 68 games played. He then moved on to the South Shore Lumberjacks, where he scored 20 points in 34 games.

I ask members to join me in congratulating Will for being one of the newest members of the Gatineau Olympiques, and heaven help those seated in front of this family tonight.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

### **MOTHER, JOANNE SPARKS - BIRTHDAY WISHES**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Today I want to acknowledge, and I rise as today my mother will turn 73 years old, so I'd like to wish my mum a wonderful . . . (Applause) Thank you.

My mom, Joanne Sparks, formally a Clark, was born in Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, moved here with her one sister and two brothers, and that's where she met my father later on, who would have me along with two other sisters and two brothers. I just want to acknowledge her today.

One of the things I would say about her that I want to thank her for is loving hard and with full values and loyalty in a marriage; for demonstrating when it's okay to leave relationships when they aren't positive for you; and be who you are. Most importantly, that words matter, how you treat people matters, but what's most important and what people will remember is how you treat them, so make sure that you always treat people kindly. I want to acknowledge that.

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

### **GRANT, AL: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the passing of long-time supporter and organizer for the NDP, Al Grant. Al Grant worked hard on behalf of the NDP in the riding of the former Cape Breton West and now Cape Breton East. In fact, Al worked hard for the Party in all of Cape Breton and spent many years organizing and working on campaigns. He worked extremely hard to get former MLA and Leader of the Nova Scotia NDP Helen MacDonald elected and was a supporter of John Morgan. I know his friends and Party members will all miss him greatly.

I ask the House to join me in offering our condolences to Al's wife, Imelda, and his three daughters, Megan, Shannon, and Kerry Lee. Rest in power, Al.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**ALLEN, DENISE: CREATION OF FOOD PANTRY - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to honour a woman in our community named Denise Allen. Denise came to me during the last election campaign and she said, why should I vote for you? I said, well, what's important to you? What do you want to see in our community? She said, I'm worried about the children in our community going hungry. She said, I want to build a food pantry beside the West Highlands School, and I said, well, let's do it.

We reached out to town councillor Sheila Christie, who had built one a few years earlier. We reached out to the Wesleyan church. Within one month, Denise and a team of local volunteers had a food pantry built for the students and families in the area around West Highlands School. I wanted to bring honour to her today because she and so many people in our community are the ones who truly make things happen. Because of her, many children will not go hungry this Winter.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

**CLOW, CHARLES:  
RECIP. OF 2021 HOCKEY N.S. COACH OF THE YR. AWD - CONGRATS.**

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to announce that the 2021 Hockey Nova Scotia Coach of the Year Award was presented to Charles Clow, a volunteer with the East Hants Minor Hockey Association.

The Clary MacDonald Memorial Award is given to an individual who shows compassion and dedication and strives to better all they coach. Charles has been a dedicated coach and mentor for almost two decades, sharing his passion for the sport and encouraging his players to be the best they can be on and off the ice, making him a well-deserved winner. Charles coached the U15 team and was instrumental in the development and success of his team.

Please join me in congratulating Charles Clow for earning this much-deserved award.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Today I rise to recognize the contribution of my friend the member for Preston, as well as the member for Cole Harbour, after the last eight years serving in this House, and my new colleagues who have brought so much to this House, the member for Halifax Armdale and the member for Halifax Needham.



The unfortunate news yesterday is a setback for this House and democracy in Nova Scotia. We have accomplished some in the last election with more diversity in this House, more reflective of the population, just to be set back - one step forward and two steps back. Mr. Speaker, this needs to be a safe place for people to do the work that they need to do for their constituents and communities. The reality is it's not. We wear a poppy today, the members of the House wear that. People fought for this freedom - that everyone, every Nova Scotian, deserves to have and to serve their community.

I ask the members of the House to reflect on the actions and their interactions in debates and Question Period and work together to elevate how we treat each other. Racism has no place anywhere, especially in this House. This is the People's House.

[9:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**RACISM: NEED TO DISCUSS - RECOG.**

SUZY HANSEN: I stand here today to give a lesson. Racism, behaviour or attitudes that reflect and foster this belief, racial discrimination or prejudice - this is a lived experience of thousands or more professional working Black men and women every single day, just trying to show up and do their job, the reminder of the horrible sting of racism and enslavement and how much we are not heard, believed, and valued, and receive no equality.

In order to be comfortable is to be uncomfortable. I believe that we have to talk about it, and we have to experience it because we are Black. We have always known that Black lives matter. I live this and some of our members around this room here live this. Some of our members can go home safely without the worry of racial discrimination, but some of us are terrified for fear of our own lives.

I want to say that the members in this House need to understand that all of us have a certain lived experience and our job is to use these experiences to make all the things that come in legislation better, fairer, equitable for everyone. Racism is not tolerated and accepted.

I also want to commend the Premier for quickly and swiftly acknowledging that immediately.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**ROSS, SCOTT: FOUNDING PICTOU COUNTY FOREST SCHOOL - RECOG.**

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, children learning forest skills helps them to build confidence and to feel good about themselves, which is why I would like to acknowledge Scott Ross and his Pictou County Forest School.

Mr. Ross is the founder and lead instructor of the Forest School on 23 acres of land in Meadowville, Pictou County. The pilot project began this summer by offering two one-week day camps for kids ages 4 to 14 learn shelter building, animal trafficking (Interruption) oh, animal tracking - you know what's on my mind, right? I am so sorry - edible plants and proper use of maps and compasses. He also hopes to be able to create a program for high school students.

We are fortunate to have Scott Ross providing such a valued program and I wish him success in his future offerings for Pictou County youth.

THE SPEAKER: It definitely is Friday.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support my colleague. My colleague is a hard worker. She is a mother, and she is a loved community member. My colleague has, for years, been in the trenches fighting for my community.

I am really dismayed that I have to stand up here and have this conversation today. I am really bothered, when we pose a question for response, the first response is "Black Lives Matter," when you are talking to a Black man? That really baffles me.

Second, we're in the People's House. I've had many members before me, Mr. Speaker, who had to deal with the same issues.

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

**ANTI-INDIGENOUS RACISM: NEED TO FIGHT IT - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate receiving the TRC Calls to Action upon arrival this morning. This is the last day of Mi'kmaq History Month that we'll be together. I am a settler here but as the parent of two Indigenous children, I've had a lot of support, first from the Ottawa Indigenous community and later here in Halifax. We've had baby welcoming ceremonies, I have been given a spirit name, and we welcomed Keira into the powwow circle.

But with this privilege comes a great deal of responsibility to fully understand colonialism in Canada and its effects. I've sat in healing circles, and I've heard the stories about residential schools, about the devastation of families forced to move, children removed, and families and communities completely devastated by the impacts of colonialism. All of this informs me in my experience, in this province, as I see how my children face anti-Indigenous racism.

My son watched all his friends get jobs at the Quinpool Road Canadian Tire, but he gets followed down the aisles. He has been accused of not paying taxes for his small business and Keira, as the granddaughter of a residential school survivor, was sent home on the first Truth and Reconciliation Day in this province because she was experiencing anxiety at school and that was treated as inappropriate.

I ask all members to stand together to fight racism today, tomorrow, and forever and to take our inspiration from the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

**BATES, FRED: SUPPORT OF 4-H CLUBS IN COL. CO. - THANKS**

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Fred Bates of Vancouver Island who grew up in Bible Hill. In memory of his grandparents, Wyman and Inez Bates, he was generously supporting three 4-H clubs in Colchester County.

Mr. Bates will assist members of the Onslow-Belmont, Stewiacke Valley, and Truro-North River 4-H clubs with post-secondary expenses. All three clubs cover areas that hold special meaning and memories for Mr. Bates during his childhood. These communities also held significant meaning to Fred's grandparents, who had a large, successful family farm.

Mr. Bates participates in the criteria and selection process for bursaries and scholarships that are awarded annually. This year, Tim Porter, Natalie Porter, Emma MacMillan, Zachary Best, Shannon Grant, and Mackenzie Boudreau combined received over \$6,000 in bursaries from the bursary scholarship.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in thanking Fred Bates for his contribution to youth in Colchester County and congratulating the six recipients of the 2021 Fred Bates Bursary/Scholarship in Colchester North and wish them well in their future endeavours.

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

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge how proud I am to stand with the member for Preston, the member for Cole Harbour, and all of the members in this caucus. We are a family. When you hurt one of us, you hurt all of us. (Applause)

While the members in this Chamber disagree on policy, it's meant to be a safe environment for all of us. There's no room for hate. There's no room for prejudice. Most importantly, there's no room for apathy. It's up to us as the members of this House to take action and to make sure that we create the policy, that we set the standard, and that we make the rules that reflect what outside of this Chamber should be.

Even though we're the ones privileged to walk and to sit in these seats, this is the People's House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

**COHOON, SHELDON:  
DONATION TO PORT MEDWAY VOLUN. FIRE DEPT. - THANKS**

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize Mr. Sheldon Cohoon of Port Medway, Queens County. Over the past months, Sheldon has very generously donated over \$130,600 dollars to the Port Medway Volunteer Fire Department.

Our local volunteer fire departments rely heavily on fundraising and donations, so Sheldon's contributions have had a huge impact on the Port Medway fire department. They have been able to purchase bunker gear, communication equipment, jaws of life equipment, AED, a generator for the hall, a live fire training unit, and so much more.

Chief Kendall Farmer, his team, and the entire community are beyond appreciative of Sheldon's monetary gifts and on the evening of September 15<sup>th</sup>, a parade was held to honour him and express appreciation.

I ask all members of this House to join me in thanking Sheldon for his selfless generosity and his commitment to the Port Medway Fire Department and helping to keep his community safe.

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

**RACISM: NEED TO DO MORE TO FIGHT IT - RECOG.**

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, more often than I care to admit, I hear people ask: Why do we have to pay for the transgressions, the racism, of our ancestors? Humbly

speaking, that's because our systems are inherently racist. It's because we have unconscious biases that we don't even acknowledge.

As people who have the privilege to stand in this House, I ask that we challenge ourselves to do better, because people in our past, they didn't have this privilege. Many of us as white Nova Scotians have a privilege that many weren't afforded. We as legislators, who have the privilege to stand in this House, we need to do better, because this is the People's House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**RIPLEY, DWAYNE: COM. SERV. - RECOG.**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to give honour to a local entrepreneur, Dwayne Ripley. Dwayne is the owner and entrepreneur of Curly's Sports & Supplements at Dayle's Grand Market.

Dwayne is one of many entrepreneurs who persevered through a very challenging time, and which continues to be a very challenging time due to the global pandemic. What I love about Dwayne Ripley is that he has this spirit, that he's not giving up. In fact, he opened a second business called the Balcony Candy Shoppe.

He's always looking for ways to give back to our community, and today I stand to honour this young entrepreneur, Dwayne Ripley.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

**W. KINGS HS SENIOR BOYS DIV. 1 VOLLEYBALL TEAM:  
HALLOWEEN CLASSIC TOURN. WIN - CONGRATS.**

CHRIS PALMER: I rise today to recognize the West Kings High School Senior Boys Division 1 volleyball team, who this past weekend won their home Halloween Classic tournament.

Eight teams from all over Nova Scotia attended this annual tournament in Auburn, after a break last year due to the Covid pandemic. West Kings defeated Lockview High School in a thrilling three-set semifinals, and then won a close, hard-fought match over Prince Andrew to win the gold medal.

Thank you to Coach Sheri Archibald, her coaching staff and all the parent volunteers. A very special congratulations to all of the players on a great victory for West Kings Volleyball, especially the graduating players on the team: Tobi Archibald, Noah Palmer, and Landen Allen, who kicked off their senior year in style.

I would like to ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating West Kings and everyone involved in their successful tournament.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Today and every day, I stand with the member for Preston, the members for Halifax Needham, Cole Harbour, Halifax Armdale, and all who have come before them and will come after them. They are leaders inside and outside of the Legislature. They have overcome so much and obviously have to continue to overcome more.

Words are not enough. Action is needed. Action in our justice system, action in our education system, action in our health care system, action in every corner of our society, even our own homes.

This government has an opportunity to act for all and make a difference. There are options in front of them. Take them. After all, this is the People's House.

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

**JAY IT FORWARD MOVEMENT:  
ENCOURAGING RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS - RECOG.**

JOHN WHITE: I rise today to recognize The Jay It Forward movement, which was created by the family of Jaycee Raine Tracey, who tragically lost her life to meningitis at the age of four years old.

Jay It Forward is a kindness movement founded to keep Jaycee's memory alive. Cards with her picture on it are often handed out around the community for good deeds and acts. They range from having a coffee to replacing an entire roof on a house in the Jay It Forward movement.

The movement encourages folks to be kind, just as Jaycee was. Even at her young age, she made time to make people feel important.

I ask all members of the House to extend random acts of kindness in Jaycee's memory.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. KEITH IRVING: I'm hurting. Our caucus is hurting. Our Legislature is hurting. Our province is hurting.

Racism is a lived experience for many Nova Scotians; it's a lived experience every day of their lives. Racism is alive on the streets and the country roads of Nova Scotia. It's alive in our institutions. Now we are witnessing a member of our Legislature experiencing racism as others before them have felt. This is not the Nova Scotia that we can be.

This is not the House of Assembly that we should be. Each of us must do better. This House of Assembly must do better. This is the People's House. (Applause)

[9:45 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

**SWAFFER, BETTY:  
SELLING TOASTERS ORDERED BY MISTAKE - RECOG.**

HON. TIM HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Betty Swaffer, manager at the PharmaChoice on Waverley Road in Dartmouth East.

In August, Betty encountered a situation where she realized she accidentally ordered 222 toasters rather than just the two she thought she ordered. Now while Betty had to take all 222 toasters, she didn't crumble under the pressure and she was able to find room for all of them around the small pharmacy.

When Betty took to social media to share her mistake and try to offload some of these toasters, well, Mr. Speaker, the community of Dartmouth stepped in. Within less than three days, Betty managed to sell all of the toasters.

I ask that all members of the House join me in a toast (Laughter) to Betty Swaffer, thanking her and the community of Dartmouth for the spirit of helping others.

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

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

LORELEI NICOLL: Well, as you can see, we're all standing in unity with my colleagues from Preston, Cole Harbour, Halifax Armdale. As a past councillor who represented Lake Loon and Cherry Brook, it was my finest and fondest honour. I got to meet many residents, some today I call friends.

The words of my colleague from Preston honouring her mother Joanne Sparks of Cherry Brook - the people will always remember how you treat them. When I visited Lake Loon and Cherry Brook, I was treated very well. Sadly, when the people of Lake Loon and Cherry Brook left their community, the treatment changed. I witnessed it myself, and you're hearing it in the voices of my colleagues today because we've all witnessed it.

Systemic racism and institutional racism exists - it's called institutional racism. Our schools themselves are institutions. This is where change needs to happen, and we will not put up with anything in that regard with any racism in not honouring the words of Joanne Sparks, "that people will remember how you treat them." This is the People's House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cape Breton East.

**GRAHAM, CARL:  
RECIP. OF MARITIME TITLE FOR LARGEST PUMPKIN - CONGRATS.**

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to applaud Carl Graham of Donkin, who claimed the Maritime title for the largest pumpkin on October 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year. Carl's hopes were to have the largest pumpkin in Canada. He fell short by just three pounds.

In any case, his 1,956-pound pumpkin he named Howard - in honour of pumpkin-growing legend Howard Dill - brought a lot of excitement to the crowd when it was weighed a few weeks ago. Carl says he loves plants and will continue his hobby, hoping to break more records in the future.

I would like to congratulate Carl on his current record and wish him all the best.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

**NEED TO PASS BILL: SEAT TO REMAIN EMPTY - RECOG.**

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, members of this Legislature, this bill has been put in this House. Until this bill passes, my seat will be empty. This Legislature has that choice, whether to support me or not. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. I respectfully note and will allow it at this time, but props are not to be used in the Legislature.

With today's words, I will recognize that that's okay.

The honourable member for Chester-St. Margaret's.



**GOLD RIVER RESERVE:  
CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE FOR MI'KMAQ - RECOG.**

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I realize I'm a few days early, but unfortunately or fortunately, we do not sit on Sunday. I rise today to acknowledge the end of Mi'kmaq History Month.

In Chester-St. Margaret's, the Gold River Reserve was established in 1820. With approximately 270 hectares of land, it is positioned near the mouth of the west side of the picturesque Gold River. The Mi'kmaq people of this area have a long history of using the resources within Gold River and the area surrounding Mahone Bay. In addition to the river itself, the area is known as a location with traditional campsites and there are various areas that have culture and spiritual importance. I grew up around here. It's absolutely fantastic.

Recognizing our Mi'kmaq people this month of October is not enough. We need to continue to acknowledge them through the year as we are to continue to move forward with the truth and reconciliation process.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I stand here with my imperfect English that I suffer from every day, to stand here with all my heart to support my colleague from Preston; amazing members who have joined our team. These are people who are teaching us so much. It is amazing, teachable moments that we're learning.

One thing I really want to speak about is being privileged. I never thought I would say the word that I am privileged compared to them until I hired a 26-year-old Black girl in my office who taught me that. That she had suffered so much more than I have. I have knocked on doors where people argued that I am not their MLA, because of who I am - right? I have suffered it. It's nothing compared to what she went through by the age of 26.

We need to hear them. We need to make a change and we need to have a lot more members in this House, especially on that side, to make the change - and this is the People's House.

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

**RESPECT FOR MI'KMAQ LANGUAGE: IMPORTANCE - RECOG.**

LISA LACHANCE: Kwe', me'talein? Teluisi Lisa Lachance. And I start today, Mr. Speaker, with a few words that I know in Mi'kmaq. I am trying to learn Mi'kmaq out

of respect for this place where I am a settler but also the important part of reclaiming language and culture.

One of the primary objectives of the residential school system and other forms of colonization and violence was to strip communities from their language and from their culture.

One key step I think we can take in our past to decolonization and reconciliation is to respect the languages in the places where we live. In particular, I think it's very important to be sure of using the right words in particular to describe people.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members to recognize that the correct pronunciation is "MEEG-maw" and indeed it is spelled differently for different uses and pronunciations and plurals and all that sort of thing.

I think we should all, as members in this House, learn basic Mi'kmaq. Wela'lin.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

**MARTINIQUE BEACH COM. ASSOC.:  
MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE - RECOG.**

KENT SMITH: I rise today to bring recognition to the Martinique Beach Community Association. This volunteer association was created to advocate for maintaining and improving infrastructure, accessibility and to promote the beach as a tourist destination.

The association acknowledges that Martinique Beach on the beautiful Eastern Shore is a driver for our local economy and approaches its work through the lens of environmental sustainability, ensuring that the natural habitat can be enjoyed by all in a respectful manner. Regular beach cleanup is one type of event organized by the association.

I ask all members of this House to join me in expressing gratitude to the Martinique Beach Community Association and all their volunteer members for their dedication to our beautiful beach.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize my caucus colleagues, specifically the members for Preston, Halifax Armdale, Cole Harbour-Dartmouth. It's been an honour as a new MLA to serve in this caucus. I want to thank those members for sharing their stories, their experiences, and their pain of past incidents that have happened.

I hope that I can be there for you as much as all of you have been here for me, so I really appreciate you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

**SITUATION IN HOUSE: NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE IT - RECOG.**

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise to acknowledge the profound dissonance of this moment in this House.

It is always awkward to bring matters to the floor of this Legislature that aren't directly to do with legislation or policy at hand. This morning, our colleagues in the Liberal caucus are doing their best with the short time allotted to bring attention to a specific issue that is emblematic of an institutional issue that came to light.

With the few moments left and in consideration of and in solidarity with my colleagues in this Legislature - the member for Halifax Needham, the member for Preston, the member for Halifax Armdale, the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth - I would really invite all members to just take the remainder of this time and acknowledge what is happening right now in this House.

We have another week to talk about hockey teams, to talk about birthdays, to talk about all of those things. The members can use their privilege to stand and speak, of course, about whatever they want.

It is important that we are always uncomfortable in this room - at least a little bit. Always, because these are not our seats, this is not our Chamber. This is the People's House. These are our community seats. I invite everyone to take the remainder of this time and talk about what is happening, the elephant in the room, or stay silent and acknowledge it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou West.

**RACISM: NEED TO ADDRESS IT - RECOG.**

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: I just want to say that we are listening. Thank you to the member for Dartmouth South, thank you to all the members who are having an opportunity to speak today, speak from the heart.

This is not lost on us, and we all need to do better. We all know that it's the People's House and we have to be reminded of that daily.

In this Chamber, there are so many important issues and these issues of racism need to be talked about more. We need to address it. I hope that we all move forward collectively and collaboratively together.

I also want to take this moment to thank all the members in this Chamber for this past month for wearing the pin that I placed on your desk, as well as today you'll see that you have a book on your desk as well. I want to thank the Department of L'nun Affairs for supplying those books.

We just need to do better. I know for myself and my colleagues that this is not lost on us. We talk about this all the time, and we know we need to do better.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, today I rise with my entire caucus and colleagues to support my fellow colleagues. We all have an opportunity to learn and to work together to make this a better place for everyone.

I learned a valuable lesson myself this morning. It's not enough to say you're sorry. What is enough is to take action. We all deserve to work in this House, and we all deserve to be here and be heard because this is the People's House.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. We have two other members from the Liberal caucus who wish to speak and with the unanimous consent of the House we'll provide that opportunity before we get into Oral Questions.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable member for Bedford South.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, as everyone else has said so well, I do just want to stand and recognize my colleagues for Preston, Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, Halifax Armdale, and Halifax Needham as well.

Obviously, all of us have been thinking about this over the past day or so very, very closely. What stands out to me is the pain of things that are said and unsaid; the pain of things that are seen and unseen.

I think about someone who lived down the street from me when I was growing up, Gerry Morrison, who I know the member for Cole Harbour knows him as well. Gerry was the father of one of my best friends. I've known Gerry since I was 5 or 6 years old. As a child, I was in Gerry's house hundreds of times. I knew that he had had a difficult childhood. That's pretty much all I knew at the time.

It wasn't until about four or five years ago that I learned, because Gerry spoke about this very bravely and publicly, that he had spent several years living at the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children. I think the fact that I didn't know that, even though I had spent so much time in his company and been blessed to know him, and still know him, as a wonderful person is really a sign of the fact that the trauma that people feel often can be quite deep.

I think we all need to recognize that and do everything we can to help and support everyone who has pain, as I said, that is seen and sometimes that is unseen and unsaid as well. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my colleagues for Preston, Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, Halifax Armdale, and Halifax Needham. You're all such valuable members of this House. I want you to know how important you are as representatives of your communities.

During my hockey playing days, I was known, probably too often, to drop the gloves at centre ice or go hard into the corners maybe with an elbow or two up. I don't really remember. I guess the point being that I want my teammates to know that I have your back. This is your House, and this is the People's House. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments being made today. I very much appreciate the resiliency and strength of character that members in this House have shown.

Just to provide an observation I've had over the years in dealing with people, it's oftentimes the communities that deal with the greatest struggles and that have had the biggest challenges that are the most loving and welcoming and compassionate. Let's all learn from that example. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize my colleagues in the House and my new sister - I knew I couldn't do this. (Applause)

I've had the opportunity to represent Whitney Pier for a number of years. It's a community that struggled, but really is such a huge part of the history of Cape Breton. The unfortunate thing, as my colleague said, it's in the communities that face the largest struggles that you find your greatest champions.

I see that every day with Clotilda Yakimchuk, with Chester Borden, with Patriarch Waterman, with Mayann Francis. That's CBRM. That's our community and I learned from them my entire life. I'm so honoured. I know that my journey was much easier to get here than my colleagues'.

I rise in my place today as a friend, as a brother - I can't wait until we get the kids together - I'm so proud of you. I'm so proud of our colleagues. I'm proud of my new friend over there. I really appreciate the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, for giving us extra time so that we could express our thoughts and our love for our colleagues. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

**MEMBER FOR PRESTON: SUPPORT FOR COLLEAGUE - RECOG.**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, this is the People's House. That means it's the House of all the people. We've learned this past week that we have a member of this House who has been the butt of remarks, attempts to silence her speaking about her community, most recently in remarks on social media. We all need to do better. We all need to step up.

A couple of times recently I've spoken about the portraits in this room, and I've noted that they are mostly middle-aged white men. One is a person of colour, and I want to honour Wayne Adams, Yvonne Atwell, Stephen Gough. I hope I am not leaving anyone out. I want to thank the many (Interruption) Oh my gosh, Percy Paris.

I want to honour the many African Nova Scotians who have stepped up to run for office, to change the situation here in the House, who maybe didn't make it. I want to honour them and I want to honour my colleague, the member for Preston, the member for Halifax Needham, the member for Cole Harbour, the member for Halifax Armdale, who are here, who are teaching us so much. We need to do better. This is the People's House.

THE SPEAKER: The time for Statements by Members has expired. I thank everyone for agreeing to extend the time for this occasion.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

### **ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: The time is 10:07 a.m. We'll go until 10:57 a.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM: OEARI - PRIORITIES**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Today I'd like to begin my questions around the new office that we created. The last government was a short one, half a year, but one of the things that we are proud of - and I'm personally proud of - is the creation of the new Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. Yesterday's revelations, I think, point to the importance of why this office needs to be maintained and strengthened over time.

I'd like to ask the Premier: What are his priorities for this office?

THE PREMIER: I appreciate the member's statements in the House today, and certainly they're not unique to a political party. We all feel the emotion, and the office that was created by the previous government is an important office. We all do need to do better. This is the People's House. We can continue to learn and make sure we do better. The number one priority that I would share with the member opposite is just do better. It's as simple as that.

IAIN RANKIN: I appreciate the sentiments, and I do appreciate the action taken by the Premier yesterday to rectify that issue. I would like to ask the Premier again: What specific initiatives will he take, and will he support the legislation that my honourable colleague has tabled, which I think is necessary and needs to be passed this session?

THE PREMIER: I think when you know better you do better. Certainly, something was brought to my attention yesterday and we addressed it very quickly in the only possible outcome. There's no place for inappropriate behaviour. There is no place for racism. Not in this House, not outside the walls of this House, not in our society. We feel very strongly about that, as do all of the members in this House. I believe we share that belief. We have that in common. Of course, when we know better, we'll do better. That's what we will do, as all members of this House. That's what's owed to Nova Scotians.

IAIN RANKIN: With respect, we are used to not getting answers, but on this very important topic, we need answers today. We have a colleague from Halifax Armdale. One of the reasons why he was compelled to run in this election was to support this legislation.

I know the Premier has made favourable comments on the intent of the legislation to define what racism is, and it's really important that we know that he'll support this legislation.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell the member what I told him privately when we talked about this very issue. I said we're on the same page. We all want the same thing. We share the same goal. The specific piece of legislation - I told the former Premier we'll look at it. We're sincere about that.

To stand up in Question Period and ask about a specific piece of legislation, as important as the issue is, the former Premier knows we spoke privately about this. The former Premier knows my feelings on this issue. He knows exactly where I stand on this. He knows the sincerity that I've expressed to him privately.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

### **OEARI: MANDATE LETTER - CLARIFY**

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. We know that discrimination in housing is real and is faced by too many people in Nova Scotia. We know that Black people being turned away from landlords, fighting for their land - the title to their land - and living with legacies of displacement from Africville, are all grappling with discrimination in housing.

We know that Deidra Williams and Sinclair Paynter, who are Black and who had to go to the media about racism that they faced in their Dartmouth co-op, are grappling with discrimination in housing.

This is a present and pressing issue in our province. I would like to ask the minister: What does he think is the reason that his mandate letter does not instruct him to work with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on these issues?

HON. PAT DUNN: Thank you for that question. I'm going to start off by saying that I feel the pain from what I was hearing this morning. It's extremely disappointing. As the member for Cole Harbour said earlier, he can't believe he's standing in the Legislature today having to discuss this type of - these circumstances and so on.

Mr. Speaker, we know there are unfair differences in many of our systems when racialized communities don't have the same responses, the same outcomes. Government is committed, across all departments, including Municipal Affairs and Housing, to addressing inequities that are occurring, that have occurred. We have to do much better.

SUZY HANSEN: Thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister.



Mr. Speaker, we know that racism impacts people's health and we know that too many people are confronted with systemic racism when trying to access health care. The Canadian Public Health Association recognizes that racism affects the health of individuals and populations. This is the case with the Black community in the south end of Shelburne, who are left wondering about the connection between the dump in their backyard and the high rates of cancer in their community.

I would like to ask the minister: What does he think is the reason that his mandate letter does not instruct him to work with the Minister of Health and Wellness on these issues?

PAT DUNN: Again, Mr. Speaker, through the office of OEARI, our top priorities are working with all of the departments across government, with the Count Us In action plan, with the deputy ministers meeting on a regular basis to address a lot of these issues. It's one of the top priorities of our government.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

### **PREM.: OEARI PRIORITIES - SPECIFICS**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll preface this by saying that I don't doubt the Premier's genuine concern on these important matters. But I would like to know some specifics today. If not this important legislation, what specific priorities will he have? What will he take on with his mandate with that new, very important office? Specifics.

THE PREMIER: With the office? (Interruption) Look, my commitment - I thank the member for the question. I thank the members for bringing to the floor the seriousness of the issue. We have a long way to go in this province. There's absolutely no question about that.

My personal commitment for that office, my personal commitment as a member of this Legislature, my personal commitment as a human being, is to make sure that we do everything possible - as a government, as neighbours, as friends - to make sure that we in this province recognize the issues and take every step that we can and act when something is right in our face, and we can do better. That's always my goal - with the office, with every single part of my life.

IAIN RANKIN: My concern is that surely after eight weeks in government, he would have been briefed on some of the issues that the department is working very hard on. We want to see that those advance, Mr. Speaker. He hasn't been able to bring one of them forward. There is important work that pertains to the subject at hand, creating equity assessment tools across government.

[10:15 a.m.]

So I want to ask the Premier if he has an update, or the Minister responsible for the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives. Perhaps he can give an update on where this initiative is that crosses all departments in the government.

THE PREMIER: I'm not sure if the member is trying to imply that something has been stopped or something. I just want to assure him, every initiative that is in movement is moving forward. This is all about recognizing the issues, accepting the issues, consulting with communities - First Nations, African Nova Scotians - and just making sure that communities are heard and are respected in everything that the government does.

That's why the office exists. We're totally committed to the initiatives of that office. I don't want to leave that unsaid, because we are absolutely committed to the office, and we're committed to making this a better province for everyone.

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

#### **PREM.: CULTURAL AWARENESS - ACTION**

HON. IAIN RANKIN: There are many initiatives in that office. I referenced one. The IPP issue is another one. He has a long list of things he could choose to talk about. Land titles is another one, Mr. Speaker. We have talked about these issues all session.

