



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

Published by Order of the Legislature by Hansard Reporting Services and printed by the Queen’s Printer.

Available on INTERNET at <http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/proceedings/hansard/>

First Session

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS:	
Article: “NS Premier says he won’t appeal ruling on discrimination against disabled people”	
G. Burrill	1604
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 109, An Act to Amend Chapter 217 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Income Tax Act, Respecting a Fertility and Surrogacy Rebate, Hon. M. Thompson	1604
No. 110, An Act to Establish a Nova Scotia Housing Corporation, L. Nicoll	1604
No. 111, An Act Respecting Performance-based Regulation of Electrical Utilities, C. Chender	1604
No. 112, An Act to Dissolve the Holy Heart Seminary, Hon. C. LeBlanc	1604
No. 113, An Act to Amend Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act, S. Leblanc	1604

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:

Clarke, Christopher: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. K. Masland	1604
A & J Bent Farms: Recip. of Agropur Milk Qual. Awd. - Congrats., C. Kerr.....	1605
Crt. of Appeal: Dec. on Rts. Reg. Disabilities - Observe, G. Burrill	1605
Cataford, M./Swan, J./Furlong, J.: Moosehead Schol. Players of the Mo. - Congrats., Hon. T. Halman.....	1606
Authors: <i>Amazing Atlantic Canadian Women</i> - Congrats., Hon. K. Regan.....	1606
Chedrawe, Joseph: Com. Serv. - Thanks, S. Hansen	1607
Lohnes, Bruce: Appt. As High-Perf. Curling Coach - Congrats., L. Harrison	1607
Wilson, Michelle: Syd. Downtown Dev. Efforts - Recog., Hon. D. Mombourquette	1608
World Bipolar Day: Educ. & Empowerment - Recog., L. Lachance.....	1608
Meuse, George: New Anti-Bullying Book - Congrats., Hon. C. LeBlanc	1609
Daughter, Freya Rose - Birthday Wishes Hon. I. Rankin.....	1609
Proudfoot, Ben: Recip. of Academy Awd. - Congrats., S. Leblanc	1610
Johnson, Elizabeth: Com. Serv. - Recog., Hon. J. Lohr	1610
Royston, Marilyn: Death of - Tribute, Hon. B. Maguire	1611
Eyland, Terry: Retirement as Dir. of Dart. Her. Mus. - Congrats., C. Chender	1611
Gillis, Allison "Al" Goodwin: Death of - Tribute, Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin	1612
Gilby, Ritchie: Death of - Tribute, John A. MacDonald	1612
Cdn. Police Curling Assoc. Ch'ship: Held in Hfx. - Welcome, Hon. T. Ince	1613
C.B. Youth Proj.: Grand Opening of Space - Congrats., K. Coombes.....	1613
MacDonald, Mary Janet: Tunes and Wooden Spoons Pgm. - Congrats., Hon. A. MacMaster.....	1614
Stone Hearth Bakery: Com. Serv. - Recog., A. Duale	1614
MacDonald, Doug: Retirement - Congrats., S. Hansen	1615
South Shore Pub. Libs.: 50 th Anniv. - Congrats.,	

Hon. B. Druhan	1615
Drover, Sandra : PHIT’Cetera Boutique Success - Recog., B. Clark	1616
Harris, Nick: Recip. of Rhodes Scholarship - Congrats., L. Lachance.....	1616
Guys. Mem. Hosp. Fdn.: Fundr. and Recruit. Efforts - Recog., Hon. G. Morrow.....	1616
Jessome, Florence “Dolsie”: Death of - Tribute, F. Tilley.....	1617
O’Regan, Sean: Death of - Tribute, S. Leblanc	1617
Galloway-Jones, Joy: Recip. of Perseverance ACE Awd. - Congrats., D. Ritcey	1618
Crosby, Sidney: 500 th Goal - Congrats., L. Nicoll	1618
Wellness Within: Vol. Prison Doula Serv. Work - Thanks, C. Chender	1619
Dill, Danny: Com. Serv. - Thanks, M. Sheehy-Richard	1619
Barsoum, M./Jackson, V.: Power of 10 Tut. Grp. - Thanks, R. DiCostanzo.....	1620
Palmer, Barbara/Leadbeater, Cody: Mural Creation - Recog., K. Coombes.....	1620
Team Flemming: Tim Hortons Brier Success - Recog., K. Smith.....	1621
Orenda Canoe Club: Contrib. to Lake Echo Com. - Recog., A. Simmonds.....	1621
Morrison, Eugene & Ruth: 60th Wedding Anniv. - Congrats., T. Taggart.....	1621
Flynn, Denise & Derek, Corberrie Cider Co. Success - Recog., R. LeBlanc	1622
Antig. Kinsmen Club: Com. Serv. - Congrats., Hon. M. Thompson.....	1622
Barron, Laurie: MJHL Coach of the Yr. - Congrats., Hon. Z. Churchill	1623
Morse, Heather: Com. Serv. - Thanks, C. Palmer.....	1623
Barrett, Dr. Lisa: COVID Testing Efforts - Thanks, Hon. K. Regan.....	1624
Anderson, Shawn: Christmas Lights Display - Thanks, Hon. B. Wong	1624
Clayton, Dekota: Hearing Aid Initiative - Thanks, Hon. I. Rankin.....	1624
Tottie’s Crafts Soc.: Com. Serv. in Shelburne - Thanks, N. Young.....	1625
Kerr, Greg: Years of Service - Congrats.,	

C. Kerr.....	1625
Chester Playhouse: Rebuilding After Fire - Recog.,	
D. Barkhouse.....	1626
Hatt, Millie: Retirement from Rich. Co. Lit. Network - Thanks,	
T. Boudreau.....	1626
WeShare Lun. Co.: Sharing of Com. Resources - Thanks,	
Hon. S. Corkum-Greek	1627
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 314, Prem.: Cost of Living Crisis - Acknowledge,	
Hon. I. Rankin.....	1627
No. 315, Prem.: Income Assistance Rate Increase - Prioritize,	
G. Burrill	1628
No. 316, FTB: Better Pay Cheque Guarantee: In the Works - Confirm,	
Hon. K. Regan.....	1630
No. 317, DCS - Income Assistance: Increase Needed - Respond,	
Hon. B. Maguire	1630
No. 318, DED: Small Business Relief Plan - Commit,	
F. Tilley.....	1631
No. 319, Prem. - N.S. Power: Return to Public Utility - Comment,	
C. Chender	1632
No. 320, SNSIS: End of Renoviction Ban - Explain,	
L. Nicoll	1633
No. 321, SNSIS: Renoviction Ban End: Senior Protection - Recog.,	
B. Clark.....	1634
No. 322, MAH: Aff. Housing Units Deliv. Shortfall - Explain,	
F. Tilley.....	1636
No. 323, FTB: Payday Loans Harm - Acknowledge,	
L. Lachance.....	1637
No. 324, MAH: Aff. Housing Definition - Clarify,	
L. Nicoll	1637
No. 325, MAH: Lack of Housing Supp. for C.B. - Address,	
D. Mombourquette.....	1638
No. 326, DPW: Chig. Isthmus Team - Clarify,	
E. Smith-McCrossin.....	1639
No. 327, MAH - First-Time Home Purchase: Prohibitive - Action,	
B. Clark.....	1640
No. 328, SLTC: Cost of Living Crisis - Impact on Seniors,	
Hon. K. Regan.....	1641
No. 329, SLTC: Cost of Living Crisis - Plan for Seniors,	
Hon. K. Regan.....	1642
No. 330, DCS: Cost of Living Crisis - Action Demanded,	
Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	1643
OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS:	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING:	
No. 97, Social Safety Net Security Act,	
Hon. I. Rankin.....	1644

K. Coombes.....	1646
Hon. K. MacFarlane.....	1649
Hon. B. Maguire	1653
C. Chender	1657
No. 100, Municipal Government Act,	
L. Nicoll	1659
S. Hansen	1662
Hon. J. Lohr	1664
B. Clark.....	1667
G. Burrill.....	1669
F. Tilley.....	1673
ADJOURNMENT:	
MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5):	
Gov't. (N.S.): Arts Funding - Support Required	
S. Leblanc	1676
R. DiCostanzo.....	1679
Hon. G. Morrow.....	1680
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:	
ADDRESS IN REPLY:	
Hon. K. Regan.....	1684
L. Lachance.....	1694
ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY:	
C. Chender	1703
F. Tilley.....	1705
Hon. B. Wong	1708
Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	1711
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CW ON SUPPLY AT 7:21 P.M.	1715
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 10:45 P.M.....	1715
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Thur., March 31 st at 1:00 p.m.	1715



HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30, 2022

Sixty-fourth General Assembly

First Session

1:00 P.M.

SPEAKER

Hon. Keith Bain

DEPUTY SPEAKERS

Angela Simmonds, Lisa Lachance

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Before we begin our daily routine, the topic for the late debate at the moment of interruption this evening has been forwarded by the honourable member for Dartmouth North:

Be it resolved that the arts, culture, and recreation sector, which contributes greatly to our economy and well-being, is one of the industries hardest hit by the pandemic and requires targeted, emergency, and sustained support to recover and grow.

Moving on to the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

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

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, in consideration of a member statement that I will be reading later, I would like to table this document entitled “N.S. Premier Says He Won’t Appeal Ruling on Discrimination Against Disabled People.”

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 109 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 217 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Income Tax Act, Respecting a Fertility and Surrogacy Rebate. (Hon. Michelle Thompson)

Bill No. 110 - Entitled an Act to Establish a Nova Scotia Housing Corporation. (Lorelei Nicoll)

Bill No. 111 - Entitled an Act Respecting Performance-based Regulation of Electrical Utilities. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 112 - Entitled an Act to Dissolve the Holy Heart Seminary. (Hon. Colton LeBlanc)

Bill No. 113 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act. (Susan Leblanc)

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 Queens.

CLARKE, CHRISTOPHER: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Christopher Clarke of Liverpool and to recognize the numerous and significant contributions that he has made towards improving the quality of life and care in Queens County.

The first mayor of the Region of Queens, when Bowater Mersey closed its doors in 2012, the former CEO rallied the community and was instrumental in steering the region through the economic crisis it faced.

Christopher served as Chair of the successful Queens General Hospital Expansion Project and is Chair of the Queens Manor Board. A passionate proponent for a new long-term care facility in Queens, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that Christopher was instrumental in bringing this dream to reality.

Mr. Speaker, it is with sincere gratitude and respect that I applaud the tireless efforts of Christopher and on behalf of all communities in Queens, I want to thank him for all that he has done and continues to do for all of us.

SPEAKER: The member for Annapolis.

**A & J BENT FARMS: RECIP. OF AGROPUR MILK QUAL. AWD. -
CONGRATS.**

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector contributes so much to the vibrancy and economic success of my constituency of Annapolis, and I'm always pleased to have the opportunity to celebrate our farmers.

Today I rise to recognize A & J Bent Farms Ltd. in Clarence for being named a regional winner of the Agropur Club of Excellence Milk Quality Award for 2021. Agropur is a co-operative owned by over 2,900 dairy farmers from across eastern Canada, and being selected as one of only 16 winners reflects an exceptional commitment to producing the highest quality milk for Canadians to enjoy. I invite all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Allen and Jacqueline Bent and the entire A & J Bent Farms Ltd. team on receiving this prestigious award.

SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

CRT. OF APPEAL: DEC. ON RTS. REG. DISABILITIES - OBSERVE

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the landmark decision issued by the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal on October 6th that the government was violating the rights of people with disabilities when it failed to provide them with meaningful access to housing and care. I have previously tabled an article published by CTV News entitled "N.S. premier says he won't appeal ruling on discrimination against disabled people."

That article reads:

"The Nova Scotia government won't be appealing a recent court decision that found there was discrimination against people with disabilities who

had sought services and housing in the community. Following a Cabinet meeting Thursday, Premier Tim Houston said he doesn't believe anyone should have to take their government to court to make it do the right thing." He said his government has heard the Court of Appeal's message 'loud and clear.'"

I ask the House to join me in observing the importance of this ruling and of this subsequent government commitment.

SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

CATAFORD, M./SWAN, J./FURLONG, J.: MOOSEHEAD SCHOL. PLAYERS OF THE MO. - CONGRATS.

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Mathieu Cataford, James Swan and Jake Furlong, the respective September 2021, November 2021 and December 2021 Halifax Mooseheads Scholastic Players of the Month. These hockey players are all students at Prince Andrew High School and have been commended for their dedication to their academic studies. As a Grade 11 student, Mathieu maintains a 97 per cent average, while James and Jake, Grade 12 students, both maintain an average of more than 90 per cent. There is no shortage of achievement amongst these players, whether they're on or off the ice.

Mathieu, James and Jake are responsible individuals who diligently take charge of their academic and hockey careers. I ask all members of the House to recognize their hard work and congratulate them on their achievements as Mooseheads Scholastic Players of the Month.

SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

AUTHORS: AMAZING ATLANTIC CANADIAN WOMEN - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with my colleagues the story about *Amazing Atlantic Canadian Women*, a new book that's aimed at inspiring young adults. One of the women included in the book is Bedford resident Rachel Brouwer, who at the tender age of 14 won a major prize at the 2016 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in Phoenix, Arizona.

Rachel won for her invention, which purifies water using easily accessible materials. Her drive to help developing nations in this way was prompted by reading the autobiography of Malala Yousafzai and by a camping trip. On that trip, Rachel realized not everyone has access to safe drinking water and she set out to change that situation.

Folks who were in this House back in 2016 may remember Rachel visiting here with her school principal, Nancy Wallace of Bedford Academy. Rachel is now a university student at Dalhousie University studying political science, which is another way to tackle long-time inequities.

Congratulations to authors Stephanie Domet and Penelope Jackson and artist James Bentley on their inspiring book, and to Rachel Brouwer for her continued drive to make the world a better place.

SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

CHEDRAWE, JOSEPH: COM. SERV. - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge a community business leader, Joseph Chedrawe. He's an immigrant from Lebanon who migrated to Canada when he was 17 for the purpose of furthering his education. Fondly known as Joe, he had decided while in his early 20s that he wanted to stay in Halifax and bought what would become Richmond Hill Store. Joe has single-handedly operated Richmond Hill Store, located at 3274 Veith Street, for the past 50 years.

Stores like Richmond Hill were staples for the community and offered everything a family would need, from meat to produce, milk, et cetera. Joe has watched a few generations grow up in the Halifax Needham area, like me, where he was once a staple before big box stores entered our region. Joe has given countless to many community members and has supported many community events, and I'd like to say that no child ever went to Joe's store and left empty-handed.

Today, I'd like to thank Joseph Chedrawe for his hard work, dedication, kindness, and support in the North End community, specifically Mulgrave Park.

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

LOHNES, BRUCE: APPT. AS HIGH-PERF. CURLING COACH - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, many young curlers are benefiting from the expertise of one of Nova Scotia's most successful male curlers. Bruce Lohnes has recently become a high-performance coach of the Nova Scotia Curling Association. His new role has him working with junior coaches and curlers in all areas of the game.

Mr. Lohnes brings a lot of credibility and experience, as his career included 11 Canadian men's championships, several individual accolades, as well as coaching the Mary Mattatall foursome at the 2017 Scotties Tournament of Hearts, and the Canadian Senior Women's Championship. In fact, Mr. Lohnes's former team, the Mark Dacey Mayflower Rink, was recently inducted into the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame.

I wish to congratulate Bruce on his latest appointment and thank him for lending his expertise to the next generation of curlers.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

WILSON, MICHELLE: SYD. DOWNTOWN DEV. EFFORTS - RECOG.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in place to recognize Michelle Wilson and all the staff with Sydney Downtown Development Association, who work day in and day out to really support the growth of Downtown Sydney. They've been a huge part of the conversation over the past number of years, and one of the big projects is about to start this Spring with the redevelopment of Charlotte Street.

Downtown Sydney has become a very vibrant part of the community between the Charlotte Street redevelopment, the NSCC relocation, the second birth, the New Dawn Centre for Social Innovation, and all the other investments that are being made and have been made.

I'm very excited about the future, so I want to stand in my place to recognize Michelle for all the hard work that she does, and her staff and her dedication, not only to Downtown Sydney, but the entire CBRM.

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

WORLD BIPOLAR DAY: EDUC. & EMPOWERMENT - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today, March 30th, is World Bipolar Day. We all experience changes in moods from time to time, depending on the events we go through in life, but when these mood swings become more dramatic and severe and impair a person's ability to function as usual at work, school, or in the community, it may indicate the presence of a serious mood disorder.

Bipolar disorder is characterized by severe mood swings, cycling between periods of intense highs and periods of intense lows. Bipolar disorder has a significant impact on family, friends, and communities. Many people with the disorder still lack the fundamental care and therapy they rely on to live well with it.

This World Bipolar Day, we can connect and remind folks that they are not alone with what they're going through. By using the hashtags #BipolarTogether and #WorldBipolarDay, we can unite to educate, empathize, and empower others.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to recognize the contributions of Nova Scotians who live with bipolar disorder, and to commit ourselves to creating a province where systems support the well-being of all.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

MEUSE, GEORGE: NEW ANTI-BULLYING BOOK - CONGRATS.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a local author, George Meuse, on his new book *Teach Your Children*. Mr. Meuse is a retired schoolteacher who, in his 33 years of teaching, witnessed the results of bullying first-hand. With four grandchildren in the school system, he hopes to contribute to the battle against bullying.

His book clearly brings to light the seriousness of bullying in our schools. The story is that of a young junior high school teacher in a fishing village on Nova Scotia's South Shore. He is concerned about the widespread bullying that has been worsening to the point where a young girl in one of his classes has committed suicide. Another dramatic pivotal event brings everything to a boil.

I ask the members of this House to join me in congratulating Mr. Meuse on his new book and thank him for his efforts in the fight against bullying.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

DAUGHTER, FREYA ROSE - BIRTHDAY WISHES

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Today I rise with immense pride and happiness to acknowledge the birth of our first child. Mary and I (Standing Ovation) - and she's watching right now (Laughter) - Mary and I were overwhelmed with pure joy as we welcomed Freya Rose Rankin on November 12, 2021, into our lives.

This is a life-altering journey, and although life has been more hectic in our household, we also know parenthood is the single most significant role we will ever have, and I've had some important roles as of late myself.

We are excited to welcome the smiles and giggles, to sing songs, to recite nursery rhymes, and to soak in all the first moments, milestones, and new discoveries. We are looking forward to teaching the valuable lessons of love, compassion, empowerment, and service - the characteristics that make us human and are the basic qualities that bond us together as a community.

What an awesome experience to look at the world through the eyes of Freya as she begins to explore the world and take pride in learning how to do things on her own. I've always been motivated by using politics as a vehicle to create change and a better future. Fatherhood strengthens my drive and ambition to ensure our daughter lives with all Nova Scotians in a safe, inclusive, more just society.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like the members of the House to join me, which they already have, in celebrating the arrival of our most precious and newest member of the family.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I want to do this another time because that was too hard to follow.

THE SPEAKER: You do have your hands full trying to top that one, I must say.