I would like to ask the Premier: After he took action on the staff member yesterday, does he think that there's any further action that's needed in terms of cultural awareness training with the rest of his staff?

THE PREMIER: I want to assure the member that there is lots of action that's always necessary, not just after the action I had to take yesterday. But cultural awareness training, sensitivity training - these things were all in motion over the last couple of weeks. These are all things we have been working with the department on scheduling.

Look, making sure that we have a Public Service and a society that are diverse, are equitable - we share these goals. There can be no confusion as to these being the goals of one party in the Legislature but not the other. We share these goals, Mr. Speaker. We're on that same page. We're on the same journey. We'll do our best. That's my commitment to Nova Scotians today.

IAIN RANKIN: I do appreciate these commitments. High-level words. We're just looking for specifics. There is so much work to do to tackle the system issues. We were concerned, going all the way back to the Throne Speech, when they said our system is fair

and equitable. We want to see the initiatives, that we've started progress in this office, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to ask the Premier: Will he expand the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism Initiatives? Will the Premier ensure that they have all the resources they need to tackle these very important issues?

THE PREMIER: The importance of the office cannot be understated. If the member feels that the office that their government established does not have the resources, that's something we need to work on. We'll absolutely work on that. The importance of the office cannot be understated. Our commitment to the office cannot be understated. Our commitment to a Public Service and society that are inclusive, equitable, diverse - our commitment to that cannot be understated. I just want to assure the member of that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

#### **PREM. - CENTRAL CORR. FACILITY: WOMEN'S FACILITY - COMMIT**

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, the government purchased Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility. Under the previous government, there was a commitment to transition the east unit at this facility into a separate facility to specifically address the needs of women in custody.

Is this government committing to creating a separate facility? What updates can the minister provide this House on the status?

THE PREMIER: I'll be - I appreciate the member. Certainly, we stand in solidarity with the member. I just want to say that.

I don't have the specifics of this particular situation to hand, but I just want to - I can't say enough that important initiatives - all initiatives that were in place do continue under this government. We haven't stopped anything, we're not backtracking on anything. Our desire is only to go forward as a province and not backwards.

I apologize, I don't have the specifics, but in general terms, I can assure the member that we're not changing anything on that plan.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Thank you for the response.

We also know that incarcerated women have unique mental health considerations. They are more likely than incarcerated men to be diagnosed with a major psychotic disorder, and two times more likely to be suffering from depression.

The Office of Mental Health and Addictions is to work across government departments to assess these gaps. Can the minister please tell this House what work has been completed or is under way to address the unique mental health considerations for women in custody?

HON. BRIAN COMER: I think you're correct in saying that the significant mental health concerns of incarcerated women in our province, especially for disorders across the continuum, especially with concurrent disorders. I have been reaching out to the stakeholders in the correctional facility sector. If you want to be part of those discussions, I'd be more than happy to have you with me.

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

### **PREM. - LAHEY REPT.: IMPLEMENTATION - CONCERNS**

GARY BURRILL: I want to question the Premier on the subject of forestry.

Forest harvests are routinely approved a long way in advance, sometimes years ahead of the fact. This is the background to why there's so much public concern at the moment, that once the Lahey review is finally implemented, there still will be years of unsustainable harvests, so to say, in the pipe ahead.

I want to ask the Premier if he will ensure that when Lahey is implemented, all pending harvests will be freshly reviewed and there will be no grandfathering-in permitted?

THE PREMIER: Obviously, when we talk about sustainability of our forests, I do want to be clear that our foresters have been very focused on sustainability. Often they make their livelihood off their land for generations and generations. When we talk about sustainable cut, that's been something that has been monitored and controlled, I guess, reviewed for quite some time in this province.

Certainly, going forward, the Lahey report will be implemented. It will take a bit of time, but we all know that sustainability of our natural resources has to be top of mind for all Nova Scotians.

GARY BURRILL: It was almost a year ago that half the members of the advisory committee to the Minister of Lands and Forestry wrote expressing their concern that while we are waiting, as we were then, as well, for the implementation of the Lahey review, unsustainable forestry practices were continuing, amounting to what they call - this was their word - a liquidation of the forest.

In that letter at that time, the committee called for an immediate moratorium on clear-cutting in the in-between time until Lahey is implemented. I want to ask the Premier: will he do that?

THE PREMIER: I know the minister is working with the minister's advisory council. There are all kinds of different cuts that happen in the forest. Clear-cutting is one type of cut that happens, selective cuts happen.

I just want to be clear to the member that there are certainly times - you may have a diseased stand, you may have - I don't want to anticipate all of the different scenarios that could exist, but there are certainly times when it is in the best interest of the health of the forest that it be cut.

I don't want to make a blanket statement like the member would like me to make, but I do want to be clear on this: Sustainability of our natural resources always has to be top of mind in government decisions, and the minister is working hard with the industry and the landowners and environmental groups and the minister's advisory council to make sure that our forests are properly managed in this province.

GARY BURRILL: The Lahey review also recommended that the department ensure, as an immediate priority, the implementation of the Endangered Species Act on Crown lands, including the identification and protection of core habitat for endangered species. This still has not been done for the mainland moose and just yesterday Nature Nova Scotia raised the concern about new forestry activity taking place in Digby County, where some of the last of these moose live.

My question to the Premier is: When will the government announce the core, no clear-cutting habitat for the mainland moose?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, we can get back to the member with a specific date, but my understanding is that there will be a report and some guidance available very shortly on that exact topic.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

### **PREM.: HEALTH CARE AUDITOR - DETAILS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, this government was elected on very specific promises surrounding health care: 300 doctors a year, 2,000 nurses, 2,500 net new long-term care beds, 24/7 surgeries.

The Premier and the government have also been very clear that accountability is absolutely necessary to ensure that the government is achieving those very specific targets.

Another commitment we spoke about previously in this Chamber was the PC government's commitment to a health care auditor that would be an officer of the Legislature.

My question to the Premier is: When can the House expect the creation of this office, and when will we be receiving the first report from the health care auditor?

THE PREMIER: I do feel very strongly about the need for a health care auditor in this province. That's not just because I'm a former auditor either, Mr. Speaker. I believe it's really important that we Nova Scotians know that their health care system is working in an efficient, effective manner. I think that's important for our health care professionals to know, too, that they are supported, so we are looking.

There are a number of initiatives that we are - if it was in our platform, we are sincere about doing it and we'll get to it. I don't have a specific update on where that is, but I will reaffirm my commitments to Nova Scotia establishing a health care auditor.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, I know I speak on behalf of our caucus when I say that will be an issue that we do support on this side of the House.

Along with that, we do require reporting on the numbers to hold the government accountable. Also to know if the initiatives are being successful or not, it's absolutely key to do that. We have discussed in this House what reporting could look like on vacancies and recruitment numbers.

My question to the minister is: Has there been any movement on determining what those reports are going to look like, and the frequency of those reports?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, there is work happening now. What we need to understand is what to report and when, so there will be a variety of reporting structures. Some things may be reported monthly, some things may be reported quarterly. We'll be working with the Nova Scotia Health Authority, the continuing care sector, and the department, to undertake that task.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth, on a new question.

### **DAE - NURSES: TRAINING - PLANS**

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the answer to that question.

The nursing shortage that we are experiencing here in Nova Scotia is of course fundamental to ensuring that our health care system is providing the services that people need. We had expanded nursing seats in Nova Scotia at Dalhousie, the Yarmouth Campus, and CBU.

My question to the Minister of Advanced Education is: What steps is he taking to ensure that we are training more nurses in the province of Nova Scotia? Specifically, will

he commit to expanding the current seats that we have in our post-secondary institutions for nursing?

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for that question. As we all know, nurses are important to our health care system and as our Premier announced the other day, he has guaranteed a job for every nursing graduate for the next five years.

We do understand the need for nursing across the spectrum and the continuum of nursing. We are working with our partners in universities and working with our other departments in order to have those discussions about exactly how to do that.

[10:30 a.m.]

ZACH CHURCHILL: I know the minister would also be aware of the shortage that we have of continuing care assistants in the province of Nova Scotia.

What steps is the Minister of Advanced Education taking to incentivize more people to pursue the noble profession of continuing care assistants to ensure that we're going to meet the demand that we have in the province for CCAs?

BRIAN WONG: CCAs, as well, are an important part of that continuum. One of the things that we are looking at is trying to find out why we have so many CCAs that are no longer part of the system. We're trying to find out ways to attract people into that market so that they'll stay there, as well.

We're also talking with our partners at NSCC and private career colleges to see how we can advance that forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

#### **DHW: CONSTITUENT - ADVICE**

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness.

A young constituent reached out to me recently. She's been suffering from an all-too-common affliction for women: menstrual irregularities and pain. Most recently, she was referred by her family doctor to the OB/GYN clinic at the IWK because she has exhausted any of the common treatments for such a situation.

She let me know that she was told the clinic there, at the IWK, has a 12-month wait-list that's growing, no doubt due in part that it was shut down during the first wave of

COVID-19. Her doctor now has referred her to a gynecologist at another site in the hopes of getting her in a bit sooner.

Unfortunately, she's just learned that her gynecologist is going off on maternity leave. My young constituent, of course, supports her gynecologist in this but has discovered that the doctor who is going to fill in has now retired.

My question to the minister is: What would she advise for my young constituent to do?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I actually have had a couple of inquiries since I was elected and came into this position. I understand that there is a significant wait. I have asked the department to look into why that wait exists.

What I would ask is that maybe we could speak afterwards about that specific case and see if there is something that we can do to expedite her care and care of other women who are experiencing a lot of difficulties. It's a very specialized clinic.

KELLY REGAN: The Premier has stated numerous times that he is going to fix the health care system. A couple of examples: On August 17<sup>th</sup>, "this team will fix the healthcare crisis" on Twitter on election day, then on August 16<sup>th</sup>, it's time to fix the health care crisis.

For this young woman, who has been suffering for about a dozen years since she was 12, not being able to access a specialist now that she's been referred is, in fact, a crisis. I just want to be certain that the minister understands that because doctors are people, they will do things that doctors do like have babies and retire.

My question is: Will the fix for the health care system that the Premier campaigned on include doctors to fill in during specialist leave occurrences?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Certainly, the staffing shortages and the physician crisis in the health care system is not unknown to me. It's actually why I ran in the election to begin with. (Applause)

I'm very committed to working particularly with Dr. Orrell, and of course we'll look for locums for all these specialized clinics to get people the care that they require as close to home and with the right specialist that we can.

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

#### **DHW - GENDER AFF. CARE: MSI COV. - EXPAND**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness.



Gender-affirming care is life-saving care. The previous government's approach forced people to bring forward human rights challenges in order to have procedures covered by MSI. This approach is not in line with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. There are international standards for gender-affirming care and we should be meeting them.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to expanding MSI coverage for gender-affirming care?

HON. BRIAN COMER: I've already had a thorough briefing on gender-affirming care and we've actually already met with a couple of stakeholders in this regard. If the member wants to talk to me after the session to kind of line up some additional stakeholder requests, I know it is a significant issue in the province and across the province, and I would be happy to follow up with the member opposite.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is, again, to the Minister of Health and Wellness. I am a bit confused by the deferral to the Minister responsible for Mental Health and Addictions, noting that what we are talking about is a broad range of health care issues that should be covered under MSI. Certainly, jurisdictions like the Yukon very clearly made this a mandate of the Minister of Health.

Another hurdle for people seeking gender-affirming care is access to knowledgeable and nearby health care. Currently, prideHealth at Nova Scotia Health is tasked with improving access to care for 2SLGBTQ+ people, but it is underfunded and only has one navigator position serving the entire province.

As a start to this important work, will the Minister of Health and Wellness commit to increasing funding for prideHealth?

BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear with the member opposite, a significant component of the gender-affirming care is a psychological evaluation before surgical operations would take place. We all work under the umbrella of Health and Wellness, like with my colleague in Health and Wellness and Seniors and Long-Term Care. It is all coming from the same area, essentially. I would be happy to move this initiative forward if you are willing to have a conversation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

### **NRR - ECOL. FORESTRY: LARGER PERCENTAGE - COMMIT**

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, I am hearing from forest sector stakeholders that large clear-cuts continue to move through the department's harvest approval process. I have learned that since the election, approximately 1,500 hectares of proposed cuts - maybe only 4 per cent or 61 hectares - were recognized as suited to ecological forestry.

My question for the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables: Can he commit to ensuring a much larger percentage of cuts in the coming months are earmarked for ecological forestry?

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Yes, that is the movement that we are taking. There was a backlog because of the election, and as we know, the economy still has to go. The protection of the forestry has to be paramount, but with the SGEM initiatives and the implementation that has started since the election, and the report out prior to the election under that member's government, we are certainly moving in that aspect further.

As the Premier initiated the comment earlier, my department and myself are certainly working with the minister's advisory council to start that implementation even further and the training that needs to happen on the ground so we can get to that Lahey report.

CARMAN KERR: I want to thank the minister for that response. The minister has said to me privately and here in the House that we will see progress on the Lahey report, and yet we are hearing from this government recently this week that the Lahey report may not be fully implemented until 2023.

My question to the minister: Could he let Nova Scotians know what specifics of Lahey will be implemented before Christmas?

TORY RUSHTON: I appreciate the conversations that I do have with the member opposite and the Critic of my department, and the invites that have been extended for me to go out and tour his area in the forestry sector. That will certainly help my department have a dialogue with not just foresters in his area but foresters all around.

The quick response is that the SGEM is what we are working on, and the Silviculture Guide is the main part that we are working on right now to get that implemented so we can move that further. Those blocks that are being approved are going to meet that sort of model of the Lahey report.

Let's not forget that there is a triad model. There is going to be select harvest. There are going to be areas of intensive harvest that are in the Lahey report. Just with a few seconds, I look forward to having those conversations further.

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

### **EECD - RAPID HOUSING DEV.: SCHOOLS - ADDRESS**

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Yesterday, when I asked the minister about the building of schools in relation to the rapid housing developments that have been

initiated by the government, she said, “I am very happy to say that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has a five-year capital plan. Our capital planning, which includes the planning for building of schools, is one that looks forward to the future and has a long-term approach.” I will table that.

With the utmost respect, the five-year capital plan does not even keep up with regular growth in communities. It still does not build schools fast enough, let alone will cover the housing development and the rapid housing that is happening within this government, which I applaud.

My question to the minister is: How will her department address this rapid housing development in relation to the building of schools?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: The five-year capital plan allows us to project and forecast, which will get us ahead of the scramble to keep up with the growth that’s been experienced in the past.

In terms of addressing the challenges for space that currently exist today, the department has many mechanisms to address that. We use modular classrooms, and there is the ability look at boundary reviews when necessary, so we do have both long-term planning as well as short-term and immediate mechanisms for dealing with those issues.

PATRICIA ARAB: In Fairview-Clayton Park in particular, but it’s not unique to HRM, we don’t have land. There is a lack of land. There are the developments that are taking place, our population is here, and we are growing and it’s amazing and we are happy for the modular classrooms. We’re happy for whatever accommodations are made by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, but the fact of the matter is currently our kids in my riding and the neighbouring ridings do not have space.

We’re dealing with COVID-19, we’re dealing with protocols, but even aside from all that, on a regular basis, they are not existing in structures that are conducive to the type of learning that is needed, the space, the energy, especially our younger kids. Given the fact that we have limited land and we have these challenges, apart from modular classrooms, apart from the five-year capital plan, what does the minister have planned to address these current needs?

BECKY DRUHAN: The focus for our education system is ensuring that our students get quality education, and we have all sorts of ways that we support students in our schools to get exactly that. If there are specific crowding issues that the member has that she’d like to speak about, I’d be more than happy to talk to her about those, but our students are getting excellent education and our teachers and educators are doing a wonderful job, and we’ve been handling the very exciting growth, I think, very well. Like I said, I’d be happy to speak to the member if she has very specific issues she wants to talk about.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

**FTB: ATL. INVEST. BUBBLE - DISCUSSIONS**

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: My question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. Earlier this week, I asked the minister what actions were being taken to protect the finances of our province in the face of rising inflation rates. Keeping expenses as low as possible and managing our debt is a very important thing for our province, but also equally as important is making sure we have a stable and growing tax base.

There is a movement for an Atlantic investment bubble, to have equity tax credits for the Atlantic region. I'm wondering if the minister has been involved in any of these important discussions.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Our government, of course, is looking at things that affect people. I think about the rent cap that was put in place. I think about gas price regulation that gives consumers confidence that when they're paying the price at the pump, there's some transparency around it.

Specific to the member's question, the Atlantic investment bubble is certainly something of interest. It's something that the Atlantic finance ministers will be meeting on soon. One of the challenges, though, is the fact that if you have a company that's based in New Brunswick and is not paying corporate income tax in Nova Scotia, if we are to give them some kind of a rebate, they can't apply it against Nova Scotia taxes. That is one of the challenges, but it's something that we will be meeting on and we'll be discussing further.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: We live in such a small region, the Atlantic region. We're so interconnected and of course we know it best in our border community.

In order to start a business, a new venture, or even grow an existing business, entrepreneurs need capital. Back after World War I, the country started something called Victory Bonds. I had a constituent actually meet with me a few months ago and suggest that we look at doing something like that, because even though we haven't been through a war, we have been through somewhat of a war with this pandemic.

I'm wondering if the minister has considered creating an opportunity for Nova Scotians to invest in Nova Scotia businesses and entrepreneurs through something like a vehicle, a type of bond investment.

ALLAN MACMASTER: The member is correct. One of the significant issues for anyone operating or wanting to start a business is access to capital. There are certainly programs through the Nova Scotia Credit Union - up to half a million dollars in loans. I

think it's safe to say that governments feel that grants to business - things in the past, oftentimes, they didn't work out. We still have things like a payroll tax rebate.

[10:45 a.m.]

I would also say this, though. One of the things that has been on my mind is the need for human resources. Many businesses are struggling, trying to find the people they need. I want to just make a positive note that I think there are many opportunities for Nova Scotians out there, whether it's to get retrained - because there are a lot of good jobs out there. We have gone from a period of time in some areas with high employment to now times where we don't have the people to fill the jobs.

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

### **OMHA: PROVINCIAL GAMBLING STRATEGY - UPDATE**

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question this time is indeed for the Minister responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions - although perhaps someone else will choose to respond.

Last week, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board explained that he had not decided if the government will permit the Atlantic Lottery Corporation to move forward with online gambling. He also could not say whether his government will reinstate the gambling supports that were eroded under the Liberal government.

Can the minister tell the House whether or not his government will reinstate funding to Gambling Awareness Nova Scotia?

HON. BRIAN COMER: I have been talking with my colleague the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board about this very issue. It hasn't come to a conclusion at this point, but it's definitely something we're discussing.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, the NDP released a broad and comprehensive Responsible Gaming Strategy in 2011 that "sets forth a plan for gambling in Nova Scotia that ensures a responsible, sustainable, and accountable approach to gambling, problem gambling, research, and governance." The previous government abandoned the strategy, never bothering to update it or complete its implementation.

Nova Scotians are concerned that this government will greatly expand access to gambling without ensuring we have the needed supports for people living with problematic gambling habits. Can the minister commit to updating the province's gambling strategy?

BRIAN COMER: I would say that the Office of Mental Health and Addictions obviously has a top priority on addictions for Nova Scotians, especially post-pandemic. It's

a big concern of my department and our caucus. I would say that's accurate. As far as comprehensive gaming strategy, that's something you'll hear about in the near future, but I wouldn't have specifics today.

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

**MAH: UPPER H. PLAINS HOUSING PROJECT - COMMIT**

HON. BEN JESSOME: My question is directed to the Premier.

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, two weeks ago today actually, the Leader of the Official Opposition posed a question to the Premier pertaining to a commitment that we had made during the election. The Premier graciously committed to make good on that promise related to the strategic initiatives committee in Hammonds Plains and a housing project that they're intending to start on.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Premier: Given that two weeks have gone by, what steps has he taken? What resources has he deployed? What steps has he taken to familiarize himself with this project?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I know the member has placed that document in my hand, and I have placed that in the hands of my staff. I don't have an update at the moment, but we're certainly aware of the project.

BEN JESSOME: I do appreciate the minister's response and certainly his reception to that paperwork and that community. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the minister would be willing to come out and meet with the community organization in Upper Hammonds Plains to make sure that they have the resources that the Premier has committed to.

JOHN LOHR: Of course, absolutely, I would want to. I need a little bit of time to get a briefing on that, but absolutely, I would commit to that.

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

**MAH - NEW HOUSING PLAN: ACCESSIBILITY - CONFIRM**

LORELEI NICOLL: I did have a question lined up but I'm going to change my question in light of the discussion that we had earlier.

My colleague who sits next to me, and I'm very honoured to have him sitting next to me - I don't know if it was missed, but he actually announced that he was not going to sit in this House until Bill No. 12, the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act, was addressed.

My question is: How long will my colleague not be sitting next to me?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. That bill is on the order paper right now and cannot be discussed until it comes forward.

The honourable member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

LORELEI NICOLL: So given that - as we learn, because the process in this House is intriguing, to say the least - this government has committed \$35 million to support over 1,100 new affordable housing units across the entire province, does the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing plan to ensure that a certain percentage of all these affordable units will be accessible to all Nova Scotians?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I know that in our department, the move to barrier-free houses - truly barrier-free homes - is something that is under way.

I don't have the number right now for how many of those 1,100 will be barrier-free. Certainly, part of that 1,100 is rental supplements, as the member would know, and those would be wherever the families are living. For the ones that are being constructed, I don't have the answer to that question, but I will find out.

LORELEI NICOLL: To add to that, Mr. Speaker, roughly one out of three Nova Scotians over the age of 15 self-report that they have at least one disability - the highest rate of disabled citizens of any province in this country. According to the Affordable Housing Commission report, many people with mobility and non-visible disabilities struggle to find a home that is both affordable and accessible.

What is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing planning to do to address the need for accessible housing in this province?

JOHN LOHR: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that question. It certainly is a priority in our department. As the member and members opposite may know, through Housing Nova Scotia, we have a number of units in the province which the Province owns, and some of those are being transformed to barrier-free. It's a costly and expensive process and it takes time, but we are currently doing that. That's a commitment on our part.

I don't have the exact number of how many there will be, but I know that it's something that we are working on, that we're transitioning to. We recognize the need for these types of units.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

**DCS: FOSTER CARE SYSTEM REDESIGN - COMMIT**

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, foster care is difficult, both from a youth and foster parent perspective. Imagine being removed from one home and placed into another home full of strangers. Now imagine being put in a home where your race, religion, sex, or culture is not reflected in that home.

What is the minister doing to ensure that foster homes and support staff reflect the diversity of our youth in care?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member for that important question. We are definitely, through the Department of Community Services, working with African Nova Scotian communities, as well as Mi'kmaw communities, and making sure that all foster care situations are spoken.

We have very thoughtful conversations and are working with all diverse and different demographics, and we will continue that great work. We always look at advancing how we can do better with foster care.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Redesigning the foster care system is a priority for many families and youth involved in the system. Our government was working with families to redesign foster care with a focus on a hub model, elevating the voices of youth in care and providing a better funding model. I noticed that there was no notice of foster care redesign in the minister's mandate letter.

My question is for the Minister of Community Services: Is this government committed to the redesign of the foster care system?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, this is a great opportunity to give a shout-out to all those foster families who open their homes, their hearts, to foster children. Where would we be without their compassion?

I want to assure everyone in this Chamber and all Nova Scotians that we are committed to that, we are currently working on that and I look forward to announcing some different programs in the future with that.

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

**FTB - CANNABIS SALES: MUNICIPAL SHARE - ADDRESS**

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Three years ago, the federal government agreed to give the provinces more tax revenue for the sale of cannabis if municipalities were given a 25 per cent share to cover costs associated with legalization. Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta have all set up



agreements with municipalities. Here in Nova Scotia, cannabis revenues continue to rise but there is still no indication that the money will flow to municipalities.

My question to the minister is: Will the minister address this problem and give municipalities their fair share of cannabis revenue?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think one point that we have to keep in mind with cannabis sales is that there's been an effort to try to keep reducing the price of cannabis. When it was first selling in the province here it was about \$10 a gram. Now it's down to as low as \$6.50 a gram.

What that means - it's good news for some people, I guess, Mr. Speaker. What that means is that the profit margins are quite low on cannabis. I just want the member to be aware of that point, that . . .

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

### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

### **PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 61.

### **Bill No. 61 - Joint Regional Transportation Agency Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 61, an Act to Establish a Joint Regional Transportation Agency, be read a second time.

It is a pleasure to speak to this legislation today. Improving the flow of people and goods in and out of Halifax Regional Municipality is critical to residents of HRM and to all Nova Scotians. HRM is experiencing a period of growth unlike anything it has seen before. While this is so very positive, it puts strains on the existing transportation infrastructure. This dynamic environment calls for action to ensure we are best positioned to handle and to harness future growth.

That is why I am pleased to bring forward an Act to Establish a Joint Regional Transportation Agency. The new Joint Regional Transportation Agency that will be created will enable the Province and Halifax Regional Municipality to work together collaboratively on transportation challenges and opportunities. The Regional Transportation Agency will review roads, ferries, and public transit to ensure that the transportation system is best set up for growth.

Once this legislation is passed, we will immediately begin to get to work on getting this Regional Transportation Agency up and running. This new group will collaborate to develop a five-year master transportation plan for HRM to guide their work. It will report to me, as minister, and their master plan will be approved by the provincial Cabinet.

Naturally, it will build upon already existing work, such as HRM's Integrated Mobility Plan. We anticipate the work on this transportation master plan to begin in 2022, with preliminary information coming back in 2023.

Mr. Speaker, I want to stress that the Regional Transportation Agency is not being created because the province and HRM don't already co-operate on transportation issues - we do. However, it is on an informal, ad hoc basis. Creation of this new body ensures a formalized and structured approach to the transportation challenges and opportunities HRM faces.

A good example of the need for a coordinated and co-operative approach on critical HRM transportation issues and the value of that approach is the National Trade Corridors project to renovate and upgrade the Windsor Street exchange. The exchange is currently utilized by 48,000 cars per day, with major congestion during peak periods. This congestion impacts access to the Halifax peninsula, the movement of freight in and out of the Fairview Cove container terminal, and access to the Bedford Highway and Highway 101, as well as traffic flow for the A. Murray MacKay Bridge.

This critically important transportation infrastructure affects HRM, the province's highway system, the Halifax Port Corporation, and Halifax Harbour Bridges. The Windsor Street exchange is one of a number of transportation challenges in HRM that demonstrates the necessity for a regional transportation agency to coordinate and prioritize transportation issues.

The Regional Transportation Agency will be set up as a Crown corporation. It will have a small staff including technical experts selected by the Department of Public Works and HRM. I will appoint an advisory board with representatives from HRM and the Department of Public Works, as well as other stakeholders like the Halifax Port Authority, the Halifax International Airport Authority, and Halifax Harbour Bridges.

We have the chance to learn from mistakes that other cities have made. We don't want to approve more housing and then discover that we have a transportation crisis. It's

critical that we consider both matters at the same time. Creation of the Regional Transportation Agency ensures we have the right people in the room working collaboratively to plot the best path forward for HRM and its residents.

[11:00 a.m.]

Mx. Speaker, I look forward to hearing from my colleagues from across the aisle.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mx. Speaker, thank you to the minister for those comments and for introducing this bill.

We had a briefing on it yesterday, and it's interesting. In general, I have a wait-and-see attitude on this, but there are a few things that I'm potentially concerned about. In fact, I think the scope of it is maybe a bit narrow. I know that it applies only to HRM, and that makes sense, because HRM is growing very, very quickly, as we all know, but I also think there are many, many municipalities across the province - smaller, rural municipalities - that would benefit, I think, a great deal from having provincial expertise and resources on hand to help with their transportation planning and strategy. As the minister mentioned in her remarks, what we don't want to have happen is development anywhere in the province, really, that's not planned from a transportation point of view as well.

I see the effects of that very clearly in my own constituency, which really has exploded over the past decade or so. The biggest issue that I deal with and that I heard about on the campaign trail is transportation: traffic, ferries, potential highways. All of these issues crop up when we don't have appropriate planning in advance. In terms of spirit of the bill and the intent of it, I think it makes sense, but I do think there is a missed opportunity here with other municipalities that could use the assistance.

I'm also curious a bit about the issue around membership of the board. This is Clause (2) here: "The Board's members must be licensed professional planners or professional engineers or hold such other technical expertise and qualifications as determined by Governor in Council regulations." That makes sense to an extent, of course. We do want people with technical professional expertise on this board. I think there's no doubt about that. That would be an obvious thing, but I do think there could be room for others: community members, different stakeholders who might not have that technical planning expertise or engineering expertise, but who are dealing with the consequences of poor planning decisions on the transportation side. I'm sure there are lots of people in my constituency who would volunteer to serve on this board if they could.

That's another point that concerns me a little bit. I'm also interested in the technical advisory board. I know the minister mentioned representation from significant stakeholders. I know from my past work that at times there has been a lack of coordination

between Halifax Harbour Bridges, the Port of Halifax, the airport. All of those, really, hubs of the transportation network across the city and the municipality do need to work together. I agree that that's a really important point, but I would like to see, again, that representation perhaps be broadened a bit to let people in on the conversation because no matter who you are and no matter what your expertise may or may not be, you're dealing with transportation no matter what - whether you're going to work, going to the doctor's office, taking the dog for a walk - everybody is touched by this issue. I think we should be focusing on including as many people, as many voices on it as possible.

I'm sure that the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, who I think will be speaking on this bill as well, knows the ins and outs of the municipality's work on transportation and mobility in general, so I will defer to her for the details on that.

I do think a lot of good work has already been done, so I would hope that the agency will incorporate a lot of that work, a lot of that expertise, so we're not reinventing the wheel when we don't need to.

I know that yesterday in the briefing some of the staff talked about some of those plans being a bit micro- or laser-focused, whereas this agency will be tasked with kind of a macro view of the municipality, which, as we know, is huge and rural, suburban, and urban all at once. That's another point that I'm sure other members will touch on, not reinventing the wheel, as I said.

All in all, as I say, the bill makes sense, but the devil is in the details and I would like to see a lot of these issues be smoothed out, be ironed out. Also, as I said, I do want the government to consider the needs of other municipalities, which are growing as well, and which hopefully will not have to deal with a lot of these concerns in five or 10 years. Transportation is all about infrastructure and real things on the ground. When you put a road in or you choose not to put a road in, or a bus shelter or anything, it's hard to go back. It's really hard to go back once something has been built.

Those are my few comments for now and I will take my seat and look forward to the rest.

**THE SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

**SUSAN LEBLANC:** I also am pleased to rise to speak to this bill today, An Act to Establish a Joint Regional Transportation Agency. I appreciate that the government is moving speedily ahead with changes it believes are necessary to address the housing crisis.

I would just like to echo my colleague from Bedford South in saying that Dartmouth North - I am speaking as the spokesperson for Public Works right now, but Dartmouth North is an interesting constituency in that at its edges - though it is an urban and mostly city jurisdiction for transportation - at its edges it intersects quite a lot with provincial roads,

so the Lancaster intersection, which I can go into great detail about some time with the minister, the Burnside connector on one side, and of course Shannon Park, which currently is home to a wonderful elementary school but I gather and I anticipate that in the next several years it will be the home to many new people, but it is also half-owned by the Millbrook First Nation.

I might go into a bit more detail in a second about all of those things, but I want to echo my colleagues' concerns about the representation on the agency and when the minister listed the bodies that will be represented on the agency, I'd like to . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order. The honourable member for Dartmouth North has the floor. If there are some side conversations, they could be taken outside. Thank you.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you so much, Mx. Speaker. I just want to call to the floor of the House the discussions we've been having today, in particular in the last couple of days, and that is the importance of representation, of diversity in all of our agencies, boards, and commissions. This would apply to this one as well, and also community voices.

I know that there are people in Dartmouth North who are very, very concerned about the fact that a two-lane or a four-lane highway sort of rips through a residential area in our community. If there was ever a planner or an agency of planners looking at that, it would be really important, obviously, to have a voice at the table for the folks whose community is literally separated by this monstrosity of a road right now - in my humble opinion, of course.

I wanted to, first, echo my colleague's concerns about that. I think that the idea of placing greater emphasis on transportation and creating an explicit role for the province at the regional level is a great idea, but we do have to do it, again, with an eye to the climate crisis in a way that ensures accessibility and community involvement. When we're looking at bills, Mx. Speaker, we need to look at them with a lens to diversity and inclusion, accessibility, and also a climate lens, making sure that at the forefront of anything we do moving into the future, and that includes housing developments, road developments, making sure that we are looking at all of these potentials with an eye to the climate crisis and making sure that we are building and developing in a way that addresses the climate crisis that we are in.

I'm concerned that the bill as written does not explicitly refer to active transportation, for instance, or require the agency to factor the climate crisis or accessibility into its mandate. I would love to see amendments to the bill that make reference to these things. I worry that the lack of those things could be a consequence of the speed at which the government's moving without making sure to take the time to consult with Nova Scotians.

I know that we need to act quickly, Mx. Speaker, but there's lots that government could do right now, quickly, to improve active transportation in HRM. For instance, they could commit to their portion of funding for new ferries and rapid transit routes.

I also know that there will be questions - and the minister has addressed this a little bit - about how the agency's work will intersect with HRM's work, and I'm sure we'll hear more about that on the floor of this House, in particular with the integrated mobility plan.

I guess I will leave it there. I know the minister is burning to know about the Lancaster intersection, but I can talk to the minister about that another time - and I certainly will. I look forward to hearing from stakeholders at the Law Amendments Committee.

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

**LORELEI NICOLL:** Thank you for all the comments that have been said so far. It's interesting. My colleague from Bedford would be interested in this because the Bedford Highway is one of the big pressures. I'm Cole Harbour-Dartmouth, and the bridges are a big pressure as well. I'm glad to see the essence of what the agency is going to do to work collaboratively, but I wonder why they feel the need to form yet another Crown corporation to consolidate or having other Crown corporations working together. I have had many discussions. I know the history, the evolution of time. There used to be a Metro Transportation organization that was in play that looked after the ferries. There has been a lot of ownership that has been passed back on to HRM since amalgamation.

Where we are now, the municipality feels that they're doing a good job, but I also know, having been on the Halifax Partnership for eight years, the Atlantic Gateway and the means to move goods and products with the airport and the port are of a big concern. It is about the economy, so I'm supportive to see them come back to the table. Because they're Crown corporations, all these properties are privately owned, and when they leave their properties, they feel a need to have their concerns addressed on our streets and roads, the way they're going to move these things, and there are things in place.

To the member for Dartmouth North: HRM does have a plan for the climate crisis. All those things will be addressed in their streets and roads. You'll see it down on Lower Water - I think it's called Lower Water. That's a major concern when it comes to the climate crisis.

To the questions at hand with the document that I have before me, the object of the agency is to conduct a comprehensive review of all modes of transportation associated with the municipality, including roads, bridges, highways, ferries, transit, rail, airports, and ports for the purpose of creating a master transportation plan to ensure a regional approach to transportation consistent with the municipality's growth and development, and the safe, efficient and coordinated movement of people and goods, as I said. Any other activities

deemed necessary to fulfill the intent of this Act in accordance with the regulations, I would like to know what the intent of this bill is. I don't see it necessarily spelled out.

To the point of who is going to serve on this committee, my colleague pointed out the qualifications that were needed, but when it comes to 9(e) where it says "a member, at any time in the preceding 10 years, of the Parliament of Canada, the legislature of a province of Canada or a municipal council in Canada" cannot serve, I don't know what the intent is, why they cannot serve, and why the 10 years. That was one of my questions and concerns. I understand that it is a work in progress.

In 26(1), the clause says, "As required by the Minister, the Agency shall submit to the Minister for approval a five-year master transportation plan to improve the flow of people and goods in and out of the Municipality ...". There is nothing in this section where it says the minister shall submit the five-year master transportation plan required by Subsection to the Governor in Council for approval. There is nothing in the objects section - Section 5 - that says that the agency has to implement the plan, only develop the plan. If it's a five-year plan, when is the plan going to be implemented by this Crown corporation?

Those are all concerns of mine. There seems to be some ambiguity as to how it's going to go about, but again, "The Agency shall submit to the Minister an annual report, on or before December 31st of each calendar year, outlining its progress on implementing the five-year master transportation plan required by subsection 26(1)."

I just wanted to know: What will that look like? What will the five-year master plan look like? How is the Crown corporation going to respond to all of these things that are going to be recommended? Streets and roads cost money. Halifax Harbour Bridges wants a third bridge. Those are all things that are going to come into play. Where is the money going to flow from this master plan?

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I actually have bit of a sore throat today, but I did take a rapid COVID test at home and everything is fine. I think it might have been a little too much talking last night. If anyone has a Halls or something like that, maybe I could get one.

I wanted to speak on this bill because I think it's important. The devil is in the details, and what I would say on this bill is there's a process in place right now on how things get done. That's what an elected city council is for. I know that there are members here on both sides - thank you so much. One second, Mx. Speaker. Do you mind? Can I ...

AN HON. MEMBER: I want a million dollars. (Laughter)

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Whoever provided that, thank you so much. I probably should have asked who provided it first.

There's a process in place right now on how city planning happens, how infrastructure happens, how transit happens. I'll be the first to say I don't always agree with it. I'll give you an example in my own backyard where we had the Sambro Loop bus route from Metro Transit. It was actually making money. When there was a redesign of Metro Transit, that bus route was removed - to the chagrin of a lot of people.

Right now, when it comes to infrastructure, there's a process. We go to our city councillors, we have conversations with them, we make a fundamental case why Shore Drive in Herring Cove should have water. There are no details in this on how that process is now, how it changes. Who do we go to? Who do we talk to? I think one of the biggest responsibilities for HRM City Council is city design. I think they take it very seriously. I might be wrong or incorrect on this, but I remember reading somewhere that it was Councillor Mason who said that the Department of Public Works and the government as a whole has two city planners and HRM has dozens.

I wonder the influence of developers on this plan. Who is going to sit on this group? We do know that there is some developer influence on that side of the aisle. I'm not naming names, but we do know that they were part of the Premier's transition team - one of the largest residential developers in all of Nova Scotia. I wonder if those individuals will be rewarded and sit on this committee. Those are some of the questions I'd like answered. How are these individuals going to be chosen?

We've seen in the past that development is not just development. We've seen our Indigenous communities struggle with developments, with homes and housing falling apart and nobody listening. Will their voices be heard?

We have a member on this side who has fought for land titles in the Preston communities. I first met that member because both my brother and sister-in-law volunteered as lawyers - two of the original people - for the Land Titles Clarification Act. They were fighting along with that member for Preston to have those titles and that land properly given to the people who own it. They had to fight government for decades on that.

I'm proud of the work of the previous premier, and the one before that, the two Liberal premiers, who took that responsibility to heart. It was an issue that was ignored for a long, long time.

I remember when I first got elected just after 2013, both my brother and sister-in-law approached me about this. They said they'd been working on this by volunteering hours and time on this and this is just absolutely - their words, not mine - disgusting. Why are we fighting our own government on this stuff?



So now we're taking the development of a city and we're taking it out of the hands of those who know best - those who know their cultural needs and who know where things need to be built - and we're putting it in the hands of government.

We could give you a little history of where government builds. It's a term called environmental racism. We can give you the history of how these decisions are made. Especially with what I think we know will be hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars - probably billions of dollars - of taxpayer dollars. I wonder what the oversight of the committee will be.

If I have a development moving forward, will that committee step in and say, nuh-uh, no more, even though HRM is saying wait a second, this is a good development? I'll be honest with you, Mx. Speaker, I do actually trust the judgement of the current Minister of Public Works. But we're not going to always have that person in that position. Ministers will come and go.

We know good intentions, which we've seen in past governments - not in the previous Liberal governments - but governments before that, good intentions can be destroyed and thrown to the wayside when it comes to Treasury Board and Cabinet.

For those who haven't been in that position, it's an interesting process. You can have the best argument in the world, you can have the best reasons in the world - or so I've heard. I think our previous governments, Liberal governments, were always open to the good ideas, the great ideas. But I've heard from past governments that stuff gets thrown out that should not be thrown out.

I'll use examples. I'm going to give you an example of a friend of mine when it comes to development. It's somebody whom I see as a bit of a mentor, somebody who I go to for advice on some of the stuff. We're about the same age. His name is Norman, and he's been in the development industry for a long time. His family has been in the development industry for a long time.

I know there was a dispute with himself and a few others around the St. Patrick's-Alexandra site, for those of you who may not know what that site is. My colleagues - and I'm sure the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture knows about St. Patrick's-Alexandra.

There were a lot of good intentions, and for one reason or another, it didn't come to fruition in the way that someone I highly respect, someone who I think has great intentions - but that's not for me to decide, as the MLA. That's for city council to decide.

What I would say to Mayor Savage and the band of councillors there is, where does it stop? So tomorrow this government decides that maybe they don't like Halifax Water and the way it's being conducted. Well, it's ours now. We'll decide who gets water and

who doesn't. I guess that's kind of what this bill is all about, too. This bill is not just about housing. It's about water. It's about bus routes.

I was going to go down that road, but I think this bill essentially neuters HRM. It takes the power out of them. I think one of the things that the members across could do to show what they feel about the authority and the responsibility of HRM is to just stand up and rip up the charter.

Then I think you go a little further and maybe just decide who the councillors should be, because this bill takes the decision-making power away from HRM at a time where they have asked for more autonomy. As the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, I can tell you that I spoke to every single mayor and warden across this province. I made it a point to do that. I spoke to some councillors, a lot of the councillors. I spoke to one of the councillors who is now sitting here when he was a councillor, and I think some of them over there might have been in on some of those meetings. They can tell you that when I was Minister of Municipal Affairs, I didn't believe in top down. I didn't believe in dictating, and this bill . . .

[11:30 a.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would ask the member for Halifax Atlantic to speak directly to the bill.

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Yes, I am. I will say, Mx. Speaker, I've seen - yesterday we saw members opposite stand up and talk about the environment bill and they were not stopped, even though they were talking about the exact same topic I was talking about when I was told to talk on the bill. If we like, I can provide those recordings and we could compare them side by side.

What I will say is that the conversation I am trying to have here today is about the bill and the power that is taken from our city councillors, from our elected representatives - the power it takes from this bill. I'm sorry, the bill takes the power from them.

This all-powerful committee that's being created - I'll also say, Mx. Speaker, I think you are doing a great job, by the way. It's not always easy to keep me in line, so I appreciate it.

There are no details on who this all-powerful committee will be, what their personal experiences will be. Maybe they could put a clause or an amendment in this bill saying that those individuals on this all-powerful committee will have no direct political association, will have no direct political affiliation.

I do agree with my colleague about the ten-year - some things that just don't really make sense. They are very specific on certain things in this bill and very vague on others. The things they are vague on are the meat and potatoes, the bones of this, the decision-making process, the why. I think that we all know there's a housing crisis. We all know this bill is being put forward to try to address the housing crisis. But I think what we also know is that this bill was designed with zero consultation.

How do we know that? Well, when this bill was announced, those that it impacted were like, what in the bloody blue sky just happened there? What happened to our plans? What happened to a decade of taxpayers' dollars going into plans that we've been implementing? A perfect example of that - we're seeing that in my own community where HRM and their city planners are expanding these communities.

What I will say about the bill is, there is a mandate on housing. There's not a mandate against HRM. This bill feels like it's punitive. It feels like the parents are disciplining the children, saying you are not capable. I will say there are former members of HRM Council here today in this room that I believe - if they were still on council - would be furious, up in arms over this. I wonder if they've had these conversations with those members, with those councillors about this particular bill. I know they haven't.

The reason I brought up housing on this bill is because, how do we get to and from housing? Transportation, right? Bus routes. Sidewalks. Bike lanes. (Interruption) Things that make you go hmm - that's right.

I can say from my own perspective and from my own experience, one of the first things I did as an elected official in 2013 was have a conversation with the former Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal - now the Department of Public Works. There are a lot of great people in that department. I always am very, very complimentary of that department because it is a fantastic department. I took them to the community one day because we had a bit of an issue with cyclists. The Sambro Loop is one of the more popular places in all of HRM where people cycle.

We met with them, and within two years, my entire community was able to build active transportation lanes. I like to say that shortly after that, the former Premier, the member for Timberlea-Prospect, who was still a member at the time - and I'm okay with this - he stole my idea and he decided to fight for some active transportation lanes in his own community.

The reason I bring that up is because we were once community that was unsafe to walk. My foster dad lives probably a minute and a half down the road. When my partner Rena and I, when our kids were young, we had one of those difficult three-person strollers - throw all the kids in and move it along the road. We'd get halfway there, and then all of a sudden there are no sidewalks, there's no road. It was impossible to move them along the road. So, we'd have to go onto the road, which is a main thoroughway in our community

and it's dangerous. So what did we do? I went to my city councillor. I followed the process, and it was rectified.

I don't know how that process works now. I don't know how we get access. Do we go to the minister and say, listen, Mx. Speaker, I know the minister does not want us to be going to her about crosswalks and sidewalks? If that was me, I would be bald because I would be pulling my hair out. Every single day, you would get an MLA saying, hey, I need this bus lane, I need this, I need that. I know that she's listening intently, and I know there are going to be lots of answers. I think she'll feed that back to us. She'll feed that back to us.

Transportation is a big subject. It's not just about building the infrastructure. The member for Bedford South put forward a really good bill. It gives some of the power back to HRM with regard to transportation. Maybe it's something that could be in this bill, and that's allowing - and we've seen this in other jurisdictions - residential areas to have their speed limits lowered to under 50 kilometres per hour. We know that if you decrease your speed limit, the chances of survival if you hit a pedestrian are much greater. I would like to see a commitment, Mx. Speaker, from the government that this group is reflective of our communities.

The reason why I'm a little apprehensive about this - and I'm glad that I stood up and took an hour on aquaculture, even though I think for some people it might have been a little cringey. The reason why I was glad, and the comparison here is because that bill had a group of one that was going to make all the decisions. That's not a group. The fantastic minister over there listened. He said, you know what? It can't be a group of one, there's no such thing. We're going to bring in others, we're going to bring in experiences. That's what I would like to see in this bill. The definition, the group defined, what powers they have.

What happens, Mx. Speaker, if a project is already approved or going through the process? Let's say that the member for Fairview-Clayton Park decides that, just as an example, that the member wants to build housing over here and has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of their own money to go through the process with HRM? Then the group decides nope, we don't like it. We don't want you to do it.

Who is responsible for that money lost? That will happen once or twice and it will upset - and when I say "developer", I don't just mean big developers, I mean people of all stripes - it will dissuade them from building. There are enough bureaucratic hoops already to jump through when it comes to building.

If you want to put a fence up in your yard, in the time of COVID it's taking quite a while just to get inspectors out to look at your fence. Now you're asking developers and individuals for another layer, and that costs money, and that costs time, and that's uncertainty. What I foresee on that is I see a moment in time where Person A wants to build

a development over here - they have all these plans. Now Person B also wants to build something over here in these plans. Maybe they're wrong, and he's out. Maybe the wrong development gets picked, one that's maybe not as good for the people. Then that government is responsible for that - maybe they get sued over it.

I know that HRM has done extensive studies on transportation and our urban cores and from point A to point B. That's gone; that's thrown out the window. (Interruption) No? The minister is saying no. That's good. We will be incorporating those plans. Again, I apologize for the confusion, but what happens if those plans conflict with a recommendation from the board? Who has the final say? Is it the city that has to maintain these services?

We have had discussions with - and by "we" I mean the community I represent - we've had discussions with HRM about expansion of transit service and water and sewer infrastructure to the point where I've gotten angry, I'll be honest. They've given their reasons why, and that's fine. I trust and believe in the expertise of those individuals. I wonder if transit is built that's not sustainable, then who is responsible?

[11:45 a.m.]

More questions are just flooding in. If the transportation that needs to be built on this housing, is it the responsibility of HRM? They don't want to build it, and they've had recommendations in the past not to build or expand, are they going to be forced to pay it?

So, if they say I don't want - we've never had the plans to expand Metro Transit to Shad Bay - I'm just using that as an example - and the group says, nope, we are building, we see that as an ideal place to build affordable housing, will there be some kind of forced spending by the province to HRM?

The reason I use that example is that they don't want to run transit to large portions of my community. Actually, 50 per cent of my community does not have Metro Transit or water or sewer, which a lot of people would love to have. HRM, in their city planning, has decided that these are not great areas of growth; they don't want to expand out that way.

I can tell the minister that when this board is convened, they are going to look out there because it is going to be, it really is one of the few places left on the peninsula that has the potential for thousands and thousands and thousands of homes.

Are we going to take into account people's ability to live in spaces that are green? To run water around my entire community is about \$140 million; that is what we were told for water and sewer.

HRM has already said no. In fact, I've put it forward several times. I've asked for it, I've begged for it, and I've pleaded for it, but HRM has said no. That part of the

community in HRM is going to come up. It is going to come up. So will they have to cover the cost, and will they have to cover the cost to pave roads? There are still dirt roads in my community.

Believe it or not, everybody thinks I am an HRM MLA, but those of us who have kind of the mixture of HRM and rural, there is still some of that. We were one of the last places to actually get out from underneath Halifax County into HRM.

When I was a kid, it was just RCMP officers and all that. It was really rural Nova Scotia. For a long time, we didn't have a bus route out that way.

I just wonder the cost. It is easy to say words and we hear a lot of shiny, nice words about we are going to fix this, we are going to do this, we going to do this. The only real commitment we've heard is a lot of money for health care. When we have pressed the government on housing and these water-sewer infrastructure programs and projects, from the Premier himself we get: We're going to do what we can. We're going to do what we can, right? We are going to do it. We are going to get through it, but we are listening, and we are going to do what we can.

These are money-spending bills and this is a deferral from the province to municipalities, HRM in particular, and forcing them to spend money that they may not have, or they may have allocated for other projects.

Listen, I'll be the first to say that I hope every section of HRM is given a transit, a sustainable transit, sidewalks, bike lanes, and all of that but we know the cost is through the roof. I think this is a way of saying these are all these nice things we are going to do, but I don't think we have a costing for this.

You know, that was one of the things that went into HRM's plan was they looked at the growth sections on the peninsula and outside the urban core of our beautiful city. They have looked at that and they've said, we need to go out here first because this is where we foresee the growth.

There are reasons why, and listen, I'll be the first to tell you that. I've complained several times as an MLA and before I was an MLA. We, the saying used to - I mean before that past Liberal government - we used to say, the saying out in our community was, the money stopped at the rotary, you know. You get out to the Spryfield, Herring Cove, Harrietsfield, and all those areas, and Sambro, nobody spent money out there since John Buchanan. No one has spent money out there since John Buchanan.

I'll be the first to say that connected communities are better communities. Accessible communities are better communities. If we have communities that have sidewalks, bike lanes, and buses, then they're going to be better. I also wonder about, when it comes to busing and public transit, the routes, is this something - and I know, I hope, the

minister will answer this. I'm assuming they're going to rely on the city planning experts to design and build. I think a lot of the area of expansion and growth when it comes to this infrastructure, which is very expensive, should weigh heavily on the city, and there should be some guarantee from the Province.

We do know that the water - and I'll use that example - the water-sewer program. It was 33 per cent from the Province. In the end, I think it was about 27 per cent that the municipality had to cover after the Province and feds covered their end. That was on infrastructure that HRM wanted. If we're building infrastructure that HRM does not want, I would argue that maybe we should cover the entire cost so there's no risk to HRM when it comes to their planning. Maybe that's something we could put in the bill. We could put in that HRM will have a strong seat at the table, and that maybe they have the ability to override if given a reason that, I guess, works.

Mx. Speaker, I look forward to the response from the minister. Like I said, I know the department is in extremely capable hands over there. Let's see what she has to say.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: I did want to just add a couple of questions and comments pertaining to the transportation infrastructure, or, frankly, the lack thereof in the community of Lucasville, one of our historic Black communities, one community that I am fortunate to represent. I'm wondering if the minister can elaborate on how communities like Lucasville, like the greater community of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville - how they can benefit from the layout of this bill and what this may or may not enable for a community like mine.

Like my colleague from Halifax Atlantic referenced, we're a community that kind of outskirts HRM, that segment of the HRM population, a former county. Some of the infrastructure challenges that exist out there are a result of the sprawl that's taken place over the years and the development that's taken place outside of the community. A bill like this, for me, begs a few questions around what are the opportunities for a rural HRM community like Hammonds Plains-Lucasville?

I started by referencing Lucasville specifically because, as the member for Sackville-Uniacke would appreciate, having been the former councillor for that area, there's been relentless inquiries made of Metro Transit, of HRM, to enable some type of bus service, some type of community transportation service in that Lucasville community. On one side of the Lucasville Road, we have Lower and Middle Sackville, which has bus routes that frankly go up into subdivisions, do the loop, come back and drive back down through Sackville, past Lucasville.

On the other side, we have the community of Hammonds Plains, a developed community. We've got more of, I would say, a piecemeal service out there. A couple of

times a day buses come and go. But the point I'm trying to make is that on either side of the Lucasville Road, there are buses that pass the community of Lucasville right by.

Over the course of my eight years in the role of MLA for the community, I've had the opportunity to meet with staff at Metro Transit, subsequent councillors, the Cobequid Community Health team, who have acknowledged this issue of limited transportation as an access challenge for, in my case, the community of Lucasville, but I guess more generally speaking, the limitations that access to health care at that Cobequid site is subject to because of some of the limitations around our transportation infrastructure and the Cobequid Health family.

I'm grateful also for the engagement of the staff members at the Community Transportation Assistance Program. I would definitely like to give them a shoutout. They have always provided me with an ear to discuss any relevant issues related to transportation in the community. That particular program is certainly enabling for part of my district. BayRides is a great example of how that office and that program work successfully with some of our rural communities.

In standing up a piece of legislation like this and contemplating how to strengthen it, it's clear to me that - through you, Mx. Speaker, to the minister - there are communities that frankly are going under the radar. They're not going unnoticed, but just don't have the resources, the volunteer capacity that is required. I mean, everybody is busy, but in a bill like this, as we debate it, I guess my intention is to note that there are specific pockets within the greater HRM area that are being left behind, in terms of transportation.

It's not to say that there are not steps that can be taken to stand up an organization like BayRides, but the fact of the matter is that not every community, small or large, has that volunteer capacity to make use of a program like the Community Transportation Assistance Program.

First and foremost, I'm wondering, as I've said, through you to the minister, what does this bill do to tackle those specific situations where communities, and in this case Lucasville - again, an historic Black community that I represent - how is it that this bill gives them the tools to advocate successfully for transportation services in their community?

The other thing I did want to reference revolves around the consultation that may take place with local businesses. As I said a moment ago, the bus route in Hammonds Plains is kind of spotty, to say the least. There are one or two runs that come in the morning, a couple that come in the afternoon - at the start and end of the day - but there is really not a great deal of flexibility with the service.

We do have a Park & Ride and Express in Upper Tantallon, which I'm sure the member for Timberlea-Prospect has constituents, and the member for Chester-St.



Margaret's, her constituents try to make use of on a regular basis. We're grateful for that. The limited access of that service in my community has the greatest impact on our local businesses and their ability to recruit and have employees be able to come and go from their entities.

[12:00 noon]

We have, in particular, and I'm sure most would agree, we've all got these organizations within our communities that play vital roles ensuring that part of this effort and the work that follows this bill has to do with consultation with business owners in the community.

Business owners in general - but I guess two that I would like to reference specifically are my long-term care facilities. They are about three or four kilometres from the nearest bus route to the front door of the Whitehills Long Term Care Centre. The fact that the bus goes directly by the Pockwock Road creates a challenge for folks at that location to recruit and maintain the staff that exists at that location.

Furthermore, we have a number of child care operators who, in a community such as mine - I can only speak to my community, but I expect that there could be other pockets like this in HRM where the sprawl has taken place and you have child care operators who are running what, at one point in time, may have been a home-based business but are now actually full-scale child care operations. They are three, four, and five kilometres off the main strip where that connection to public transit exists.

In a community like mine, most people commute to and from work. Many of them rely heavily on our child care operators. An express concern of theirs has been that the public transportation availability is just not up to code.

Again, in acknowledging the effort and the intent of this bill is to be collaborative, it's to be considerate of some additional measures or opportunities to work with city, the HRM, councillors, local community leaders, businesses, individuals. I guess I wanted to mention those two things on behalf of my community and beg the minister's attention to respond to some of those questions.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister, it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Public Works.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I will take a few moments to address some of the questions. I certainly didn't get them all written down, but I think anyone on that side of the House knows that I'm very accessible, and if there's a question you want to ask me outside of the Chamber, I certainly will do everything I can to try to get the responses back to you.

To the member for Halifax Atlantic, there were lots of questions about building housing and water and sewer. That's not in this bill. This bill is to establish a joint Regional Transportation Agency within Halifax Regional Municipality that is going to review roads, ferries, and public transportation to ensure the transportation system is set up for future growth. Maybe those questions could be directed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

To respond to a couple of the questions, I think one of the first questions from the member for Bedford South is he'd like to see maybe this look to go to other municipalities. There's no one saying that this is not going to happen. This is where we're starting today because there's such unprecedented growth in HRM. It's not limited to the stakeholders that I listed - the Halifax Port Authority, the Halifax International Airport, Halifax Harbour Bridges.

Those are some of the stakeholders, but it's open to other stakeholders as well. When we're looking at collaboration, it's good to have that flexibility there in the makeup of the board, so if you need to bring other people in to collaborate, you can do that. I hope that answers that question. Certainly, we'll be looking at other stakeholders. There also will be public consultation. There's public consultation on roads and building of roads and things like that now. That's not going to be taken away.

What else do we have here? Oh, yes. There seems to be a real focus that this bill is taking powers away from HRM. It's not about taking powers away from anyone. It's about bringing everyone together so they can work collaboratively. I can't understand why there are so many issues about trying to bring people together to collaborate. When you collaborate and you coordinate, it's a greater benefit. It's success. I'm having a little bit of trouble understanding that one. I guess I believe the good in people. I believe people are part of agencies and they're part of boards because they're doing the right thing. I believe in the people who will be part of this board.

There was a mention about connected communities as better communities. Absolutely, 100 per cent. I understand what the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville was talking about. I come from a rural community. Many of my constituents need to come into Halifax to access medical appointments and specialists. They want to make sure that they can get in and out, and the movement in and out is easy, is safe for them. I also understand the importance of transit to people. If people don't have access to transit - everyone should have access to transit. That's all something that, in my opinion, is a good thing. When we look at how we set up making sure that we have transit, whether it's ferries, whether it's public transit, whether it's our roadway system, how can we move people and goods in and out as efficiently as possible?

There was one other thing that the member for Halifax Atlantic mentioned, that there seems to be some issues, that HRM was not consulted. I can't remember his exact words but I will table this. It says, "Halifax Mayor Mike Savage says he doesn't feel like

the new legislation takes away any of the city's decision-making ability." I agree. We're all working together.

With those few words - I know I haven't covered all of the questions, but as I said at the beginning of my remarks, certainly any questions you have, I would be willing to get you the answers. I look forward to hearing from Nova Scotians at Law Amendments Committee.

With those few words, Mx. Speaker, I will close debate on Bill No. 61, an Act to Establish a Joint Regional Transportation Agency.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to close second reading on Bill No. 61. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 62.

**Bill No. 62 - Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mx. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 62, the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act, be read for a second time.

Mx. Speaker, Nova Scotians are facing housing challenges we have never seen before. People are worried about having a place to call home, and that is something they should never have to worry about. Since November 2020, a temporary rent cap has been in place to help protect tenants from large rent increases that would result in them being priced out of their homes.

The current temporary rent cap is set to expire on February 1, 2022, or when the state of emergency ends, whichever comes first. We have heard and we have seen stories of tenants who have been told that large rental increases will take effect once the current cap expires.

People are scared for the day the rent cap ends, and Mx. Speaker, I want to assure them that we are here to support them. That's why we have introduced the Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act. This new Act will allow us to continue with a 2 per

cent cap that has been in place since November 2020. It will ensure that tenants continue to be protected from high rent increases.

It won't apply, Mx. Speaker, to rent geared to income leases under public housing programs or to land-leased communities, also known as mobile home parks, as they have their own processes for setting rental-increase rates.

The new rent cap will apply once the current ministerial directive expires, so there is no gap in protection. Renters will continue to be protected during the state of emergency and after it ends. The 2 per cent-per-year rent cap will be in effect until December 31, 2023.

Mx. Speaker, we are aware of the affordable housing challenges being faced by Nova Scotians and we are taking action. Last week our government announced its plan to address affordable housing challenges being faced by Nova Scotians. We are taking action.

[12:15 p.m.]

Mx. Speaker, last week our government announced its plan to address affordable housing: *A Healthy Nova Scotia: Solutions for Housing and Homelessness*. We know that the root of the issue is housing supply. For affordability to improve, availability must improve. Continuing the current cap is necessary to protect renters while our government gets to work.

Let me be clear, Mx. Speaker, that the rent cap we are introducing is not rent control. Rent control and rent cap are being tossed around in the media and by Opposition parties. Again, we are not in favour of rent control. Rent control is not the answer. The interim rent cap is a bridge to get us to a place with more availability, which will lead to more affordability.