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

PROUDFOOT, BEN: RECIP. OF ACADEMY AWD. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Ben Proudfoot and his entire team for their Oscar win last Sunday. This was Proudfoot's first win at the Academy Awards for his short documentary *The Queen of Basketball*.

The Queen of Basketball tells the story of Lusia "Lucy" Harris, a three-time national college champion and an Olympic Silver medalist who navigated the challenging world of basketball for women in the 1970s, decades before the WNBA was founded. As Proudfoot himself so convincingly put it: "If there is anyone out there that still doubts whether there's an audience for female athletes, let this Academy Award be the answer."

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Proudfoot, who continues in that long tradition of critical acclaim for films and filmmakers in Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

JOHNSON, ELIZABETH: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'll say to the member opposite that he should wait for grandchildren. They're a lot of fun, too. (Laughter) It comes really quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to Elizabeth Johnson of Port Williams. Since the 1960s, Elizabeth has cheerfully given of herself to her community when she started the Willowbank Riders, a horseback riding group for persons with disabilities. She has also been president and secretary of the Port Williams Women's Institute, the Port Williams Elementary School, the Port Williams Health Auxiliary, the Apple Blossom Festival, the local Princess Committee, a member of the Loyal Workers for the Port Williams United Baptist Church, a District Commissioner of the Annapolis Pony Club, 4-H, and Girl Guides of Canada.

Please join me today to recognize Elizabeth Johnson for her dedication and volunteerism for her community, the Village of Port Williams.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

ROYSTON, MARILYN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I stand here today with a heavy heart to speak about the passing of Marilyn Royston. Marilyn passed away March 1st after a brief battle with cancer. Marilyn owned Mrs. P's Homestyle Bakery in Spryfield for over 25 years, and she was most famous for her oatcakes, which can be found at Costco and many shops throughout the city.

Marilyn was a well-respected business owner in Spryfield and was always willing to give back to the community she loved so much. She could always be counted on to donate cookies and treats to events in the community, such as the Christmas dinner at the Boys and Girls Club. Marilyn finally decided to retire and sold the bakery last summer. Sadly, Marilyn never had a chance to enjoy her retirement: She was diagnosed with cancer and after a brave battle with this disease, she passed.

Mr. Speaker, Marilyn was a genuinely nice person who worked hard all of her life running a successful business. Our community was devastated to hear of her passing, and she will be sorely missed by all those people whose lives she has touched. Rest in peace, Marilyn.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

EYLAND, TERRY: RETIREMENT AS DIR. OF DART. HER. MUS. - CONGRATS.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Terry Eyland on his retirement as Director of the Dartmouth Heritage Museum and before that, the Cole Harbour Heritage Farm Museum.

Under Terry's stewardship, the Dartmouth Heritage Museum has not only weathered a pandemic, but its offerings have grown. After consolidating much of the archival materials, Terry and the team were able to open up spaces for art exhibits, coffee houses, and the Evergreen Series, featuring folk musicians from across the province.

One room has been converted into a recording studio in which community members can record oral histories and traditional folk music. The back garden has been made more accessible and is a public space for all of Dartmouth to enjoy, just as Helen Creighton once did.

Terry also had a Parks Canada plaque celebrating Helen Creighton as a National Historic Person installed in September 2018, and under his leadership, the museum was tapped for several film and television productions.

Terry's welcoming smile and endless curiosity and stewardship of this important public space will be greatly missed. Please join me in wishing him a very well-earned retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

GILLIS, ALLISON "AL" GOODWIN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Today I rise to remember the late Allison "Al" Goodwin Gillis. He passed away unexpectedly but peacefully on February 18, 2022. Allison was the youngest son of Mark and Jean Gillis of Pugwash, Nova Scotia, and is survived by his beloved daughters, Kerry Turner and Leigh Gillis.

Allison was a teacher in Chester for several years before finding his way to the Interprovincial School for the Deaf in Amherst, APSEA. He taught senior students for many years at the School for the Deaf before leaving to work in his family's business, Gillis' Family Clothing and Footwear. For a time, he worked at the Sunset Community, eventually returning to APSEA to bring co-op opportunities to children who were deaf or hard of hearing, until his retirement in the late 1990s.

Allison was a valued volunteer for many years in the community of Pugwash, with the Gathering of the Clans Festival, Pugwash Harbourfest, the Village Council, the Curling Club, and Sunset Board. In 2008, he was elected to municipal government and proudly served 12 years, first as councillor, then the four last years as the warden of Cumberland County, retiring in 2022. He was a humble man who loved his village of Pugwash and county of Cumberland.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

GILBY, RITCHIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I rise to tell the House about the passing of Ritchie Gilby of East Hants on January 16th. I wanted to say a few words about a man who contributed to humanity in a profound and impactful way.

Ritchie was a well-known and respected paramedic and businessman. However, his family was always number one. He worked as a paramedic for 30 years. He was the first Nova Scotian and second Canadian to graduate from the Advanced Life Support Institute of New Hampshire. His giving nature was evident and was not limited to just the numerous local organizations. Ritchie also traveled to Trinidad and Tobago, where he helped

incorporate a modern ambulance service, and volunteered his time in Haiti, helping with their hurricane relief.

Ritchie will be tremendously missed by our community, his wife of 18 years, Suzanne, and his two girls, Breanna and Megan. I would like to offer my sincere condolences to his family, and may his memory live through his acts of kindness.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

CDN. POLICE CURLING ASSOC. CH'SHIP: HELD IN HFX. - WELCOME

HON. TONY INCE: I stand in my place today to welcome all the teams participating in the Canadian Police Curling Association Championship. This year's event is being held here in Halifax and hosted by the Nova Scotia Police Curling Association at the Mayflower Curling Club April 1st to the 10th. I and the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth are proud to support this event.

The Canadian Police Curling Championships are the oldest and longest-running police sporting event in Canada. The first national championship was run in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1956, and has run every year since until COVID halted the event in 2019. We are pleased that they are able to start having this event again and, an added bonus, to have it here in our own city.

Over the years, the host team, the Nova Scotia Police Curling Association, has raised money and made donations to numerous charities. For many years, the donations went to the Special Olympics. In 2010, they changed their charity of choice to Tourette Canada. They also donate to the Rally Point Retreat, which helps supports their brothers and sisters who suffer with post-traumatic injuries.

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

C.B. YOUTH PROJ.: GRAND OPENING OF SPACE - CONGRATS.

KENDRA COOMBES: Today, March 30, 2022, marks the grand opening of the Cape Breton Youth Project space on Townsend Street in Sydney. I wish to congratulate Madonna Doucette, the Cape Breton Education Coordinator; Mitch, Sefin, and Bradley, the community educators; and Jana Reddick, the BIPOC Support Services Educator.

I have the pleasure of knowing these incredible and caring individuals. They work hard to make all of Cape Breton a safer, healthier, and happier place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary, and all youth under 25, and their families.

The Cape Breton Youth Project provides programs and services and fun nights from Port Hawkesbury to Glace Bay and every place in between. Their services and programs are much-needed and have saved countless lives.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

**MACDONALD, MARY JANET: TUNES AND WOODEN SPOONS PGM. -
CONGRATS.**

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I met a nice woman from Port Hood who, during the pandemic, helped bring happiness to a great number of people. She did so with her good humour, warm nature, and culinary skills.

Mary Janet MacDonald launched her Facebook Live program, Tunes and Wooden Spoons, shortly after COVID-19 emerged as a threat to the health of Canadians. While a great number of people worried about what the future held, Mary Janet offered a safe venue on Sunday afternoon where she taught baking skills online, not to mention provided conversation with guests and live music.

Mary Janet's kitchen knowledge is now collected in the national bestseller *Tunes and Wooden Spoons: Recipes from a Cape Breton Kitchen*. Please join me in congratulating Mary Janet for her success and thank her for helping to keep spirits high and stomachs full during the pandemic. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

STONE HEARTH BAKERY: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize the award-winning Stone Hearth Bakery. Stone Hearth Bakery is more than just an amazing bakery. They are a social enterprise that has provided a work-based training program to hundreds of bakers in Nova Scotia. Stone Hearth Bakery is also one of the only kosher-certified bakeries east of Montréal.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Stone Hearth Bakery for bringing so much business to the Halifax Armdale riding over the last 40 years and for training so many of the province's best bakers. I ask the members of this House to go and grab some baking before you go home.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MACDONALD, DOUG: RETIREMENT- CONGRATS

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge Doug MacDonald, who was the executive director of Ward 5 in Halifax Needham for 49 years. Doug has been a fixture in this non-profit organization that offers children's services such as a breakfast program and daycare service, a food bank, community services, and more. He was instrumental in his support of St. Joseph's-A. McKay school as well.

Doug showed exemplary leadership skills and worked tirelessly to help those in need, including many seniors who lived in the area. Doug provided mentorship, set policies and procedures, and also got Ward 5 through hard financial times when there was a threat of closing. Doug would go out of his way to ensure seniors received the seniors' lunch at Ward 5, taking the van out each day to pick up those seniors who could not make it in on their own.

I would like all the members to join me in congratulating Doug MacDonald on his long and successful career and wish him and his family the very best in his retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

SOUTH SHORE PUB. LIBS.: 50TH ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: South Shore Public Libraries are celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. With four branch locations in Bridgewater, Greenfield, Liverpool, and Lunenburg, as well as a renowned mobile service, this public library brings the magic of books and important educational and inclusive initiatives to every corner of Lunenburg and Queens counties.

Events are being planned throughout the year to mark this incredible milestone and there is a lot to celebrate. In August 2021, the library replaced its old school bus-style mobile branch with a new state-of-the-art Bookmobile, loaded with features including wi-fi and a lift to welcome expectant moms, parents with strollers, and those with mobility issues.

The new bookmobile brings the gift of books to rural Nova Scotia and is one of only two in operation across the province. Acting Chief Librarian Jeff Mercer believes that the new bookmobile is the perfect way to serve our rural areas and to nurture a lifelong love of books among young and old alike.

Congratulations and best wishes to South Shore Public Libraries, its staff, and volunteers on all their successes and outstanding achievements over the past 50 years.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

DROVER, SANDRA: PHIT'CETERA BOUTIQUE SUCCESS - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: I would like to congratulate and recognize small business owner Sandra Drover on her innovative and successful PHIT'Cetera lifestyle wear, clothing boutique.

At the end of 2019, Sandra realized there was a huge void with the choice of sustainable and ethically made active, leisure, and casual everyday wear in HRM. Her vision is to offer affordable, quality clothing collections from a host of brands that are not only concerned with how a garment was made, but also how their production impacts the environment.

Sandra believes that people should not only feel good in the clothes they wear but should also feel good about the clothing they choose. She believes one piece of clothing at a time can make a difference in creating a cleaner environment through the clothes we wear.

Thank you, Sandra, for your sustainable and environmentally conscious approach with your business. Wishing you nothing but the best.

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

HARRIS, NICK: RECIPIENT OF RHODES SCHOLARSHIP - CONGRATS

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge Nick Harris of the University of King's College, who has received one of 11 Rhodes Scholarships awarded to Canadians this year. Nick has been a member of the Halifax community since 2018 as a student at the University of King's College and Dalhousie University. He is the immediate past president of the King's student union.

The Rhodes Scholarship offers Nick the ability to continue his academic career at Oxford University, where he will pursue a Master of Public Political Philosophy once he completes his honours degree in political science and law, justice, and society. Nick is the 33rd King's student to receive this scholarship.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members to join me in congratulating Nick as well as the 10 other Canadians who received Rhodes Scholarships this year.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

GUYS. MEM. HOSP. FDN.: FUNDRAISING AND RECRUITMENT EFFORTS - RECOG

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Guysborough Memorial Hospital Foundation. Since its early days, the foundation has been supporting

the Guysborough Memorial Hospital with fundraising for equipment purchases and education of staff. They even own a home in the community to provide accommodations for physicians.

During the past number of years, the foundation has also been directly involved in the physician recruitment process. Members attend recruitment events in and outside the province and promote Guysborough as a perfect place to practise family medicine. Their commitment to ensuring the family practice and hospital have physicians available has been a priority, and their efforts have been quite successful. Guysborough has just welcomed three family physicians, and our community is grateful for the role that the foundation has played in bringing these much-needed doctors to the area.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the House recognize the Guysborough Memorial Hospital Foundation and their ongoing commitment to health care in our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

JESSOME, FLORENCE “DOLSIE”: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of Florence “Dolsie” Jessome. Dolsie passed away November 23, 2021, at the age of 85. Those who knew Dolsie knew that she had an avid political mind. Dolsie was a member of the Cape Breton North and Northside-Westmount Liberal Association and ran many, many elections over the years. Dolsie supported me in everything that I have done and ran my office in 2006. I know she’s looking down here now very proud of where we have come.

Dolsie has four sons - Thomas, Archie, Murray, and Lorne - and was a widow at the age of 36.

Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to stand here and thank Dolsie for all of her years of contribution to Nova Scotia, and I ask the House to celebrate her life.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

O’REGAN, SEAN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the life and generosity of lifelong Dartmouth resident Sean O’Regan, who died suddenly earlier this month. Sean was part of the third generation of his family to be involved with O’Regan’s Automotive Group, and he was named President and CEO in 2008. He often said that you could not be a success in a failed world, and so today I would like to focus on some of the many ways Sean O’Regan sought to improve our world.

Described as having limitless generosity, he and his family had a major impact on the Dartmouth community through gifts to The North Grove, the Dartmouth General Hospital Foundation, and Churchill Academy, a Dartmouth school for students with learning challenges. A supporter since its inception, Sean gave 16 years to Churchill's Board of Directors. He also gave his time and knowledge to L'Arche, the Children's Wish Foundation, the Heart & Stroke Foundation, and other organizations. He was honoured twice as Outstanding Corporate Philanthropist of the Year by the Association of Fundraising Professionals of Nova Scotia.

I offer my heartfelt condolences to his entire family: his wife, Lisa; children Danny, Maggie, and Aiden; mother, Mary; and siblings Patrick and Kathleen. May the memory of his generosity and care for his community be a comfort to them in these sad days.

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

GALLOWAY-JONES, JOY: RECIP. OF PERSEVERANCE ACE AWD. - CONGRATS.

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the winner of the Fundy Female Leadership Network's Perseverance ACE Award: Truro's Joy Galloway-Jones.

Joy has been the head coach of Dalhousie University's AC Cross Country team since 2009 and has worked hard to encourage women to join male-dominated industries and activities. She is the only female fire officer and first female captain for the Town of Truro's fire service.

Joy is leading by example. She is encouraging women to push the envelope and is a strong advocate for greater female representation in leadership roles. Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of the House to join me in congratulating Joy on this well-deserved award and her recognition.

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

CROSBY, SIDNEY: 500th GOAL - CONGRATS.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, throughout his 17-year NHL career, Sidney Crosby has filled a highlight reel with countless unbelievable achievements: three Stanley Cups, two Olympic Gold Medals, two Conn Smythe trophies, to name just a few.

On February 15th, the Pittsburgh Penguin's captain and Cole Harbour's own added one more career milestone when he scored his 500th goal, becoming the 46th player in NHL history to do so. To put this in perspective, this was the 500th time that Sidney has lit the

lamp and electrified the City of Pittsburgh, and the 500th time that Crosby stole the momentum from the opposing teams.

Never one to boast of his accolades, Sidney continues to be the modest, humble, down-to-earth Cole Harbour kid who started his NHL career so many years ago. We wish to congratulate him on this impressive achievement.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

WELLNESS WITHIN: VOL. PRISON DOULA SERV. WORK - THANKS

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today during World Doula Week to recognize all doulas working here in Nova Scotia, but specifically those who work with Wellness Within, the only volunteer prison doula service dedicated to advancing reproductive justice in Canada.

Doulas are non-clinical support people who provide information and emotional and physical support during the perinatal period. The doulas who volunteer with Wellness Within devote an extraordinary amount of time, and their hearts, to compassionate and justice-seeking support. Their work is highly specialized and includes attending court appearances, care planning across both carceral and hospital institutions, and sourcing extensive maternal and newborn resources.

Thank you to Wellness Within and their incredible doula team for their service to people experiencing pregnancy and post-partum in the criminal justice system.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants West.

DILL, DANNY: COM. SERV. - THANKS

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to Danny Dill. He is an example of community spirit through and through. Since 1979, Dill's family farm can boast that they have the world's largest variety of pumpkins and welcomes thousands of visitors to the farm each year.

Danny's hard work does not end at the pumpkin patch. He also sits on numerous committees, such as the Agricultural Society, the Pumpkin Fest Society, and the Windsor Hockey Heritage Society, to name a few. This year in particular, Danny stepped up and accommodated the Nova Scotia Ski Club with the use of his fields, because if he can help anyone, he will.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to thank Danny Dill, a die-hard Bruins fan, for being an active member in our community and drawing tourists from around the world. Big things can grow from small beginnings because of people like Danny.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

[1:45 p.m.]

BARSOUM, M./JACKSON, V.: POWER OF 10 TUT. GRP. - THANKS

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize student leaders of the tutoring group Power of 10 Mirele Barsoum and Victoria Jackson. Power of 10 at Halifax West High School was originally founded by student Hannah Birru. It was meant to help students who are newcomers to Canada with their learning and assist them with building self-confidence and connecting them with other students.

The tutoring group is supported entirely by volunteers. The current student leaders, Mirele and Victoria, have been very innovative. They have expanded this program to bring students from different ages, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds together and that brings our community together.

I would ask that the House join me in recognizing the Power of 10 student leaders, Mirele Barsoum and Victoria Jackson, and thank them for their incredible work.

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

PALMER, BARBARA/LEADBEATER, CODY: MURAL CREATION - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge Barbara Palmer and Cody Leadbeater for their creation of a 40-piece puzzle mural painted on the Boys and Girls Club of Cape Breton building in Whitney Pier.

Cody came up with the concept, stating that puzzle pieces represent how the club brings youth together in a positive way. The pieces connect like a family, thereby connecting the club and the community together.

Barbara worked with the club members and the staff before painting the 100-square-foot artwork. Her work represents how the club connects with youth and the community, the values and programs and social movements that are important to the club, and the community as a whole.

Barbara's artistry captured the essence of the club, its dedication, the staff dedication, and the hopes and dreams of all the youth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Shore.

TEAM FLEMMING: TIM HORTONS BRIER SUCCESS - RECOG.

KENT SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Team Paul Flemming, who recently represented Nova Scotia at the Tim Hortons Brier in Lethbridge, Alberta. Skip Paul Flemming, third Scott Saccary, second Ryan Abraham, lead Phil Crowell, and alternate Kevin Ouellette began the week with a three-game winning streak before ultimately falling just short of the playoff round and wrapped up the event with a 3-5 record.

These decorated athletes are no strangers to our National Men's Curling Championship. For Paul, this was his 11th Brier. Phil competed for the seventh time and Scott for the sixth. Mr. Speaker, there is no question this team put their best efforts forward and represented our province with pride and dignity.

I would also like to formally congratulate Scott Saccary for winning the Ross Harstone Trophy. This award is presented each year to the player chosen by his peers who best demonstrates good sportsmanship and exemplary conduct. I trust Mr. Saccary's admirable behaviour will carry over into other sporting events such as Slice 'n Dice. I ask all members to join me in congratulating Team Flemming.

THE SPEAKER: The member for Preston.

ORENDA CANOE CLUB: CONTRIB. TO LAKE ECHO COM. - RECOG.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: I rise in the House to recognize Orenda Canoe Club, a parent-run non-profit organization with a membership of over 150. With only one full-time coach being employed during the Summer, this club is situated 15 kilometres east of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in the community of Lake Echo. Set on a beautiful lake, the club has a rich history of community and is the home of five Olympic champions.

Since the formation of the club in 1977, the mandate and objectives have been to provide a much-needed facility to a growing community, to contribute to a place where children and youth could look upon on their own to experience the activities in community. Orenda Club offers year-round services for athletics and is a full-time Summer program for kids ages 6-plus. I'd like to recognize Orenda Canoe Club for their contributions to the success of the Lake Echo community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

MORRISON, EUGENE & RUTH: 60th WEDDING ANNIV. - CONGRATS.

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Eugene and Ruth Morrison on their 60th wedding anniversary. I met with Eugene and Ruth last Saturday. Eugene took great pleasure in recounting the challenges he faced in acquiring a marriage

licence at age 19. The happy couple, who reside in Brookside, were married by a Justice of the Peace in Pictou during a snowstorm. It was the wedding that almost didn't happen. I ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating the Morrisons on their milestone anniversary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

FLYNN, DENISE & DEREK: CORBERRIE CIDER CO. SUCCESS - RECOG.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Every day, entrepreneurs decide to take the next step and expand their businesses into new ventures. After bringing back a neglected five-acre apple orchard, Denise and Derek Flynn purchased Corberrie. Denise decided to take the next step and use the orchard's apples to make cider. After a couple of years of preparation that involved taking a cider-making course and building a cidery on their property, the Corberrie Cider Company produced its first cider, the Fresh Apple cider, from some of the orchard's 18 varieties of apples.

The cider and two new seasonal flavours are now available through the owners at the local restaurants, as well as the local farmer's markets. I ask that all members join me in recognizing the entrepreneurs like Denise and Derek Flynn for taking the extra step to expand a small agricultural operation into manufacturing new products.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

ANTIG. KINSMEN CLUB: COM. SERV. - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the great work done by the Antigonish Kinsmen Club. Kin Canada is an all-Canadian service organization made up of dedicated member volunteers who serve our community's greatest needs.

Kinsman Radio Bingo on 98.9 XFM radio has been one of the organization's many successful fundraisers for many years. Proceeds from their fundraising go back to deserving groups in the community. Saturday Night Kinsmen Radio Bingo was particularly enjoyable and helpful during COVID-19 restrictions. Many people in Antigonish continue to enjoy Kinsman Radio Bingo every Saturday night and have established the weekly routine of playing as a family. Recently, the Antigonish Kinsmen Club made a \$10,000 donation to CACL Antigonish.

I ask all members of this House to congratulate the Antigonish Kinsman Club for their dedication to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

BARRON, LAURIE: MJHL COACH OF THE YR. - CONGRATS.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, Yarmouth's Laurie Barron has been named the Maritime Junior Hockey League's Head Coach of the Year. This is the third time the Yarmouth Mariners' general manager has received this award during his career. He previously received it in 2012 and 2018.

Laurie Barron led Yarmouth to the best record in the Eastlink South Division for the fifth straight year at 25-8-4-1. The Mariners also had the second-best goal differential and allowed the second fewest goals in the league.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating Yarmouth's Laurie Barron on this impressive and prestigious award and wish him much success in the future, as well as the team. Go Mariners.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

MORSE, HEATHER: COM. SERV. - THANKS

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize another valued volunteer in Kings West doing great things for our communities.

Heather Morse is a retired educator and principal with a passion for community volunteering. She currently serves as chair of the Western Kings Community Health Board, where she has been a member since 2017.

Heather is committed to the health of the community, and to food security in particular. She has filled many roles throughout her time on the Community Health Board, including working on the Kings County Food Council, reviewing grant applications on the Wellness Fund Committee, assisting in school food initiatives in Berwick, and participating in the Community Alcohol Partnership.

Heather also volunteers with the Kingston Greenwood Mental Health Association and Valley Restorative Justice and is on the Board of Directors of Nourish Nova Scotia.

I'd like to ask all members of this House to join me in thanking Heather for her dedicated leadership and volunteerism. Her work has certainly made a difference in Kings West.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

BARRETT, DR. LISA: COVID TESTING EFFORTS - THANKS

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to express my appreciation for Dr. Lisa Barrett, the Dalhousie infectious disease expert who has led Nova Scotia's testing efforts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Lisa has been a go-to source for media, both local and national, for commentary on the pandemic, and no wonder - she studied under Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Dr. Lisa saw early the need for widespread testing of the population. She and her team mobilized volunteers to welcome clients, administer tests, and even check the results on rapid tests. As a result, Nova Scotia was catching between 10 to 20 per cent of the cases during COVID-19 through these rapid tests. I can tell you, relatives and friends in other provinces looked on this effort and our results with envy - and she did all this while treating COVID patients in hospital too.

I want to thank Dr. Lisa Barrett for her determination, her grit, and for just being an inspiring role model for all the girls and young women who see her at the forefront of testing efforts in this province. Dr. Lisa has made, and is making, a difference.

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

ANDERSON, SHAWN: CHRISTMAS LIGHTS DISPLAY - THANKS

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, although Christmas is a few months behind us, this is worthy of consideration. Christmas was especially bright for many residents in Fall River and beyond due to a creative and talented homeowner who produced an amazing light and musical performance for all to see.

Thirty-five hundred lights covered Shawn Anderson's house and lawn and were programmed by him - designing the colours, patterns, and brightness. With the addition of an FM transmitter, visitors watched and listened to the brilliant four-song display from their cars. In addition to the light show, donations were collected for the Lions Club Christmas Express, filling two truckloads of food and items for families in need.

Please join me in thanking Shawn for spreading Christmas joy to the many families of Fall River and area and creating an event that was unique and very COVID-friendly.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

CLAYTON, DEKOTA: HEARING AID INITIATIVE - THANKS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Dekota Clayton, a resident of Beechville. To celebrate African Heritage Month, Dekota, one of Nova Scotia's

few Black audiologists, is giving the gift of hearing. Dekota created a contest to donate a free pair of hearing aids to a member of the Black community.

Hearing health is connected to not only your ability to communicate with others but also to your overall quality of life. Hearing properly impacts people socially and emotionally. There are so many Nova Scotians who do not have access to good health care, let alone access to hearing services. Research shows that the average Nova Scotian experiences hearing loss for seven to ten years before seeking any kind of treatment.

Listening is demanding, and people who struggle to hear properly often isolate themselves socially and pull away from the things they love to do. Studies also link hearing loss to cognitive problems and increase the risk of dementia. Being able to hear properly is a quality-of-life issue and provides a level of independence.

I'd like the members of the House of Assembly to join me in thanking Dekota for his life-changing initiative to help a community member connect and communicate effectively with family and friends.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

TOTTIE'S CRAFTS SOC.: COM. SERV. IN SHELBURNE - THANKS

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Tottie's Crafts Society. Tottie's was established in 1977 to foster interest in 18th century crafts and to financially support the growth of the historic complex on Dock Street in Shelburne. Since its inception, the group has donated at least \$150,000 to various waterfront projects, including upgrades to the old Guild Hall, Cox's Warehouse, the Tourist Bureau, the Orderly Room, Market Square, Ross-Thomson House, the Dory Shop and Founders' Days.

In 2021, \$15,000 was donated to the Shelburne Fire Department and this year the Society will support major work plans at Coyle House. Many wonderful volunteers have contributed, including most recently Mona Foged, Judith O'Brien, Ellen Miller, Holly Renaud, Donna Jeffery, Verna Roache-Williams, Linda MacLachlan, Lorin Hesse, Claudia Lorenson, Pierrette Tremblay, Shirley Crockett, and Germaine Osborn.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

KERR, GREG: YEARS OF SERVICE - CONGRATS

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute and thank my uncle, the Honourable Greg Kerr, for his service to our communities. In 1978, after nine years of teaching, Greg was elected MLA for Annapolis at 31 years old. He rose to become Minister of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, Minister of Environment, Minister of Housing, Minister of Tourism and Culture and Minister of Finance for 10 years from 1983 to 1993.

In the years that followed, Greg returned to work in the woods, volunteer throughout the county and serve locally as municipal councillor for Annapolis. He was elected as Member of Parliament for West Nova in 2008 and after two terms retired from public life in 2015.

I welcome everyone to congratulate Greg on his many years of service to Nova Scotians at all three levels of government as municipal councillor, MLA and MP.

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

CHESTER PLAYHOUSE: REBUILDING AFTER FIRE - RECOG.

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Chester Playhouse. As far back as 1938, the Chester Playhouse has provided a home to theatre and culture in Nova Scotia.

I am thrilled to announce that the Chester Playhouse is expected to reopen by Spring 2023, only two years after the building was heavily damaged in a fire, supported by this provincial government, the municipal government and the federal government and an incredible fundraising drive from the community, which contributed \$500,000.

Like the phoenix, the Chester Playhouse is rising from the ashes and will once again be a leader within this province in delivering Nova Scotia arts and culture. I call on the members of this House to join me in congratulating their board of directors and all those who supported the Playhouse in this incredible rebuild.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

HATT, MILLIE: RETIREMENT FROM RICH. CO. LIT. NETWORK - THANKS

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, the Richmond County Literacy Network has been contributing to literacy skills and employment needs in our county and surrounding areas since 1998. On March 31st - that's tomorrow - Millie Hatt, the network co-ordinator, is retiring after 24 years of dedicated service. Millie has been an outstanding promoter of literacy in the county and has provided many residents with programs and classes that have not only benefited the students but also their future employers.

We would like to thank Millie for her years of dedicated service and wish her well in her retirement. She will be missed. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg.

WESHARE LUN. CO.: SHARING OF COM. RESOURCES - THANKS

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to WeShare Lunenburg Co., a South Shore Facebook group that is all about building a strong, sustainable, connected community through caring, sharing and a little trading.

Launched in 2018 by Anne Weeks and Becky Nodding, this group offers a safe space where people don't have to worry about money and can rely on others to help share resources in order to meet a variety of needs. So far, exchanges have included borrowing tools and sharing a crop of vegetables. Seniors will trade an item they no longer need in return for a service and young families with newborns save themselves the expense of purchasing new. In one instance, a member left the hospital in order to move into a new apartment and within a week had a fully furnished apartment. Thank you to WeShare.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY**ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS**

THE SPEAKER: We will end at 2:50 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - ACKNOWLEDGE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, in the first few days of this House, I know the Premier has been hearing about the cost of living crisis. I'm sure he's hearing it in the streets with inflation at a 30-year high, fuel prices at record levels, and power rates about to increase. Considering these runaway costs, is the Premier prepared to admit that we are in a cost of living crisis in Nova Scotia?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): I thank the member for the observation that I think pretty much the entire world has observed. The cost of living is going up. Inflation is up. We've had incredible stresses on the supply chain and all kinds of things happening in the world. Wars and things that we couldn't even imagine taking place are taking place.

Yes, the cost of living is going up. Yes, Nova Scotians are under incredible pressure, most definitely, as are all Canadians, all North Americans, and citizens of the world to be honest, Mr. Speaker.

IAIN RANKIN: Isn't it ironic that the Premier admits that there is a cost of living crisis, yet his Finance and Treasury Board Minister tabled a solutions document yesterday in the House that doesn't have support from the majority of Nova Scotians who are battling this, Mr. Speaker? (Applause) I'd like to ask the Premier: If he does believe Nova Scotia is facing this cost of living crisis, when will we see the solutions? They certainly weren't presented yesterday.

THE PREMIER: Au contraire, Mr. Speaker. They were presented yesterday. They were presented in the weeks leading up to yesterday. We didn't wait for yesterday. We got going within weeks of getting elected into office, when Nova Scotians looked at what was available to them to govern this province in August. They spoke very loudly and very clearly that they like the solutions that this party was offering. I will tell you that I'm hearing from them every day that they are impressed with the speed at which we are delivering on the solutions we promised them. (Applause)

IAIN RANKIN: What we did see is relief only for corporations to the tune of a \$200 million tax cut. We didn't see support for the majority of Nova Scotians the way that other provinces have come out proactively. Quebec gave everyone under \$100,000 relief. British Columbia came out with something for everyone who has vehicle insurance. Even New Brunswick, our neighbouring province, has come out giving tax relief to people who need it most. My question for the Premier: Compared to the rest of the country, why is he letting Nova Scotians fall further behind with the cost of living crisis?

THE PREMIER: In the flurry of announcements we were making about the incredible amounts of investments we've made in support of Nova Scotians - by the way, including the \$13 billion in yesterday's budget in support of Nova Scotians - the honourable member may have missed the support we put out for Nova Scotians last week to recognize the immediacy of the issue: support for food banks, support for home heating, all to go with rental initiatives. There is a lot of work to do in this province, but Nova Scotians can see very clearly that we are the government to get it done.

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

PREM: INCOME ASSISTANCE RATE INCREASE - PRIORITIZE

GARY BURRILL: Yesterday in Question Period, the Minister of Community Services provided the House what she called a friendly reminder: that she had been mandated by the Premier to fight poverty. I would like to provide the government a friendly reminder.

Today in Nova Scotia, a single parent with one child, while receiving social assistance, receives the single lowest income assistance payments that are payable anywhere in our country. This was true the moment the mandate letter was written, and it will be true the moment that this budget is passed, because this is a budget that does not

increase income assistance in Nova Scotia by a single cent. I want to ask the Premier to explain why he finds it acceptable that Nova Scotia families receiving social assistance should be left to be the poorest in the country.

THE PREMIER: These are the types of issues that are so important to Nova Scotians and so important to us. That's why we put forward such a compassionate budget yesterday. Is there more work to do? Yes, there's more work to do. We're getting to work on things like child benefit and rental supports. Look, Mr. Speaker, the member can pretend that nothing is being done in support of these Nova Scotians, but it would only be pretending, because it's not true.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier refers to this budget as, to use his word, "compassionate." I don't think, however, that it qualifies as compassionate to have a budget that leaves a single income assistance recipient receiving a total annual income of \$7,920 in the midst of a 5.7 per cent inflation environment which is going to knock \$400 off of that in the course of the next budget year. I want to ask the Premier: Why, if they are so compassionate in this government, did they not have enough compassion to simply index income assistance to inflation?

THE PREMIER: Look, nobody on this side of the House will deny issues facing Nova Scotians. We'll leave that for the three prior governments. They have ignored the issues. We won't ignore the issues. We're getting to work on this side of the House. We were very clear with Nova Scotians in the Summer campaign. We're very focused on health care. Nova Scotians have seen that focus come through on everything we have done. We'll do more. There's more work to do. There's always more work to do. We're committed to doing it, Mr. Speaker, and we will always fulfill the commitment we made to Nova Scotians. That's what this budget started on yesterday.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, when the previous Premier came into office, the first budget that his government brought forward incorporated a \$100-a-month increase in income assistance. When the current government of British Columbia came into power, their very first budget included a \$100-a-month increase in income assistance. That is because this was a matter that was a priority to both of those governments. This government, however, in the midst of a 30-year high in the cost of living, has brought forward a budget that doesn't increase income assistance whatsoever. Will the Premier explain, then, simply: Why is this matter not a priority for him?

THE PREMIER: There are lots of priorities for the government, Mr. Speaker. There's only so much we can do, but we do as much as we can with what we have. We're very focused on fulfilling the commitments we made to Nova Scotians, and Nova Scotians are seeing that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

FTB: BETTER PAY CHEQUE GUARANTEE: IN THE WORKS - CONFIRM

HON. KELLY REGAN: Wage growth is not keeping up with inflation. Nova Scotians' paycheques are buying less and less as their purchasing power diminishes in a cost of living crisis. This government promised Nova Scotians a Better Pay Cheque Guarantee but there's no sign of a better paycheque in the works. My question is for the Premier: Is the better paycheque for Nova Scotians not so guaranteed at all?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, the member keeps asking about this. I think she's becoming a champion for this program. The reality is that there's a significant cost to that initiative, and we can't do everything in the first year. With that said, Mr. Speaker, the budget presents solutions for Nova Scotians. It's compassionate. When I think about it, it's helping to serve needs that everybody has. Right now, a lot of those needs happen to be - with what we have seen over the last number of years - in health care.

KELLY REGAN: The Premier said the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee is, "... a key component of the 'can-do' attitude Nova Scotians will see from your PC government" and "... unlike other plans, it guarantees" - guarantees - "more money in employees' pockets." I'll table that. Nova Scotians need more money in their pockets now. Where is the Premier's can-do attitude now that Nova Scotians need some help?

ALLAN MACMASTER: One item in the budget that I will point out is more opportunity for skilled trades, which provides significant tax relief for individuals under the age of 30 - thousands and thousands of them. The reality is, we're living in a province now ... (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has the floor.

ALLAN MACMASTER: The reality is we're now living in a province that is growing with many opportunities for people. We are struggling to find people to fill labour shortages. This is an opportunity. There are all kinds of opportunities in the province for people. We want to make sure that people have a chance to realize it and to have success themselves.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DCS - INCOME ASSISTANCE: INCREASE NEEDED - RESPOND

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, we heard the minister to say skilled trades are important, labour shortage, and yet there are zero dollars in this budget for the Nova Scotia Community College. The previous government's budget included the largest increased income assistance in our province's history. I was disappointed that this government has not committed to an increase, especially as Nova Scotians are dealing with

the cost of living crisis. Can the Premier explain to this House why he has neglected our province's most vulnerable by not increasing monthly income assistance payments?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: I think we started out in this budget showing that we are truly working as hard as we can. As other colleagues indicated, we can't do everything at once, but I do think that we did a lot in our first seven months. If anyone takes time to look at the budget, they will see that we made some really substantial investments in all sectors, really, in government.

I do want to remind the members here in the Chamber that we did just put out, as well, \$13.2 million as a support package. It's a matter of us all working across the aisles here with each other and making suggestions, and that's what I plan to do. I'm committed to reducing poverty.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: They give \$150 once. We gave \$100 in perpetuity. Do you want to know what people on income assistance need? More than \$7,000 a month. It's that simple. People are struggling to make ends meet. Inflation is at a 30-year high. Our programs need to be revisited to account for the astronomical inflation that is affecting Nova Scotia. Since this government won't commit to increasing the funds on our social assistance programs, what are they doing to ensure more Nova Scotians are captured within them?

KARLA MACFARLANE: Living in poverty is totally unacceptable, and we are all very well aware that - I commend the government for increasing it by \$100. That was substantial, and it absolutely has helped a lot. I think what we need to realize, too, is those people living in poverty also access a number of programs that assist them.