It is important to point out that most landlords have not priced their tenants out of their homes with large rental increase amounts. Most have been very supportive of their tenants during the time of this pandemic, but there are a few - and I emphasize a few - who have chosen to take advantage of their tenants and make this rent cap necessary.

Mx. Speaker, this interim measure is about protecting Nova Scotia's tenants during unprecedented times. We know it's not a long-term solution, but it will help protect renters while we get to the root cause of the affordable housing problem and build more housing.

With those few words, Mx. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and look forward to hearing comments and feedback from the members opposite.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mx. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister as well as the government for continuing with the hard work that we started on this file.

It was clear that the temporary rent cap needed to be extended. Those of us, in particular, who live in HRM can see that there's development all around us, but the issues of affordability and access are not happening quickly enough.

I applaud the government for continuing this effort to allow the supply to be built up to try and address some of this need, especially in Fairview. A big shout-out. There's a lot of development that's happening there but there needs to be protections in place. I am supportive of this extension.

I do have some questions for the minister, though, I guess the first one being: Why wasn't this attached to the Residential Tenancies Act? For many reasons, but for simplistic reasons, the Residential Tenancies Act is the one-stop shop for tenants and for landlords. It's the one document they can go to to keep things as simple as possible.

We have had conversation and discussion that the Residential Tenancies Act is not always easy to understand and that renters in particular don't always know their rights, understand that they have a voice, or that they have the ability to have a say. The Residential Tenancies Act is meant to be a balance so that landlords and tenants both feel supported. The adding of another piece of legislation to this issue could confuse many. So, why wasn't it in the Residential Tenancies Act? Why don't we open that up again?

We've talked about that. There are more changes that can happen. I want to refer to this bill and not any other bills. Going back to the renovations and the inability to evict for renovation purposes during the school year when a tenant has a young family or has school-aged children, there are things that we can tackle that are really meaningful but don't have to be cumbersome or complicated.

I think about seniors who go to the Residential Tenancies Act and who trust that document and trust those pages in order to know what their rights are and to know what's going on.

Since that hasn't been put into the Act, I guess another question that I would have to the minister is: What lengths is his department going to to make sure that this extension is known?

We rely a lot on social media. It can be a place of information. It can also be a place of misinformation. It can add to confusion. We rely on traditional media and sometimes that gets accessed and sometimes it does not. We rely on word of mouth. Again, something as important as this, especially and particularly to the most vulnerable in society who get taken advantage of. I agree that is a small number of landlords, but nonetheless, don't always have the knowledge, don't always have the advocacy. I am sure that the minister

has an answer to this: How is his department articulating this, getting that message out there, and making sure that those most vulnerable have the answers and have the knowledge?

I also would like to ask the minister - and also we have the Law Amendments Committee, that will have public representation to speak to this, too: What other protections for landlords and tenants is the department considering? The issue of housing, the issue of initial residential tenancies? Is this is going to be on the forefront? This is not something that is going away.

This is not something that is going to be solved and this is not a criticism, but it is not going to be solved by rapid development and it is not going to be solved by an extension on a rental cap. There have to be fulsome decisions and discussions that are made in order to fix this. Again, not a criticism. I applaud both of those directions of government, but I am curious what else is being discussed. What are the long-term strategies and thought processes for continuing a balance or ensuring there is a pronounced balance within the Residential Tenancies Act?

I was really glad to see that the issue with fixed term leases was addressed. Sometimes it feels like to be a tenant, or to be a landlord, you need to have a law degree in order to understand the ways to work around the Residential Tenancies Act. Some are, but most are not.

I guess another challenge that I would have to the minister and his department is finding ways to make that information, as a whole, accessible. More plain language, better understanding of the nuances of this particular piece of legislation because, again, it impacts the majority of us.

I am pleased, Mx. Speaker, to support this bill, but I really do urge the minister to do more. I know that he will and I'm happy. As I've said off the floor of this House, I am happy to work in collaboration with him. I feel like there is a strong partnership and a strong desire to work and to tackle all these big problems and I am happy to be of any assistance to him as I can.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: Mx. Speaker, I would like to say, first and foremost, thank you so much for this movement on this particular item. To the minister, we have had a number of conversations and, as usual, I will have questions and some comments.

I want to say that it shouldn't come to any surprise to any of the members in this House that the NDP caucus supports rent control, absolutely. Our caucus tabled a bill to re-establish permanent rent control in Nova Scotia in 2017, and we have tabled it in every session since then.

A media article from August 29, 2021, called “When developers and landlords speak, Tim Houston listens”, summarized the positions the three parties had on rent control in the most recent election. The article says the NDP promised to implement permanent rent control to stabilize and make predictable people’s monthly rent.

THE SPEAKER: Order. I would ask the honourable member to refrain from referring to members of the House by their names directly.

SUZY HANSEN: Mx. Speaker, I do apologize. Sorry about that. I’ll re-read it. A media article from August 29<sup>th</sup> called - and it was a quote but I will just table it, anyways - summarized the positions the three parties had on rental control in the most recent election. The article says the NDP promised to implement permanent rent control to stabilize and make predictable people’s monthly rent.

The Liberals, as is their wont, waffled with the government, initially seeming determined to stick to its announced intent to end the temporary 2 per cent COVID-19 rent cap once the province reached Phase 5 of its reopening plan. But then in the last desperate days of the campaign, fudging - suggesting it might keep rent control for a few years until the market stabilized. Like the NDP, the PC were consistent but consistently “no” to rent control.

But here we are debating a PC bill that is based on a Liberal government’s policy. Sadly, neither goes far enough. We need permanent rent control for Garry Williams, who is living in Halifax with his partner, when they were told their rent would increase by \$400 a month. We need rent control for Terry Madden, who lives on a fixed income and before temporary rent control was in place got a rent increase that forced Terry to give away his cats as he could no longer afford to keep them. We need rent control for Darlene Lewis, who shares an apartment with her Mom and her adult son, who received a notice of \$100 a month increase and started to worry but was spared an increase she couldn’t afford when the temporary rent cap was in place.

I want all members to know that I will continue to raise these concerns in this particular House and I look forward to working with and collaborating with the minister and am happy to be of assistance in any further movement on this. I also look forward to hearing from more people about this bill at the Law Amendments Committee, for further debate. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister, it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleagues across the aisle for their feedback and comments. I appreciate their willingness to work together on

this file. I certainly appreciate the opportunities to chat offline on this and have some constructive conversations.

To answer some of the questions from my colleague for Fairview-Clayton Park about why have we presented an interim rent cap in a stand-alone piece, it speaks to the ability - it's a little bit straightforward and easy to amend if it ever needed to be amended, but certainly to the member's point that the RTA is already complicated as is, it's quite complicated.

I would have to respectfully disagree that it's not going to create any more confusion for Nova Scotians, because I don't know how many Nova Scotians actually read the legalese of the bills. I think the general principle that Nova Scotians are aware that an interim rent cap is in place, that there have been changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, that's high-level and that speaks to the question that my colleague for Dartmouth South brought forward regarding education. That ties into the question from my colleague for Fairview-Clayton Park about how are we going to communicate this. I think it has made the front page of the paper, or at least a couple of papers in the province.

Through ongoing discussions through our stakeholder groups, we have communicated this bill or the idea of the bill and that has been tabled in this Legislature. It has been communicated to the stakeholder groups. We will continue to engage with them and we will also be promoting this Act and the extension of the existing cap throughout other channels.

The member also asked about other protections. I think the changes that I have presented as Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services - when it comes to the housing file, my department's role in the housing file is but a sliver of the cake. We've taken some pretty significant changes when it comes to the Residential Tenancies Act.

I guess the point I want to emphasize is it's just the start. Through the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Commission - I guess I don't want to speak too much on the other bill, but it was specifically regarding Recommendation No. 3, which was a short-term recommendation. We are as a department already working to address Recommendation No. 14, which is more of a medium-term recommendation, so that work there is ongoing. I don't want to speculate on what's going to be in and out, but I do know, having had the opportunity to speak with members and through amendments, that fixed-term leases, for example, have been raised. Again, I'll emphasize the point that there are different opinions on fixed-term leases, but at the end of the day, any transition, any movement on fixed-term leases has to be handled very carefully.

Again, this is the first step. As minister, I want to make sure the changes we're bringing forward through legislation, that we're getting it right, because the Residential Tenancies Act impacts a significant portion of our population - in fact, a third of our general population. I want to make sure as minister responsible for this file that we're thinking



things out, that we're engaging with those partners that we need to engage, and that we're getting it right.

[12:30 p.m.]

I do want to talk briefly a little bit about our housing initiatives that we've announced over the last week. It's not just the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. There's involvement with the Department of Public Works. There's involvement with the Department of Community Services. There is involvement, obviously, within my department. It's complex, and we've been criticized - when's the housing announcement going to come? - and it did take time. We took office and we quickly got to work, supported by amazing staff, might I add, who are there to work for Nova Scotians, who also themselves are striving to get it right.

The complexity of the housing issue is not just one department. That's why I was pleased to join with two other ministers yesterday for the announcement on the three bills that we introduced. Everything is interconnected and, in general, at the end of the day, we know that supply is an issue. That is the root cause of what's going on right now, but it's not just the supply. We have to look at it with different lenses, but at the end of the day, for affordability to improve, we know that availability must improve.

I hope I answered most of the questions there. Again, I appreciate the feedback and the support. I expect there will be some amendments being brought forward to this piece of legislation, but again, I'll wrap on this note. There is, again, some confusion regarding rent cap and rent control. The Leader of the New Democratic Party has an opinion piece that he submitted to the *Chronicle Herald* today. I had an opportunity to have a read of it.

Again, rent cap, rent control, two different things. Rent cap is just a ceiling on what a rental increase can be. Rent control is a much more complex, broader regime. It's not the same thing. There are many more considerations, there are above-guideline increases, and that's something that our government has stood strong on, that we are not in favour of permanent rent control.

Again, if the NDP want to take credit or believe that we have fallen to our knees and understood and put pressure, at the end of the day, I think what this bill demonstrates is our ability to sit down, understand the issues, and understand that Nova Scotians need reassurance that they're going to be protected from high rental increases over the next two years, and this is what this bill is going to do.

With that, Madam Speaker, I look forward to Law Amendments, hearing what Nova Scotians have to say, and I move to close debate on Bill No. 62 - Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 62. All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Madam Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 64.

**Bill No. 64 - Cannabis Control Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Madam Speaker, I move that Bill No. 64 be now read a second time.

THE SPEAKER: I call the House to order.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Madam Speaker, we'll get this straight.

I move that Bill No. 64 do be read a second time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Madam Speaker, the amendments to the Cannabis Control Act will better align our provincial law with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Cannabis Control Act received Royal Assent on April 18, 2018. The Act regulates and controls the purchase, possession, sale, and distribution of cannabis.

The object of the Act is to protect public health and safety, protect youth and restrict their access to cannabis, ensure cannabis is sold in accordance with the Act, and to deter unlawful activities in relation to cannabis through appropriate enforcement and sanctions.

Under Section 24(1), police are provided with the authority to search a vehicle or a place, excluding private dwellings, at any reasonable time. In a recent court case, the court found Section 24(1) failed to articulate a standard that would ensure Section 8 Charter rights are respected. The amendment of the Cannabis Control Act will now define a reasonable standard to be Charter-compliant. Therefore, we will be amending the Act to include the standard of "reasonable grounds to believe."

Mx. Speaker, the amendments will ensure usage of the accepted language standard to determine when police can search. The clarity in the Act will have many benefits. Public health and safety are the primary goals of the cannabis legislation, but it is also important that the Charter rights of Nova Scotians be protected.

This amendment will ensure that the police have reasonable grounds before searching a place or vehicle for suspected non-compliance with the Act. This standard of “reasonable grounds to believe” is in line with case law in other Canadian provinces. We have acted quickly to ensure the standard for reasonable grounds for a search is clear for law enforcement and also protects the rights of the citizens. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: We actually support the bill and the changes being made. One of the things that we immediately noticed was the higher legal threshold. I think it’s important that one of the things this bill does do is really speak about language and how impactful that can be on communities and people. In particular, I would say that this will help avoid random stops and random searches that happen.

Also, if I could just highlight how quickly government went to work on this and changed the language, and how fundamentally different it will be for folks in the cannabis community. If we can do it so quickly here, I’m looking forward to the street checks and the Police Act that can also do similar things with language.

Other than that, I just want to say that we do support this bill and it is good. Good work. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would essentially echo the words of my colleague the member for Preston. This amendment brings greater clarity for law enforcement in terms of the standards that need to be met for search and seizure. It’s compliant with our courts. We absolutely support the amendment.

I would also echo the sentiment that it’s a great job of quickly bringing a bill or government policy into compliance with a legal principle or Charter right when that gap is determined. I think there are other legislations and policies before this House where similarly quick action could be taken.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables.

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mx. Speaker, we're all blessed with that right now. I now rise to close debate on Bill No. 64.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 64.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. 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: Mx. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 37.

#### **Bill No. 37 - Fair Registration Practices Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mx. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 37, an Act to Amend Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2008, the Fair Registration Practices Act, now be read for a third time and do pass.

It is my pleasure to rise and read for the third time Bill No. 37, an Act to Amend Chapter 38 of the Acts of 2008, the Fair Registration Practices Act. As we have heard through this amendment process, everyone who works in a provincially regulated occupation must be registered with a regulatory body. These organizations have a broad impact on professionals throughout Nova Scotia. They provide important functions to oversee and set the standards and practices for specific professions and trades. It is important that their processes are fair and clear for licensed individuals who qualify to be registered in their profession.

Since 2008, the regulatory bodies and professional associations have been operating under time-consuming requirements. They had to provide detailed responses about registration practices, with supporting documentation, under the Act. We have heard from organizations that these processes created unnecessary administrative burdens on

regulatory bodies and their staff. The process was often repetitive, outdated, and in some cases the requirements were unclear.

[12:45 p.m.]

The Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration heard those concerns and took action. We introduced amendments that will improve the Act while remaining impartial and fair.

In the review of this bill and these amendments we have heard from members of this House who agreed that these changes made sense. Like regulatory bodies themselves, my colleagues are happy to see that government is cutting the red tape for these organizations. These changes further align to my department's mandate. It provides solutions that improve the ability of regulatory bodies and professional associations to do what they do best - serve and oversee the needs of its licensed memberships. With that, Mx. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Mx. Speaker, I like the opportunity to speak to this bill. It is, as we know, a housekeeping bill, and consultation, I like to always repeat, is always good. It's always good to see consultation in the House and from consultation good bills are made. I look forward to the passing of this bill and getting this housekeeping out of the way. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALI DUALE: Mx. Speaker, I am happy this House is not the place we always disagree. There are times that we respect each other, when we produce good bills and good will, and this bill is one of them. I have spoken on this bill before, and I support some of the visions that we need to bring to Nova Scotia as we are willing to attract business communities and entrepreneurs and innovators.

In order to do that, this kind of red tape and this kind of loophole we need to overcome and to correct past practices on how we deal with the business communities. So, I have great respect, even though this amendment was started in 2019 and I give the credit to the staff who worked hard and did this leg work. It has been consulted, 47 communities who actually have impacted this kind of decision. I look forward to working with the minister on these kinds of beautiful ideas and this kind of helpful mindset and decisions.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister, it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

HON. JILL BALSER: Thank you to my colleagues, Mx. Speaker. I do look forward to the conversations in going forward and knowing that this bill went by pretty quick and this is nice to know that this happens. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to it and again, to work with my colleagues going forward.

With that, Mx. Speaker, I move to close debate on Bill No. 37, the Fair Registration Practices Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 37. 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: Mx. Speaker, could you please call Bill No. 24.

**Bill No. 24 - Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: I am pleased to move third reading of Bill No. 24, An Act to Amend Chapter 25 of the Acts of 1996, the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act.

Mx. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to stand here and to bring forward this bill for final reading. We are looking for efficiency in the Aquaculture Review Board by adding up to 10 members. Also, to keep through Law Amendments Committee and the comments that were made by my honourable colleagues as well as those who commented in the Law Amendments Committee about the numbers, the minimum number to make up a review panel ought to be three and not one - that amendment passed yesterday.

I'm pleased here to put forward this bill for third reading and I look forward to comments from my honourable colleagues.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: My comments will be pretty short. I have already spoken to this bill twice, and I again commend the minister for bringing forward that amendment that would guarantee a minimum of three members to make up the panel.

I do agree as well to increase the number of members to 10, but I have to reiterate for a third time - I don't want to be repetitive - the importance around the criteria of board members. Their competencies, their backgrounds, their expertise have to really be taken into consideration.

The board has to be composed of stakeholders from across the province and across jurisdictions. I realize you need people who are involved in the science and understand the legalities of it, but there have to be members on that committee who understand their communities, who understand the fishing industry and who can really take into consideration the comments made, especially around public consultation.

A lot of the frustration in aquaculture that I have seen is when those public consultation hearings are held and very few people seem to be listening, or that's how the public perceives it, because for them it is a very important part of the process.

The way this bill is set up, it puts a lot of responsibility on the minister, and I hope he doesn't take that responsibility lightly. Again, I ask him to really consider the criteria, the board makeup, and to make sure that he strengthens the process. With that, I take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We have spoken to this a couple of times, as my colleague said. On third reading, I'll reiterate, in light of the stated purpose of this bill, which is efficiency, it is our position that effectiveness trumps efficiency.

Here, as we heard eloquently spoken of by my colleague, the member for Clare, although to a different point, effectiveness relies on trust. We remain concerned that these legislative changes are happening in the absence of a regulatory review. Just to remind folks, these regulations are subject to review every five years, and in the terms of reference of the Nova Scotia Aquaculture Regulatory Advisory Committee, and I'll table these, it says in the background:

“The panel recommended that the process of implementing the proposed framework be regarded as the beginning of an ongoing process of continuous regulatory improvement, rather than as a one-time regulatory reform that ends with the implementation of the recommendations. This is the rationale for establishing the Aquaculture Regulatory Advisory Committee.”

People are eager to see a review of the regulations because there are concerns about whether there's adequate communication right now with communities and individuals and whether the department is, in some people's eyes, perceived as being biased. Again, I think

the effectiveness relies on a basis of trust, and that trust can easily be engendered by following the five-year review, which, again, is overdue.

That review was recommended by the Doelle-Lahey report, and to quote from that report, which I've previously tabled in this House:

“Another important rationale for a mandatory and independent five-year review is that it puts the DFA on notice that it will be accountable at the end of five years for showing that the regulatory framework has been diligently and effectively implemented. This will help to ensure that the commitment to producing a world-class regulatory framework that was expressed when we were appointed to develop a new regulatory framework will be maintained through the process of translating our recommendations into effective action.”

We know, as I have mentioned earlier, that this advisory committee has not been meeting regularly and in fact their meetings have diminished in frequency since the establishment of that committee, so without offering an opinion on the content of this specific bill, it is our position that this legislation, and any other legislation related to this specific area, should not go forward in the absence of that review. If the government is serious about regulatory reform, if the government is serious about social licence, then there is no need to rush legislative change in the absence of that review. For that reason, we will not be supporting this legislation.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: This has been a great learning for me, to see the extent and the impact of the Doelle-Lahey report and the implementation, the importance of social licence, the importance of open and honest communication, getting the feedback. This was a bill that, when it passes, will give the minister the ability to add up to 10. There are a number of applications I now have that I am reviewing the core competencies, requirements, the representation, for people to sit on this board.

It has been mentioned a couple of times about the regulations and to review those. That work is in process. The committee that is slated to look at that, I've asked my office to set up meetings. Those meetings are being set up so I can meet the members and understand the process going forward on how this will be done in the first time. This will be the first time it's being done.



Relative to it being overdue, I do not agree with that. There are many things that happened in 2020, including the pandemic and the constraints of provincial employees and of our sector itself and the people in Nova Scotia. That too has had an impact.

This is a bill not of expediency is the way I would phrase it. Even though we're looking for effectiveness and efficiency, it's not going to be rushed through to be implemented, relative to the number of people that are going to be on the board, without doing some of the things that the honourable members have mentioned.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to close the debate on the reading of Bill No. 24 - An Act to Amend Chapter 48 of the Acts of 1996, the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act.

[1:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 24. 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: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 27.

**Bill No. 27 - Collection and Debt Management Agencies Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: I move that Bill No. 27 be read now for a third and final time and do pass.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment we are making to the Collection and Debt Management Agencies Act is in direct response to our request from industry. Collectors and debt management agents working from both within and outside of our province want to keep their staff safe and healthy during the pandemic. Working remotely when contacting people living in Nova Scotia from home will do just that.

This is a common practice in all other provinces except Quebec. The industry has shown a great level of professionalism and focus on consumer privacy and protection. We are confident, Mr. Speaker, that this is the right step for our province to take. The

amendments will not only allow collectors and debt management agents to continue working remotely, they will also give government new regulation-making authority to respect privacy and other requirements that they must follow.

Amending the Collection and Debt Management Agencies Act will keep people safe, support economic growth, and encourage industry to continue doing business in our province. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks.

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

PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister for this important bill. We are in full support of it, not just the practicality of allowing our hardworking public servants to be able to work remotely, but as I said during second reading, the removal of the gendered and antiquated language from the bill itself.

In addition to letting the minister know that our caucus supports this bill, I will take this last opportunity - well, it probably isn't going to be the last - to encourage him to look at other pieces of legislation that fall under his purview, particularly the Vital Statistics Act, and remove gendered and antiquated language from that piece of legislation as well. With that, I will take my seat.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill. Thank you to the minister for this important bill and thank you to my colleague from Fairview-Clayton Park for talking about some other issues that are being resolved by this bill and could be resolved in other bills as well.

We understand this is an amendment that's been requested by other jurisdictions in order to bring Nova Scotia in line with other jurisdictions, and we support the bill.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister, it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the feedback from the members opposite. As I said in the House before, where I spoke regarding pieces of legislation that have gendered references, that's a direction that has been given to staff that we will be undertaking for further review of the Vital Statistics Act, with ongoing consultations.

I extend that invitation to the members opposite to take part, and we can have these chats offline. We want to ensure that we're doing things right because it's impacting Nova Scotians that we represent.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have support on this bill, and I move to close debate on Bill No. 27.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 27. 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: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private and Local Bills for Second Reading.

### **PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 38.

#### **Bill No. 38 - New Minas Water Commission Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move second reading of Bill No. 38, the New Minas Water Commission Act. This bill, requested by the New Minas Village Commission, replaces an existing piece of legislation passed in 1982 which established the New Minas Water Commission.

While the issue of setting honorariums was the initial impetus for the bill, it soon became apparent that an opportunity existed to update the bill in its entirety, to ensure that it is more reflective of the needs of the utility and its users in 2021 and beyond. This pending legislation is a modernization of the Act, which has not been updated significantly since its initial introduction.

The bill that has been introduced and is before the House, if passed, would update the legislation that governs the New Minas Water Commission by incorporating the changes that were made to the original Act through amendments made in 2006, Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2006, updating the language and style of the Act, including replacement of gender-specific terminology in favour of gender-neutral terminology; giving authority to the New Minas Water Commission to set their own honorariums; and giving natural person powers to the commission. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the member for Kings South it will be to close the debate.

The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I move to close debate on Bill No. 30, the New Minas Water Commission Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 38.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this bill be referred to the Committee on Private and Local Bills.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, will 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: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 30.

### **Bill No. 30 - Residential Tenancies Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I might need another glass of water after all this talking today.

Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 30, an Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes of 1989, the Residential Tenancies Act, be read for a third time. I would like to start by thanking the members for the debate on these amendments. I appreciated hearing their thoughts and their feedback on the bill and the issues that they brought forward.

I would also like to thank those who appeared before the Law Amendments Committee earlier this week to share their observations and their suggestions.

Mr. Speaker, the Residential Tenancies Act has a very important role in protecting the rights of tenants and landlords. The amendments we have proposed will strengthen tenant protections and provide clarity to landlords. Many of the changes are in direct response to the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission Report's Recommendation No. 3 to modernize provincial legislation, to enhance renter protections, and to specifically address evictions due to renovations.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments will do just that. They will create stronger protections for renters in situations where landlords require an eviction to do major renovations, also known as renovictions. The amendments set out a clear process and will provide tenants with compensation for being evicted from their homes. The amendments also provide tenants an opportunity for compensation if a landlord violates the new provisions. Other amendments are being proposed based on stakeholder consultations that will address concerns, including tenant protections, and improve the administration and efficiency of the residential tenancies program.

There are many stories of landlords who are taking advantage of tenants, but we know that this is a small group. Again, as I said earlier in debate on another bill, it's a small group. Most landlords have been respectful and supportive of their tenants during these very difficult times. They have been flexible as people's lives have been turned upside down during this pandemic, and I would like to acknowledge and thank them.

Mr. Speaker, some amendments we have brought forward to the Residential Tenancies Act, such as protections against renovation evictions and some administrative and efficiency amendments, will come into force upon Royal Assent. The others will come into force upon proclamation to allow time to amend the residential tenancies regulations.

This is only the beginning. I am proud of what we have accomplished in our short time in office, but we know there is much more work to do. More than 300,000 people across our province are depending on us to get it right. We will continue to work with both tenants and landlords and stakeholders to address their challenges.

I have heard the concerns brought forward by members of the House and through the Law Amendments Committee and will take them back to the department to look at how we might be able to address them in the future. I'm committed to modernizing the Residential Tenancies Act and to better support tenants and landlords. We will be bringing more changes forward in future sessions of the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, changes that will benefit both tenants and landlords.

With those few words, I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I like that the minister gets to get up on his feet because it means that I get to get up on my feet too. I should tell him that he should be fortunate to bring forward so many of these pieces of legislation.

I wholeheartedly support these changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, as do my caucus colleagues. We talk about that balance - and you're going to say the word "balance" over and over again during the course of your time in that department because most of the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, in particular with the Residential Tenancies Act, is to find that balance, to find that commonality.

I want to take these few moments to celebrate the staff in that department - their hard work and their commitment. These are a passionate group of people who know these rules and regulations inside and out and really strive to protect all interested parties and to make things as fair as possible. I want to celebrate and thank the Affordable Housing Commission, who came from various walks of life and different experiences and different perspectives and brought forward a very comprehensive report for us and to commend the government for following along that report.

I'm happy to hear the minister say that there's more work to do. I'm happy to hear the minister say that there's going to be more instances where the Residential Tenancies Act is going to be brought forward in this Legislature because there is more work to do. This isn't always a fair piece of legislation, and depending on who you're talking to, you will be able to find tenants who tell you why it's not fair, but you're also able to find landlords who tell you still why it's not fair. There is red tape. There is paperwork. There is sometimes a non-common-sense approach to what should be simple straightforward situations that both tenants and landlords find themselves in.

Again, as I said in previous remarks, a lot of people feel that they need a law degree to understand the Residential Tenancies Act because there are instances where it's not a very simple straightforward path to take. Something as important as this piece of legislation shouldn't be complicated.

I know that we have lots of pieces of legislation that are entrenched in dialogue and precedence and language that elevates it to the point of House of Commons Parliamentary Standards. Something as fundamental as the Residential Tenancies Act needs to be more straightforward than it currently is. It needs to be a more comprehensive piece of legislation.

That being said, I do think that the minister should consider school year renovations, much like our neighbours to the northeast, in P.E.I. I understand that the minister feels that that's already encapsulated, and the timelines would stop a school year renovation from happening, but I think that it's important that we protect our school-aged kids from being displaced because of any sort of rental renovation.

Aside from that, I thank the minister and am happy to support this piece of legislation.

[1:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill on its third reading. We in the NDP definitely acknowledge and agree that there are many changes needed to the Residential Tenancies Act. I want to thank the minister for bringing these changes forward.

I also want to thank the minister for his excellent and noticeable listening during second reading and in the Committee of the Whole. (Applause) It means a lot to know that ministers are willing to make changes and willing to take comments and ideas from the Opposition further. Of course, I would have liked the minister to have accepted our amendments, but we'll get there. I really firmly do believe that we will get there.

We've heard about finding the balance between tenants and landlords. As I said, I believe, in second reading, right now there is no balance. There's actually a massive power imbalance between tenants and landlords which we need safeguards to address - I will reiterate my comments - especially with big investment REITs and large multinational corporations that are landlords. There are many of those in Dartmouth North.

Many folks have massive issues with them. Those companies have teams of legal advisors and people that they pay to represent them at different court hearings and that kind of thing. Folks in Dartmouth North, the people who are going to Small Claims Court, often don't have any representation or help. That's one of the things I know the minister has heard me say. I just wanted to say it again for the record, that we need to look at that. Make sure the tenants know their rights. Make sure that there's a way for them to attain their rights.

Our caucus has put forward many bills to try to strengthen protections for tenants. We have put forward a bill that would require publicly available and searchable reports on the presence of vermin: bedbugs, lice, mold, ants, or cockroaches in rental apartments, and to hold landlords accountable for the presence of those issues.

We've also suggested amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act which would require rental rates for a unit to be publicly posted and allow group applications to the Residential Tenancies Board.

This was an important feature in the work that I did with the folks from Dalhousie Legal Aid Service around the renovictions on Victoria Road late in 2020. Had they been

able to make a group application to the Residential Tenancies Board, it would have made things a lot easier to organize. It's a really important change.

We heard from presenters at Law Amendments about improvements that could be made to strengthen this bill's ability to address recommendations from the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission. Mark Culligan, community legal worker with Dalhousie Legal Aid, spoke to the Law Amendments Committee about the need to address concerns around fixed-term leases, which, as the name implies, have a fixed start date and fixed end date.

Unlike month-to-month or year-to-year leases, fixed-term leases do not automatically renew and do not provide security of tenure. When a tenant has security of tenure, when they have that they can stay in a unit as long as they want unless the landlord has just cause to terminate the tenancy. Fixed-term leases don't allow for this. That lack of security for tenants discourages them from raising issues or concerns or even requesting basic maintenance to their units for fear that the landlord will refuse to renew their lease. So, again, that speaks to the power imbalance that we see in these situations.

It's not just about the nuts and bolts of a fixed-term lease and what it does or doesn't do. It's about the presence of them making it difficult for people to even request a sink being fixed or a loose floor tile, which could be dangerous, to be fixed. We also have seen, and this is true in Dartmouth North and I am sure lots of other jurisdictions, lots of other constituencies, that there has been a significant increase in the use of fixed-term leases in the last year. These leases allow the landlord to just simply terminate a tenancy. Mr. Culligan told the Law Amendments Committee that Dalhousie Legal Aid has heard of many landlords using fixed-term leases as a way to skirt the laws that provide protections for tenants currently.