Just for a reminder, because I think a lot of people have a misconception of how the \$13.2 million was rolled out, we're getting that out to individuals this week, but if you were on income assistance and you have three children, each of those children get \$150 too - it's not per case, it's per person living in the household.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DED: SMALL BUSINESS RELIEF PLAN - COMMIT

FRED TILLEY: The weight of the cost of living crisis is also crushing our small businesses. They've been waiting for an economic recovery plan since September, but the Premier fired the Economic Growth Council with no backup plan for recovery and no plans to get our small businesses out of the red and back into the black again. My question for the Premier: When will small businesses see a plan for economic recovery from this reactive government?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: The continued suggestion that there is no plan for economic recovery is ludicrous. Our recovery plan is based on the same trail that we will blaze, that we have outlined in various mandate letters across a few departments based on growing Nova Scotia - a trend that is already well under way, attracting people to the trades, increasing local consumption, and supporting our businesses to become more efficient and to expand.

[2:15 p.m.]

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, to suggest that “there is no economic recovery plan is ludicrous” is ridiculous. If it’s there, we’d sure love to see it, Minister. Businesses across this province are still struggling. From Sydney Mines to Yarmouth, small businesses across this province are concerned about rising costs. As a matter of fact, 66 per cent of businesses are still below normal revenues. Over two in three, or 66 per cent, had to take on debt in the pandemic and 15 per cent of those are afraid they will not be able to pay that back. I’ll table that. My question to the Premier is: How many more small businesses will have to close their doors before they see any support from this reactive government?

SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: Mr. Speaker, and to the member opposite, our conversations and our support for small business continues every day. It includes \$12 million specifically for tourism businesses. We are ever mindful and no one has to tell us that there are businesses that are holding on by their fingernails. One of the biggest movements forward was the reopening of society and the lifting of restrictions, which is a cautious process. We will continue to work with Public Health to appropriately get people, and therefore our economy, moving and we will help businesses to get through this period.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PREM. - N.S. POWER: RETURN TO PUBLIC UTILITY - COMMENT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. This April our province will mark the 30-year anniversary of a decision that continues to impact every Nova Scotian in this province. That’s right, it’s the decision by a previous PC government to privatize Nova Scotia Power. Since then, Emera has made billions in profits and Nova Scotians, plagued by rising power bills, poor service, and an unreliable grid, watch as executives rack up millions in bonuses.

My question to the Premier is: Does the Premier feel that his predecessor made a prudent, well-informed decision to sell off our power utility?

THE PREMIER: I’ll answer on behalf of the Minister of Energy. The member may not be aware, but the largest power rate spike we saw in this history was in a brief window of time when the NDP governed and power rates went up 25 per cent. I will assure the

member that we, on this side of the House, understand the importance of protecting ratepayers and we will do exactly that.

CLAUDIA CHENDER; Thank you, but I was asking about the decision to sell Nova Scotia Power and whether it was well-informed. When it comes to dealing with Nova Scotia Power and its recent application to raise power rates and impose fees that would decimate the solar industry - and I'll table that - the Premier said, "no option is off the table." I take his comments at face value but asked directly about returning Nova Scotia Power to public ownership, the Premier said that he would run some numbers. I'll table that. This is exactly what was not done in 1992, when there was no analysis done at all to justify the decision to sell Nova Scotia Power for a pittance.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Premier is: Will he make good on his word and commit to table a study that outlines the costs and benefits of returning all or part of Nova Scotia Power to public ownership?

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the Premier, I am going to ask that the word "he" not be used, that it be "will the Premier" or wherever the question is intended.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the concern over rates in the province. Speaking about an analysis of the numbers, I wonder if the former NDP government did an analysis when they saw rates go from 12 cents a kilowatt hour up to 15 cents a kilowatt hour. (Interruption) I will assure Nova Scotians that our primary . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Premier has the floor. Order, please. Once everybody calms down, we'll recognize that the Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: I assure the member, we are constantly running numbers and putting forward what we can do for Nova Scotians. People saw the analysis of the numbers and the art of what is possible. They saw it in the budget yesterday, with over \$13 billion of investments on behalf of Nova Scotians.

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

SNSIS: END OF RENOVICTION BAN - EXPLAIN

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, it's been two weeks since Nova Scotians lost their protection against renovictions. The vacancy rate in this province hovers around 1 per cent. The new units and solutions promised by this government are months and years in the making, but people are in crisis today. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Knowing that there is not enough housing supply and that tenants of older units are especially vulnerable, why did this government end the renoviction ban?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: The member is very well aware that last Fall we brought forward amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act. Our government was very proactive, knowing that the end of the renoviction ban was going to come. We recognize that substantial renovations are important to safe and secure households and residential premises. That's why we put strict tenant protections in place and there is a substantial and rigid process to follow. Again, the rhetoric - the narrative - that's going on in the public right now regarding renovictions taking place should not be taking place. Tenants have a process to follow, as do landlords.

LORELEI NICOLL: "The rhetoric in the public." Okay.

We know that rent caps incentivize renovictions. How are Nova Scotians expected to find affordable housing when investors are chasing them out of every affordable unit they can find. This "compassionate" government has lifted the ban on renovictions while maintaining the rent caps. This is a dangerous combination that is seeing vulnerable Nova Scotians on the street and losing the place they called home for over 30 years. I'll table that.

My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: This government is not offering any safety and stability to these Nova Scotians. Will you act now, with speed, on reinstating the renoviction ban? Housing is health care.

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, please allow me to take this opportunity to outline the process for all members, that all members voted in this Assembly last Fall. If tenants and landlords do not mutually agree to a renoviction process, then the landlord must apply to the Residential Tenancies Board, demonstrate the need for vacant possession, demonstrate that they need a building permit for the renovations. Again, Mr. Speaker, they are substantial renovations. It's not simply changing a window or light fixture.

That's why this government took action last Fall to bring tenant protections regarding compensation for tenants and penalties against landlords who do not follow this process. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

SNSIS - RENOVICTION BAN END: SENIOR PROTECTION - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, with the renoviction ban being lifted, seniors living in older affordable rental units are receiving eviction notices kicking them out of their homes, so they can be renovated and put back on the market - in some cases, for double the rent. In Dartmouth, a 62-year-old retired hospital worker who lives on a pension was renovicted twice from two different buildings - former units of \$700 and \$725 put back on the market for over \$1,400. I will table that document as well. My question for the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, it appears: With the renoviction ban

being lifted, how many more seniors and Nova Scotians will find themselves out of house and home as a result of this decision by the government?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I noted in my previous response, there is a process to follow. There was some question regarding the number of applications made since the ban was lifted last week. There were five applications made prior to the ban being lifted on the 21st. Since then, there were another seven. None of these applications have made it through the hearing process. As with any application to the Residential Tenancies process, there is a process to follow. Again, it is for substantial renovations to ensure the safety of the premises for all Nova Scotians.

THE SPEAKER: Before we go any further, it's been noted that some members are on their phones. I'm going to ask that that not happen during Question Period especially.

The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Right now, today, there are over 2,800 low-income seniors waiting for affordable housing. Even more concerning than that is that seniors were not mentioned once in the Premier's housing plan, and zero funds were earmarked for seniors on fixed incomes; of course, there are many. My question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: How many of the new 373 affordable units in Dartmouth will be earmarked for seniors?

JOHN LOHR: I would like to thank the member for that question. We are very concerned about housing across the spectrum and the 373 units that we have announced will be managed by the by the landlord when that time comes so that how the distribution of who lands there will be up to them. There is a requirement for the landlord to confirm the income level and manage that. Who actually ends up in those units in a year and a half, hopefully - a year, a year and a half from now when those units are built, it will be up to that.

As far as it goes, Mr. Speaker, in public housing we have a substantial program for seniors on multiple levels, including keeping seniors in their own homes, which is helping them with furnaces, and roofs and that. We have a substantial number of seniors in our public housing units. So we are doing a lot for seniors.

THE SPEAKER: I am going to ask once again that the questioners and the ministers please try their best to keep their responses and questions within somewhere near the time limit.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MAH: AFF. HOUSING UNITS DELIV. SHORTFALL - EXPLAIN

FRED TILLEY: In October, this government announced that they would be creating over 1,100 new affordable housing units, and I will table that. It gets better. In the Affordable Housing Commission's January progress update, the release states that this government will produce 1,139 more affordable housing units. And it does get better. However, yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing stated that the Province actually only plans on creating 714 affordable housing units. I will table that.

I know there are a lot of great mathematicians over there. Can the minister help me do the math here? How did this government go from promising 1,100 affordable housing units to 1,139 units, but now only delivering on 714?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I would just like to state there is no intention to mislead on the numbers. The numbers get stated one way or the other. The fact is, and again, right off the top of my head, I believe that we were creating in the initial announcement last Fall for \$35 million, which we have committed to the affordable housing Quick Starts program, which I will remind you was initially a \$25 million Quick Starts program but in the Fall we topped that up. The number was over 1,100, which included 425 rent supplements. I am very pleased to say that we are committing in this budget to 550 more rent supplements this year.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I did not realize that this government considered rental units and rent supplements to be the same thing. Units are where people live; supplements offset costs. There is a difference. The government committed to creating 1,100 new affordable housing units, which I previously tabled. When can Nova Scotians expect to see the 1,100-plus affordable housing units that they were promised?

JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the question. Again, yes, we have used those terms interchangeably. One of the benefits of rental supplements is that it provides people with a choice on where they want to live. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has the floor.

JOHN LOHR: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Look, we are deeply concerned about the housing crisis. We are acting at lightning speed here. We realize there was a lot that wasn't done. We are moving to correct things that had not been dealt with and have not been addressed and have not been done across the department and we are moving at lightning speed. We've announced new units. They should've been started four or five years ago. That's the reality.

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

FTB: PAYDAY LOANS HARM - ACKNOWLEDGE

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board. A recent national survey of ACORN members, and I'll table that, found that 80 per cent of respondents who took out a payday loan did so to meet everyday living expenses such as rent, groceries, utilities, or car repairs. These loans overwhelmingly impact people who are already financially vulnerable. In Nova Scotia, the maximum interest rates on payday loans are as high as 443 per cent. Does the minister agree that payday loans are predatory and harmful?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I can think of a young fellow at home who saw the commercial "\$300 for \$20," and thought: \$300 for \$20, that's a pretty good deal. The other thing I have noticed the last number of years is that there have been a lot more ads for people to get themselves out of debt. There are people who are trying to, I suppose, in some ways they might say help people. But there's no question that people who are suffering financially - there are people trying to get more money out of their pockets, and that does concern me.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotia has some of the highest rates of use of payday loans in the country. Statistics Canada found that at least one person in 5.5 per cent of households in the province had used a payday loan over the last three years compared to a national average of 3.4 per cent. Our party has long advocated for allowing credit unions, backed by the province, to fill some of these lending roles because they can do so in a far less harmful way. If the minister agrees that payday loans are harmful, will he also agree to adopt these important changes?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: The UARB held a hearing on payday loans on March 28th to review the payday loan industry. Every three years, Mr. Speaker, the board reviews the payday loan industry to ensure that the rates and rules are fair and up to date, and the board may decide to change the maximum cost of borrowing and other costs and requirements. We will certainly bring that back to the department and look into that further.

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

MAH: AFF. HOUSING DEFINITION - CLARIFY

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, the Affordable Housing Commission report is a great report. It defines affordable housing as costing no more than 30 per cent of a household's pre-tax income. I will table this. At an affordable housing announcement on Monday, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing defined affordable housing as units ranging in cost from 60 per cent to 80 per cent of average market rates, and I'll table that as well. There's a big difference between these definitions. My question to the minister is: Which definition is it? How does this government define affordable housing?

HON. JOHN LOHR: The reality is that affordability depends on where you're at. We're working across the spectrum of housing. I said just a few minutes ago that we're working very closely with seniors to keep them in their own homes. We're working at the other end of the spectrum with deeply affordable housing through things like announcing the Akoma and Souls Harbour projects and the North End Community Health Centre, the projects we've done with them. We're working very closely across the spectrum. There are those definitions. There are other definitions. It just depends on where you're at. We're working with Nova Scotians right across the housing spectrum.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, let me take him back to market rates, which are rising rapidly, meaning that under this government's definition, affordable housing prices will also rise rapidly. When asked what would happen if someone couldn't afford 60 per cent to 80 per cent of average market rent, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing stated that low-income earners could also apply for a provincial rent supplement, and I'll table that. Is the minister saying that in order to afford the Progressive Conservatives' affordable housing, you will also need to have a rental supplement?

JOHN LOHR: The reality is we're deeply concerned about affordability across the whole spectrum. We're working at lightning speed to do things that have not been done. It has been left behind by the previous administration, in my opinion. We're picking up where they didn't do it. We're reacting to that. The reality is that we realize the challenges. All of these programs are going to assist Nova Scotians. As I said previously, it should have been started three, four, five years ago. Supply is a huge factor and the lack of supply. We're working at lightning speed to address all those things.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

MAH: LACK OF HOUSING SUPP. FOR C.B. - ADDRESS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, the housing crisis exists in every corner of the province, from Yarmouth to Sydney. However, we are seeing heavy focus from this government on Halifax, despite the HRM already having the plans and existing tools in place to help address the issue. We know that in December there were close to 1,000 on the wait-list for housing under the Cape Breton Island Housing Authority alone. I will table that, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: When will Cape Breton see the same level of support of housing that has been given to Halifax?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I'd like to thank the member for that question, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say there are things we've done to address the housing crisis across the province, and I would agree. I've met with over half of our municipal units now in my role as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The housing crisis exists everywhere in the province, and we are working to address it.

We've announced \$916,000, I believe, on Monday and a number of those were to Cape Breton community groups. We made other announcements that have reached out into Cape Breton. We've announced \$400,000 in grants in the Fall to more community groups. We're doing a lot of things, Mr. Speaker, but we recognize there's more to do.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, it is wonderful to see the uptake of international students enrolling at Cape Breton University and the NSCC Marconi Campus. Given the housing crisis in the CBRM and the rise in the need for student housing in the area, why was Cape Breton excluded from this government's plan for new NSCC student residences?

JOHN LOHR: Again, as I will say, we are working at lightning speed to address all these crises. We realize there are needs across the province. We've had many different areas that have NSCC campuses also reach out to us that want them. We will address the housing crisis as we can. We've announced three new bills for NSCC, and we will continue to work on that, too.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

DPW: CHIG. ISTHMUS TEAM - CLARIFY

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The Chignecto Isthmus feasibility study was released to stakeholders on March 18th. The people were really happy to finally see the results of this \$700,000 study that was first started back in 2018. As we know here, the Chignecto Isthmus carries \$35 billion worth of goods through the trade corridor which goes through Cumberland County and the town of Amherst every year. It is being threatened due to rising sea levels as well as an increase in severe weather storms.

My question for the minister responsible for the Chignecto Isthmus is: Will there be a Nova Scotia team that includes local politicians, CN, Nova Scotia Power, and landowners? As well, will there be a communication plan that gives quarterly results to the local community?

HON. KIM MASLAND: It's too early to tell right now exactly what that list will look like. What I can tell the honourable member is that we certainly will be reaching out to stakeholders, like stakeholders have reached out previously when they were going through the study. Certainly, I would expect that community members and any stakeholders would be approached, and the Chignecto Isthmus will be discussed.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I know that at the meeting that we had on March 18th, CN was not invited to be part of that and hadn't been contacted in over two years. They were very concerned about their lack of inclusion in this, as well as local landowners who read the study felt there were some errors in the study.

I also was concerned about the lack of urgency at that meeting shared. There is a need right now to replace the aboiteau on the Musquash River, similar to the aboiteau that was replaced on the LaPlanche River about five years ago. We would love to see more urgency. Certainly, we do not want to see what happened in British Columbia happen here. My question to the minister is: Can the minister share, is there money earmarked in this budget? If not, when will we expect to see that?

KIM MASLAND: The aboiteau question specifically should be better addressed with the Minister of Agriculture. I certainly will take it back with the landowners and CN not being consulted. I certainly will take that back to the department to be discussed.

What I will tell the member is that we certainly understand the importance of this Chignecto Isthmus. We will continue to work with our federal counterparts and also our counterparts in New Brunswick transportation to make sure that we're expediting this project as we go forward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

MAH - FIRST-TIME HOME PURCHASE: PROHIBITIVE - ACTION

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians my age and younger are coming to the realization that owning a home - first-time home purchase - is becoming almost impossible. I spoke to somebody last week who said, "I've given up on it." I had a flyer in my mail yesterday about home prices in Bedford up \$150,000 on average in a year. This government has not provided any clear solutions to this huge pressing problem for young Nova Scotians. My question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: What is his department doing, if anything, to help young people looking to purchase their first home?

HON. JOHN LOHR: One of the things that we are doing is we have just recently announced the Executive Panel on Housing, nine special planning areas. We're taking part in - really in partnership with HRM, to work very closely with them to see the increase in supply. We recognize that this is fundamentally a supply issue. It's driven up housing prices in ways that we could have never expected. We're very cognizant of that, very concerned about that, and working hard to increase the supply of housing.

BRAEDON CLARK: I appreciate the minister's response. As I mentioned a couple of days ago, it is important that we have more housing supply. However, if the cost of housing is so out of control to begin with - and I don't think anybody expects it's going to go back to where it once was - the out-of-pocket costs for first-time home buyers are absolutely prohibitive. If you do not come from wealth, if you do not have parents who can gift you tens of thousands of dollars, I really don't know what you're supposed to do.

I would ask the minister: Has he given any real consideration to working with the federal or municipal governments on some out-of-pocket fees and taxes that could perhaps lessen the burden for first-time home buyers so that the dream of home ownership does not die for a generation of young people?

JOHN LOHR: I would like to say that I agree that home ownership is incredibly important. One of the things I did, which we did not announce at the time - last Fall, we increased the amount that first-time home buyers could apply for. We upped it in HRM, and we upped it across the province - in HRM from a \$280,000 to a \$300,000 home, and across the province from \$240,000, I believe, to \$280,000. We've increased those limits. We realize there is more to do, but we did that in the Fall. As I said, when I became minister, I realized that there were a lot of things waiting to be done, and we're addressing those. We're doing those things.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

SLTC - COST OF LIVING CRISIS - IMPACT ON SENIORS

HON. KELLY REGAN: The cost-of-living crisis is hitting our seniors hard. Seniors cannot make ends meet on their pensions with this increased cost of living. Many are actually returning to the workforce. In fact, Statistics Canada reports that over the last year, older workers have increased in both their labour force numbers and employment rates. I've tabled that. My question for the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care: How many more seniors will have to set aside their hard-earned retirements just to keep pace with this cost-of-living crisis?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I am pinch-hitting for the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care today. We have taken some steps to support seniors in living in their home with the \$500 grant to support them, making sure that (Applause) - ensuring that they do have some extra money in their pockets in order to have some renovations and things done in their home. I know if the minister were here, she would be able to outline several more topics for you, but unfortunately, I cannot yet.

KELLY REGAN: In this government's platform, they promised they would be there for seniors, but they've missed the mark on this one. It turns out the solutionists have no solutions to support our seniors during a cost-of-living crisis. There are no new programs, there are no new services, and there are no new incentives.

Mr. Speaker, not all seniors are ready for long-term care. Not all need home care. In fact, most seniors are still active and contributing to the economy, but they need some financial help now. My question for the minister: Why does the minister think dignity only applies when you're going into long-term care?