While we will be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker, we do have concerns that without the amendments we propose, the increased protections for tenants against renovictions will be undermined. I am not speaking as the - well, I am - I am not the housing spokesperson for the NDP, but I do represent a constituency with a huge number of rental properties, and I will also, for the record, state that we do have lots of good landlords in Dartmouth North who really are trying to make life workable for their tenants and are finding the current situation quite difficult.

I just want to acknowledge, on the record, that those landlords are struggling. At the same time, we have a lot of large company landlords in Dartmouth North that are run from elsewhere in the country or even out of the country and that is mostly where we are seeing the issues. Again, I will say that in my constituency office, the number one issue that people come in with is housing. It's renovictions, it's evictions, it's there is nowhere to go, it's rental increases, it's all of those things, and literally it is, I would say, 95 per cent of the cases that we work on.



Again, I want to applaud the minister for addressing some of these head-on. I encourage the minister to keep looking for ways to improve, and I am happy to talk to the minister any time about the situations in Dartmouth North.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister, it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the members opposite for their feedback. I appreciate the positive remarks that it is touching. Thank you.

I think members will know that I am very receptive to ongoing dialogue. I am going to try my best to continue that practice but, again, as I said during a previous debate, I want to make sure that we are getting these - any changes that we are passing through, that we are getting them right. It impacts the vast majority of our population; a third of Nova Scotians are tenants. I know there are always going to be issues and, again, as I stated, this is just the first step.

The chapter is not closed, and the bill is going to pass, but there is ongoing work being done as we look to modernize the RTA, to reflect the ongoing and ever-so-changing needs of both landlords and tenants. As my colleague from Fairview-Clayton Park mentioned, it is that balance. It is a balancing and it is a juggling act. As I said during the debate process on this bill, there have been identified issues, some issues that have been already discussed and consulted with stakeholders.

We're going to continue the engagement with stakeholders because any changes that we make impact either party differently. Again, it is that balanced approach, but surely trying to do our best to get it right.

The member also noted the staff, and I also gave a shout-out to the staff previously, but truly I think perhaps the member for Fairview-Clayton Park and I are the only ones to understand Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services. It's a vast department, a broad department, that has different connections in so many other departments that maybe members are unaware.

I mean, if we go through Alcohol, Gaming, Tobacco, and Fuel, the Nova Scotia Digital Service, the Land Registry, the folks at the access centres, the RMV, GeoNOVA, the folks that . . . (Interruption) Pardon? Internal Audit. There are too many to list. We'll be here - I'll be following in the footsteps of my colleague for Halifax Atlantic in chewing up the hour. The folks who deliver the Heating Assistance Rebate Program and the folks who deliver the property tax rebate program for seniors.

It is a broad department and I appreciate tremendously the support that I've been given since taking the seat as minister responsible for this department.

I also do want to express my appreciation to Dean Johnston, who is the director of our residential tenancies. Dean has shared with me a wealth of knowledge. He is truly the definition of a subject matter expert. If you look it up in Merriam-Webster, or the dictionary, you are going to see his photo there, I am pretty sure, Mr. Speaker. He has been there to answer questions.

As members have expressed, the RTA is complicated. As any piece of legislation, it's legal jargon that most people would not understand. The RTA is 46 pages in length, so most people will not take the opportunity to sit down and go through it. But to the point that the member for Dartmouth North mentioned before, education about the RTA and clarifying education when it comes to the rights of tenants and landlords has to be improved. There is a document out there created by my department, but it's eight pages in length and still it's wordy.

I have a strong interest in seeing how we can improve that document and sharing it with our stakeholder community to get that information to those who need it, because for some it can probably be an intimidating process to submit an application to the board. Again, if there are any questions, if a tenant or a landlord have any questions at all, I think the best approach - I know the best approach is to go through the Tenancies Board, because they are the experts in that field.

Those are a few words, yeah - 55 minutes to go.

Again, I'll say one last time, we're ready to listen and we're ready to continue this work. We want to get it right. I want to get it right, Mr. Speaker.

With those few words, I will close debate on Bill No. 30, an Act to Amend Chapter 401 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Residential Tenancies Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 30. 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: Mr. Speaker, will you please call Bill No. 32.

**Bill No. 32 - Municipal Government Act and Halifax Regional Municipality Charter.**

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 32, amendments to the Municipal Government Act and HRM Charter, now be read a third time and do pass.

[1:30 p.m.]

The changes in this bill provide municipalities with more planning powers to address affordable housing. Inclusionary zoning is designed to include affordable units in new housing developments. It's used in cities across Canada and the United States, and I would encourage municipalities to work with developers to make policies and programs for inclusionary zoning.

I know that Nova Scotians want strong vibrant communities that offer housing and services they need. We recognize that finding affordable housing is challenging for many Nova Scotians. Inclusionary zoning is one of the items included in our recent housing plan, as this House knows. It is a recommendation from the Affordable Housing Commission.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to comments on Bill No. 32.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: I do just want to register some concerns about the approach that the government is taking to deal with the housing crisis that is very real in the province of Nova Scotia. These are concerns I have registered as well with our party when we were in government and at various times.

I do very much worry about the optional inclusionary zoning being part of this legislation. The reason being is, we can very well create a race to the bottom, particularly in rural Nova Scotia. If inclusionary zoning is not mandatory, developers may be only interested in going to develop in municipalities that do not have inclusionary zoning because their profit margins will be higher. I believe this may create an unstable market condition in our rural municipalities that is worth paying attention to, so I do urge the minister to consult particularly with our rural municipal units.

I do want to register this concern to the House as well as a concern - I didn't speak on the rental cap bill as well, but that is another policy that, if it goes on too long, has the potential to impact in a negative way the citizens that we're actually trying to help. The reason it can do that is because buildings can go bankrupt.

In my area in Yarmouth, we do not have an issue with rents being above market. The issue is access to housing. It is a supply issue. If you look at the margins that some of these buildings are operating under, they're very tight. These aren't big major developers. We do have some of those in Yarmouth, but we also have a lot of smaller buildings that

are owned by individuals, like many of us in this House, who are middle class. Sometimes these buildings might only make \$1,000 to \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year.

These landlords are experiencing increases in insurance, increases in property tax. I do believe that there are elements of this plan - again, I'll recognize that it's similar to what we had proposed, and these are concerns that I had registered with our government as well. There are elements of the overall plan that might actually hurt the people whom we're trying to help. The two red flags that I'll plant in the ground are on the rent cap. Now this government is taking it beyond what our government was going to do, into 2023. It's also something that in the election, the party said they weren't going to do.

This is going to create a lot of economic pressure on smaller landlords who are really not working with big margins on profits with their buildings. We know what happens if these buildings go to the bank: The people in them are evicted, and they're on the street. In my area, we can't afford to lose any of the supply. Supply is an issue right now.

I have had very few people over my 11 years in office who have come into my constituency because they can't pay their rents. I have had a lot of people, particularly at this point in time now, who are coming in because they can't find a place to stay. This is something that I'm very, very concerned about. I don't know that we have landed, even collectively, on a policy framework that is going to address this issue adequately in Halifax and in rural Nova Scotia.

I do feel the approach that's being taken is very Halifax-centric, very metro-centric. There's a lot of pressure here on the housing market as well, on the rental market of course. There are some landlords who have pushed their rents up in very unreasonable ways at a time when people are dealing with their own urgent situations with their jobs and ability to earn income.

This can hurt the people we're trying to help, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, I believe, so I do think the inclusionary zoning not being mandatory but being optional can create a very problematic playing field in Nova Scotia, where we do have perhaps a race to the bottom in certain communities who are trying to compete for those developing dollars. I do want to register a serious concern with the extension of the rent cap, because I do think it has the potential to actually put people on the street, which is the opposite of what we want to do.

I do appreciate the House's time for me to register these concerns, and I do hope that the minister and the government take them very seriously and monitor what's happening with the implementation of these policies. I do believe there may be some trouble on the horizon with them.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: I'm happy to speak to this bill again in third reading. As noted, before when I've spoken, municipalities have been asking for more tools to address the housing crisis, and again I'll say this bill does help. It is not the be-all and end-all, but it does help.

Municipalities have been quite clear when talking to us and talking to other members that they want empowering legislation, not prescriptive. I agree with the approach of this bill. It empowers, but it does not behold them to do it if it is not within their capacity to do so. I am concerned, and I will speak more about this in other debates about other bills of this nature, that despite this bill's empowering approach, I fear that the province is still taking a heavy-handed approach with its relationship with municipalities.

I want to remind the House again that the previous government engaged in a pattern of inadequate consultation - one might even say again talking down to municipalities on municipal issues. (Interruption) No, it was not. It was talking down to. As a councillor, I can tell you, it was. You may remember that municipalities were not invited to have a seat at the main table at the Housing Commission. They were eventually, after they spoke up and said that this wasn't right. If you're going to involve municipalities in housing, they should have a seat at the table.

What they were eventually offered, I think, was a disgrace. I want to say a slap in the face, because they were given a place on the subcommittee. I have likened it to the kiddy table at a family dinner. We've heard that municipalities were not consulted ahead of the government's announcement of the current housing plan.

Again, I'm going to point to my experience in CBRM council, and I'll talk about the library and the funding for that. That happened under a different government, the previous government, where they made this announcement that more funding would be given to libraries. That's great: Our libraries do need a lot more funding. The problem became that instead of talking to the other stakeholders - the municipalities - what the government did was use the municipalities as check marks. Just a check mark. They didn't really consult with them, just told them what was going to happen - and they were not allowed to take any pictures or get anything of any nature for information to bring back to their councils or to bring back to the public.

This leaves municipalities feeling frustrated, sidelined one would say, when they are trying to do their best for their constituents, and they are dealing with complex issues, crumbling infrastructure, and chronic underfunding.

I've said frequently in this House that empowering legislation should also come with investment. I want to commend the government side and I hope they hear this. I recognize that the transfers to municipalities have been doubled. Others would know those transfers as equalization. It is encouraging, Mr. Speaker.

It is very encouraging to see that, and I commend the government for listening to municipalities of what they needed in that respect. We'll be looking for a fair MOU with municipalities going forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will say we support this legislation. We welcome it, it is empowering and with that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to bring a bill in that I think has all-party support. When I heard the member for Yarmouth's comments, I started to wonder if it did have all-party support.

When I asked my staff on this bill, I didn't realize it had been asked for as long ago as 2016. I thought it had only been in the conversation the last couple of years. I asked, why did the previous government not pass it? They simply said, we don't know. I do note that they immediately brought in this bill themselves, so I think it has all-party support.

I do believe the measures that we have brought in are provincial in scope, by and large, not entirely, but the vast majority of the measures we brought in in our sweeping housing announcement are provincial in nature.

This is a tool for municipalities to use. It's up to them if they use it. We will be watching very closely. We don't intend to create circumstances that create a race for the bottom in any way at all and we'll be watching that issue very closely. I do not believe that will be the case.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 32. 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 Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, can you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Second Reading.

**PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, can you please call Bill No. 63.

**Bill No. 63 - Housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality Act.**

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

[1:45 p.m.]

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 63 now be read a second time.

I'm pleased to be here today to speak to the creation of a new panel to accelerate housing in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Mr. Speaker, having a home is essential, it is crucial. It is a key part of our health, our sense of security, our ability to live and thrive.

The housing crisis we are now facing has come upon us quickly. We're seeing unprecedented growth in Nova Scotia, particularly in the HRM. We haven't planned for this type of growth because we haven't had to.

Our goal for this panel is simple: to quickly increase housing supply so residents of HRM can have a safe, affordable place to call home. This panel will put the province at the table with HRM to look at large-scale developments, figure out what roadblocks are in the way, and figure them out together. We'll have two members from HRM, two from the Province, and a chair whom I will appoint.

The chair will have the power to compel information from either the province or HRM, similar to a commissioner under the Public Inquiries Act. The panel can make recommendations to me as minister about how we can improve policies and practices at HRM and the Province to develop housing more quickly. The panel will be able to investigate factors impacting housing supply. That includes availability of land, taxation, availability of labour, and other issues.

Mr. Speaker, these aren't just HRM problems or provincial problems. The housing crisis requires concentrated, focused effort by all levels of government. It's all our problem. Mayor Savage and the HRM planning staff have worked hard to increase the number of approvals, and I thank them for that. We know we can do more together, and this panel will put our staff and their staff together, talking openly, addressing all the issues, taking them back to fix them quickly.

Once the panel is established, either the panel or HRM can ask me to declare an area of the municipality to be a special planning area. This Act gives me, the minister, additional planning and approval authority if that happens. This panel will be in place for three years. In that time, we should be able to make some serious progress on housing supply.

This is just one part of the work we will be doing to address the affordable housing crisis, but it's an important part of increasing the overall supply so people don't soon find that something so basic as a place to live is out of reach. I look forward to hearing comments from the other side of the House.

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

LORELEI NICOLL: I want to acknowledge the collaborative nature of Bill No. 61. We heard earlier from the Minister of Public Works on transportation and working with HRM in that regard. HRM is the largest municipality in Nova Scotia. Geographically, it's the size of P.E.I. It's also the largest rural municipality in Nova Scotia. I want to quote the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services as saying earlier that housing supply is an issue and affordability needs to improve. I don't see collaboration; I don't see the outcome of affordable housing to the housing crisis in HRM and in Nova Scotia in what's before me right now.

The municipality, or those that I spoke with, feel this is a done deal. They're not going to have any input. The bill is giving a mandate, which I presume is on Page No. 2:

“6 (1) The Panel shall

(a) advise and provide recommendations to the Minister and the Municipality respecting

(i) regulatory, administrative and policy options, actions and improvements at the provincial and municipal level to accelerate housing development in the Municipality, and

(ii) factors affecting housing supply, including the availability of land, the taxation environment, the availability of labour and any other factors that may affect housing development;

(b) review applications and other requests made to the Municipality under Part VIII or IX of the Charter for the purpose of making recommendations to the Minister and the Municipality...” - making recommendations.

“(3) The Panel may, in accordance with clause (1)(b)” - which I just read - “review applications and other requests that are made before or after this Section comes into force in which no decision has been made” - and do what? At that point, make recommendations?



The panel is going to consist of members appointed by the minister as the chair - advise the minister? The makeup in itself tells you the outcome and why people feel it's a fait accompli.

“16 (1) On the recommendation of the Panel, and in place of the Council or a community council who may otherwise have authority to act, the Minister may

(a) amend or repeal a land-use by-law.” Let that sink in. But only “within a special planning area.”

“17 (1) On the recommendation of the Panel, and in place of the Council or a community council who may otherwise have authority to act, the Minister may approve a development agreement or an amendment to a development agreement within a special planning area.

Number 19 says: “Any procedural, public participation or public hearing requirements that apply to the Council, a community council or a development officer under Parts VIII and IX of the Charter do not apply to the Minister or the Panel when exercising authority under Sections 15 to 18.”

Number 15(1): “On the recommendation of the Panel or the request of the Municipality, the Minister may make an order designating an area of the Municipality as a special planning area, if the Minister is satisfied that the order is required for the purpose of accelerating housing development in the Municipality.”

Will there be a requirement for any public engagement when those special planning areas are identified and submitted?

Any municipal councillor in this room has sat through many, many public hearings. It is valued by the public, and I will remind, the Speech from the Throne says our system gives a voice to all people. Yet we are not giving a voice to all the people in this process.

Will the panel ensure that all appropriate services are available in any of these areas, special areas? The minister just said large-scale development. Is that going to be a special area, just the one large-scale building, and that's what you're going to determine?

The panel should be recommending to the minister, who in turn will issue a development approval, but this bill gives authority for three years to a panel itself to approve and issue development approvals. The very thing that council has the authority to do and does it in a public way and you're removing that from this council.

Now we've heard many times that it's all to facilitate and to help.

21 (1)(c): “do not exempt any development from the requirement to comply with applicable by-laws of the Municipality or from obtaining any licence, permission, permit, authority or approval required under any by-law of the Municipality or enactment of the Province or of Canada.” Good!

What’s bad is Number 21(2): “Notwithstanding clause (1)(c),” which I just read, “where a by-law or an enactment provides that a development officer cannot issue a development permit or subdivision approval until a specific licence, permission, permit, authority or approval is issued, the Panel may issue a development permit or subdivision approval even if the specified licence, permission, permit, authority or approval has not yet been issued.”

Why this approach? It’s been said many times. We’ve all heard it. I’ve asked many questions with my concerns; I’ve not received replies. There’re no specifics given on the housing and the affordability pieces that we all have concerns about across Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker. The jargon in the Residential Tenancies Act may be complicated, but this one is as clear as anything.

I know that there are, from many years working on planning issues, 11 municipal units in Nova Scotia that don’t even have a municipal planning strategy. Why aren’t we focusing on those, if it’s truly about providing affordable housing? Again, I don’t see that this is addressing affordable housing.

In my time at council, I approved many large developments. It was a good thing. The one thing nobody could address and respond favourably was what the benchmark is considering what is affordable for a unit in these large-scale buildings.

I asked the minister that the other day. The department knows. Which department? It’s not in here. It’s not in the bank accounts of the young people in Halifax, either. They can’t afford their first home. We looked at that. I don’t see why there needs to be interference. One thing - and it is interference - and yes, it will go to Law Amendments, but I have a feeling, after they watch the Elections Act, they feel it is going to have the same outcome.

They don’t feel like they are being heard. They will make an attempt. I will wait for this to go forward and I look forward to hearing a lot of opinions when they go to Law Amendments, but this is not what it’s being presented to achieve.

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

**KENDRA COOMBES:** Oh, we were doing so good, Mr. Speaker. We were doing so good with the consultation of municipalities and then comes the hammer. All right.

I am going to give the members opposite, my colleagues, a commendation and say that while it is encouraging to see the government - to see a government - naming and acting on the housing crisis, there are a number of things that concern me in this bill.

The bill is meant to address the housing crisis, but it does not target building affordable housing. It doesn't, Mr. Speaker. It just doesn't. Instead it refers to housing for "all income levels." If you are looking for a bill to regard affordable housing, you are going to say, "affordable housing," not housing for "all income levels."

We have been clear that yes, supply is a problem. We know this. This is a fact that we live with. It is a fact that we need to address, but we need to direct our efforts to building housing that is and stays affordable for people at lower income levels. Earlier in the last bill, for third reading, I spoke about municipalities being talked down to, that they do not like to be talked down to. They want to be collaborative. They want to be consulted, because - and I said this - it creates feelings of frustration, of being sidelined. They have had enough of this in previous years where they felt this frustration. They don't need to continue to feel this. They shouldn't.

This is a bill that directly affects municipalities. It directly affects, particularly, the HRM. Consultation should be taking place, Mr. Speaker. Consultation must take place. This bill overrides the planning powers and the authority of the HRM. In some cases, ministerial zoning orders may be warranted, but we need to consider whether it is necessary. To pass this bill at some point would take the power away from the HRM, and then what happens to the other municipalities? Are they to follow suit and lose their powers?

When they ask for enabling - all they asked for is enabling and they asked that when we, as a collective, pass bills that are prescriptive in nature or have a cost to them, we provide them with the funding. That is what they ask of us, Mr. Speaker. They don't ask for their powers to be stripped by the Nova Scotia government, particularly when they are doing their job by working for their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I too have sat at many public hearings for zoning. We have many hearings in the CBRM on zoning amendments. That is when the public is empowered to come to the municipalities to tell us why or why not a bylaw - a zoning amendment - should pass or not pass.

Not only would this bill be taking away the powers of the HRM and potentially other municipalities, it is taking power away from the people. It is taking power away from constituents, from the electorate, from residents, from taxpayers. That's what this type of bill would be doing as far as my understanding of it reads. I could be wrong. I've been wrong before, but I think it's quite clear.

[2:00 p.m.]

Planning processes exist for a reason. Planning departments are very knowledgeable in what they do. Planning departments have a full department, not just a few employees. We are worried that the Province will be deciding for communities where housing should go without proper consultation.

In other bills, there has been some consultation, Mr. Speaker - consultation that provided great information and great feedback. I'm happy for those, but not this one. Not as far as I understand it. I have not heard of any consultation that took place regarding a ministerial directive - an executive directive.

With that, I'll be very interested to hear what the public has to say at Law Amendments Committee. Apparently, that is the only place where consultation is going to take place right now.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I didn't intend to speak on second reading and will probably speak on third reading to this, but I just have to get on my feet and say how surprised or shocked I am that the government is proceeding in this way. As my colleagues have said, this is a unilateral, un-consultative, heavy-handed override of the powers of the municipalities.

Planning is a complicated process. It takes years and it takes many qualified people to examine planning issues to work with communities on their vision for their community and for their neighbourhoods. One of the toughest things that municipal councillors face is when they have the bylaws that they've agreed upon, then a development goes into a neighbourhood and it meets the bylaws, and the community is upset.

Unfortunately, the communities don't get as involved in the drafting of the laws to have a full understanding. When you bring projects into a neighbourhood, you have to have those bylaws, that municipal planning strategy, and that public process that uses consultation to make those decisions or they create community outrage and anger and conflict.

Those projects get drawn out. They're not good for the community and they're not good for the developers who are trying to move these things forward. Developers want certainty. They want laws, bylaws, and municipal planning strategies written down so that they can follow them and get approval from a community.

To think that the minister has such power to override a community's wishes - a vision for their community, what is appropriate for their neighbourhood - and to think that

the minister and three friends can make those decisions for a community is wrong. Absolutely, fundamentally wrong.

What I'm most fearful of in the way this is drafted is this idea that we can, kind of, throw the laws out for this particular piece of land or that particular piece of land, cherry-pick the projects. The abuse that can happen under that kind of process, where one developer with power can walk into a minister's office and say, let's talk to your two friends on this committee and make my project go ahead like this. Give some respect to the municipal councillors that we, as legislators, have given them the power and the responsibility to make the municipal bylaws and municipal planning strategy.

We've delegated that responsibility. It's one of the toughest jobs as a municipal councillor. It's one of the toughest jobs. They put hours into it, they take abuse from their citizens, they take abuse from developers, they're under tremendous pressure. To think that this government is going to go into a closed-door room with three friends and say building heights can only be three. I want seven.

Planning is complicated. I don't know HRM very well, I'm a rural MLA, but I'm sure that the planning department is full of very well-qualified - 200 - planners. Four at the province. Two hundred planners who have been examining HRM for decades, managing its growth, working with communities and neighbourhoods on their vision, what they want in their neighbourhood. This bill is terrible. I ask the minister and this government to reconsider. I ask you to listen carefully at Law Amendments Committee.

I understand you want to get housing going. I understand that, the need for affordable housing, but this is not the tool. This is a tool that will be abused. How hard is it to make affordable housing? The federal government wanted to do things quickly. They brought in - what was it called? - the fast-track rapid housing project. They wanted to do it quickly, they wanted housing out there, and they wanted it affordable. CBC did a review of the federal government's program - 130 projects were done.

I can't remember the quotes, but the majority, if not all, of those units that were supposed to be affordable are over market. An absolute failure of 130 housing projects, because they tried to move fast, they tried to work with developers, and they didn't achieve any affordable housing. I'll say virtually none.

You have to be far more considerate when you're trying to solve a problem as complex as housing. A quick bill, a backroom, and three people is not going to solve this problem.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the minister it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments across the floor. I will point out that the previous government did require all municipalities to have a land-use planning strategy. There may have been 11, but all are in the process of creating that.

We know that the housing shortage or market supply of housing right now is somewhere between 10,000 and 25,000 units in HRM. We don't know precisely what that number is, but the driver for this is the absolute crisis in supply housing. We know that when the supply is challenged, then the affordable housing becomes unaffordable, too. This is a time for action for our government. This is our third month and we're taking action.

I too, as the members opposite, look forward to comments from Law Amendments Committee. This is an opportunity for us to formalize the relationship with the HRM and we're doing that and we're going to take action.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 63.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

Ordered that this be referred to the Committee on Law Amendments.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, can you please call the order of business, Public Bills for Third Reading.

### **PUBLIC BILLS FOR THIRD READING**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 1.

#### **Bill No. 1 - Elections Act.**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Deputy Premier.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I now rise to move debate on third reading of Bill No. 1, the Elections Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speak for as long as I did the other day - I know you are disappointed - 59 minutes there, but I did feel it was important to get some of my concerns on the record in Hansard because the Committee of the Whole House on Bills does not show up in Hansard.

I just want to be clear that we are in favour of fixed election dates on this side of the House, in our Party, and I believe the NDP is as well. But we do have concerns about the date that has been chosen and we have concerns about the process at which that date was arrived at because we have yet to hear why this particular date is the one that has been chosen, with any convincing argument.

[2:15 p.m.]

The fixed date was promised in the Speech from the Throne. I'm not going to retable all the documents I retabled the other day because then we'll be here forever, and we'll use up a lot of trees. I will just say there was a promise in the Speech from the Throne, and it did say that fixed date legislation would be coming in. I always look at the language that's involved and it didn't say what that date would be. Just as we didn't see how many beds were going to be added, that kind of thing, for long-term care.

I look at that and I say if all along things have been specific, like around the beds, then suddenly we're not specific, I wonder why. I look at the fixed date election bill and see a date in July. Really, we don't know how that date was arrived at. The Premier did say something, I think, on the first day of debate on the bill - my understanding is Elections Nova Scotia is pretty happy with the date. Then when we actually heard from Elections Nova Scotia at the Law Amendments Committee, it didn't sound like there was any kind of consultation with them. We have been pretty clear, I would say, that it is our preference that the elections commission would actually go out and consult with Nova Scotians on this date.

There are a lot of arguments against the July date. Again, we're in favour of fixed elections, but we're not in favour of a date in July. A number of my colleagues on this side of the House have spoken quite eloquently about why July is a bad idea.

We heard about the health concerns. I can tell you, normally when I go door to door, I have people who have been canvassing for many, many years go with me, and a lot of them are older. I can tell you, this time around, we tried to avoid that on the hot, hot days - of which there were many in August - because it was really difficult.

If you're going out for six hours a day or longer, and you live in a constituency like mine or some of the other ones where there are a lot of hills, that heat is quite punishing, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you I have known candidates that have been dehydrated at the end of very warm elections. I know one that they tried to put in hospital on an election day and he wouldn't go. I'm just saying that in terms of the weather part, that's a concern.

There's also a concern around the lack of opportunity for students. I do think that the response of "well, you can just have pretend elections" - there is nothing like real life experience. For those of us who have been involved in the education system, whether it's tangentially or as a minister, we know the value of hands-on learning. We have seen over the years the expansion of our apprenticeship program, the expansion of the co-op programs. I will just say that there is nothing like the experience that our young people get when they get to experience a mock election. For many years, our children, our three kids, would be involved in elections at school as well. They were always excited to come home and talk about the elections as they pertained to what was happening outside their school.

I actually remember one friend's son - they were driving around in their car during a federal election and he piped up from the back seat, that Geoff Regan sure sells a lot of houses. We had to explain to him, no those aren't real estate signs, those are election signs. Then we had to have the conversation about what an election is.

When we take that opportunity away from our children, I am concerned about how involved young people will be in elections when they grow up, in participating in that particular process, when we have taken away some of the best opportunities that they really have to participate.

The other day, I read a letter from one of our teachers in Bedford who actually had her class do the research. I believe it was the federal election, because that was in September. Her class did research on the various concerns that they had and what the various party positions were. She actually had them determine what her vote would be based on their research. You're not going to get that in a Summer election. I think this would be an incredible opportunity lost.

We have talked about how we don't know how this date was arrived at. There are 52 Tuesdays in any given year. Why we chose this particular one, or, indeed, any of the eight Tuesdays that happen over the Summer, why we would do that? There are 52 Tuesdays, and yet this one was chosen. Why was that chosen? We don't know why that happened or how it happened. We know that it will deny schoolchildren the opportunity to learn about elections, platforms, and to think critically about what they're hearing.

When I talked the other day, I tabled a document which was an email from an NSCC teacher who talked about having many students who'd come from other countries and having them learn about elections. She feared that because they won't be on campus during the Summer, they will lose that opportunity. That is a concern as well.

We don't know how this date was arrived at. We know that students will not have an opportunity to participate. We know the weather is difficult for seniors in the Summer. Then we ask ourselves, why this date? Why this date? I keep coming back to that. What was the process, why this particular date? As we heard in Law Amendments Committee, and I did table the document the other day, if we look at all of the elections since I think



1933, there have been very few... (Interruption) No, '33 and '37 were two Summer elections. They were won by the Liberals. Since that time, there have only been three Summer elections. Every single one has been won by the Progressive Conservatives.

That's the conclusion that we're left with, that the Premier wants to have a Summer election because the Progressive Conservatives tend to win Summer elections. And why do they tend to win Summer elections? Because younger people don't come out to vote.

My colleague, the member for Bedford South, named it as a form of voter suppression, to hold an election at a time when people are not paying attention. That is my concern. (Interruption) I'm sorry, I wasn't able to hear the Deputy Premier.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I had all kinds of young people working for me in Inverness.

KELLY REGAN: As did I. However, we do know that historically, younger people don't vote as much as older people. Who votes for the Progressive Conservatives? Often older people.

And, yes, Madam Speaker, as the Deputy Premier has interjected, we all had young people working on our campaigns. I had a great team of young people who were helping me out, but you don't have the kind of attention paid that you do when people's minds are focused if you do this during the Summer. That is our concern. If you make it difficult for people to vote or if you do it at a time when you know they are occupied with other things, you are less likely to get a good turnout. We saw that, actually, in the numbers of people who voted - second-lowest turnout in a Nova Scotia election.

I would think we would want to get people to vote. I would think we would want young people to understand democracy and how things work. I can tell you that when I was sworn in for the fourth time here, I had, as we referred to her, my Summer sidekick with me. A Grade 12 student, just graduated, co-president of her local high school. She was with me almost every day on the campaign trail, but there were other people who were normally there who were not, and they were not there because they were away, because it was hot, and because of COVID-19 this time.

We've had the Premier say that Elections Nova Scotia was pretty happy with the date. I keep going back to that, because there was no indication that they were consulted. The Electoral Commission wasn't consulted. The other parties weren't consulted.

The other day, I talked about what happened the last time we had a government interfere in the electoral process without listening to the Electoral Boundaries Commission - in fact, directing the Electoral Boundaries Commission that they could not do what they wanted to do. They got taken to court. So for a while, we didn't have members from protected ridings sitting in this House.

I can tell you I am glad that they're back. I think that our Legislature is richer for it. I think we make better decisions when we include people who often don't have the same experience as the rest of us.

I understand the urge and the desire of the Premier to have a fixed election date. It was a promise. Normally, I would note, anything to do with elections is tabled by the Justice Minister, but this time it was tabled by the Premier. I think he wanted to put his mark on it, and I understand that.