[2:45 p.m.]

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I don't think that is the attitude of this government at all. We have invested very heavily in health care and in seniors across the spectrum. I would disagree.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin on a new question.

SLTC - COST OF LIVING CRISIS - PLAN FOR SENIORS

HON. KELLY REGAN: We know times are tough for many Nova Scotians, especially for our seniors. One-third of seniors who rent or pay a mortgage are struggling to make ends meet. I'll table that. These seniors are having to make difficult decisions like whether to fill their grocery cart or make their mortgage payment.

Mr. Speaker, these seniors need help and they need it fast. So far, we're not seeing any solutions. Can the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care please indicate: Where is the plan to help seniors make ends meet in a cost of living crisis?

HON. JOHN LOHR: On behalf of the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care, I just want to point out that in housing we have very significant programs to help seniors stay in their own home. They are income-tested. They apply for them. We are focused very heavily on roofs and furnaces.

I want all members of the House to know that in October of this year - again something we didn't announce - we had my executive assistant on the housing say that we're short on our housing repair plan. We have people who have roofs that can't be fixed and I said we'll put more money in. We did in last year's budget and we will continue to do so. We'll continue to help people, seniors in particular, stay in their own homes.

KELLY REGAN: The Seniors Care Grant, and the program that the minister referenced and in which I have increased money to myself at times, are a drop in the bucket for what our seniors need now. It's a particular situation now. The program - the first one that the Minister of Health and Wellness mentioned - includes services like cooking and meal preparation support, but it does not include the cost of groceries. It includes lawn care or small home repairs, but it excludes the cost of housing. I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, the grant has had a low uptake - and I'll table that, as well. Only 29 per cent of eligible seniors have applied to receive assistance and there's \$30 million still on the table. Perhaps that's because seniors need help with necessities.

My question for whichever minister wants to answer it: What is the plan to get more money into the pockets of seniors now?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Our government took action last week when we invested \$6.7 million dollars to increase a one-time payment in the HARP - Heating Assistance Rebate Program. That means that Nova Scotians who are eligible under this program could get up to \$350 this year under this program. I remind all members of this House the program ends tomorrow, so encourage their constituents to apply.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DCS: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - ACTION DEMANDED

HON. DEREK MOMBORQUETTE: In Glace Bay, 72-year-old Mary has had to give up most things that she loves, from her favourite hobby to going to church, as she struggles against the rising price of food, gas, housing, and other services. I'll table that. We're in a cost of living crisis in this province. The cost of gas has increased 31 per cent. The cost of food has increased 7.3 per cent. The cost of shelter is almost 6 per cent higher. Helping our seniors can't be a one-off, one-time payment. We didn't see any help in the tabled "Solutions" budget yesterday.

My question to the Minister of Community Services: How many more seniors have to turn to food banks, default on their mortgage or rent payments, or miss payments on their utilities before this government acts?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: I really appreciate the question. No level of poverty in Nova Scotia is acceptable. We're all working hard to decrease the level of poverty in Nova Scotia. As my colleague mentioned, last week we did put out a \$13.2 million support package that would . . .

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

OPPOSITION MEMBERS' BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBORQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private Members' Public Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBORQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No.

Bill No. 97 - Social Safety Net Security Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: It's timely that we bring a bill forward. With the cost of living crisis, I believe this bill - entitled the Social Safety Net Security Act - is a compassionate bill. We hear that word a lot from the government, especially as they describe their budget. This bill will undoubtedly help a lot of people, especially people who need help the most, which is what I think we're all here for.

As Liberals, our caucus believes in increasing that safety net, and I think in the election campaign, the Progressive Conservatives very much tried to campaign to tell people that they believe in increasing that safety net too by supporting some of the programs that we put in place, like signing the Child Care Agreement, like the Pre-Primary Program that's in place, and the budget does speak to honouring those commitments, and acknowledging and accounting for the cost pressures for those programs, to fulfill those Liberal programs that were put in place.

It is in my view, and my belief in politics, that the first thing that governments should consider when there's occasion to spend is to help people, to expand that social safety net. We witness this happening right now nationally with the expansion of the dental care program, and the pharmacy program, now that all the provinces have finally signed on to the Child Care Agreement. Those are the next logical steps for us as a country, and I do believe that when the economy does well, or there's financial room presenting itself, that we have to target that precious public funding to people who need it.

We're asking, ultimately, that the government take a step and look at reviewing existing programs that we have in place, and help people, and act.

It was talked a lot about in Question Period today, the fact that people - unimaginable in the price increases today - that people are only able to get \$7,000 a year and try to make ends meet. I asked the question: Is a \$29,000 income for a single person living in a home the appropriate threshold? We talked a lot about HARP and the one-time payment that's going to be sent out to Nova Scotians.

Is that threshold still the appropriate one, given that that program was created years ago, long before these cost pressures come in place? Is the threshold for two-income people in a home just above \$40,000 appropriate for today? Is that enough support for people with their home heating costs? Can we agree that it is not, and that those income levels ought to be right-sized? In this case, in this bill, we are advocating a 30 per cent increase.

Can we not agree that the payment going to recipients in these programs needs a boost to keep up with the price that people are paying at the pump, that they're paying at the grocery store, with heating costs, rent, which is escalating, and pretty well everything

else? Did we not just go through a campaign that was in large part about who could spend more? Did we not see an increase in federal transfers recently with the budget update, which put the last budget, our budget, into surplus?

We have population growth, we have GDP that's growing because of population growth, and more provincial revenue. The government and the ministers are the only ones who can take this on and make this happen. The most pressing objective for the government in a cost of living crisis needs to be how you ensure people don't fall farther behind. I see no urgency or compassion to do that.

I know this bill won't be supported, but I do sincerely hope it highlights the need to review these programs to my colleagues. Different thresholds for different programs. You might want to increase some more than others, but they need to change. We are in a vastly different scenario than we were even when we were last in government. Since the new government came in power, we've had multiple waves of the pandemic, we now have record inflation, and the highest fuel costs ever.

The argument that we should have done more - I'm sorry, but circumstances have changed. Not giving any increase to income assistance right now is effectively a de facto cut to families who are on income assistance.

Here's what the government decided to do to mitigate this being pointed out before their budget increased: a one-time \$150 payment to those on income assistance. So let's juxtapose that with the \$100 payment we made monthly to people who need it the most - and they need more. That's an easy way you can measure the way we view our most vulnerable people, and what support our government thought they needed at that time, and what support this government thinks they need: a one-time payment sent out in a flurry of March-madness spending.

The fact is, most vulnerable people need sustained assistance, not a one-time payment. They need enhancements to these dear programs to reflect today's reality.

The middle class also needs help. We've mentioned BC and Quebec. There are other provinces that we've recently seen act - New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador. They're sending out cheques to people who are incurring that cost - at the pump especially - for people at less than \$100,000. In BC's case, it's for everyone who has vehicle insurance.

What I would say is, yes, the war in Ukraine - and the Premier mentions all the externalities that are occurring across the country - is out of his control. But people need that help and we see other jurisdictions that have the capacity to act - and they should.

A one-time fee should be considered for the middle class, but the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable, our neighbours, need structural increases to the programs. It's

not just the war in Ukraine that's causing poverty in this country, child poverty in this province. I would say the pandemic certainly revealed inequalities more than ever and we need some help.

I can't help but think that this government cares more about the demographics that vote than what the primary duty of government ought to be. That is, in my view, to be there for people who don't have the type of influence or means to lobby the government or donate to political parties.

That's why we increased income assistance. It wasn't about votes. We know that many people on income assistance are disenfranchised and don't vote. Even though we were on the verge of an election, it was the right thing to do. When we looked - I personally asked what the largest increase our province had was. I know we were falling behind, and it wasn't near enough to match that - I think it was \$20 - so I looked across the whole country to find what the highest was.

It was British Columbia, that I found, as my honourable friend mentioned. The first act the government did when Premier Horgan came in was increase income assistance by \$100. I said that if BC can do it, surely to God, Nova Scotia can do it.

I acknowledge that this bill won't help attract more votes for the governing party. It certainly won't help with their base - and maybe that's the real issue here - but that's why this is the first bill that this caucus is bringing forward on our Opposition Day in this session. We believe that in the middle of a cost of living crisis we need action.

Since the government doesn't feel the need to address the affordability issues in their documents they tabled yesterday, we will continue to make it our unrelenting priority for low income and for middle-class hard-working Nova Scotians. For right now, I'm asking the government to do the right thing and help people.

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

KENDRA COOMBES: Madam Speaker, no one in this House would disagree that Nova Scotia's social safety net is inadequate. It is a fact. We're all familiar with the statistics: one in five children living in poverty in Nova Scotia, one in three in Cape Breton. If memory serves, about one in five seniors are also living in poverty in Cape Breton. It's absolutely shameful.

As my colleague for Halifax Needham shared yesterday, there are at least 50,000 Nova Scotian families in core housing need. Even without statistics, every MLA in this House is well aware that there are many people slipping through the cracks. Our constituency offices see and hear from them every day: people who are living paycheque to paycheque, people who can't afford to buy groceries and keep the lights on, and people who can't find a place to live.

[3:00 p.m.]

Speaking of places to live, in my constituency, I hear of people who are living in conditions with black mould creeping up their walls. There is rain spilling through their roofs, snow coming in from under the doors. There are people in my constituency living in shelters or couch-surfing - essentially homeless.

A recent CBC article reported that more Nova Scotians are turning to food banks as the cost of living rises in our province. Between August 2021 and January 2022, Feed Nova Scotia saw a 50 per cent increase in new people approaching food banks. I will table that.

Nobody should have to rely on food banks to receive their groceries or to put food on their table. What Nova Scotians need is a raise. They need help. They need so much more than what this government is giving them.

Having a full-time job is no guarantee to making ends meet today in Nova Scotia, certainly not with the minimum wage that is about to hit \$13.35 an hour. We know from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that a living wage in our province ranges from \$18 to \$22 an hour. Their release said that regionally, living wage rates are: \$21.30 for Annapolis Valley, that is Annapolis, Kings and Hants Counties; \$18.45 for Cape Breton, that is Cape Breton, Inverness, Richmond and Victoria Counties; \$22.05 for Halifax, Halifax County; \$19.20, in the northern area - that's Antigonish, Colchester, Cumberland, Guysborough and Pictou Counties; \$21.00 an hour in the southern area - that is Digby, Lunenburg, Queens, Shelburne and Yarmouth Counties. I will table that.

The CCPA has weighed in on the Progressive Conservative's budget and has found it lacking in overall strategy to address income inequalities and the cost of living. Director Christine Saulnier said, and I quote, "What does it say when one income tax cut that has no evidence that it will make any difference will cost as much as \$100 million, which is roughly equal to the combined and critically important investments in affordable housing, the Nova Scotia Child Benefit and support for persons with disabilities?"

In the words of Lesley Frank, primary author of the *2021 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia*, families are in deep poverty in our province, needing many thousands of dollars more per year to reach the poverty line.

Catherine Leviten-Reid, a CCPA Nova Scotia researcher and associate, and CBU professor, whom I have had the privilege of working with, wrote:

"It could have addressed the housing crisis by making a significant investment in permanent, actual affordable housing instead of continuing to subsidize those who use housing for profit-maximizing. This investment goes furthest if it is in the non-profit,

community-based sector that has been doing the heavy lifting for decades and not in 20-year deals with the private sector.”

I will table that. Thousands of dollars away from reaching the poverty line is what was said. That’s just reaching it - reaching the poverty line. That’s just to get them at the line where they’re not really considered in poverty - but are in poverty. Never mind enjoying a decent quality of life or - heaven forbid - thriving. Bread and roses, Madam Speaker, bread and roses. (Interruption)

I don’t know, Madam Speaker, if that was funny or not. I mean, we all need bread, and we all need roses in our lives - but that’s just it.

Thousands of people in our province are not thriving, and we’re paying the price in health care costs. Even as the Progressive Conservatives throw resources at fixing health care, the CCPA knows - and we in the NDP know - that health outcomes are directly linked to the state of our social safety net. We in the Opposition find ourselves needing to propose ways to compensate for this lack of strategy, ways to improve government’s response to the cost of living and the affordability crisis that we are in.

What my friends in the Liberal caucus are proposing is sprinkling measures to lighten the load for some people. There’s nothing wrong with that. There’s nothing wrong with it at all, but it only scratches the surface of a much deeper problem. To borrow a phrase from our Leader, Gary Burrill - I’m sorry, Madam Speaker, the member for Halifax Chebucto - it’s a problem that has political origins and political solutions.

What the moment calls for is not tinkering with Nova Scotia’s safety net but a broad and comprehensive strategy for eliminating poverty in Nova Scotia. That is what we must strive for. That is what we must do, a comprehensive strategy for the elimination of poverty once and for all. Poverty is an income problem, and that is a fact. One hundred per cent of people in Nova Scotia who rely on the government for income live far below the poverty line.

A serious approach to eliminating poverty needs to look at household budgets and where things aren’t adding up: wages; household bills, including power bills; housing costs, mortgages and rent; energy efficiency in people’s homes; and access to affordable, healthy food. One of the biggest problems, if you have ever experienced living paycheque to paycheque, if anyone has ever experienced living on the poverty line or under the poverty line, is that it is very difficult to be able to afford healthy food. Therefore, how can you expect to stay healthy if you can’t even afford to buy the food - the nourishment - that will make you healthy?

Access to paid sick days to prevent income loss - Madam Speaker, if people are living paycheque to paycheque, how can we expect them to stay home sick when they can’t afford it? They just simply can’t afford it. When government and Public Health say please

stay home when you are sick, the reality is that people can't do that. They can't afford it. It means a pay loss.

Progressive Conservatives and Liberals have historically taken a poverty-management approach rather than a poverty-elimination approach. The difference in the NDP approach, in our value system, is that we do not see poverty as a necessary fact of life. We don't think, oh, it is what it is. It is not our aim to replace the harsh reality of income inequality with a kinder, gentler version of that.

Of course people need and deserve relief, but we are fooling ourselves in this House if we think that a small tweak here and a slight adjustment there is going to make up for the decades of legislated suffering, Madam Speaker. So yes, we have to improve our social safety net, but let's be honest about what it is really going to take and let's commit to making long-term structural changes to provide every Nova Scotian with a dignified existence.

Let's work to eliminate poverty. Let's strive for it once and for all in our Province of Nova Scotia. No longer a tweak here and an adjustment there, but real systemic, institutional change. That is what is needed in this province. That is what we must strive for every day in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Community Services.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Before I begin my comments, I just want to make a correction on one of the facts that came from one of the colleagues across the aisle when they - it's incorrect. It is not one in five children who live in poverty. It is actually one in nine. That is the most current Market Basket Measure that has been taken. So, one in nine. I give credit, actually, to the Liberal party for helping to get to that number.

One of the things that you are not going to hear from me is that I am not going to point fingers at who is to blame for poverty. As I mentioned yesterday, we all should be bearing the shame of the crisis we are in with regard to poverty in Nova Scotia, but a lot of great work has been done in the last eight years. I think we all smiled the day that we heard that there was a \$100 increase for individuals on income assistance.

I could stand here and say well, it took eight years - that gets us nowhere. Why would we bother belabouring the past on this? We have to work together to try to solve this. Believe me, I lie awake at night thinking about this. It's going to take all levels of government and it's going to take individuals to help. There are a lot of individuals helping as well but I just want to thank the member for introducing this bill.

It's an important bill. It's a Private Member's Bill and again, just to indicate that it is the Social Safety Net Security Bill and our government does believe in a strong social safety net and to improve the lives of honourable families and individuals experiencing

poverty. This goes beyond income to a range of different programs and policies that build security and inclusion for Nova Scotians.

[3:15 p.m.]

As mentioned earlier, poverty is a very complex issue, and I am learning more and more each day. It is frequently intergenerational and systemic. It is often rooted in trauma, racism, or issues relating to mental health and addictions. I want everyone in this Chamber to know that this government and myself, personally - we are totally committed to trying to reduce poverty.

I see the member for Halifax Atlantic across the aisle shaking his head. I guess he doesn't believe that I am sincere in wanting to reduce poverty, but I am. That's why, again, I mention I am not pointing fingers at anyone because anyone who wants to join the team in helping, we need you. We need you as government and we need you as individuals helping.

As outlined in my mandate letter, as Minister of Community Services, I will work across all departments to establish a five-year target for the reduction of childhood poverty in Nova Scotia. The most recent data from the Canadian Income Survey shows there has been a notable improvement in the Nova Scotia child poverty rate since 2019. Nova Scotia has the fifth-lowest child poverty rate in the country, down to 5.5 per cent in 2020, compared to 10.9 per cent in 2019, and down from 20.7 per cent in 2015. Again, Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, a lot of that is credit to the Liberal Party - and I have no problem giving credit where credit is due.

I share this data with the caution that the numbers have been affected by the income supports provided, though, by the federal government through COVID-19 relief programs. Putting more money in the hands of low-income families is the most immediate way to reduce childhood poverty. This is why our government is adding an additional \$12.5 million in funding for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit for families with low incomes below \$34,000. When fully implemented by the end of 2023-24, this will result in total funding of approximately \$16.6 million.

This benefit is a tax-free, monthly payment to families to help with the cost of raising children who are 18 years of age and younger. This increase will mean that families with a household income below \$26,000 will receive \$1,275 per year per child. For families with income between \$26,000 and \$34,000, the increase is \$1,275 for the first child and \$637 for the additional child. This is an important increase for families to help them deal with the rising costs of meeting basic needs and to help ensure their children can participate in school activities like any other child in Nova Scotia.

We acknowledge, Madam Speaker, how the rising cost of fuel has impacted the cost of transportation, home heating, food, and basic goods. Current global events have

introduced significant issues to dealing with this crisis. Basically, what's happening globally is that basic living is being driven up, and we have to ensure that we are looking at child poverty as well as all individuals and all demographics.

As a direct result of this, our government is providing \$13.2 million to vulnerable Nova Scotians to help them address these costs. The support package announced last week includes a one-time payment of \$150 to all current income assistance recipients, including Disability Support Program participants receiving income support. This means a single parent on income assistance with three children would receive \$600.

Payments were processed yesterday and are being distributed by direct deposit or cheque. Within days, those funds will be arriving in the mail or in the bank accounts of Nova Scotians. This investment will assist 35,416 people who rely on income assistance and 2,794 Disability Support Program clients.

We are also helping Nova Scotians heat their homes with an additional payment of \$150 to all recipients of the Heating Assistance Rebate Program. This is in addition to the standard rebate of up to \$200. This is a huge help for more than 45,000 households who saw their heating bills rise with the cost of oil. That payment is expected to be made by the end of April.

We are also making sure our food banks are able to meet the needs of vulnerable Nova Scotians. A total of \$1.2 million will be distributed across the province to 140 banks. Again, this comes at a crucial time and we are responding to that need. As well, over \$200,000 is given out to 10 or 12 other food banks that are not associated with Feed Nova Scotia.