Again, I come back to the date. For us in this party, the issue is the date. The issue is, how was that date arrived at? What was the process? It doesn't appear that there was a process. That is our concern.

This is the kind of thing that should have at the very least had consultation among parties, preferably would have had consultation with Elections Nova Scotia, and preferably would have gone out to the Electoral Commission to ensure that if we're going to do this thing, if we're going to make this big change finally, we do it right. That is a concern.

The other day I read out the next election dates for all of the provinces and all of the territories and the federal government - every government across this country. There was not one single Summer election that was coming. So we have to ask ourselves, why did all these other provinces, territories, and the federal government all not go with the federal election but we're going to go with a provincial one - and not just once, because it was pushed back because of COVID-19, but in fact for perpetuity.

It doesn't make sense. We continue to object to the date, and really, if you take out the eight, there are over 40 other Tuesdays in the year. And yes, we don't want one at Christmas and there are probably a few other dates that we don't want in there as well, but there are a whole lot of other Tuesdays that could have been chosen, Tuesdays that are better - in the Spring, when it's warmer. It might be windy, but it's warm and you can go door to door. I've gone door to door during winter elections and byelections. It's not great. I can understand why we would avoid those.

But there's September. I understand that Elections Nova Scotia doesn't want October, but I think we can probably work around the federal and the municipal elections. They are each supposed to happen only every four years. Again, with minorities, it could change - it could be different with the federal election, but municipally it happens only every four years. It's pretty easy to work around that.

You can even go into November, because for most of November it's pretty good around here. September is kind of busy, but there's September, there's October, there's November. I understand December, January, you don't want to do that, even February, maybe even March, but then you have April, May, and June.

[2:30 p.m.]

While there aren't a lot of provinces and territories that actually go in the Spring, Alberta has what they call a fixed election, but it's a fixed election period, really. They do that and Ontario does early June. So, we could have done that.

Instead, we decided to go into an election at a time when people are focused on graduation, end of school year, getting the kids sorted out for the Summer. It doesn't make sense.

I'm pleased to see a fixed election date, but I've got to say that the date, and the way by which that date was chosen, remains unclear to me. The reasons for it seem flimsy. I'm disappointed that this was the first bill that came forward because it didn't have to be like this.

If the Premier would change the date to one of the many other Tuesdays in the year, this caucus would be in favour of the entire bill. Right now, we're only in favour of the fixed election portion.

It would have been nice if the first thing that came to the House was something we could all agree on.

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

GARY BURRILL: I, too, would like to make a few comments on this legislation as it stands to establish permanent fixed mid-July elections in our province.

May I say first that I feel as though in the course of this debate, the Premier has become an expert at arguing against positions which nobody has taken.

Over and over again, in the course of these discussions, when the case has been made to him for the multitude of reasons why July is a poor time to have elections, his response when the evidence is presented to him is: It's important to have fixed dates; we're going to have fixed dates; fixed dates will be an improvement, et cetera - as though there were anybody remotely in view who is against having fixed dates for elections in Nova Scotia.

There isn't anybody remotely in view in that category. The Liberal Party is in favour of fixed dates. The Progressive Conservative Party is in favour of fixed dates. The New Democratic Party is in favour of fixed dates. The Independent member is in favour of fixed dates. My mother is in favour of fixed dates. As far as I know, my daughter's dog is in favour of fixed dates. The universe of this discourse here is in agreement: having fixed election dates is not the issue.

The issue is a date for fixed elections which is sensible. A date for fixed elections which is coherent and not anachronistic. None of these criteria is met by a fixed election date in the middle of July.

Ultimately, there is only one standard by which to judge a democratic reform. That is the question: Does it or does it not increase and enhance democratic participation? Does it or does it not increase and enhance democratic engagement?

If we want to judge, say, a proposal about proportional representation, the ultimate question for judging it is, well, does it increase and enhance democratic participation and engagement?

If we want to evaluate a proposal, say, about the voting age or perhaps other mechanisms for voting, maybe e-voting, the pivotal central question in that discussion is going to be, does it enhance, does it increase participation?

That which increases engagement and participation in a democratic reform means that it is a success. If a democratic reform does not increase participation and engagement, that means that that reform is a failure.

By this measure, it would be hard to do much worse as far as selecting something from the calendar than mid-July for an election. Mid-July is the calendar's dead centre epicentre of disengagement on so many levels when it comes to community life, when it comes to civic life, and certainly when it comes to democratic life in a jurisdiction.

The Premier says in the course of all of these discussions and debates about this, that is the date that was recommended. I would be interested, Madam Speaker, to know a little bit more about these recommenders. I can venture an educated guess that they are not people with, for example, very much experience in organizing things in real communities. Everyone who organizes things in real communities, whether it's in Legions or churches or fire halls or community halls or whatever, everyone who's really involved in the nitty-gritty of organizing church suppers and fundraisers of a million different sorts knows that the last thing you would do is organize that in the last two weeks of June.

Everybody in the real community life business knows that there's only one period on the calendar that's pretty nearly as bad as the last two weeks of December, and that's the last two weeks of June. That is the period that is defined by graduations, by sporting activities, by all kinds of things that wrap up various things in the form of end-of-year events. I can't imagine that these recommenders are people who are very experienced in finding dates on which to organize occasions in the real life of real communities.

I also find it hard to imagine that these mysterious recommenders of this date are people who have had an awful lot of experience, either, bringing up kids. Everybody who has much experience in raising a family or is raising a family now knows that those

precious few weeks of Summer are the times that have to be dedicated to the kids. That's the only time when a family together can go somewhere or do something and maybe even have a small vacation. Even the back half of August is kind of compromised with all this back-to-school readiness and so on.

There is still, or has been, at least this precious little six-week window from Canada Day until about the middle of August when that hasn't been the case. I think we have probably all tried to organize something in a community or politically or something in that six-week period, and we have found that people have this kind of visceral negative response: The third week in July? No, I don't think so. It's very understandable that people should have for that reason - those visceral negative reactions aren't hard to understand because it is a precious time and one of the very few times in the 52 weeks of the year when the priority of your children is something that you're able to tend to.

If you'll indulge me just for a second, Madam Speaker, to speak about my own experience a number of years ago raising my family - I was raising a family during the time of the last two Summer elections, in 1999 and 2003. In the first one, in 1999, I was an active engaged person in the politics of the province. I was part of the group that looked after our Party in the constituency where I lived. I took some responsibilities there. Yet I have to admit that when that important election came in Summer 1999, I remember sitting with my children and listening to the returns around a campfire. I wasn't anywhere near a polling station providing support. I guess maybe I was a member of the local executive, but I probably wasn't a very good one. That was the only time, that was the only space that we were able in my family to be able to have that kind of time.

I had the same experience in the most-recent-before-this Summer election. That came in 2003. In that election, I lived at that time in the constituency of Colchester-Musquodoboit Valley, where my great friend Kathryn Belzer was running for our Party. I have regretted through the years how, in the course of Kathryn's campaign, I really let her down. I really wasn't able to be very much of a support to her.

I was engaged in politics in our area. In fact, in the subsequent election, I would become the candidate for our party. But I have to acknowledge that I heard the results of the 2003 election by leaving the kids with my wife in the bleachers of Fenway Park and running down underneath them and asking my friend to holler at the top of his lungs so I could hear over top of the crowd because I wasn't paying attention. I was on a trip to a ball game with the children. This is kind of a bittersweet memory on a week when the Red Sox have come up a dollar short towards the World Series, but that's another story.

That was the only time. At that time, my children then were in Grades 5, 8, 10, and 12, and that had to be the priority. That was the only time our family could manage to go on a little trip. I'm suggesting that that's not at all a rare experience. When you are in the kid-raising business, that is the character of how you experience those mid-weeks of July.

I agree with my colleague, the previous speaker, that this is a terrible foot for the government to set off on in their four-year mandate, because democratic disengagement means democratic diminishment. I cannot understand why any government would want to choose this to be the very first note they sounded in the legislative program of their mandate.

Even if we take the Premier at his word that there is no nefarious intent here in terms of an agenda of voter suppression, the very best that could be said about setting a permanent fixed election date in mid-July is that it is ill-conceived and thoughtless. It is true that by now this has already established itself as something of a Progressive Conservative pattern, but the government has dealt with other elements of this pattern more constructively in other instances that we've seen so far.

It was ill-conceived and thoughtless for the government to come to power and then promptly dismiss an African Nova Scotian deputy minister and the health board to which a prominent African Nova Scotian had recently been appointed, but they have acknowledged and apologized about that and are attempting, at least at some level, to redress that error.

It was ill-conceived and thoughtless for the government to have introduced legislation prohibiting demonstrations on hospital grounds and giving people the understanding that this would prohibit organizations from the labour movement from expressing their opinion there, but they understood that that was a mistake. They have acknowledged and apologized about that and they subsequently amended their legislation in order to rectify this error.

It was ill-conceived and thoughtless to have defeated our party's amendment at the first Law Amendments Committee of this session, calling for people to be able to present their opinions to Law Amendments in a virtual forum, but the government walked that error back and re-established virtual access properly to these proceedings.

In the case of the ill-conceived and thoughtless establishment of the third Tuesday in July as a fixed election date, it is as though the government feels they had already used up this year's whole supply of the capacity to recognize mistakes. They are therefore determined to press ahead with this one without any cognizance or recognition of how much it discredits them as an enterprise at the beginning of their mandate.

I want to speak some on the general subject of the importance of civic engagement. I want to say a few things about how important it is. I would like to add my comments to those things that have been said by my colleagues in our party and in the Liberal Party about how important this is from the point of view of schooling and education and children.

[2:45 p.m.]

Of all the emails that I've received over the years taking issue with different proposals that the government has made and people expressing their opinion, some of the most heartening communications that I have received are those that I have received in the course of this debate on the fixed election dates in mid-July.

I would like to share with the House just a few sample sentences from this correspondence. I'm going to read just a couple of sentences from three emails that I've received from Grade 9 students, Madam Speaker, at the Halifax Independent School, which I will then table:

Dear Gary, Every year during the Fall when kids are in school, there is a student vote but if the election date is switched, then teachers will not be able to teach the students about the government and student vote will not happen. During student voting, kids also often encourage their parents to vote. Overall, if student vote doesn't happen, it will badly impact kids' education for the worse and people won't be as likely to vote in the future. I strongly disagree with Bill No. 1 for these reasons. Warm regards, Alexander and Eli.

Dear Gary, As students who in the past have participated in the student vote, we believe that Bill No. 1 shouldn't be passed as right now the elections are in the Fall, which allows schools provincewide to learn about government and have the opportunity to vote in a mock election. Sincerely, Ryan and Silas

Dear Gary Burrill, Our school has been doing the student vote for at least 10 years. We remember learning about voting in Grade 3. We had a whole unit on how the voting process works and why it's so important for the younger generation to know about voting. This is why we believe Bill No. 1 should not go into action. We hope you'll consider our concerns about Bill No. 1. Sincerely, Page and Abby

The Halifax Independent School has just been added to the constituency I serve, Halifax Chebucto, in the recent redistricting. I'm looking forward to including the Halifax Independent School in a project of political engagement that I've been conducting with Grade 6 students over the past number of years until it was recently interrupted by COVID-19.

Every year since I've been fortunate to be in this work, I contact all the Grade 6 classes in the constituency I serve and invite them to join me here for a day at Province House. We come here and assemble in the Chamber and I explain to them the workings of democracy in Nova Scotia and, most particularly, that every area of Nova Scotia has got

its own chair and its own seat. How every four years we select a person to carry the voice of the people and that that person is the only person who is allowed to be in that seat and the only person who, for that period, is granted the right by the people to make the laws that we all abide by in the province.

The kids all come and take turns, Madam Speaker, sitting in our Halifax Chebucto seat and have their picture taken doing that. It's also in the Speaker's seat. The Sergeant-at-Arms is often good enough to come and present the Mace and give the kids an explanation about the meaning of the Mace and if we've got enough time, the class will hold a mock debate. Often, the Commissionaires here will help me kind of gather the kids up and keep matters a little bit organized as we go. We get to go downstairs and talk about the meaning of the presentation on the wall around Viola Desmond and then turn around and see the meaning of the presentation on the wall about Chief Sylliboy.

Without fail, every time I do this, when we're winding it up and the kids are getting assembled and getting their coats back on, talking to their parents and so on, the Commissionaires here at the House. The teachers and the parents who have come to support the outing - always there's a sense in those conversations that people are really glad to have had the morning, because they've really had a feeling of having been engaged in something quite important and they have been. We have been, in those instances, engaged in something quite important.

In those couple of hours, those 12-, 11-, 13-year-old children have been filled with the spirit of engagement. It's a precious spirit, which once extinguished is some awful hard to reignite.

One of the several schools that I've had the great fun of organizing this project with is LeMarchant-St. Thomas here in Halifax. A few days ago, I received a package from LeMarchant-St. Thomas containing a series of handwritten letters from students at LeMarchant in Grade 4. The students in LeMarchant in Grade 4 had written in, arguing against a July 15<sup>th</sup> election date. I'm not going to read all of this correspondence, but I hope you will allow me to read a couple of sentences from seven or eight of the letters that the kids had written - mind you, Grade 4:

"Hello, Gary Burrill, Instead of the provincial election in July could you change it to October or November, as they are in the school year, it would NOT be fun to learn about it after it happened, and I know that some people would not vote ... Sincerely Jess ..."

Dear Gary Burrill, can you change the election to anytime in the school year? If it's in July, we can't learn about the provincial election, so when we go to the election when we're old enough we won't know what to do. Sincerely, Kenley



I will table all of these.

Dear Gary Burrill, please change the provincial election because then other kids will be able to understand the meaning of it. Plus, when other kids are over 18, they won't understand how to elect. Sincerely, Liam.

"Dear Gary Burrill ... our school thinks it should be in october because when we are on summer break [in] July it would be annoying ... Sincerely Max.

"Dear Gary Burrill, we think that you should change the Election to october because if its in July than kids cant learn because it would be summer and if its in october than we can learn about the Election. All the best Calix"

Dear Gary Burrill, In my class we were learning that people want to change the election to July and in my opinion thats wrong. Let me explain why, because if its in the summer kids won't be able to learn as much as me and all my classmates. It will all so, not be fun to learn about it when it already happened. Sincerely Spencer.

"Dear Gary Burrill, I think you should change the provincial election to our school year" - just three more, Madam Chair - "because when were older and we get a job like a deputy official we would be clueless because we wernt educated on how to do it properly ..."

Not bad. We want to go on record as being against cluelessness in our Party.

Dear Gary Burrill, I think you should change the provincial election to any time instead of July so we can learn about the election, so please change the election any time instead of July, because if we don't learn about it in school, we might never learn about it. Sincerely, Alice.

Dear Gary Burrill, please have your election in October or something like that. Me and my friends learned so much about the federal election because it was in September. This is why I want to have the election in October, so I can learn about it. Sincerely, Eric.

I already gave the copies for that. These are the originals.

Some of the most meaningful times that I've had over the last number of years of gathering kids up here in the Chamber, I had Grade Six children from a school in Dutch Settlement. Not everybody in the House would know where Dutch Settlement is, but it's between Elmsdale and the Halifax County side of Lantz. In that school, from which I had Grade Six students come here with me three or four different times, it was always quite striking that they had a teacher who is so committed to imparting a civic understanding, and so devoted to doing that, and so talented in the doing of it, that the kids just had an amazingly developed sense of what democracy's about, long before they ever got here. And they're so knowledgeable.

I remember that when we came into the Chamber, the kids from the Dutch Settlement Elementary school every year would immediately separate themselves into Conservatives and Liberals and NDPers, knowing what the difference was. Once they found their placement, sit down and run a whole mock debate without any supervision. They would, amongst themselves, appoint - it's your turn to be the Speaker - and that person would be the Speaker for a while. Then it was, okay, you're done, you'll be the Speaker now. It was an amazing thing to watch.

I guess what I'm trying to draw attention here, one of the things I want to draw attention to here, is in these three instances I'm speaking about - in that Grade 9 class at Halifax Independent School, in that the Grade 4 at LeMarchant-St. Thomas Elementary, and in that Grade 6 class in Dutch Settlement - in every one of those classes, there was a teacher. The teacher in every one of those classes was somebody who was making one extraordinary effort.

We see the effort and presence of the teacher in the letters of these Grade 4 teachers. Of course, we see the personalities and interests of the kids, but we also see the behemoth effort of the teacher. We see it in the more sophisticated and complexly formulated letters of the Grade 9 students. In each one of these cases, there is a teacher who has been beating themselves inside out in order to help those kids stand in the world against the enormous force of passivity and cynicism and alienation from the world in which we live.

Those teachers, so many of them, have said very, very clearly - through their union; through their contacts with their MLAs; through their individual correspondence with members of the government and members of the Opposition; through their presentations of the Committee of Law Amendments - they have said that their important efforts in this regard are going to be undercut and undermined by a fixed election date that's outside the year of school.

It seems to me that one of the core things that's at issue here is that these teachers are awfully important people in our world, awfully important people in our civic mission. What they have to say should be listened to and regarded and respected, and their efforts should be upheld and supported, not diminished.

I want to say, in concluding that with Bill No. 1, fixing our fixed election dates in the middle of July, the government is embarrassing us in Nova Scotia. We've already had enough to embarrass us in the past. It's been embarrassing all these years to have to say to members of the public who've asked us about election timing that, well, actually, we're the only province in all of Canada that doesn't have the benefit of fixed election dates.

It will be sad from so many angles, if we solve that embarrassment now, only to replace it with another embarrassment so that we will have to explain to members of the public in years to come that well, actually, it's true. Nova Scotia's the only province in all of Canada that holds its elections as a matter of statute in the middle of July.

There is a reason why the 12 Canadian jurisdictions that have fixed elections today do not have them in the Summer - none of them. That is because it is a very poor, a very weak, and a very ill-thought-out idea.

[3:00 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Before we move on, just a note. The honourable Leader of the New Democratic Party has tabled emails containing reactions in ink and partial names. Tabled documents must be authentic, attributable, and complete, specifically the author or source of all tabled documents must clearly be identified with a full name. The House can only receive correspondence that contains both a first and last name. Those letters tabled by the honourable Leader of the NDP - the lack of a full name for attribution - will therefore be rejected by the House.

The honourable member for Clare.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to discuss the bill on fixed elections. At the best of times, I'm not the most articulate or exciting person, so following the Leader of the NDP is going to be a tough job, I admit.

I have been listening to this debate for a few days now, and honestly, I wasn't sure if I was going to speak or not. There are a few points I want to raise. One is around fixed election dates. As a municipal councillor for 21 years, having run in six elections, I know full well the value and importance of fixed elections. I can say municipal elections are true fixed election dates. We even ran our municipal election in 2020 during the pandemic, and there was almost no discussion about changing it.

Personally, I'm a big fan of fixed election dates, and the fact that there wasn't fixed election dates when I was considering running almost made me decide not to present myself. That's the truth because as a lobster fisherman, I didn't want to leave my captain and my employer in a hard situation because that's not the type of guy I am. I want to dispel the argument right here that we're against fixed election dates.

The other point I heard also is that we're opposing to oppose. I have heard my colleagues speak quite eloquently, especially the member for Bedford South, and I can say what he said in this Chamber was from the heart, and he means it. For me, it was quite motivating and compelling for me to get up here today.

I consider myself a reasonable guy. I'm not sure. But all of my friends and everybody who knows me always says that I listen first and then react or respond. All through the debate, what I have been looking for from the government is one compelling reason why the election is in the Summer - one. If I had heard it - I have watched the news. I have listened to the comments. I have listened to the Premier. I'll challenge him even if the bill is passed or isn't passed to make a compelling argument. I want to hear that.

The only thing from memory that I can remember is the member for Richmond, who talked about voter turnout during the Summer, the last election, which was around 71 per cent. I think what he missed, respectfully, is that if you look at the Acadian ridings in the last election: Argyle, 68 per cent; Clare, 67 per cent; Richmond, 71 per cent, give or take. We have high turnout because we know our voices matter. If we don't vote, there's nobody here to speak for us, so I felt compelled to get up.

We have gone through the boundary reviews in 2012, when I presented to the Law Amendments Committee as a warden. I have been to public meetings, one at the gym at Université Sainte-Anne with 1,000 people in an 8,000-people community out to fight for our representation in this House. At the end of the day, the government decided to get rid of the boundary. We went through the whole process, and I don't want to go through that. Acadians vote because Acadians know it matters. If there's one point I want to make here today, it's that point. When your voice isn't listened to, there's only one way to do it and vote.

The Summer election date is a terrible date. Terrible. I believe when I first heard of it, and no disrespect, but I thought it was a joke, to be honest.

As a municipal councillor, and I was there 21 years, council kinds of gets - I don't know if you'd call it a cycle or a dance, it's the repetitive motion and I'm assuming the House here is the same but to me I don't see any pattern yet.

We all know on municipal council, and those who have been councillors, maybe it is not like that in your area, but in Clare it is. September hits, everybody is encouraged, business is being done, meetings, public meetings. Christmas hits, everything slows down. You know March, April, budgets, try to get business done because we all know Summer is coming. So, by the end of May, our business has to be done.

We've talked about planning. Any municipal councillor knows that if they schedule a planning meeting in the Summer they are going to be accused of trying to pass something under the table. We've talked about the aquaculture bill, about hearings. I can guarantee

you if any aquaculture company tried to do their public consultation on July 15<sup>th</sup>, it would be a disaster.

I am honestly trying to understand the rationale and I again ask somebody to make that compelling argument. I mean we've just gone through a Summer election and I believe there was a reason for it, between the third and the fourth wave. It wasn't ideal, but I'll say people took their vacations to work on my campaign because they wanted to help me, sacrificed that, Summer months. My wife actually took two weeks of her vacation to work on the campaign.

What I found, too, during the campaign, which I really struggled with, you know, you stop at a house, there's a family supper, there's a family gathering, you don't know if you should walk up and have a chat or walk away. That's not the democratic process, that's not how you engage people.

I guess what I'm trying to say is from a municipal perspective and from my experience in my own community and what we've experienced with the Acadian communities through the boundary reviews, the lack of consultation, this is about our democracy, it's about voting. I think the member for Bedford South couldn't have said it better. To really arbitrarily just pick a date - to me, I don't know, I just can't accept that.

For those who know me, if I didn't believe in this I wouldn't have stood up. That's how I'm going to be for the next four years. So, if you don't see me stand on something, it's because I can't speak from the heart. On this issue, I don't believe this bill should go through.

**THE SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

**SUZY HANSEN:** I want to commend the colleague in the back there and his eloquent words, because it is true: So many of us are sitting here thinking that a fixed election date is exactly what we want. We want to have a set date so we can prepare and plan, but as has been said around this whole entire room, other than - on this side of the room, a Summertime election is the worst idea ever in life. I don't even understand why we would think let's do it during a time when people are disengaged, when they are checked out, when they have kids home that they have to micromanage and figure things out with. It's not a good idea.

I, too, have not yet heard any type of explanation or even a reasoning for why that date is great. I mean, even if you said it's my birthday, I would have said, hey, that's a good date to have an election day - not in the Summer, though.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak on this. We did listen - was it last week, earlier, about the presenters? We've gone through this so many times. We listened to the presenters who spoke in support of fixed election dates. Like I

said, I want to make it clear that we do, on this side of the room, believe that fixed election dates are imperative. (Applause)

Nova Scotia, as you know, is the last province to bring forward this important democratic reform. We're the only province that has put forward a fixed election date in the Summer.

As I just mentioned, people are checked out, they're busy, child care challenges - we can name a number of pieces - sports, et cetera. We had talked about that.

Many of the presenters to Law Amendments last week were teachers. When elections happen within the school year, students at all levels have the opportunity to participate in the Student Vote program offered through CIVIX.

I am huge on education. I can hear many of us around the room talking about how important it is to engage young voters, because they are our future and they will be voters, so we need to teach them how to do that properly. I'm big on engaging our youth in learning more about our democratic process. This is why I'm in favour of continuing to teach them that.

Student Vote uses the election as a teachable moment and enables teachers to bring democracy alive in the classroom. This hands-on learning program empowers students to experience the voting process first-hand and cast ballots for the official candidates running in the upcoming election.

If we believe in education, we need to understand how impactful this program is and how we need to recognize that our children are the future. We should never give up on any opportunity to educate them.

As we've heard from our Leader about the young learners, the Grade 4 students. When we think about how old they are now - they're 9 years old. In nine years, they'll be of voting age. As someone who teaches young people and educates young people in many different facets, we know that teaching them early is the best way to embed that information so that they can later on continue that process.

The program itself is open to elementary and high school students and there's no cost to schools to participate. Registered schools are supplied with a variety of learning materials and election supplies for the coordination of the vote. These activities inform students about government and the election process. They encourage research into the parties and candidates and foster dialogue among the students and their families.

Students vote for the local candidates running in their electoral district. The Student Vote results are shared publicly after the close of the polls on election day. Ninety per cent of those parents said the program gave their family an opportunity to learn more about

politics. I, too, have participated in this process, as well as the Leader. The excitement and the questioning - all of those pieces that these young people bring are exactly why we want to continue engaging them. Exactly why we want to engage the communities to get out there and vote.

Retired teacher Molly Hurd wrote in her submission to Law Amendments: By declaring the fixed election date to be in the middle of the dog days of Summer, thereby precluding children's involvement in Student Vote, I can only conclude that this government is not interested in voter participation, either for the present or the future.

Another written submission states: The establishment of a fixed election date must be established with the goal of improving civic engagement, thoughtful deliberation of issues, and increased participation in the electoral system. This is why no other province, territory, or federal government has a fixed election date in July and August.

A student who wrote to the Law Amendments Committee said: What is good about Student Vote is that we get to learn about election issues and actually cast our vote. If elections were in the Summer, we would not learn about Student Vote. When would I cast my ballot? Now I get to cast it and I feel happy to do that.

Teachers who have had experience with the program have given positive reviews on the impact it's had in the classroom. In October 2013, a newspaper section to mark World Teachers Day highlighted the importance and success of the Student Vote program.

Former Prince Andrew High School teacher and now government member for Dartmouth East is quoted saying: "As educators, we have a responsibility to help kids understand that their community is their responsibility. I really enjoy this program and I'm totally committed to it."

Setting a fixed date in mid July for provincial elections in Nova Scotia ensures that there will never be a provincial election for students to participate in the Student Vote program ever again.

The member for Dartmouth East went on to say that with voter turnout hitting all-time lows, this program is specifically designed to reverse the trends we're seeing. It's disheartening to see the statistics. You have to have an engaged citizenry. I want to quote the member in the article itself:

"As educators we have a responsibility to help kids understand that their community is their responsibility,' the member for Dartmouth East explains. 'I really enjoy this program and I'm totally committed to it. I can just see that spark with my students. From a teaching point of view, it's been amazing. It's an authentic learning experience.' With voter turnout currently hitting historic

lows, the member for Dartmouth East says, 'it's exactly this kind of active instruction that's imperative for the future. This program is specifically designed to reverse the trends we're seeing at provincial and federal levels,' [the member for Dartmouth East] says. 'It's disheartening to see the statistics - you have to have an engaged citizenry. The greatest threat to a democracy is people who don't care. As a parent and as a teacher, I want schools to emphasize literacy, and civic literacy is part of that,' says the member for Dartmouth East."

[3:15 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Unless the member is going to make a further quote from that article, I would ask that you table it.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: As you can see, our caucus absolutely agrees. We need to reverse trends of low voter turnout. We need to engage children and youth in learning about the democratic process. We need fixed election dates. That fixed election date must show the commitment to the student vote program that the member for Dartmouth East expressed back in 2013, and not the cynicism of the date put forward by this PC bill.

On another note, I did say that I would stand up here if I felt that my voice and the voice of my community are not being heard and that this House was going to hear me. Going back to a statement that I made previously, I want to remind you that my journey on this path is a response to the silencing, suffocation, and exclusion of Black people and their voices in professional settings, barriers to their opportunities, options, resources, and freedom of full self-expression that have been active and oppressive.

If we look around this room, how many of us in here, if we didn't have the support, the drive, or the means to run an election, would be here? We can see from the lack of representation around this room of diversity that there are still barriers for people of colour, gender identity, accessibility, parents, impoverished communities, marginalized communities - I could go on and on and on.

We want representation from across the province in this House, as it is the People's House - all people, not the ones who can afford to be here, not the privileged. We understand that there are sacrifices made as we all campaigned in this last election in 2021 - the Summer of 2021. We all had missed time with our kids during their only break during the Summer, losing our vacations. We knew it was a commitment. We knew that this was something that we wanted to do for the people in our riding, for our constituency. Not everybody has that access. Not everybody has that opportunity.



I agree with my colleagues around the room. I know you have heard me say this already, but fixed election dates are absolutely necessary and long overdue. We all agree about that. Every single one of us in here is like, yes, fixed election dates are absolutely great - just not in July. Since everything we have to bring to the table, in order for it to be discussed and debated and moved forward and go through all these readings - everything we bring forward has to have proper research and data in order to be decided upon. I would think that when we brought this forward, all of this research and data that's been brought forward to the leadership would hold some weight, especially when at our Law Amendments Committee there were a number of people who came and spoke and gave their piece and spoke because of the voice of the people.

If the date is based on data collection or information that was collected, then I could see it being something that we could all agree upon and say, hey, this is what the consensus is, this is what the electors say, this is what Elections Nova Scotia is saying - anything that is substantial, but I don't see that here.

I want to say that when we think about any of our changes to our Acts and legislation, I want to continue to remind us to all check our privilege and ground ourselves, to be more aware and responsive to what our constituency and Nova Scotians want. Let's be the government that listens, just like in the Throne Speech. Let's be that change.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

HON. TONY INCE: I'll start with saying that I've gotten several emails about this bill, as many have in this House. The one email I'm going to reference - I don't need to table it, because I'm not going to really quote it - I had a teacher who explained to me that he's got a Grade 5 to 6 class and this Grade 5 to 6 class, this September, was his first class to ever be taught about elections.

The reason why I raise this, Mr. Speaker, is because in that, when he talked about elections, he talked about the young people getting involved and becoming excited. He also indicated that the majority of his students are racialized students. So here we are again in the People's House, discussing something that affects all of us. We have a date that was set that is not going to change. The Premier has told us that this is the date.

What really perplexes me and disturbs me about that is that there was an Electoral Boundaries Commission struck, as was mentioned - all-party. Everybody was onside with that, because we had to correct and rectify an issue that made things unbalanced, that made things not equitable.

So we come to a scenario - and what I'm also little disturbed with is the fact that the narrative that is being drawn here is that we're fighting because it's about a fixed

election date. The fact that an individual would twist that statement to that when it was already openly said, the fact that there were no consultations with the African Nova Scotian community, no consultations with the Indigenous community, and it's obvious the Acadian community didn't have any consultations.

So when people stand up and say they question, they wonder, it's due to the fact that, number one, there were some steps taken that left the rest of us out of it. There were decisions made, and those decisions leave me feeling like he's my parent.

Mr. Speaker, we have communities. We have an Electoral Boundaries Commission that was non-partisan. Why isn't that brought into the conversation? Why haven't those folks been addressed? I just want to know why, other than the fact it's "because I said so."

As a young man being involved in politics off and on again like was mentioned earlier, I often was the only one in the room. I also realized how important it is to be in those rooms, how important it is to have your perspective heard in those rooms.

I'm not confident, and I don't believe at this current date and time standing here and now, that the current government even cares about that. They don't care about this election, because if they did, they would at least show us in this place who represent many of those folks across this province, the evidence, or just show me something that says most Nova Scotians agree with you. We haven't seen that, other than a flippant remark about the fact that Nova Scotians picked us.

That was then. You are now venturing on another path, taking our democracy, which is a slippery slope right now, in another direction. You don't feel you need to address this with the people of the province? Help me understand. Truly, help me understand, because that's not democracy. If we're looking for democracy, or if we're looking for that kind of democracy, just go across the border, because that's the kind of democracy that we're seeing there.

Mr. Speaker, I like the gentleman. I respect him, but on this, with no explanation, with no evidence, with no proof that all Nova Scotians want this particular date, really bothers me. If he has a crystal ball that speaks about the positive results of this particular date, please share that with us. Anything to stop this debate so that we can all move forward. Anything that will give us some confidence that everything that you're saying is real.

My community is disengaged. They're disengaged and we all know why, because I'm not going to go down that path right now. We all know why. Not just my community. We heard about the Acadian community, who I am very happy and proud that they get it, and they stand up and they realize; but they're not dealing with the trappings of slavery, they're not dealing with all that other stuff. My community is divided.

This is no way to get my community, or Indigenous, or even an immigrant community involved in a democratic process, when we can't engage them.

[3:30 p.m.]

Now let me back up a minute because yes, we could engage. We've heard you can start in May and everything else or you can start a year out, but the reality is, it's a Summer election.

We've heard all the evidence around Summer elections from south of the border to here and I don't believe - as I stand here - I don't believe we are going to improve voter turnout; not during that time. If I am wrong, I will be the first one to shine his shoes but I don't believe we are going to have the opportunity to get full engagement in July.

I know how hard it was this past election. Yes, we know, it was a Summer election but you also know that there were circumstances around that.

Now let me back up for a second. We are saying this is fixed, as everybody is saying, and then there is that caveat: 70 days, the Premier. So, again, show us. Share with us the proof in the evidence of a fixed election date. Show us that all Nova Scotians agree with you, then we will shut up.

That's the problem here, folks, and we all know it, sitting on either side of the House. In this particular debate and issue, we have truly not engaged Nova Scotians. We have not engaged Nova Scotians, folks. No, let me back up. We've engaged some Nova Scotians. We have engaged some, not all.

As a member of this House sitting with all of you, trying to work with you to try to address the concerns of the province, this doesn't send a good message. From where I stand, it certainly doesn't send a good message because again folks, my community is not engaged.

Don't get me wrong. It's not on you that you should have to engage them. We are trying to do that ourselves. However, you've got to give us the opportunity, the tools, and the ability to do that and by minimizing those things for us to be able to participate and get involved in, is not democratic.

This election was the first time since 2013 that I had a real good component of young people working with me. They got out, they were excited, they were happy, and those young people really got me across that line. They were great. That being said, they may - depending on me because they came out for me and I'm so thankful to all of you. However, I don't know if I would get that same thing in the future because of July.

Again, ladies and gentlemen, it's not that we are debating or fighting to say, "no, we don't want fixed election dates." You've heard it over and over again. Mr. Premier, if you're listening, it's the date.

I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I said, "the Premier." (Interruption) It doesn't matter, I apologize.

The member for Pictou East, if he is listening. (Interruption) Okay, I'll leave that alone.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Just to remind the member, you are almost implying that there is a member not in the House by asking if he is listening, so I'd ask that you withdraw that statement.

HON. TONY INCE: I withdraw that statement, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

TONY INCE: All I'm asking is that the government, as we've heard several times, pause. Others had said, give it a year. In my opinion, even just six months I'll be happy with, but pause and show us that Nova Scotians agree with you. I'll keep my mouth closed.

When we talk about - let me just back up a minute, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that I've been passionate about when I started in 2013, I started a program around elections because I knew, as the member for Dartmouth East knows, how important it is. I started engaging, I started going into schools, I started a program called MLA For a Day.

My program went into the schools. We engaged the youth. I explained to them, I'm open: You can ask me any questions. So they would ask me questions. We'd talk, they'd learn about my job. Then we would take them through the nomination process for those who wanted to run. Then we would take them through the election and the campaigning and the election. Then those students who had the opportunity or who were fortunate to win that vote within their classes, those students and those couple of years - there were four of them - they got to be with me, and they got to do my job for the day.

They got to sit at my desk, they got to come down here - and that was powerful, Mr. Speaker. The little cards and the things that I have in my office and the thank yous from the students and their parents because I would take them through all those processes. Then they'd hang with me for the day and get to see what I do.

I'm not saying that I can't do that anymore. I will continue to do that. However, I think that we are missing an opportunity here. We are missing a real chance, if we do our jobs right, to really get those young people engaged. They are our future, because once we are all gone, and you know what, you can put it aside and you can say look, they'll learn.

Most of us didn't get that education. Well, I did: I got it in civics in the 1960s, but you know, got it.

But there has been a phase in our lives where, for whatever reason, education - something's happened where what we do isn't as important when they're teaching it. I don't know if that makes sense, but what we do is very important, but for some reason in education, part of that, part of our lives, of our society is being pushed a little bit less important. Or it's that "they'll learn it later." That's like our issue earlier today - we'll learn it later. We've got to get them to learn it earlier so that we're not dealing with it when we're adults.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask one thing and then I will take my seat. All I'm asking is for some real concrete evidence that the government's decision on this particular day has been backed by all Nova Scotians.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to talk to this very important bill. It's clear that this House supports fixed election dates, and I'm going to talk a bit about the importance of those before I turn to talk about the implications of a July fixed election date.

I truly believe that fixed election dates are essential to encouraging diverse voices to come forward and seek office. In my own experience, I think I had a chance to look at the whole process and question if I could run or not from a number of different perspectives.

I'm still a student, as I've mentioned before, and I had to think about how an election would fit in with my program of study. Many other students, again, would have to do that reasoning. It's not that a Summer election would be great for students, it's just about planning through a program or a degree.

I also looked at it from being an entrepreneur. On one hand, I had the privilege of being able to organize my time, give myself time off, I was able to keep paying myself, but it was also a drain on my team on the projects we had. I had to consider how we could maintain the work we were doing if I wasn't there, but I didn't know when I wasn't going to be there, so that was really hard. I will say, I know that a couple of clients were quite disappointed in the fact that I had to step away from projects midstream.

On the flip side, I kept thinking, what if I was an employee? What if one of my team members was coming to me and saying, hey, you know what? I'm going to run in an election, but I don't know when that election is going to happen within the range of a year basically. Then, you know, as we know, there were the little moments of speeding up and

slowing down. Again, there are lots of situations where people would not be able to undertake those types of negotiations or discussions in the workplace.

People still quote being a parent and trying to manage without fixed election dates, in particular about managing in the Summer. I would say that as the parents of some neurodiverse kids, that Summer planning at its best is fraught, and at its worst, you just kind of give up at a certain point because you have young people who thrive in consistency, routine, relationships, and connections. If you start moving kids around who are neurodiverse or have other needs from a different type of situation to a different type of situation, it's not actually what they want. What they want is consistency. I think it's particularly difficult for some parents.

[3:45 p.m.]

I think it's also challenging to think about a Summer election in terms of families in a transition period. In my case, my son graduating from high school and moving into post-secondary, and that's again, a difficult transition for many, many young people of many families, and there's a heightened level of difficulty when someone is neurodiverse and needs a bit of extra support along the way.

Speaking of neurodiversity, I kind of wish I could play you a little clip from my life through the Springtime. I proudly parent my son, who has autism spectrum disorder. I do think autism spectrum disorder can be a superpower. My son has the ability to see quite clearly through matters to the heart of the issue and to raise it. All through the Spring, he kept saying, "What do you mean, you don't know when the election is going to be? How does nobody know when the election is going to be?" I appreciated his honesty and his clarity with that question. Then when we called an election in the Summer, his question became, "Why are we doing this in the middle of the Summer? It's really too hot."

When we got a chance to go out during the federal election campaign in September, it really served noting the difference that we could actually be comfortable in our canvassing. I think this is only the beginning - from being people who are involved in the electoral process - the beginning of removing some of those barriers that I think are really important to take away. When you know when an election is coming, you're much more able to build your support, build your team, do your fundraising in a way that's quite tangible.

Like I said, I think we are all very supportive of a fixed election date. I mentioned a couple of days ago doing a little bit of research, looking in the academic databases to look at what has been studied about the effect of Summer elections. In fact, what I can say is that I still haven't found a Summer election article. As a researcher, I would say that there are very systematic approaches to analyzing and synthesizing research. I don't want to infer that I found the answers in research.

I will say that, in the U.S., where there's a very well-developed body of research on civic engagement and election participation, it seems like many studies have found that when they're in one of their heightened election years - so every two years; there are different jurisdictions that have elections in the U.S. - the more elections, the more participation. That seems to be the case. That is a Fall election cycle. I do think that this idea of having an election season, having some flexibility around not directly conflicting with a federal or municipal election would be really - I think having an election season is actually really positive.

For my riding, there was a great deal of disbelief as I arrived on people's doorsteps in May and June and early July. I kept saying, there's an election around the corner, and people honestly couldn't quite believe that, to the point where I'm sure they thought, why is she here? This doesn't make any sense. She doesn't know what she's doing.

Then once the election was actually called, I didn't see people suddenly leap up in joy. I didn't see enormous enthusiasm when I tried to convince people - oh, you're leaving for three weeks tomorrow? It's okay, the advance poll is open. Go vote now. I could sort of see people say, oh yeah, we'll try and get to that, sure. Or the situation of arriving and seeing a family gathered and knowing at this particular point that that family gathering might have been the first time in a long time that families had gotten together, and again, trying to persuade folks to take a break from that important time to get down to even the advance poll was quite difficult.

I mentioned before that for seniors in my riding, this was a very difficult time of year. In a lot of the manors where there is no discernible air conditioning, people were very uncomfortable in general as we were going door to door. Even getting out to vote, I think, was very hard. Residents in Joe Howe Manor here in Halifax mostly waited until Election Day to vote, which made a lot of sense because the poll was in their common room.

Despite the fact of being in their building, the polls were also for neighbours, and there was quite often even a short wait to have the opportunity to vote. A lot of seniors reported that there was no way they were going back down there because they went down and they saw people waiting inside or outside - which didn't matter. It was uncomfortable in either case. They just couldn't take it, or had certain disabilities or just pain that really prevented them from waiting outside in the heat.

I also talked a bit before Committee of the Whole House on Bills on the transformative moments in education. We have heard more about that idea, that teachers can teach anything, that teachers work miracles in many different ways, but that there are often times when you have an experience, particular something that's experiential, that really makes the difference. Providing for a provincial election that happens during the school year is really important.

I have shared the story before about my experience in Grade 11, learning about the fall of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Bloc, and how we relied on the weekly delivery of our *Macleans*' magazines into our class to catch up on what had happened. There was CBC Radio, but basically the big, deep stories you had to get once a week. That was the pace of information, though, at that time. If you think about the pace of information at this time, it would be absolutely impossible to recreate the experience of a real-time election at any other time of the year.

I would also like to just summarize some of the issues for folks on post-secondary campuses and post-secondary students. As many of us can attest and many of us know, time in post-secondary education can, for many people, constitute a formative and significant part of people's lives. We benefit greatly from a lot of students choosing to have that experience here in Nova Scotia. Advanced education is a provincial responsibility. We take great pride in our system of universities. One in twenty Nova Scotians is affiliated with a post-secondary institution in this province. I think we can't undervalue the input of that part of our population.

We heard from many students at the Law Amendments Committee that the bill had real potential to disenfranchise students and dampen the ability of the over 55,000 post-secondary students in Nova Scotia to participate in provincial voting. We heard from student organizations about how fixing the election date in July would hamper student organizations' ability to perform civic engagement work.

We heard that from Students Nova Scotia. They had the experience this past Summer of trying to overcome information and access barriers. Their belief is that voter turnout among young people is not due to apathy but due to unfamiliarity or confusion with the process, and I think I would really agree with this. I have spent a great deal of my career mobilizing young people across Canada for various issues, and young people are actually very engaged with things that matter to them and in ways that they can see results. I think holding elections in times that are not ideal for them certainly sends a real message that their vote is not being valued.

In my experience in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island on the doorstep, I think I met - and I don't think I'm exaggerating - hundreds of students who did not know if they could vote. More often than not, they could. They were students who had been in Nova Scotia - maybe they were in their third or fourth year of an undergrad, or they were graduate students - and they had, in fact, been at the same address for the previous academic year and into that Summer, but because they weren't connected to campus, there weren't the informational campaigns happening in the summer, and they really didn't know if they could vote or not. Like I said, the vast majority of them actually did have that right to vote.

I know what that looks like on campuses because I have done that work before. I have done the work of mobilizing students through all sorts of means. I actually just spent a small amount of time looking at past articles I wrote about students in the elections in the



*Dalhousie Gazette* from 1992 to 1995. There are some good ones in there, talking about the importance of getting students to vote at this particularly influential point in their lives, talking about the difficulty with the timing of the 1993 referendum because it was soon after schools went back. I know what tools there are to engage students on campus, and I know how important it is to engage students on campus.

We support a fixed election date, but we don't support a fixed election date in July. I think anyone who spent any time on university campuses or college campuses in the Summer versus the other parts of the year knows that there's a vast difference in feeling and atmosphere, and that I think having a voting season in Nova Scotia that matches the voting season across Canada would be a really strong asset, so I support this bill.

I really hope that we come back to this some time and fix this date. With that, I'll take my seat.

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

HON. BEN JESSOME: I'd like to note that the first time that a politician wearing a blue uniform, who was involved in convening a July Summer election, a Summer Assembly, by the name of John A. Macdonald, it inspired 152 years of celebrations. I don't know that today's situation will have the same effect. I was trying to make a joke but that didn't land the way that I hoped. (Laughter)

Of course, I mean no personal ill will to the member for Hants East. Welcome to the House, to everybody who put their name on the ballot this time around, to our returning members, congratulations to our new members. I'm looking forward to getting my first opportunity to work with you and the past number of days and couple of weeks have so far been a lot of fun. So congrats everybody. Let's go to work.

I'm going to speak to my truth and frankly, the elephant in the room for me that I think some have acknowledged was that the Liberal Party called an election in the Summer. We did that. My truth is that I had started preparing for an election in January of this year, anticipating through conversations with colleagues on all sides of the House that we would go into an election campaign in the Spring. That's my truth, that's what I understood to be the reality that we were facing and so I was preparing for a Spring election.

Mr. Speaker, the other piece of my truth in facilitating that and in participating in that Summer election was what I hoped to be an anomaly in the universe, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the fourth wave in Nova Scotia. I sincerely believe that that was a main contributor as to why our government decided to facilitate the Summer election. I sincerely believe that there was a meaningful justification around trying to engage voters at a time when the pandemic caseload was suppressed. Was it ideal? Frankly, it was not.

The door-to-door that I experienced during the Summer election, sincerely, was campaigning that was greeted with, in a number of different cases with frustration and disregard and questions around why in the good Lord's name we were having a Summer election.

I have to believe, and again, I speak for myself in this context, I can't fathom, I don't understand how most, if not all other members in the House, Mr. Speaker, had a similar scenario where they'd knock on a door and say, why are you hosting a Summer election?

I would present them with that consideration of why we're hosting a Summer election. Most people understood that and for perhaps the people who are watching, the members in the House, you can take that or leave it. That's my truth, that's what I believe caused us to facilitate a Summer election and that was my experience.

[4:00 p.m.]

We've touched on a number of different arguments and debates around why a Summer election appears to be a good thing. We've all come to agree that a fixed election is appropriate and wonderful.

The government party has a lane right now that I know they will take to be the government that fixed an election date. There is frankly no element of our present democracy that will disable that opportunity for them.

Mr. Speaker, what I can't understand is having lived that experience of a Summer election this past Summer, why July is observed to be a reasonable choice. Part of the arguments and considerations that we're being asked to consider in coming to this realization that July is a good date is that you have four years to get ready. If I've got two months to get ready, I'm going to get ready.

I think that that element of consideration in this debate is very internally focused. I've heard the government party on numerous occasions say that this is not about politics, it's about people. This is, in my view, a sincere contradiction to that scenario.

It frustrates me to think that after all those doors that I went to this Summer and after having received that feedback, having the government party come to the table with the consideration that you need to be ready in four years or tough cookies is the point here. We're missing something. It doesn't make sense to me.

When it comes to democratic reform, we should be here to capitalize on opportunities to engage the electorate. We all know that in different scenarios over the last number of years, we've had low turnout in municipal elections, low turnout in federal elections, and low turnout in provincial elections.

While there is a favourable situation for planning here and getting ready for an election - Elections Nova Scotia will have an opportunity to schedule their endeavours around a four-year cycle. That's great. But again, we're not talking about the electorate here, we're talking about an organization that is an arm of our political operation that we're accommodating in scheduling a Summer election.

I feel like it's short-sighted. We have an opportunity to create a great deal of momentum. The government has the opportunity to keep their name on that bill. For some reason, they're choosing not to go to the public and do what I observe to be something that could be very meaningful for their tenure in government: engage people on an issue that, clearly, there's a lot of passion about.

Elections are an experience that I had the opportunity to observe and participate in as a student leader at Acadia. There was a federal election during my time as student president of Acadia. We had the enthusiasm and the involvement on campus and the infrastructure and the desire to facilitate what was one of my first political experiences outside of my role as a student leader.

It was neat to participate in the operational side of standing up that initiative while I was a student leader to enable an opportunity while students were on campus to observe what the different parties were offering and to debate, to engage the politicians who had put their name on a ballot. It made sense, frankly, that the election was being held at a time when one of our greatest resources for advocacy and political enthusiasm, our university campuses, was tapped.

I would be remiss if I didn't also acknowledge the enthusiasm that exists in our primary and secondary school classrooms. One of my friends, who is a teacher at a local school, sent me a text message that she asked me to read - excuse me, I asked her if I could read. Her name is Amanda Windsor. She is a high school teacher. She is involved in the SAC. She's taught at the junior high school level. She says:

Just dropping a quick note re: Bill No. 1, which plans to fix provincial election dates for the third Tuesday in July, if I understand it correctly. Fixed election dates are fine, but I do think that it is important to hold elections, whenever possible, during the school calendar year. For many young people, school is the first and sometimes the only place in which they learn about and engage in the democratic process prior to being eligible to vote. Programs like Student Vote, which have a high positive impact, would become obsolete.

In addition to the missed opportunities for students to engage in all other lessons and discussions that occur in our classrooms, both planned and spontaneous, which schoolteachers facilitate, I do

think that it would be a real shame if this opportunity was removed. Again, no issue with fixed election dates, but I'd like to see the proposed date fall within the school year.

Yes, I am happy to table that for the record.

Just to wrap up, I am not going to spend a ton of time here. Ultimately the difficult piece for me on this one is that I had an experience with a Summer election. Resoundingly, there was displeasure at the doors about having a Summer election. One might think that politicians could learn from their experiences and propose better solutions to Nova Scotians.

The predominant consideration from the governing party that I can understand is that the organization of an election is easier on the politicians and the bureaucrats who enable it, and yes, while that may be true, it misses the most important group that we should all be focused on getting to, and that is the electorate.

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

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to share some of our points of view. As you already know, I am an educator. I will always be an educator and I want to let you know right now that democracy is well and good and alive in our school system right now. A big part of that is to teachers - former teachers like my good friend, my colleague for Dartmouth East - because what some of you may not know, because you are not in the education system, the curriculum covers civics in Grade 3, Grade 9, and Grade 11 Canadian history, if you choose to take Canadian history.

The Grade 9 curriculum was implemented two years ago fully. It is called Citizenship. It covers everything that we are talking about, every student in Grade 9 gets it, Grade 3, Grade 9. However, it starts in Primary, it starts in pre-Primary, it starts in our homes.

Every year when kids start, we do storming, norming, and performing. We sit down, we have consensus with our students, with classroom rules, with school rules. That's democracy. We have student elections. In school, that is democracy.

The hard work that my colleague put in on student vote has not gone unnoticed. A big part of student vote is in the Grade 9 curriculum, which every student gets.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member is not allowed to use props.

BRIAN WONG: So I will table, because as I mentioned, democracy is alive and well, is that I did look at my statistics about how many students in school actually

participated in 2017 in student vote: 167 schools reported out of 371, 45 per cent of schools participated, 15 per cent student participation rate. Come on, if we're judging democracy, civics in school based on the student vote alone, we are using the wrong metric - and I will table that.

There are actually eight different pieces of that student vote. It is not curriculum, it is really a resource teachers can choose to use. It is a wonderful resource and teachers that use it, I'm sure, find it very useful.

The second thing I will speak about is that a lot of the objections I have heard to the July 15<sup>th</sup> date is based on an assumption or based on a feeling or based on experience with snap elections. When we have a snap election we run into a panic, a panic of who is going to work on our team. So where are we going to have our elections? Where are we going to vote? Who is going to work it? It takes at least a couple of weeks to get it good, if it ever does get good.

Planning is everything. A lot of the objections are already solved by having a fixed election date and, I may remind you, I think we should change the name. We shouldn't call it Election Day. We could call it "Counting Day," because the truth is that we can go back 46 days - 30 to 46 days can be the voting period, that's May 31<sup>st</sup>. You want to vote Tuesdays? If you want to vote on Tuesdays, may I suggest June 24<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, July 8<sup>th</sup> or July 1<sup>st</sup>? You can vote any of those Tuesdays. As a matter of fact, you can vote just about every day except Sundays. You can vote anywhere in the province at any returning office, anywhere.

So we have our continuous polls, advance polls, at home voting. We have write-in ballots and you can vote on voting day if you want to wait for when it's hot and sweaty. You can do that.

Here's the other thing you can do: you can actually do the student vote in school. You can do six of eight modules in school. The voting you can also have in school and you can talk about it later on. You can talk about polling, you can talk about - you can use historical documents because disengagement is not because we're not teaching it. Disengagement is because politicians do not normally do what they say they're going to do. This historical document which you have all studied so well ...

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. That's another prop. I'm going to ask the member not to be raising things like that up in the air.

BRIAN WONG: This historical document where this party is going to do what we say we - sorry, sir.

THE SPEAKER: I would ask the member if he's going to table it just to give it to the page, please.

[4:15 p.m.]

BRIAN WONG: That is a historical document, Mr. Speaker, that we can look on in the future and say, this government did what they said they were going to do.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

HON. KEITH IRVING: I would like to offer my comments today with respect to the proposed amendments to the Elections Act, Bill No. 1.

Like others have said, the debate on this bill was not the value of a fixed election. The concern is the Summer election date and the process to select that date. I have already spoken on second reading of the problems with Summer elections, on the engagement of election volunteers.

On third reading, I want to speak to our role as legislators in a democracy and the imperative of a non-partisan process. That the Elections Act is our new government's first bill says something about priorities. It is representative of the thinking of the new government, that democratic reform has been on their mind.

When we make reforms to the Elections Act, we task a commission to do that work.

Mr. Speaker, many of us in this House probably had early experiences with democracy that impacted the route they took in public life. This was the case for me. I hope this gives you some insight why I feel that what is happening here needs to be examined extremely closely.

My first introduction to the Legislature was as a page in P.E.I. when I was 16 years old in the Alex Campbell government. What an extraordinary experience at age 16 to learn about the Westminster system of government and to be introduced to the many parliamentary procedures. I had the privilege of a front-row seat on how democracy works.

Years later, I completed a volunteer placement in Cameroon, western Africa - 1983. I was living in the bush, no running water or electricity, the developing world. In 1983, that young democracy - the country formed in 1967 - was celebrating the election of Paul Biya, their second president. They had been under rule by one president for 16 years (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. There's a lot of chatter going on in the House.

The honourable member for Kings South.

KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, 1983 was a long time ago. Today, Paul Biya is still president. Early in his presidency, he attempted to create one-party elections. This was

resisted and defeated, but many independent sources have provided evidence over the years, since 1992, that the subsequent elections were rampant with fraud. We can see how Cameroon and many other developing countries - we can see in those countries how fragile democracy is.

I had another extraordinary experience at the House of Commons. I had been a volunteer with Canadian Crossroads International. I became Chair of the national organization, and we had a meeting with the country reps from 30 developing countries who had come to Canada for an international consultation. As Chair, I had the honour and the privilege to attend Question Period on Parliament Hill with 30 country representatives from around the world, from the developing world.

They were dressed in their regalia from their various countries. It was a colourful procession as we entered Parliament. During that session, we watched QP, and we watched the Opposition parties hammer the then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney about the competency of his government.

As we were leaving the gallery, Tati Cope from Côte d'Ivoire turned to me, and he said this: I now know what democracy means; if anyone in my country spoke to our prime minister like that, they would be shot. I have never forgotten these words, because it was a searing lesson on the fragility of democracy around the world and that as a Canadian citizen, and now in the privileged position of a legislator, I have the duty to both value and fight for our democratic foundations. The most foundational piece of our democracy in Nova Scotia is the Elections Act.

This was not in my speech originally, but when we put poppies on this morning, it reminded me of the honour and privilege I had to take my 23-year-old son several years ago to walk the war cemeteries in Belgium and France. I visited the monument of the Nova Scotia Highlanders, walked through Tyne Cot Cemetery - thousands and thousands of gravestones, many with maple leaves. When you walk with your 23-year-old son and read the ages of 17 and 23 and 25 and 19 and 16, you realize how important democracy is. We have lost thousands of Canadians in the protection of democracy. We as legislators have a duty to protect our democracy.

Madam Speaker, I have two core concerns about Bill No. 1. My first concern is how narrow the proposals are, and I'll explain this. My second concern is the lack of logical arguments to explain to Nova Scotians why the choice of July 15<sup>th</sup> as election day in perpetuity is smarter than all the other provinces and territories in Canada which have avoided choosing a Summer election.

To my first concern, what do I mean by how narrow Bill No. 1 is in its proposals? Governments that undertake legislative changes to their Elections Act typically define their goals in making these changes. For example, will the proposed changes lead to increased electoral fairness? Will the proposed changes lead to increased participation in the electoral

process? Governments or electoral commissions that undertake reviews of their Elections Act, such as the work completed in New Brunswick four years ago, typically look at aspects of the election process to strengthen the democratic process or accessibility - aspects such as eliminating barriers to entering politics for underrepresented groups, introducing new measures to increase voter participation, or measures such as e-voting or moving election dates to maximize voter participation. Some election reform processes look at election financing rules or, as we saw in P.E.I. in 2019, hold a referendum to determine if they should adopt mixed-member proportional representation instead of first past the post.

My point here is that the Elections Act, as a foundational piece of our democracy, warrants thoughtful, deliberative, and expansive review processes if we as guardians in legislatures seek to change it. As has been pointed out, we have time - several years - to do this review. We can do it with the knowledge of the report upcoming from the recent election by Elections Nova Scotia.

The Elections Act is different than all other pieces of legislation that govern this province. It must be for the common good. It must meet the ultimate test of non-partisanship. The Elections Act is legislation that impacts all citizens, and we must take great care as legislators to do this right.

Above all, changes to the Elections Act should be non-partisan for the very reason I described earlier. As legislators, we have a duty to value and protect our democratic foundations and to be thoughtful about our changes to these foundations, not in the interest of parties but in the interest of democracy. Bill No. 1 doesn't pass the test of careful, deliberative process.

Instead, the day after the election, the Premier was quoted as saying, "It's my intention to actually select the next election date pretty soon." "My." One person. One person is deciding. There are a million Nova Scotians. We have one person making this decision.

As legislators we are being asked to consider this government's first bill: a bill that underpins our democracy in Nova Scotia, that did not seek the deliberative advice of the Nova Scotia Elections Commission, and that did not wait to incorporate the recommended legislative changes from the Chief Electoral Officer on Elections 2020.

This is very narrow in scope, amending only the date an election will be held. My question is, why the hurry? Since the introduction of Bill No. 1, we've heard many well-thought-through arguments against July 15<sup>th</sup> as the date to hold all future provincial elections. Where governments across Canada are striving to increase voter participation, there has yet to be an explanation on how the fixed date of July 15<sup>th</sup> would achieve this.

Evidence presented made clear that a Summer election date will decrease voter participation. Where governments across Canada are looking at how to increase student



engagement in our democratic processes, we have a proposed election date of July 15<sup>th</sup> that creates barriers to student engagement.

Teachers from across this province and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union have expressed concerns about the July 15<sup>th</sup> date, in particular its clearly unforeseen impact on the very successful Student Vote program offered by CIVIX in our schools and involving 40,000 students.

The only teachers who have spoken in support of this election date in the Summer are partisan teachers. They're sitting in this House. If the incoming generation of voters are not engaged in the electoral process, their issues do not become part of the issues debated during the election.

[4:30 p.m.]

I was struck by how little attention climate change got during our most recent provincial election. This Fall, in my home community of Wolfville and throughout the province, we have seen climate action protests organized by our younger citizens demanding action from our legislators.

Yet during the Summer election, those voices were muted because our university students were dispersed in the Summer and our high school students were not in the classroom.

As my colleague from Bedford South stated, Bill No. 1 is much more aptly described as a tool for voter suppression disguised as electoral reform.

Mx. Speaker, it is my belief that we have a duty, as legislators, not to put politics above the fundamental elements of democracy. Democracy is too precious in a world where there are far too many examples of democracy under siege. Why would the government choose to amend the Elections Act without thoughtful, deliberative and expansive review processes to underpin the proposed changes? Why would the government stick to a July 15<sup>th</sup> election date that so obviously lacks support from the Nova Scotians who have been asked about this election proposed date? Why would the government choose to amend the Elections Act without waiting for the recommendations from Elections Nova Scotia? Why would the government choose a Summer election date without explaining to Nova Scotians why this date would enhance voter turnout, wisdom that no other province or territory shares?