My department also has a role when it comes to housing Nova Scotians. Through the integrated action plan, government was able to provide eviction prevention and diversion funding directly to community agencies. This funding is for one-time financial interventions to prevent a loss of housing. Funding for this initiative was made available to Shelter Nova Scotia, Cape Breton Community Housing Association, and the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre to deliver directly to clients.

In addition, early this year, service providers in eight communities across the province were each given \$20,000 for a one-time financial intervention to prevent loss of housing and support access to safe housing, including emergency hotel stays.

We trust community agencies to make decisions that make sense in individual circumstances. I can tell you they are making a difference. The use of the money is flexible in order to meet immediate clients' needs. For example, this could be a car repair if a family is worried about losing their housing to pay for repairs to a car, and other instances that would come up that we may not think about. Investments in our youth are fundamental to breaking the cycle of poverty that manifests generation after generation. We know that

there are a number of measures required to help children in low-income families. We all want everyone to achieve success.

Within the Employment Support Services program, young people are supported through many programs to meet their needs - whether it be social, mental health, or finding employment. These programs are successful, Madam Speaker, and many are using them. They have access to skills upgrading, training, education, and job opportunities to help them achieve the independence that they are all seeking.

To strengthen our commitment to young people, the province is investing an additional \$415,000 to expand the Africentric Youth Development Initiative. This is a great project that we're very proud of and such a worthy investment. This began as a pilot project in 2020 and was extended throughout 2021-22 and will now become a permanent program because of its success, as well as projects under the Africentric Youth Development Initiative that were designed by the communities that deliver them in partnership with the Association of Black Social Workers.

The program continues to be a huge success and has supported more than 500 youth, well exceeding our expectations of reaching 200 people a year. These programs help eliminate barriers so that our youth and our clients can get the life skills, education, and work experience they need to succeed. We are committed to helping young people build connections to community, build self-confidence, develop a career path and live full and prosperous lives.

Another example is the EDGE Program. It's now in its fourth year, which has been expanded to Bridgewater, New Glasgow, Sydney, and North End Halifax. With this expansion, the program has capacity to reach 300 young adults each year. This job search and readiness program is for young adults 18-26 who receive Employment Support and Income Assistance. It also reaches youth transitioning out of care and youth at risk of attachment to Income Assistance. Additionally, the program has expanded to include integrated mental health support - so very important.

This opportunity to build community and peer connections, develop life and leadership skills, and gain practical work experience positions young adults for career success and independence. It is critical that youth see the possibilities and know they can make a future for themselves.

One of the other programs that is very exciting is through our Educate to Work program for dependants. We cover half the cost of tuition and 100 per cent of the cost of books, fees, and health and dental to dependants of ESIA clients who want to study at the Nova Scotia Community College anywhere in Nova Scotia. This year 26 dependants of people on income assistance have received financial support to study at Nova Scotia Community College. We are incredibly optimistic about the long-term impact it will have

on supporting these youth to attain their career goals, many of whom are the first in their family to ever attend post-secondary school.

Another example is our Career Rising program. Dependants of our clients receiving income assistance or disability support, and youth who are in care can gain work experience and explore careers within their community and save for post-secondary education through the Career Rising program. As I've outlined, income is a crucial component when it comes to addressing poverty but in itself it is insufficient. The full picture includes early childhood care, education, employment, food, housing, and inclusion. Our programs reflect this.

We know there is so much more work to be done. I'm not lost on that by any means. It's through the spirit of conversation with colleagues in this Chamber, through stakeholders, through service providers, employees at DCS, friends, that I'm learning more and more about child poverty.

In closing, I want to just say I will work really, really hard on this five-year plan that the Premier has mandated me to try to reduce poverty in Nova Scotia. Again, as I said in my opening message, I'm not going to ever stand in my place and point my fingers across the aisle and say that it could have been done - by the Liberals or the NDP. They tried their best and I'm going to try my best and I hope you will all help.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Good to see you up there, Madam Speaker. Thirteen billion dollars is all we keep hearing over and over from the Premier. And none of that \$13 billion is going back into the hands and pockets of Nova Scotians - even though it's their money.

They're acting like they're doing this great service for Nova Scotians by spending \$13 billion of Nova Scotians' money. Nova Scotians' money that is being spent. I heard the government over there. They just stood up and they said: courage, it's going to take courage, it's going to take courage. You know what's going to take courage? What would have taken courage is voting for a budget that gave people on income assistance a \$100 raise instead of voting against it. The members over there, when they were in Opposition, voted against a budget that would give people on income assistance the largest increase in Nova Scotia history. There's no explanation for that. They just act like it didn't happen.

What else will take courage is - actually, instead of standing here and quoting all these numbers and facts that, quite frankly - I just heard the government say \$1.2 million for food banks. Sounds shiny. Sounds nice. It's less than \$1,000 per food bank, which for most of them isn't even their rent. Isn't even their rent.

I'm going to take the response from the government and I'm going to pull it off Hansard. I'm going to have the video and I'm going to show people in my community, and

other people I talk to who are living with poverty, and I'm going to show them the response about "we know there's more to do, we know we haven't done enough, we have all these programs, maybe you should go get educated" - because that's what I kept hearing. Here are these programs to get educated. These are things we're doing. Go get educated. Go get educated and you'll get a better job. We heard that over and over and over. It's a bit of a theme.

[3:30 p.m.]

There's lots of time for the members to speak, and both ministers, if they want to get up, there'll be time.

I hear things like stakeholders and political and bureaucratic terms. But do you know what I didn't hear? When I went to the homeless encampments here in HRM and across this province, you know what I didn't hear? Nobody over there visited them. The Minister of Community Services has chirped me twice. If you want to release your schedule of when you actually went there, I'll be glad to look at it. I spoke to the people on the ground. I spoke to volunteers. I spoke to the people working there and do you know what they said? No one.

In fact, we sat here in this Legislature and we heard them talk about how they were going to deal with homelessness in the Fall. The Premier's expression was, Winter's coming. Don't worry. We'll deal with it. Those people lived through the Winter in tents and there wasn't a place for them to go. But you know what? We'll get to it. That's what I told them. Don't worry, the government's going to get to it. They'll get to it.

The other solution that they have is one-time payments. Do you know what's not one-time? Month over month living with poverty. That's not one-time. It's not. It's very clear what this government promised and what it delivered in their historic and compassionate budget. A 4 per cent increase in health care. Historic increase in health care.

If you're so concerned about health care, do you know what else is good for health care? Eating healthy. Having a roof over your head. Not living in poverty. There is nothing in this budget to address it. (Interruption) This is the third time. The third time I've been interrupted by the government.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic has the floor.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Madam Speaker, the solutions budget - the compassionate document that they put forward - has nothing in it. I'm going to tell the government what \$150 gets you: less than a full cart of groceries for a family of two or one at Sobeys or No Frills. When's the last time you went grocery shopping? You know what they're going to do? The leader of the third party knows. He should stand up; he'll give you all the prices. (Applause) When's the last time you bought chicken?

What's going to happen, and I know that the minister's heart is in the right place. I know the minister. I know that she's going to fight long and hard. I know that we fought long and hard to get that \$100 increase. The minister and this government could've done that and more. The solutions that they put forward were supposed to be historic. I can tell you, it has been a historic disappointment. The fact that they cannot connect poverty to health care is mind-blowing.

There is nothing for people with Type 1 diabetes. Nothing for people, seniors who will have to deal with hearing aids - nothing. Nothing for seniors' Pharmacare. Nothing to increase Community Services and the funding that they get - and I challenge each and every one of you to try to live off \$7,000 a year. You cannot do it. You cannot do it.

Do you know what happens when you have a family living on less than - in poverty? Those kids don't get to play hockey. You know what they don't get? They don't get to play sports. They don't get the same opportunities that everybody else gets because they can't afford it.

A lot of times you have both parents working. So, both parents are working, kids are left home alone, and all of that is gone. So the base that those children have, and I am speaking from experience, not just as the MLA but as to what I've been through - I've talked about it a lot and I am not going to get into it in this Legislature about it - but you are that far behind. Those children start that far behind. Those families start that far behind, and they are proud people. They are proud people.

I heard the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services and the Minister of Community Services comment about - do you know what? Renovictions. There have only been five applications on renovictions. I heard - earlier that was the comment that was made - I heard it and I'll tell you, come to my community. Come to some of the members over here, committee.

Look in your own communities and ask people: Are you being renovicted? Are you being kicked out? They will tell you straight out, yes. Well, why aren't you going to Service Nova Scotia? First of all, I don't have the time. Second of all, I have children. Third of all, I don't have the flexibility that you guys have. I'm not working a nine to five job. I'm working two jobs to support my children, to support myself, so you can tell me when I can go there.

On top of it, they feel like they are up against a system - a monster. They are so afraid - the people whom I have spoken to - to go up against these landlords because guess what? These landlords own thousands and thousands of units right across Nova Scotia. So, what's going to happen? The member from wherever owns an apartment building. I get kicked out of that apartment building. They own a whole bunch over here. Guess what's going to happen? You are not going there. They are going to talk to their friends. We saw

that online. There was a Facebook group that was blackballing and blocking saying, don't rent to this person.

We saw that online and I think - again, I have a lot of respect for the Minister of Community Services. We came in together. I know. We came in together in 2013. I know. Listen, we have had lots of great conversations, but the truth of the matter is as the cost of living is going up, as the cost for rent is going up, it is your department that is going to be impacted the most. It is the people you represent and are supposed to fight for and support who are going to be impacted the most.

Hartlen Avenue in my community had an apartment building that was \$600 a month - \$650 to \$800 depending, a single- to a two-bedroom. Boom. Everyone gets booted out. That was renovations during COVID-19 by the way, but the tenants were afraid to say anything. Those are \$2,000 units now. They are \$2,000 units.

It is happening everywhere, so where do we expect them to go? Especially when they are looking toward government who gives them the money to survive day to day and they say, we aren't giving you any more. We are not giving you any more. That's it. You're done.

I think one of the members - I think it was the member for Dartmouth South, one of them over there from the beautiful third party, the great third party, suggested maybe tying it to inflation - or was it the Leader of the NDP? They said to tie it to inflation, that that would be the easiest thing you could do and you'd never hear us complaining about this again.

I see a lot of eyes being rolled. I mean, come on. But imagine being an individual on income assistance and you know that the price of everything is going to go up 5.9 per cent and you don't have to worry because you're going to get that money.

What you're doing right now - for all the yelling and the back and forth, what you are actually doing is, you're cutting. That's what's happening right now. You are cutting the ability for them to pay. You're cutting the ability for them to live. You're cutting the ability for them to eat, and you're cutting into them, and it's not fair.

There's a reason why people get so upset and they say politicians are out of touch and politicians have such a bad name, because you say one thing and you do another. I sat over there for seven years and listened to members say, when we get over there, we're going to do better; we're going to do much better right away.

At first I was like, yes, you know, they're over there and I'm going to see. Things seem to be moving at the speed of light over there. But it was just a lot of words. It was a lot of programs that had already been in place - let's be honest - that you re-upped and you

ripped the name off and you put your own name on. Which is fine - that's what happens, right?

Again, I challenge you to take what was said by the government about income assistance and people in our social nets and play it to them, and just see first-hand how they would react to what was said - wait and see, it's coming, we'll think about it, they're doing fine, \$12 million, \$3 million, \$5 million, \$14 million, all these numbers. They're shiny and they're nice, but none of them are trickling down to people who need it the most and none of them are trickling down to working-class families and middle-class families.

I actually heard the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and I called in. He was on *The Todd Veinotte Show* a couple of months back. He had just been freshly minted as the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, and what did he say? He said: Well, I don't know about the better business guarantee; I don't know if it's going to happen; I don't know when it's going to happen. Well, Mr. Finance and Treasury Board Minister, this was one of your big promises.

Listen, it's complicated. Well, it didn't seem complicated during the election. No, no. "Well, when do you think it's going to come?" "I don't know, it could be years from now. I don't know. We'll give them a better paycheque years from now. I don't know, we'll figure it out."

I'll give the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board - I'm not an accountant, as your leader reminded me of last sitting, but I'll tell you this: there's a way to put money back into people's pockets, and it's not giving money to companies and corporations and saying, please give it to them, please give it to your employees. It's cutting taxes. It's getting rid of fee after fee. It's taking that money that you are taking out of their pocket to build your beautiful \$13 billion budget that does nothing for Nova Scotians and putting it back in their pockets.

I hope that the Minister of Community Services is sincere when she said she wants to work with us, because I know, speaking to people, that there are lots of ideas out there.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South, with seven minutes left.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to rise and say a few words about this bill. I would say that we support the spirit of this bill, if not necessarily every detail of the content.

I do want to say why I think something like this bill is a good idea. Since I am addressing my remarks mostly to the government, who get to be the final arbiters of the passage of legislation in this Chamber, I'll make a health care analogy, because we want to talk about health care.

To me, the \$13 billion, the money that has been quickly deployed to help folks with the cost of living - I would say that that is a band-aid, and band-aids are important. If you're bleeding, you need a bandage - you can't just walk around bleeding. Often though, if you're bleeding and you need to be bandaged, you really ought to go into an emergency room and figure out what's actually wrong.

I think that this is one of many examples, actually, in the budget, and in the announcements we've seen from this government of an approach toward an issue which does offer a remedy - there is some action taken - but it's a band-aid. It's not a surgery.

What we often stand up and talk about over here is the need for systemic solutions to systemic problems, and when we're talking about poverty, that is the ultimate systems failure, and it rests on all of our shoulders. We have the power in this Chamber to change the course of people's lives, and we do it every day, but I would argue there's nowhere more important for us to take that responsibility seriously than when we're dealing with people who are living right at the edge. I think that's what we're talking about here.

At the risk of digressing in a slightly boring way, I would just say that often we heard the government, when in Opposition, use the analogy that government finances are like household finances, and we need to make sure we're not overspending, et cetera, et cetera. The reality is that government spending actually isn't like household spending. In a household, you don't suddenly discover that you're sitting on an extra billion dollars in January or February. I mean, I wish that that would happen in my household, but it won't. It won't in any of our households, because governments have massive budgets and they're somewhat unpredictable.

That allows for what we've seen, which sometimes we criticize, but also, we acknowledge as slippage or March Madness - extra spending that happens when there are extra dollars. I won't make a comment on the deployment of those dollars. They were there and they've been spent, and we like the way some of those dollars have been spent, and we're not so thrilled with the way that some of those other ones have. Thank you for Lake Banook, by the way. Very happy to see canoes and kayaks supported.

That doesn't actually address the problem long-term. Inflation rises, the cost of living is rising. So when we talk about what can be done, yes, in a five-year plan, I'm sure lots of ideas can come from a five-year plan, but if we're in the emergency room, in terms of affordability, which so many Nova Scotians are - there are actually systemic surgeries that can happen quickly.

Again, at the risk of praising my colleagues in the Liberal Party, I will say that I do think the \$100-a-month increase to income assistance is an example of that, and I spoke to that last year in my response to that budget, and I'll say it again: That is an example of a government acting quickly with a systemic solution. That changed permanently - or at least somewhat permanently - people's situation.

Indexing income assistance rates would do the exact same thing. That could happen - I don't know about tomorrow, but it could definitely happen quickly. It's not a hodgepodge, it's not a one-time, it's not a help-right-now, it's a common-sense approach.

We often talk about the minimum wage, and there is an independent committee that is looking at the minimum wage. We still feel like we need to move to a living wage more quickly. This is another example like that. We in this Chamber have the power to change people's lives, and we have the power to pull people out of poverty. Not only do we have the power to do that, but we have the responsibility to do that. I would urge the government: If not this bill, please listen to some of the ideas that have been put forward today.

To the Minister of Community Services, without any criticism of the money that has gone out the door, I think we are talking apples and oranges in a way. We're talking about, yes, what needs to happen right now. The government is taking some action, and that's good, but that is not long-term action, it is one-time action.

Food banks shouldn't actually exist. We need to support them when they're really needed, but we need to also make them not need to exist anymore. That's our job. I would urge the government to look at these systemic problems to really try to come up with systemic solutions. We are available to talk about that at any time.

I thank the members of the Official Opposition for bringing this bill forward, and I hope that we will continue to have more fulsome debate on these topics in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 100.

Bill No. 100 - Municipal Government Act

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

LORELEI NICOLL: Thank you for the opportunity to stand today to discuss this bill and consider looking at the deed transfer tax exemption for first-time home buyers.

I've long felt the need that this needs to be explored as an option for first-time home buyers. This bill has the opportunity to truly make a difference for those in our province looking to buy their first home, whether they are young or old. This bill attempts to address the exemption of deed transfer taxes for those who are purchasing their first home, a bill modelled after other provinces such as P.E.I. and Ontario.

Purchasing your first home is a huge milestone in anyone's life, an achievement that for some can take many years in the making through saving up or finally finding some

way to find that perfect house that comes on the market. Buying a home today in Nova Scotia is becoming increasingly difficult, regardless of whether you're a first-time home buyer, or you've owned a home for years, or are looking to grow your family or downsize your space.

It's more common now than not for houses to see intense bidding wars driving up the selling price drastically above what was originally being asked - well over assessed market value, making the price unaffordable for even those who initially made offers on it. The price of housing in all parts of this province is skyrocketing, and although we can hope that they will plateau, the Nova Scotia Association of Realtors has warned that we will likely not see these prices decrease, as Nova Scotia's catching up with the rest of the country in the housing crisis.

Although we are only three months into 2022, the average sale price of houses this year is already approximately \$409,000. When purchasing a home, we must remember that not only do the buyers have to make a down payment, but they are also faced with countless other fees and taxes required to secure the purchase of their home. Unfortunately, these fees and taxes cannot be absorbed into the mortgage of the home, as they are administrative fees. On top of a 5 per cent down payment, home buyers must also pay lawyer fees, home inspection fees, appraisal fees, and deed transfer taxes, which is what this bill hopes to address today.

After a down payment, deed transfer taxes are the largest lump sum expense paid upon purchasing a home. In Nova Scotia, municipalities have the option to set a deed transfer tax between zero per cent and 1.5 per cent. Most municipalities hover around 1 to 1.5 per cent, but jurisdictions such as Kentville and Kings County have opted out of this additional tax, not charging home buyers this fee upon purchasing a home.

For example, with the average price of a home in Nova Scotia currently standing at approximately \$409,000, this would mean that on top of the down payment, the home buyer must pay the respective municipality potentially around \$6,000 in deed transfer fees. This is a one-time fee that must be paid upon purchasing a home and must be paid within days or else the buyer will face potential penalties from their respective municipality.

I took a look on Realtor.ca and found a beautiful three-bedroom, two-bathroom home in Porters Lake, Nova Scotia, listed for \$409,000, the average price for a home. Let's break down the math - the 5 per cent down payment costs \$20,450; lawyers' fees cost around \$1,000; title insurance costs \$400; home inspection and appraisal fees could cost \$700; and, lastly, the deed transfer tax on this HRM home would cost \$6,135.

The total cash on hand required to purchase this average family home in Nova Scotia would cost close to \$30,000, and this doesn't even include the act of moving. Mr. Speaker, we are in a cost of living crisis. We've heard that many times, and we are very

well aware. I don't know many folks, especially those looking to purchase their first home, who have \$30,000 on hand.