I agree with Nova Scotians who have stated that no coherent arguments have been made to Nova Scotians as to why July 15<sup>th</sup> was chosen. Mx. Speaker, as I stated earlier in my remarks, my journey to becoming a MLA was marked by some significant moments - my early introduction to the Westminster model of government as a page in the P.E.I. Legislature, viewing the House of Commons through the eyes of a Cameroonian citizen

who was taken aback by the robustness of debate in our House of Commons, volunteering in a country where democracy has been severely compromised and, more recently, my experience as a MLA defending democracy and the common good at the door of citizens who have been emboldened to the challenge of our public health measures.

Democracy is precious. Our tools for democracy are precious. Bill No. 1 is far too narrow in scope and lacking in consultation and deliberation. We must, we can, we must do better with our precious democratic tools.

I ask the members on the opposite side of the House, particularly the new ones, to look on the wall behind you, the plaque celebrating the first responsible government in the British Empire. This is where the seeds of democracy started. This is where we, as legislators, have been tasked to protect that democracy. Right over there, Joseph Howe - he has been referred to many times in this House and I'm going to repeat the quote that has been repeated time and time again. He's a founder of this province, an independent thinker. He thought independently. I don't know if they had Whips back there, but I don't think he could have been Whip. He's a legislator who stood in this very building where we have the honour of standing ourselves and defended the freedom of the press and other critical elements of Canadian democracy.

His words, you've heard them many times before: "My public life is before you; and I know you will believe me when I say that when I sit down in solitude to the labours of my profession, the only questions I ask myself are, What is right? What is just? What is for the public good?"

A Summer election date is neither right, neither just, nor is for the public good.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I will add just a few words to this - what I have to say is an extraordinary debate. I have been listening very carefully and thoughtfully to the members who have spoken thus far today. I have to say, I have only been here for four years and a little bit, but today has been an extraordinary day of debate.

There have been some excellent, excellent speeches and some very compelling arguments. I couldn't do any of them justice - the member for Clare, the member for Halifax Chebucto, just now the member for Kings South. We got to hear the words of children who live in Halifax Chebucto. We get to hear the stories of the member for Kings South and his amazing experiences with democracy around the world. We get to hear from the member for Clare, who's so humble and speaking with such dignity and such truth about his thoughts on this bill.

I just want to say, first of all, that I am deeply grateful for all of those words and that I couldn't possibly improve upon them. My job here today is to add one more reason

why we in the NDP caucus, and I think we on this side of the House, don't agree with July being the fixed election date that is chosen in this province.

But of course, to reiterate and remind everyone, we do agree with the concept of a fixed election date. Make no mistake, we want it to happen. We just don't want it to be in July. So what I want to say is, what he said, what he said, what he said, what she said, first of all - what he said.

I also just want to remind people in this Chamber that July is becoming a terribly hot and uncomfortable time of year for many, many people. In Dartmouth North, Mr. Speaker, there are many people who live with disabilities and live with accessibility issues in an area where voter turnout is already extremely low in terms of the rest of the province. The idea that folks who are vulnerable, marginalized, living with a lot of issues that keep them from getting to the grocery store, frankly - the idea of getting out to vote on a blistering hot day, as August 17<sup>th</sup> was this year, is a lot. It's a lot to ask.

To those who will say, well, you can vote any day - you can vote on a cool day if you want now, because we have a rolling voting system now in Nova Scotia - I would also just remind people that getting out to vote at all for a marginalized community is difficult. It doesn't matter if you have 30 days or one day to do it. It's a big deal to help someone to get to the polls.

I just want to read a couple of news headlines from this Summer, during our election campaign. July 2, 2021, on CTV News: "'We are living it already': Climate change behind extreme weather events in Canada, experts say." July 20, 2021, also from CTV News: "Smoky skies, poor air quality across Canada as nearly 900 wildfires burn." August 9, 2021, *The Guardian*: "Major climate changes inevitable and irreversible – IPCC's starkest warning yet." August 16<sup>th</sup> from *The Daily Hive*: "July 2021 was earth's hottest month on record." That's from the National Oceanic Atmospheric Association. September 26<sup>th</sup> from *The Globe and Mail*, outside of the writ period: "Extreme, deadly heat in Canada is going to come back, and worse. Will we be ready?" I can table all of those headlines, Mr. Speaker.

My point in saying all this is that July is hot, and hot can be dangerous. Report after report talks about the importance of assessing risk and being ready for the worsening effects of climate change. So if we are serious about elections, if we are serious about democracy in this province, then we will not pick the hottest, most dangerous month of the year - of the warmer months - to ask folks to go to the polls and to ask folks to work elections and to ask folks to volunteer on campaigns.

I don't know if the Tory Government has some secret up their sleeves about how they're going to function and how they're going to manage their next campaign in July of whatever the year is four years from now. I'm pretty sure that in four years we're not going to have robots ready to do the campaigning for us. We will still have to knock on doors. We will still have to have volunteers working. We will still have polling stations,

presumably. All of those will have to be peopled with workers in hot and dangerous conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I will remind folks that most of our devoted election volunteers, from canvassers to scrutineers to people doing data entry, are older people. Often they are retired, which is why they have time to work on campaigns. We know that heat affects older people more severely. We know that people who are disabled are also more sensitive to heat.

Many of our polling stations are in buildings that lack air conditioning - community halls, churches, and schools. Listen, maybe we could address that situation. Maybe we can make sure the government invests in all of those community halls and puts in some air conditioning before the next election. That might help a little bit, but it doesn't help with all of the other reasons why we shouldn't have election dates in July.

In this past election, campaign volunteers who spent a lot of time outside complained of a dry cough and itchy eyes because of the poor air quality due to the forest fires in Central and Western Canada. Many campaigns had to call off canvassing early on days when it was too hot to be outdoors.

We are also putting our campaign volunteers at risk when they make decisions about whether or not to go into hot buildings. We need to knock on all the doors in that building that has no air conditioning and no air circulation, and it really does feel like an oven when you walk into it. It's not okay to ask people to do that.

I just want to end by saying that in the role of an Opposition member, Mr. Speaker - and now I have had the opportunity to be an Opposition member to both the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives. Sometimes it is an extremely frustrating position, as many of us will know who have been in the Opposition or even comparing it to being in government. It's a hard job, but it's an important job.

The one thing that gives me hope - one of the things that gives me hope I should say - is that one day, there will be a bill debated in this House where the debates are so compelling that the government actually says, we are going to unstick our heels from the mud that we have stuck them in, and we are going to actually do the right thing and surprise everyone - send everyone home in shock and change their minds about something that they are deeply invested in.

The thing about this bill that I find particularly befuddling is that the government has not given us a valid reason - a valid reason - why they are digging their heels in on this one. I know it probably sounds quite rich to hear from an Opposition member saying, well, if I was in government, I would do this. I'll tell you, if I was in government right now, I would use this bill and this debate as an opportunity to show Nova Scotians - show that they are actually listening, that they are actually willing to learn, that they are actually willing to debate, and they are above pride.

Do the right thing. Take the bill back, and change it. Don't pass it today. Go back, and have another think. Go back, and talk to a few more people about it.

It would reduce cynicism, Mr. Speaker, and that is one of the main enemies to democracy right now in Nova Scotia. People are cynical: "You're all the same. You're just in it for yourselves."

If the government can tell me a reason why they want July as an election date that is other than themselves, I am totally willing to hear it.

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

JOHN WHITE: I rise today to tell you that I am one of the teachers who just left the classroom. I just left, and now here I am. I am telling you, I am standing here in front of you, Mr. Speaker, to tell you that I am one of the teachers who supports July elections. I want that to be heard very loud and clearly. I do not want anybody to misunderstand my decisions for July elections. I agree with it and that's my statement - that's I, as in me, not just the Premier, that's I, as in John White from Glace Bay.

[4:45 p.m.]

I realize you made decisions based on personal experiences so let me tell you about my two personal experiences with elections in May and July. When I ran in May, it was quite simply favouring an incumbent and sitting over here now maybe I should be looking for that because I could not knock on a door, nobody could open a door in Cape Breton and I'm sure that rain was everywhere, and the winds were everywhere. It was miserable, you couldn't put a door knocker anywhere, you couldn't talk to people. Try and engage, I'd hear people talk about engagement, you want to engage seniors in May when you can't open a door to speak to them?

I tell you, you want to talk about engagement, talk about engagement when you have thousands of teachers marching around this building and you didn't listen to them, and now here you are now and want to listen to them? Don't tell me about engagement.

You know, there are two kinds of people in this world. Most people walk away from a fire, I walk into it apparently and here I am, sitting in a 30-year Liberal seat, thank you very much. The volunteers who took part in my campaign were disabled and they were able to go on their scooter and actually be involved. They were able to carry bottles of water around, they were able to carry door knockers around. It was very empowering for them and it was empowering for me to watch them.

So, if you guys don't want to listen to that, it doesn't matter to me, I know what I saw, I know what's real. I know that the students that were involved were happy to be

involved. I know that the college students that are up here right now were very happy to be home and be involved and listen to local issues.

My team was very different. We had a lot of seniors on our team and we campaigned in the morning and we campaigned in the evening - simple, we avoided the heat in the afternoon. Roofers don't stop in Cape Breton; I don't think they stop here. We paused in the afternoon sometimes because I'm a tradesman and we do pause, yes, but we go back to work. It's a longer day, it's the best scenario. A longer day is a good thing.

If you actively want to listen to people and speak about issues, then get out and meet them. I would argue if you want engagement, political engagement, answer the phone, answer the emails, go see the people who are asking them. We're voted to represent people here. This is not my voice, it's not supposed to be, I'm supposed to be speaking for 17,000 people in Glace Bay and Dominion. I can't speak for them if I don't listen to them, if I don't answer the call.

Get involved, the long day works. And another thing, COVID-19, we're all sitting with our masks on, I'm glad to speak just to get my mask off. If we're going to live in a world of COVID-19, which is what we're expecting to live in, a Summertime election may be the future for everybody. It gets us outside.

I have notes here to go through every month of the year, if you want to: September is no good, it's too short to be effective; October is no good, there are municipal elections, there are federal elections, there's a lot going on in October; November to April, forget it, it's not even safe, there's snow, rain, everything on the road, can't do anything; May, favours the incumbent, as I just said. Maybe I should look for that, maybe that's what I should be on. May is no good for a lot of reasons: It's no good to the students, it's no good to university students. June: Want to have an election in June? I don't know about you guys. I know we have great graduation parties. Graduation is a busy time of the year. So now you have July and August - pick one. I like July, thank you very much.

Now I am a reasonable man - my wife will disagree, but I am reasonable. I listen. I do. I often don't change my mind, but I listen. When I went to Law Amendments Committee and I listened to people talking about the CIVIX program and people who I worked with, people I served in NSTU with, people who I walked around the circle with, against that Liberal government, thank you very much.

But anyway, getting back to this, one of the papers they dropped off is this - and I will table it, Mr. Speaker - in the 2017 provincial election, there were 163 schools that cast ballots. That's out of approximately 316. Is that what we're basing our decision on? There were 18,963 students cast ballots. There are 121,000 students in this province. That's 15 per cent, thank you very much. That's 15 per cent.

Now experiences matter, so I think for that 15 per cent it does matter. I do agree that matters, that's important. But as a teacher fresh out of the classroom, I'll tell you all kinds of learning experiences and teachable moments, if that's what you want to hear about, and that is a teachable moment.

I did take part in a municipal election in my classroom - a Grade 5 classroom - and it was really good. It was. But I'll tell you as I speak back and think back to it, it wasn't all around the municipal election, it was more about the kids having their own campaign. It wasn't really about the municipal election. We had speakers come in, but it didn't take a big part of it. It really wasn't. Is that a missed lesson? I will not stand here and tell all the teachers of Nova Scotia it's not missed. I agree it's missed, but I know they can make it up because teachers are pretty resourceful. Look at what we did with the amendments you guys put on us.

So you want to talk about October elections. Here are the results of the municipal election for Halifax. In the 2020 Fall election, there were three mayors running - three candidates for mayor. Some districts had up to six individuals running for councillors, and of that, there's only 40 per cent that voted. There was online voting. Everything was part of it. I don't think the problem is the time or the availability to vote, I think the problem is disengagement because . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'd just ask the member not to use that paper as a prop, okay? The honourable member is going to table that document.

The honourable member for Glace Bay-Dominion.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, sorry. I had my notes on the back to read from before I handed it in. (Laughter)

I think engagement is important. I totally agree with it. I truly do because I lost the election in 2017 to somebody who had less than 50 per cent of the votes as well.

I think engagement is important, I do believe, but Bill No. 1, Bill No. 19, Bill No. 30, Bill No. 37, Bill No. 75, Bill No. 100, and Bill No. 148 all stripped away workers' rights and nobody listened on that side. So, don't tell me about engagement and how we're ruining it with a July election.

I want people involved and I want them to speak out and I want to hear their voice. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to follow that. (Laughter)

They applaud, and they stand. It's hard to follow, but I can say this openly: I call the member of the other side who spoke before me, I call wholeheartedly a brother. When I say I call brother, I mean it, because both of us belong in a profession that you trust the guy behind you. I know if something happens, no matter how we are different, he's going to pull me out. (Applause)

Here's my theory, or here's why I call brother, at the same time different. The fear of difference.

Audre Lorde said, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

The decision you make, you're not wrong. We all believe election date, but we're different - the date.

We have common, but we have difference, and the difference is the margin. It's a margin. What we are asking from you, where we're different from you, is the date.

Also, I know for a fact, being here a very short time, what I have learned - the setting of this House - you have the upper hand. You have the vote. You have the vote whether we stand here, all of us, and speak hours and hours, we respect that. What I will remind you, this vote, this seat, people see it. This power, whether it's three years or four years, on July 15<sup>th</sup>, Nova Scotians - and I will let them know, my fellow Nova Scotians - you have the power. You make that decision, what's good for you.

Surprisingly, we have been talking about this bill for the last couple of days, and statistics have been mentioned. Community engagement has been mentioned. The weather has been mentioned. The next generation has been mentioned. Those who actually sent us here, those who volunteer for us day in and day out have been mentioned. Yet we're still talking about the same subject.

I did not stand here to speak for one hour. But also, what we are doing here is history. I felt, to miss this history and to let my constituents know I did not stand up and express my view and my point, that's why I'm standing here. It's my duty to speak on behalf of Halifax Armdale constituents. I will urge my colleagues - we still have a chance to think about this, to have a second look. It's not about us. It's them. It's Nova Scotians. Oftentimes, I wonder how we conduct ourselves in this House and how we do things, but there are certain things that we have to take seriously, and this subject matter is one of them.

We have a wonderful library in this House. I remember my early arrival in this nation and this province and this city. When I see this kind of building - I used to walk away, three sidewalks, far away. If I have to go this way, I have to take a big loop. You know why? Because where I come from, you don't go where the government is. You don't



go anywhere - any building that belongs to government, especially where they make decisions, there are actually five or six checkpoints. You don't even go close. That's actually the attitude that I have and the feeling that I have for this kind of structure, this kind of institution.

But I have great respect and honour for Premier John Hamm. With his invitation, I was invited to this House for the Democracy 250 celebration, to speak on the value of democracy. The reason I mentioned the library is that I just remembered that I was there a long time ago. I asked the library to research for me, and here's the article. That has my name and what I have to say, and I'm tabling this.

[5:00 p.m.]

I remember speaking of this democracy passionately and believing in it. I do believe. That's why I'm here. We might be playing with fire. I think we are playing with fire. We have to be careful.

This is the reason we have this House. This is the reason we occupy these seats: because people elected us with free choice and free will. Please, I ask you, don't take that away for Nova Scotians. Give them a chance. Consult them. Reach out.

We claim we are an institution that makes decisions and that we are experts in how to make decisions. Yet we are denying the institutions that dedicated their skills to elections, and we did not consult them.

Mr. Speaker, I could be here all day to speak about this subject, but I would like to share with my colleagues. We have a chance. We have an opportunity. Let's take this opportunity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke is a hard act to follow. In a few short weeks, the time that we have been here, I have utmost respect for this member.

I just wanted to stand today and share a few last comments on the Elections Act in third reading. Echoing some of the comments that I made last night in the Committee of the Whole, this is just a reminder that this is a topic that, in the past, we have never had an agreement on in this House. This is a topic, fixed election dates, where we have seen one party push for it, but the other parties always pushed against it. It didn't matter who it was, there was always opposition. We're in a new place today where we have an agreement here in this Legislature that we all agree there should be fixed election dates.

What we don't agree on is the date. Again, representing the people that elected me, I'm here to be their voice. The people of Cumberland North have shared with me that they do not believe that Summer is the best time for an election.

I won't echo all of the things that I said last night. I guess what I would say to my colleagues opposite is, try not to forget what it's like being on this side of the House. It wasn't that long ago that you were in these shoes in Opposition. I implore you to remember how frustrating it was when you knew what the people of Nova Scotia wanted, when you knew what your electors wanted, and those in power then weren't listening. I remember because I was here with you. Two wrongs don't make a right.

I know that in some ways it's very easy to dig your heels in and say, we're not changing our ways - they didn't change their decisions when we fought hard and when we used the democratic process to talk bills out, to use all the hours possible, so we're not doing it either. I just implore you not to retaliate and not to make decisions today in this House based on actions that may have happened over the last four years.

I encourage you to think about what's best for Nova Scotians and not hold grudges and not retaliate. Listen, I'm human, it's the easiest thing to do is to want to hold onto bitterness and be full of revenge, but it's not good for us individually, it's not good for us in this House, it's not good for us as a society.

As government, we are elected to not only represent the people, but the people expect us to be leaders. They expect us to rise above that natural human tendency of retaliation and revenge.

It takes a lot of strength to do that, but as I listen to everyone and I see the response, I can't help but wonder if - I guess we haven't been given a real answer as to why the government isn't willing to change the Summer election date. There has been no actual valid reason given. There's been no study or information shared where Nova Scotians have said this is the date that we want.

So I think that's why you're continuing to hear people on this side speak out to say, this is not what Nova Scotians want. There is no other province, there is no other territory in the country that's having an election in the Summer.

Mr. Speaker, I would just ask the members opposite to remember we're all here to represent the people who elected us. That's democracy. True democracy is listening to the voice of the people, not to the voice of a leader.

This is an opportunity to set the tone for the next four years. It is Bill No. 1, the Elections Act (amended). Bill No. 1. We've seen the Premier, we've seen your leader change and compromise and work with the people of Nova Scotia and work with Opposition on rent control, on the associate deputy minister of African Nova Scotian

Affairs, on Bill No. 24. We've seen that, and it's been very encouraging to see that. We know that there's a heart, there's a spirit of working for what is best for the people.

I ask that you give the same consideration for this bill, because we've heard some pretty incredible statements from some of the members here talking about democracy. You don't have to look too far to look around the world to see countries that are not doing well. In almost every situation, that country does not have a strong democratic government. In almost every situation.

We need to be looking for ways to strengthen democracy, to always be finding ways to strengthen democracy and never take it for granted. Never go backwards. This is our opportunity to look for ways to encourage voter engagement and to listen to the people of Nova Scotia.

With those few words, I will close my comments on third reading here today on the amendment for the Elections Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: We've reached the point of intermission, so I would encourage - I'm trying to be funny, but I guess it's not very funny. I feel like there's a tough crowd here, a very tough crowd. You know when to be funny and not, I guess.

I just want to take a moment to again thank all of my colleagues for the feedback that they've provided on this bill.

I'll recognize the member from Glace Bay. This is the first time he's been engaged in a debate. I look forward to the day a Cape Breton topic comes up. I was saying that to the member. I sent a message to the minister from Sydney River-Mira-Louisbourg. I said, look out, those Cape Breton topics, those Cape Breton debates are going to be pretty interesting.

I really just want to reiterate what I said last night, and a lot has been said around weather which, quite frankly, is not a - it shouldn't even be part of the conversation. I've run elections in September, October, May, July, so weather shouldn't even be part of the conversation, and to really use that as one of the rationales for a July date just doesn't make sense.

The one thing I would say - I'll just say this and I just want to leave this because I know I don't want to be repetitive with what other people say, but I will stress this - again, I'm not trying to stir a huge debate right now, but the word "progressive" is lost in this, so much, by not consulting with the community. Hey, I agree, you are very different from your federal colleagues, but this decision is actually more Conservative than Ontario, than Alberta, than many of the other Conservative - I'm not calling you Conservative -

Conservative provinces. All we were asking for in our amendment was to consult and let people decide what the date was.

We had our school leaders coming forward, saying Summer's not right, July's not right. We had students coming forward saying that the Summer's not right. We had other stakeholders that are involved with promoting democracy within our schools saying that the date is not right, go out and consult. Go out and consult like you did during the boundary review. Go out. That was a very, very positive process, and congratulations to the boundary review commission. They did a great job. It was independent of anybody here. They were representatives from all over the province who represented many of our communities, and they did a fantastic job.

As a result, here we are: a process that we will go through again because we are mandated to do it every so many years, and we'll have to do it again. We'll do the same thing. We'll go out, we'll strike an independent committee based on the recommendations of this House, they will go out - not elected - and they'll do the work. The seat count will change again or maybe it won't, but ultimately they went out and consulted the community.

I remember very well, because I was actually the representative as a candidate for Sydney- it was Cape Breton South at the time. They were going through a boundary review and how passionate people were about it and the feedback that they provided, and then the court case because all of the feedback they provided at the time was put to the side, and as a result we had to strike the boundary review again.

I'm no lawyer, but I think it's very easy for somebody to challenge this decision. I think it's going to be very easy for somebody to challenge this decision, and somebody probably will come forward and challenge this decision, and they'll base it on the fact that they never went out when you're picking the date to hold an election, a democratic process. Somebody, I predict, is going to challenge this decision. They will, and you can avoid all of that by just going - I'm not telling you what date.

That was the whole focus for us from Day 1. Whatever that date is, let Nova Scotians decide what that date is. It wasn't about October or the weather or the Spring. It was about go out and consult. Do it right, because, number one, we want people to have the feedback, but number two, for me this is going to be challenged by someone. There is no question that we will be talking about this again at some point in this mandate.

Regardless of dates and what you think, that is going to happen because we know it happened before, and we know that in that situation, government lost because people felt that their democratic right was violated, and the courts agreed. Somebody is going to do that again, there's no doubt in my mind. We'll see what happens when the time comes, but ultimately, I just - again, a lot of this debate would never have happened. We all agree with fixed elections. Just go out and talk to Nova Scotians, and that's where I'm really kind of lost in this.

[5:15 p.m.]

You are Progressive Conservatives. I don't argue that. Some of the moves you're making are very progressive. This one is the furthest thing from it, and that's what I'm really lost on.

You are going out and consulting on housing. I was involved in some of those processes early on. I know some of the work that some of the departments are doing, but on this one particularly, the one that would be the easiest to go out and consult on, you are not. That's why I'm really lost on why you're just fixed on the date.

I'm not going to tell you what date it is. I'm not going to tell you Spring or Fall or Summer. I'm just going to say, go consult and find out what that date is. Then if that's the date, if that's the will of the people, then guess what, none of us can vote against that, ultimately. You know what I mean. Nobody can vote against it at that point. It's like the boundary review. Nobody can vote against it. That was the will of the people.

I'll leave it at that. This is going to pass, maybe, probably - I'm looking at the member for Inverness and I'm holding out hope that after his story about Halloween today, maybe there will be a miracle. But I'll say this: By not going out to consult, regardless of who is in government - well, you're the government, but regardless, by not going out to consult, this is going to come back and somebody is going to challenge this. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: If I recognize the Deputy Premier, it will be to close the debate.

The honourable Deputy Premier.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think I just heard a forerunner there.

Mr. Speaker, we've had a lot of discussion, and I want to put some points on the record to close this out. I want to speak first to the NDP position. I won't take a long time because I would just make this point. The NDP recently made an amendment, put forward an amendment to a bill in 2020, to change the election date, to put a fixed election date in the month of June. Early June. It's not much different. There's 365 days in a year. It's not much different.

If we look at the Liberal Party and their record on fixed election dates, we know that the McNeil government - when Premier McNeil was in Opposition, he introduced legislation for a fixed election date. He had eight years to do it, but it didn't serve his interests. It didn't serve the government's interests. So he and some of the members in this Chamber, who were part of his government, didn't do it.

Recently we had an election. It was referred to as the elephant in the room. The government did not consult with Nova Scotians. I think they consulted with the polls, and

they say that because of the pandemic and because of the timing of it, it might have been the safest time. But in the end, that government had plenty of time to bring in fixed election dates. In their hearts, if they really wanted them, when they had the power to do it, they would have done it. They chose not to.

I think about the member for Kings South, and it was really striking me, because it was sort of bringing back memories of my time in Opposition and looking across at the government. He brought up responsible government.

Mr. Speaker, for an entire year in this province we did not have responsible government. Responsible government is a government where there is an Opposition that can hold the government to account for the people. Not everybody agrees with the government all the time. There is a role for the Opposition.

That government chose not to sit - well, they did sit for one day. It was December 18<sup>th</sup>, and I sat outside in the parking lot in my car because we were advised the night before that we shouldn't enter the House. I watched from down below and I even took a picture on my phone to mark the moment. We did not have this Legislature sitting for an entire year. Where was the democracy?

I asked the Legislative Library: could you do a check for me across the entire country? Could you do a check to see what other Legislatures sat across the country for that period, from the time when the pandemic began until the House opened earlier this Spring?

Legislatures across the country sat for a range of about 25 days to about 82 days. Everywhere else had democracy. Everywhere else had responsible government. The Liberal Party in this province, which was governing at the time, chose not to have responsible government.

I think about the hours and hours I spent as House Leader at the time working with the Government House Leader and the House Leader of the NDP. We spent hours and hours - I remember in August having phone meetings outside playing with my children. We spent hours planning for a virtual sitting. It never happened. The government saw the opportunity at the time not to bother having the House sit. Really, what that tells me, Mr. Speaker, is that the Liberal Party didn't care about what anybody else thought. They just cared about their own agenda.

We had a reference to the plaque. We had a reference to walking through a graveyard with Canadian soldiers. Democracy was fought for by many people, Mr. Speaker. The least we can do in this Chamber is respect it, no matter what side of the House we sit on.

I think about the Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to table my rule book here, but I do want it back because I like to have my rule book at hand. If you look at this rule book, turn to Page No. 46, and look at Section No. 60(2)(b):

“Functions of Standing Committees

(2) For greater certainty, . . .

(b) the Public Accounts Committee is established for the purpose of reviewing the public accounts, the annual report or any other report of the Auditor General and any other financial matters respecting the public funds of the province.”

Those are the rules, Mr. Speaker. Rules are part of our democracy. The Liberal Party, when they were in government, chose to subvert these rules by using their majority on that Public Accounts Committee to restrict that committee so that it could only look at Auditor General reports. I had one individual I explained it to after the election. His word to me was “despicable.”

You see, Mr. Speaker, most people didn't know at the time. I do think the government made a calculation at the time. They thought, we'll take our knocks there. Most people don't understand the purpose of the Public Accounts Committee. We'll take our knocks on that. Where we'll save ourselves is none of the controversial issues will come before the committee.

In fact, the only issues that will come before the committee are the ones the Auditor General has raised and that departments have had at least a couple of years to actually work on and fix. What does that say about accountability, Mr. Speaker? That says that the Liberal Party got around the rules in this book - without changing them here in the democratic institution of our Legislature - by using their power, their majority on that committee, to change the rules, in effect to protect themselves from accountability.

Yet they would still come in here and proclaim themselves the most open and transparent government in the history of the province. There are some new members in the House, and I wanted them to understand that clearly.

I can think of the day that I walked out of Public Accounts Committee. Many people won't realize it, but the only committee of the Legislature where the Opposition is Chair is Public Accounts. I was the Chair at the time, and I gave a speech. I still remember the member from Digby standing up and hollering, trying to restrict me from speaking. For that moment, although that member sat with the government, although he sat with the majority on the committee, he didn't have any power over me.

I spoke, and I explained why I thought it was wrong. I was joined by my Opposition colleagues, and we walked out of the House to make a point. We came back because we

had a role to play as Opposition at that time, but we walked out to show our feelings about the matter.

Mr. Speaker, when I hear all these comments from the Liberal Party, that is what I remember about the Liberal Party. I can tell you that we are fixing the Public Accounts Committee. We are restoring its powers. (Applause)

We, with this legislation, are giving up our strongest card for the next election and it is the very card the Liberal Party never wanted to give up when they had the power. We are giving it up because we believe it is the right thing to do.

In the end, the parties opposite may have their opinions on this legislation and their interests in when the election date is, but we are just doing what we said we were going to do and that is to give Nova Scotians fixed election dates. Mr. Speaker, I think they will find that refreshing and I am proud we are doing it. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for third reading of Bill No. 1. 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: Mr. Speaker, I never thought we'd get here, but that concludes government business for today.

I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. Government Business will include Second Reading of Bill No. 68 and Bill No. 71 and then we will go into Address in Reply.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do rise to meet again on Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 1:00 p.m. and Happy Halloween.

[The House rose at 5:28 p.m.]



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**NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER RULE 32(3)****RESOLUTION NO. 43**

By: Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Audrey Smith teaches woodworking every Tuesday at the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre, and

Whereas she is kind, patient, and very talented with a sharp blade and a piece of wood; and

Whereas Audrey has been giving classes at the Centre for more than 15 years;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize Audrey Smith for her outstanding contribution to the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre and Dartmouth community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 44**

By: Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Dot Jack teaches knitting at the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre every Tuesday morning; and

Whereas she helps with Members Bingo every Tuesday afternoon; and

Whereas Dot has been generously donating gifts every week for the Centre to use as bingo prizes for 20 years;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize Dot Jack for her outstanding contribution to the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre and Dartmouth community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 45**

By: Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Irene Cooper has volunteered with the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre for over 15 years; and

Whereas she has served on the board, organized the travel club, and oversees the Annual Giving Tree program through which the centre gives back to the community by donating socks, mittens, hats, and other person items at Christmas; and

Whereas Irene started the popular annual Walk-a-Thon 7 years ago;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize Irene Cooper for her outstanding contribution to the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre and Dartmouth community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 46**

By: Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Malvina Knaepen has been teaching knitting for 20 years; and

Whereas she takes orders from Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre members for specialty knitted items; and

Whereas Malvina keeps the Centre's showcase well stocked and uses her keen merchandising eye to keep up with and deliver what is in demand;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize Malvina Knaepen for her outstanding contribution to the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre and Dartmouth community at large.

**RESOLUTION NO. 47**

By: Claudia Chender (Dartmouth South)

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

Whereas Yonne Bell has been running the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre's weekly Bridge Club and Card Club for over 20 years; and

Whereas she organizes Card and Supper Night once a month; and

Whereas Yvonne achieves everything she does in the most ladylike manner;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this House of Assembly recognize Yvonne Bell for her outstanding contribution to the Dartmouth Seniors Service Centre and Dartmouth community at large.