Nova Scotians are used to fleeing the province after graduating from university to find a job. But now our job market is booming, and our previous government has shown young people that Nova Scotia is a wonderful place to live. Now we have the opposite problem, where people want to stay and have a life here, but there's nowhere for them to live.

This government seems very eager to attract and retain young people, which is always something I have advocated for. With a goal to grow Nova Scotia's population to two million, and a tax exemption for trade workers under 30, I would encourage this government to support this bill, which would serve as a practical tool in incentivizing young people to stay and lay their roots in this province. This would directly support the goal that we are already striving for.

What I need to emphasize is that this bill would not remove the deed transfer tax in its entirety. As a former councillor, I understand how the revenues generated by this tax and these fees can be necessary to operate and run municipalities' infrastructure and services. However, in the grand scheme of things, the revenue generated solely by the taxes of first-time home buyers would make a small difference in the overall revenues of municipalities but would make a huge difference in the lives of those looking to create a life for themselves in this province. What is the greater cost to this government - taxes lost on a small percentage of home purchases or the economic impact of people packing up and leaving Nova Scotia to go elsewhere to find affordable housing?

Recently announced, this government has introduced an additional provincial deed transfer tax for those who purchase homes in Nova Scotia but do not live here. The point of this additional tax is to hopefully slow the market down and help maintain housing affordability for Nova Scotians.

Mr. Speaker, this bill I'm discussing today would also help tackle the affordability issue. The extra revenues generated by this additional provincial deed transfer tax could help municipalities offset any revenue lost from waiving it for first-time home buyers. It makes perfect sense.

We need to be creative and find ways to incentivize people to stay in Nova Scotia, whether big or small. This bill is a small way that we can help people land on their feet. It's a policy that realtors around the province have been advocating for for years. I urge this government to support this bill and help make life more affordable for young people in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SUZY HANSEN: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. As I have said before, we all seem to be in agreement that we need to address the issue of housing affordability. What we may not agree on is the best way to do that.

[4:00 p.m.]

This bill introduced by our Liberal colleagues eliminates the deed transfer tax for first-time home buyers. I do agree that we need to make housing and home ownership more affordable. We've given a number of pieces of feedback. Solutions are given. We have also collaborated on a number of pieces that we think would benefit our province thoroughly, but I do not agree that this is the right approach.

In March 2021, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued a report on Canada's economy and pointed out home prices as one of the largest threats. In the report, the IMF warns that well-intended measures - like direct subsidies and tax deductions - can have perverse effects on housing affordability by favouring those who can already afford to buy a house at the longer-term disadvantage of those who cannot. Eliminating the deed transfer tax for first-time buyers would make it easier for those who can already afford to enter the property market. It does nothing to address the core structural issues of affordability.

To do that, we have to talk about increasing incomes. That means putting more money in Nova Scotians' pockets and increasing the number of non-market affordable homes. That means more money for seniors, more money for teachers, more money for public service workers and health care professionals. The list could go on and on. Every profession right now in Nova Scotia is hurting, so we need to make sure that we respect them and take care of them, especially during this time.

We know that a living wage in Cape Breton is \$18.45 an hour. In the Annapolis Valley, it's \$21.30. In Halifax, a living wage is \$22.05. That is the level of income that is needed to make sure everyone is able to meet their basic needs, including safe, accessible housing. We shouldn't be relying on food banks; we should be paying people more. Food banks are considered an emergency. We should be ashamed to talk about poverty so nonchalantly.

Unfortunately, the minimum wage today in Nova Scotia is only \$13.35. As I said before, we need more money for seniors, more money for teachers, more money for public service workers, more money for health care professionals. All of these workers, and every other profession in Nova Scotia, have been working tirelessly throughout this pandemic and I think they deserve to be paid as such.

The average monthly rent in Halifax is about \$1,000. The wages are too low and the rents are too high. Not even a fancy accountant could make that math work. Something just doesn't add up.

Many Nova Scotians don't have enough with high rents, power bills, paying for food and all the other expenses that come along with living. They don't have enough left over at the end of the month to save for a down payment, so they aren't really thinking about the cost of a deed transfer tax.

Housing prices have skyrocketed to the point that it is now next to impossible to save up enough money for a down payment. People have just given up and are watching from the sidelines. I'm one of those people - and I think there may be a few more of us in here.

Although governments now seem very focused on tax rebates and loan programs, there was a time when governments did invest in building new non-market housing. Across the country, 550,000 units of public housing were built between 1960 and the 1990s. I'll table that.

The plans are not perfect by any means, but it did increase the supply of affordable housing at a time when it was needed. Non-market, not-for-profit rent geared to income, co-operative or public housing is what we need more of now. Rent supplements don't increase the supply of affordable housing, they increase the profit of private landlords who can continue to charge more than what most people can afford. As my colleague over here said earlier, units are where we live, so homes are beneficial, and supplements offset those costs.

Real estate investment trusts or REITs have eaten up many of the affordable units we did have. Even with the investments of the National Housing Strategy, we have lost 15 affordable units for every one new affordable unit that has been created.

I want to also point out that the erosion of naturally occurring affordable housing units is the most serious threat to Canada's supply of affordable housing. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of affordable private rental units to households earning less than \$30,000 per year, rents below \$750, declined by 322,600 units. This is a trend that appears to be continuing.

Germany has banned REITs from owning certain types of multi-family residential homes to keep them available as affordable housing stock. I'll table that.

Our caucus supports the government exercising their first right of refusal to buy properties when they come up for sale. In order to maintain affordable housing options, we should also be using our public money to invest in building affordable housing. We can rapidly increase the supply of affordable housing by using the provincial budget to buy and build homes that can be affordable for generations - homes that are investments in our province and communities, and well-being of our families and neighbours. As well - as my colleague on the other side said - we need to dream of home ownership. We need to make sure that it doesn't die for our new and future generations.

We can use our legislative powers to strengthen protection for tenants and establish permanent rent control to make sure renters have places to live that are safe and secure. There are a lot of things we can do to address the current housing crisis. I think it's important that what we are deciding to do, and when we are deciding to do that, we make sure that we're doing things that will have the greatest positive impact on the most people in our province.

Eliminating the deed transfer tax for first-time home buyers will certainly help some people, but not very many. It provides another advantage for people who likely don't need the help the most. Our caucus would rather prioritize other tools in our policy toolbox.

I also want to recognize that in marginalized communities, it's extremely hard to save money. When you're on social assistance, it's extremely hard to save money because they're policing every dollar you make.

When we talk about making sure that people are in affordable homes and have housing options, we also need to look at all people in our province - those who are living in poverty, or living beyond their means, or can't afford to live. We need to also recognize that - not just for those who are looking for a bit of a tax break. We definitely want to make sure that we are looking at all Nova Scotians to make sure that they have safe and affordable housing.

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

HON. JOHN LOHR: It's a pleasure to get up to say a few words about Bill No. 100. First of all, I would like to say that we recognize that we are in a housing crisis. A fundamental part of that housing crisis has been the increase in the prices of new homes.

For new home buyers, we recognize the issue. We know that is fundamentally a supply issue. The market responds to supply and demand. If there's too few of anything, prices go up. We've all heard stories of new home buyers putting in bids on homes only to have them to go for more than they bid.

Recently, someone conveyed to me a story of their son who bid on a house that was listed at \$350,000. The son bid over \$400,000 and it went for over \$500,000. We realize that we're in a moment in time when this is just crucial to our province. It's crucial to our government to address this. We are intending to do that.

I do want to point out that we have a down payment assistance program - I think I referenced that earlier today. We recently increased that program. In fact, I would say it was in early-November when this was brought to my attention, and we increased the limits on the numbers. Previously in HRM, I believe it was \$280,000. We increased that up to \$300,000. So for a \$300,000 home, someone could qualify, a first-time home builder could qualify for down payment assistance. For the rest of the province, we increased that number

by \$50,000 to bring it up to \$200,000. In my opinion, can we do more? Yes. Will we look at that? We're still looking at that. I was concerned about that in October-November, I can tell you. We're very aware of it.

One of the things I know members opposite understand is the Affordable Housing Commission Report, which has driven a lot of our activity. It did not address home ownership. It addressed rentals. There was nothing in the Affordable Housing Commission Report about home ownership, so that has driven quite a bit of our activity. We've been very responsive to that.

I know members opposite know we've done the Executive Panel on Housing in Halifax. We just recently announced nine special planning areas, which will take off months - in some cases possibly years - with the potential for 22,500 new units, we could say, or homes. I apologize if I use those terms interchangeably. Some of those will be residences to be purchased. Many of them will be rentals.

Again, on Monday we just announced 373 affordable housing units for Mount Hope for \$22 million. I hope the members opposite appreciate that is - forgive me if the math is approximate - approximately \$60,000 per unit, or per home. Of those 373 we'll secure those between 60 and 80 per cent of market rent in that area for 20 years. It's a pretty efficient use of government money.

I'm pretty proud of that endeavour. I can tell you that there will be more coming from the work of the Executive Panel on Housing. There will be more in this session coming out of what they have suggested. I can't unpack that right now, but when the time comes, we will talk about it.

There's a lot we've already done. I know members opposite know that we just recently announced \$916,000 for 18 different community groups across the province - in Cape Breton, in Truro, in Port Hawkesbury, in Kentville, not-for-profits, people who are interested. We're interested in seeing the community sector, the co-op housing sector. We recognize the co-op housing sector is not as strong as it could be in Nova Scotia, and we are moving in partnership with the federal government on a national housing strategy to make that sector stronger. So those are other things that we are doing. We continue to work very hard on that.

In terms of this bill, it's an interesting one to me because it crosses over the side - I'm the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, this bill impacts municipalities, too, and housing, so both sides of this department.

In terms of the municipal units, I can tell you that I've met with more than half of our municipalities and towns and regional municipalities and met with more than half of them, with wardens and mayors and councillors. Some of those were by Zoom, some of them were in person, I think it was about 50/50. One of the issues I hear from them is they

don't want our good ideas downloaded on them. I can tell you that the municipalities are tight for money, they watch every penny and they don't want our good ideas costing them money. This is one which I have some reservations about, this bill, because this is a good idea on our part, which is asking the municipalities to pony up in terms of losing revenue on their side.

They might say, yes minister, we agree with you, affordable housing or new home buyer programs should exist but if you want to do it, you do it, don't tell us to do it.

Furthermore, this bill would require them to manage it and that is also like, who is eligible and who is not. There are issues there and human resources required to manage any new program. Some municipal units have quite a strong ability to do that and others just don't, so there are issues.

Are there issues right across the province? I can tell you every town across the province, every municipal unit across the province has seen their market change dramatically in the last two years. There's not a lot for sale in any one of our municipal units. If you go on ViewPoint, you're going to go, wow, there's nothing much for sale there and everything that was for sale is sold. That's true where I come from. The housing market is very tight. That's true right across the province. We realize we're in a housing crisis and we're moving to address it in a number of different ways.

As I said, I think that our municipalities would be rather shocked at this bill because this bill is telling them what to do. My goal, as minister, is not to do that. I want to work co-operatively with the municipalities. You may know that in my mandate I have a very challenging mandate, as the minister, to renegotiate the Service Exchange Agreement. That is the memorandum of understanding that has existed since 1995 and has not been renegotiated since 1995, although there have been attempts at it and there are things that have been adjusted, of course. This was the fundamental relationship between the Province and all of these municipal units, an extraordinarily important one, and there's an extraordinary amount of money flow back and forth.

I think that to come out with a bill like this at this time would be a signal to them that, hey, we're just going to keep telling them what to do. I don't want to be in that kind of relationship with them. I see this very much as a partnership with our municipal units. As government we have a partnership with the federal government - it's extraordinarily important to us - and a partnership with the municipal governments.

Whenever I meet with them I tell them, listen, I appreciate what you're doing. Many of our municipal councillors do so for very little reimbursement. They take it on the chin because the municipal level can be very personal. It can be about your neighbour getting upset with you, so it's not an easy level of government to manage.

I always tell our municipal councillors and our mayors and wardens that I appreciate what they are doing. I recognize that their job is not easy, so I think that putting forward a bill that says to them, hey, you do this because there's a problem here and hey, you manage it because there's a problem here is not the right tactic. We need to be partners with them and we will be partners with them.

I know that every one of our municipal councillors I've met with, every one of our mayors and wardens, is deeply concerned about housing and is deeply aware of it and we want to work together. They are also deeply concerned. It's their sons and daughters trying to buy new homes, by and large, and some of them are very young people in those roles too who are also struggling to buy new homes. It is a challenge across our province. We will address it. We see ourselves very much as a partner with our municipal units. We are not going to be bringing in a bill to tell them what to do. We want to work in partnership with them and we are continuing to work in partnership with them.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the other speakers. I want to thank the member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth for bringing this bill forward and the member for Halifax Needham. I want to thank the minister, as well, for being here and paying attention and putting forward some comments. I do want to say a few things about this bill, which I think is a fantastic idea - very practical.

I know the Nova Scotia Association of REALTORS and others have spoken out to us as a caucus in favour of this concept. I just want to run through a little bit of numbers here. The average price of a home in the Halifax-Dartmouth region last month, in February, was \$576,986. So, the deed transfer tax at 1.5 per cent on that is about \$8,500 - a little bit more than that - and that is coming out of somebody's pocket.

If you think for your first-time purchase - 5 per cent down payment, 1.5 per cent deed transfer, and other costs that other members have talked about, maybe 7 or 8 per cent of the cost of the home is coming out of your pocket. That works out to about \$46,000 - about exactly \$46,158. For someone in their 20s or early 30s like myself, to have \$46,000 just in your pocket is unlikely and it takes a long, long time to save up that kind of money.

As I mentioned earlier during Question Period, unless you have a rich uncle or some nice friends and parents, it is very, very difficult. If you have kids on top of that and if you have all the other expenses of life that are becoming more and more expensive every day, it becomes just about impossible, and I think the implications of that are really significant.

For decades and decades, since the end of the Second World War, let's say, the core of the middle-class experience in North America - in Canada - is home ownership. That is

the bedrock of economic security through your life. Our parents and our grandparents, depending on how old you are, all went through that process, and it was seen as something that was very attainable. If you educated yourself, if you worked hard, if you did all the right things and saved, you could buy a house. You could do well for yourself and at the end of your life you could give something back to your children and your grandchildren and pass that wealth on through generations and really make upward mobility possible.

When that initial step of home ownership is taken away completely or delayed for five or ten or fifteen years, that cycle is broken. You may not see the impact of that broken cycle for years or even decades, but it is real and very significant, and it concerns me a lot. Obviously, I am in that younger demographic. As I mentioned earlier, I had coffee with a friend of mine the other day - he is maybe 29 or 30, I think - and he just said to me straight up: I've given up. I've given up on the dream of owning a house. There are people across Nova Scotia who have that same concern and I think a lot of them are dealing with a sense of quiet desperation, quiet despair.

You know, when you log on to ViewPoint and you see houses going for \$900,000 or a million dollars, houses listed for \$400,000 that are going for \$550,000, that is depressing in a lot of ways. It is very difficult to see, and it leaves you without hope and it just has a really negative impact on people's health and the economy of this province as well.

There are a couple of other points that I wanted to make here that the minister was talking about. He talked about the cost of this to municipalities and the fact that he doesn't want to dictate to municipalities. I appreciate that and I know that the cost is a concern; however, governing, at the end of the day, is about making choices. I was interested yesterday to note that the government has chosen to put in place a 5 per cent deed transfer tax on non-residents, which I think, if I'm remembering correctly, was going to raise about \$15.5 million.

Just suggesting here, would that be enough to fill the hole that's being left by this covering the deed transfer tax for first-time home buyers? As we know, first-time buyers are a small percentage of overall sales. I don't know off the top of my head, but I imagine those numbers would at least balance themselves out.

If you're going to put in place a punitive 5 per cent tax on non-resident buyers, why would you do that when you have the option to do something positive and to help young people who are struggling to save up for their first house and really could use the help of five, six, seven, eight thousand dollars off the total cost of buying a house? I think the concern around cost is, frankly, a bit overrated. I think that there could be some cost to municipalities that could easily be filled by this new non-resident tax. That piece of the argument is moot, honestly, to me. I don't think it makes a lot of sense or has a lot of merit to it.

The minister talks about supply, the Premier talks about supply. That is true. No one disputes the notion that there is a supply issue in our province, which is why we need thousands of more units. That has been announced, and I look forward to seeing that happen across HRM and in particular in my riding. As I've mentioned earlier this week, 9,800 units, tens of thousands of people. I expect and I hope that will have an impact on the supply crunch, and maybe we'll be in a situation where not every house is going for \$150,000 over asking price and it's realistic to get into the market.

You can't build houses overnight. You can't build condos overnight. You can't build apartment buildings overnight, so this is going to take a long time to get back to some measure of balance. We cannot have many more years of 20 and 30 per cent spikes in housing. I just want to reiterate the point that we talked about regarding affordable housing. That's obviously a significant issue, but there's also a huge middle class that I think is at risk of being hollowed out here in HRM and across the province. It's happening quietly, and it's not perhaps as visible, but it's a very real thing.

I know government doesn't like to take Opposition bills or consider them, and you go on your business and that's fine, but this is a really good bill. It's common sense. It helps people, which, as the member for Dartmouth South mentioned earlier, is kind of the whole point of why we're here.

I've listened to the minister. I struggle to find a compelling reason why this bill wouldn't be considered. There's support for it within the industry, and there are so many young Nova Scotians, and every year that this housing situation continues, there will be thousands more who will have a sense of desperation about them when it comes to the impossibility of ever purchasing a house. I just think the consequences are profound, and they will last for years, if not decades.

Those are my comments. I don't mean to sound so down, perhaps, but I do think it's a seriously important issue that is being ignored far too often. I would ask and implore the minister and the government to give this bill the consideration it deserves. With those words, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

GARY BURRILL: One additional concern about this legislation is, of course, its impact on municipal revenues. We clearly understand the points that have been made that home ownership is something that has been kicked past - the goalposts have been moved beyond vision for an awful lot of people.

We understand the sentiment that has directed this piece of legislation and we are in broad agreement with it. Yet we know that were this legislation in fact to be enacted, that the place that would receive the fiscal impact is not the Province of Nova Scotia but rather the municipalities of Nova Scotia. We know that in the tremendous variety of

municipalities that there are in Nova Scotia, there would be some for which this would be a relatively minor consideration, but that there would be others for which the impact would really register itself on the capacity of those municipal units.

We need to think about that, but not setting aside at all the core concern here, that the previous member has spoken to about how critical it is for people to be able to envision that somehow, at some point, the combined result of their hard work and earnings will get them in a position where they might be able to get a down payment together. In the office of the constituency I serve, I have noticed myself an increasing number of communications that have come just in the last six to eight months from people who find themselves in this category - often very heartfelt communications where people speak about how, look, this isn't the way that I thought it was going to be.

They'll say things like: I have a good job, I have a profession. My partner has a good job in such-and-such a line of work. Our income is of such-and-such a size, and it's quite considerable. Yet we have found ourselves in our goal of buying a house and thereby establishing ourselves in the world, laying out our plans for these coming years. We have found as we have been outbid time after time, and as the amount of a down payment that we would need to have in order to be anywhere in the running for the places that we would like to be able to get a chance to buy, this has moved more and more beyond us. We wonder, people write, who is speaking for us?

Is this a generalized concern for the government? There must be many people in our situation, as we know that certainly there are. It is true that government must take this into account. I would say, in fact, in my own experience of communications with my own constituency office that if I were to measure housing-related communications with our office, this particular issue - first-time home buying and the difficulty of it, brought about by the overheating of the housing market - that this has in recent months come to occupy a larger and larger amount of housing-related correspondence. I'm quite sure that this has been the experience for other MLAs in the House.

We can think back to a couple of years ago, when there was the crescendo of communications with our offices around rent. We experienced how more and more housing-related communications were about rent and about issues related to rent and about rent control, et cetera. We know that with the temporary rent control, that issue has been brought into abeyance at least until the end of next year.

In that period, we have seen this concern: What are people to do who have, in effect, clearly played by the rules as my colleagues said? The life picture that had been laid out before them, they have pursued it as it had been presented to them, and they have seen it vanish and go beyond the extent of their grasp.

I think that we need to be very clear about this. The core solution is not this kind of adaptation of taxation, which could have these potentially negative effects. The core thing

that is required is for the government to extend the supply of non-market housing. The problem that we face, Mr. Speaker, is the financialization of housing, the subjection of housing to the pressures of speculation in the market so that the price of housing moves out of the realm of its use value, we might say, to those who would be living in it, and moves into the realm of exchange value and what it can return on the speculative market.

[4:30 p.m.]

The only way, ultimately, to address this problem of the financialization of the whole housing sector - as government was in the years up to the abandonment of this field in the mid-1990s by the federal government - is the provincial government must become serious players in the world of the provision of non-market housing.

When we say “non-market housing,” we need to add some precision about what we’re talking about here. We always need to add precision when we speak about affordability. I’ll say first about affordability that when we are talking about affordable housing, what we mean is affordability relative to people’s income, not affordability relative to the market. When the market is overheated as it is at the moment, you can have a certain percentage of that market and that still adds such a remarkable distance from people’s actual incomes that being able to participate in the market is beyond people’s capacity.

We know that there are many forms of housing where this isn’t true. This isn’t true of public housing. This isn’t true of government-backed co-op housing. It isn’t true of social housing. In all of these forms of housing, the critical thing is that the ownership, the equity position, is with the public, the people of the province.

The great shortcoming of what the government has been announcing and bringing forward in these last recent days is that it is limited entirely to the private developers sector. When we operate through the sector of private developers, what we are in effect doing as the government is renting or leasing some affordable housing for a period. When the time of the agreement elapses - I think it’s normally 20 years - what happens is that the public of Nova Scotia is left with no asset whatsoever.

We invest enormous amounts of the money of the people of the province in order to address the housing crisis in a way that in fact does not bring the relief to the housing crisis that we want, because it does not create affordable housing relative to people’s incomes but only affordable relative to the market, and the gap is too great for people to participate. We do that at the same time in a way that does not leave the public of the province - particularly when the 20 years comes up - in a position where we will be the owners of the assets.

This is in fact what is required: for the government to step forward and take an equity position in non-market social public housing in order to establish affordability

relative to people's incomes. Now just pause at that for a moment and think: How many people have we all known for whom the financial struggle of life was an almost unbearable load until the day they got into that rent-geared-to-income unit?

When they got into the rent-geared-to-income unit where their housing was based on 30 per cent of their income - maybe they hadn't got to the golden line of 65 where you could get OAS and GIS, but nevertheless, even though perhaps they were receiving a small disability pension, perhaps they were receiving income. Anyway, they have a very modest income. But with rent geared to income, real affordability for housing, an enormous load was taken off their load.

How many people can I think of over the years who finally were able to get into that rent-geared-to-income unit and you know the next time you saw them their teeth were all fixed up? It was wonderful. The next time you saw them, their glasses weren't busted because they had some money for their glasses, and they had some money for their teeth. They weren't eating badly either, because there was some money left over for daily life. That's what real affordability really means.

We need to take our standard of measurement for that. Not the craziness of the market, which has this bizarre capacity to expand prices so far beyond people's actual capacity that it is almost unimaginable, except for those who live in kind of a financial stratosphere. To not take that as the measure, but people's real, daily incomes. Taking that as our standard of measure, people's actual real measures, and investing in such a way that in 20 years time the people of Nova Scotia still have an asset in their hands. That we are able to dispense amongst this million people that we've got in our province, this is where we need to be.

It seems to me that in the housing crisis as a whole, we must never allow ourselves to be diverted from this core, central, defining reality. There are many things that can be adjusted. There are many things that can be brought within the sights of the department or the government. There are many proposals that can be put forward which have various pluses and minuses, as I've tried to say is the case with the deed transfer tax that is being proposed.

But fundamentally what we can never lose sight of is that it is a core responsibility of the government of Nova Scotia to address the housing crisis by intervening in the insanity of the housing market, which has moved the capacity for not just owning a house but living in the house, often for many people, beyond their reach. That we intervene in that process and that the government take up an ownership position in non-market housing, social housing, government-backed co-op housing, other forms of other-than-market housing, so we can get serious about addressing what the core, fundamental problem is around the financialization and the speculation that is causing so much difficulty and such a deepening headache for the lives of so many of the people of our province.

This is the general position that I want to outline, Mr. Speaker, about this piece of legislation: understanding very clearly and agreeing very much with the points that have been made about how difficult it is for many people to see the goal of home ownership being kicked down the road further than what they are able to be able to get a hold of, and at the same time understanding that we don't want to cause unintended consequences that would bring limitations about getting municipal financing.

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The time for the Leader of the New Democratic Party has expired.

The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand today and discuss this bill that has been put forward by my colleague from Cole Harbour-Dartmouth. I'd also like to put my support behind this bill and thank the other members who have also spoken about the merits of this bill.

A lot of you in here are of my vintage or beyond. We didn't experience the issues that today's youth are facing when it comes to home ownership. Back in my day, I was able to get a decent job. My wife had a decent job. We were able to scrape together a modest down payment and were able to get into our first home in New Glasgow. It was a modest home, but it was a three-bedroom with lots of room to grow for when we had our child. We were able to do that. We were also able to afford food. We were able to afford gas for the car and electricity for the house, and also oil to heat the house.

Today, where we sit, we've seen housing prices skyrocket. The asking price is just one small component of home ownership. There are so many additional costs, as my colleague for Bedford South had mentioned, with regard to actually getting to the home. You're able to qualify for the mortgage, but then it's the legal fees. It's the deed transfer tax. It's the fuel fill-up. It's all of these extra added costs that tend to put home ownership out of reach for Nova Scotians.

One of my colleagues mentioned in a previous discussion, what is the plan for home ownership? How can young people afford a new home? Do they wait for their parents to pass on their home to them? Or pay their deed transfer tax for them? Do they beg, borrow, and steal from family members to pull together these extra funds? I don't think that's a great plan for young Nova Scotians.

We all want the same for our kids now. This is not just an HRM issue - if folks think it's just an HRM issue - it's a provincial issue. The housing crisis, both from a supply standpoint and from a housing price standpoint, has gone through the roof. When I first moved home to Sydney Mines, I was able to buy a three-bedroom home with a nice-sized lot and a garage for way less than \$100,000, which is awesome. Today, I don't think you could get the land for that.

It's a provincial issue that needs addressing. I think this bill goes a long way to help Nova Scotians make their way there. The member from Halifax spoke about affordability and ability for people to afford the necessities of life. That has become a lot more difficult for young people

[4:45 p.m.]

Again, speaking from personal experience, I was lucky. My daughter was lucky, too. She was able to afford a home in Sydney Mines just before everything started to skyrocket. If she went to buy that same home today, she absolutely wouldn't be able to afford the down payment and the closing costs that are associated with home ownership.

Income levels have not risen to the same level that housing prices have, and that's an actual fact. It's a fact that Cape Breton is a wonderful place to live, as is all of Nova Scotia. We all love our homes, we all love our province, we all deserve and would love to be able to have our own piece of Nova Scotia. We'd all love to be able to purchase that dream home and use our leftover funds to improve it and make it better for when we do get a chance to pass that on to our children way down the road, hopefully.

I think as MLAs and my colleagues across the aisle on the government side, we can do our part. We can do our part to pass legislation like this to help young people, to help them experience the joy and the empowerment and the pride in being able to purchase their own home. Right now, that's out of reach for so many people.

It's really unfortunate, because when you're able to have that asset for when you retire, it's just a heartwarming feeling that you're able to establish yourself, and when you get older, then you have that security there to take you into your retirement. You have an asset. I think this bill is an asset to Nova Scotians, who really deserve to have that peace and tranquility of home ownership.

There's nothing like that feeling that you've arrived. I think home ownership, a great job - there are a lot of young families out there with kids with excellent jobs, excellent incomes, and they want to put down roots. It's really hard to put down roots when you can't afford the root cellar. If you can't afford your basic necessities of life, it's so hard to put those monies in.

My colleague talked about the time it would take to actually put that \$20,000, \$30,000, or \$40,000 together to be able to facilitate a purchase such as an asset, especially with children. Children are very expensive. There are many activities. I have one, so I'm speaking from experience on that. (Interruption) Yes, the member for Halifax-Armdale would know that children are expensive, but they're worth it.

Children are expensive, but they're worth it, just like home ownership is worth it and deserving. We all deserve to be able to purchase a home. We all deserve to be able to

afford the basic necessities to make that home a viable place for us to raise our families and to grow older.

I think that our children and young people today really are working hard, and they're working hard to get there. They want to be able to be on their own, they want to feel like they're not a burden on their parents. They want to get out of that basement and they want to set down their own roots. They're responsible. They want to show their responsibility. They want to be able to participate in society, and they want to build a future and they want to build strong assets that they can show for their kids, that they have those assets, and then their children can do the same, but right now in Nova Scotia this is way out of reach.

I guess what I would do is ask the government side to please take a look at this legislation, because I think it's a great start for us to come to some common ground and help make Nova Scotia more affordable for our young people. Our young people deserve it and it's our job to help them attain those things.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I will take my seat.

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

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate all the comments from my colleagues today on the bills that were presented by the Official Opposition. At this point, that concludes Opposition Business for the day.

I will now pass the floor over to the Government House Leader to - oh my gosh, I just forgot what I was going to say. (Interruption) To announce business for the upcoming day. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Order. We'll take a one-minute break.

[4:52 p.m. The House recessed.]

[4:52 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order please. The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for unanimous consent of the House to move into late debate.

THE SPEAKER: There is a request for the unanimous consent of the House to move into late debate.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Just to clarify the record, once late debate is over, we will go back into government business. Okay, as long as everybody is clear on that for now.

We have reached the moment of interruption. The topic this evening was presented by the honourable member for Dartmouth North:

“Therefore be it resolved that the arts, culture, and recreation sector, which contributes greatly to our economy and well-being, is one of the industries hardest hit by the pandemic and requires targeted, emergency, and sustained support to recover and grow.”

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION UNDER RULE 5(5)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

ARTS FUNDING: SUPPORT REQUIRED

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I am frankly devastated that I am speaking about this subject today. This is my fifth year as an MLA and I am extremely privileged to be an MLA, but gosh darn it, I am awful tired of talking about arts funding in this House. I wanted to start by saying this: Ughhhhh. I’m not sure how Hansard would spell that, but I’m sure Mr. Chandler can figure it out.

Anyhow, I want to tell a story about one of the first times that I entered this building. It was somewhere in the years between 2003 and 2006 when Rodney MacDonald was the Minister of Communities, Culture and Heritage, or whatever it was called then, and there was a press conference in the Red Room that I was invited to by the Nova Scotia Arts Coalition. At that press conference, the coalition - which was made up of artists from all around the province - was advocating for - guess what? Increased operating funding for arts organizations.

I remember thinking, oh, this is such a beautiful room and this is - but I knew how important the subject was. I really thought that because the discussion was happening in the Red Room, in this important building, that there was going to be some kind of attention paid to the issue.

This was early in my professional career as an artist, by the way, so I guess I was naive. Shortly after that, not only was there no increase in operating funding for arts organizations, but, in fact, the minister of the time shut the doors of the Nova Scotia Arts Council - which was an arm’s-length funding body - locked the doors, fired all of the folks

who worked there and that was the end of arm's-length arts funding in Nova Scotia for several years.

It was a devastating blow to the sector. There were massive protests. I participated. I think I walked on stilts out in the back there on Granville Street protesting the decision. I would have to say that over the years, and as a recipient of Arts Nova Scotia funding several times in the ensuing years, I would say that arguably the industry has never really recovered from that cut, that action by the Progressive Conservative government. I really had high hopes for this new Progressive Conservative government, that they would see the folly in that type of action. I didn't have much luck with my Liberal friends over here during the last few years talking about this situation.

Anyway, when we look at the resolution - I'm not going to spend all my time talking about poor artists and poor arts organizations, but I want to talk about it in a very real economic way. When we look at the resolution that we are debating tonight, that the arts, culture, and recreation sector, which contributes greatly to our economy, is one of the industries hardest hit by the pandemic and requires targeted, emergency, and sustained support to recover and grow - that's what I want to talk about.

I know people in this House will take some issue with the resolution, but the arts and entertainment and recreation sector has been one of the hardest hit. The fact is, on this chart that I'm about to table - it's a Statistics Canada table, Nova Scotia's GDP outlook by industry - the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector took a stunning drop of 46.7 per cent in 2020 because of the pandemic.

I remember when things started to shut down in March of 2020. I had many friends - in Billy Elliot, for instance, at Neptune - everyone was so excited about Billy Elliot coming to town. Job's off. I had a friend who was in a production at Neptune where they were just told at the end of one night, they had another week to perform or whatever, and at the end of that particular night they were like, that's it folks, go home. People who had counted on money throughout the - they had gigs all the way through the year - all gone. For a while, of course, there was no bright outlook until the federal government finally instituted the CERB.

After arts and culture, accommodation and food were the next hardest hit, suffering a 31.4 per cent drop. We have restaurants and the food sector businesses in our ridings. We know that we were trying to support them, but guess what? They're intricately related to the arts and culture sector in Nova Scotia. People know that when they go to take in art and culture, they also go in to take a meal or a drink somewhere afterwards or before. It's part of the culture of art and culture in our province.

In 2020, the Culture Satellite Account for Nova Scotia clarified that the economic value of the cultural sector to Nova Scotia was \$989 million to our GDP, 14,000-plus jobs - more than farming, fishery, and forestry combined.

This is real money. I am so tired - and I made a joke of it earlier - but I am so tired of being the one who is labelled “the passionate one” about arts and culture. Like, she’s so passionate about arts and culture, “it’s so sweet that she’s” - maybe you don’t think I’m sweet, but that’s what I get back.

It’s not a fluffy industry or an elite industry. It’s not for elite rich people - it’s an economic driver in our community that contributes to not only actual well-being from taking in art, but health and wellness and immigration and education. All of these things benefit from the hard work that severely underpaid artists do in our province every day.

[5:00 p.m.]

I will say, credit where credit is due - sorry Liberals, I would have to look back in my notes and stuff. For this government, I will say credit where credit is due. Obviously, we are very pleased about the investment in the film industry. This has been a long time coming. (Applause) Don’t take up my time with your clapping.

It has been a long time coming, and I’m extremely pleased. But we shouldn’t have an either/or. It shouldn’t be that because the film industry got \$23 million, the rest of the arts sector gets zero dollars. I know I’m running out of time. Late debate is really too short.

I want to say this. There was a coalition of arts organizations called Home is Where the Art Is and also Nova Scotia Live that the minister received a letter from, as did probably most MLAs. They asked for three levels of support, Mr. Speaker: emergency supports from the pandemic - the Liberals did some of that, doubled operational funding - and, wait for this one, dedicated supports for building back better, activities emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I will just say that this afternoon there was a meeting of several arts organizations that were talking about diversity and inclusion, for instance, making performing arts accessible to folks with hearing impairments. Organizations would love to be able to do that, but they can’t because they don’t have any operating money to spend some time figuring out how to do that. There’s a project grant so that you can hire someone to sign your show, but if you really want to make an actual investment in that idea, you need to spend time on it, and that’s what operating money is for.

These three things are salient: emergency supports, doubled operational funding, and dedicated supports for building back better. This would be a total of \$4.45 million per fiscal year for three fiscal years, Mr. Speaker. It’s not a lot of money, but in fact the impact would be outstanding. I was going to say outrageous, but outstanding is a better term. Yet of course, we see in the budget not one dollar extra in CCTH funding.

I also quickly with my last minute want to say this: In the CBRM, Mr. Speaker, there is a coalition of artists who are at the ready to receive money from the CBRM to go

to individual artists, and they can't do it because of the lack of direction in the Municipal Government Act. This is something that could be changed with an Order in Council. It could be changed with a letter from the department, probably, yet it seems to me that the MLAs from the Progressive Conservative caucus have - I don't understand what's happening, but it's so easy to fix. It's falling on deaf ears.

I encourage the government to allow individual artists in the CBRM to get grants of \$500 to \$2,500 through an Order in Council. If anyone wants to ask me about it, I'm happy to talk about it. Seventeen seconds.

I will close by saying this. I know that I have only talked about arts and culture in these 10 minutes, but I do recognize that the recreation sector is also suffering, and I plan to speak into Supply about it sometime really soon.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: This is a very hard act to follow. She definitely has the passion. (Interruption) More than passion. She is extremely passionate, but she also knows her subject very well.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe all members of this House would agree that the arts, culture, and recreation organizations within our ridings are viewed as cornerstones of our communities. They provide a place where people of all backgrounds and demographics can come together.

I have seen this first-hand at the Bella Rose Arts Centre, which is a centre that serves my riding in Clayton Park West and the surrounding area. The Bella Rose is a place for the dancers, for the students to do their plays, for the community to be together. It is an incredible space within our riding, and there are many places like the Bella Rose that need help.

We know that the pandemic has been tough on Nova Scotians in many sectors within the province; however, the arts and culture sector has been recognized to be among the hardest hit during the pandemic and will take the longest to recover.

There was no playbook to refer to for government to navigate this during the onset of COVID-19. The most important thing we could do was listen to experts and communities to hear what their struggles and needs were and then take action to support as best as possible.

Government is meant to serve its population. It needs to be there for the people, especially in times with the greatest distress and uncertainty. It is no secret that the arts and culture sector needed support. That's why our Liberal government acted to support the

sector with \$2.1 million in emergency support. This provided funding for 89 groups throughout the province, support that was desperately needed.

I don't know what this new government has in comparison to what the Liberal government did. We knew this would make a difference. However, this would need to be continued and liaising with the sector to continue to help meet their needs.

In 2021, the report entitled *Building Back Better - A Vision for Culture Sector Recovery in Nova Scotia* was released and since then, another report entitled *A Roadmap for Recovery: Rebuilding Nova Scotia's Live Performance Sector*. While different, these two reports are unequivocal in their need for government to provide additional financial support to the arts, culture, and recreation sector.

These reports were created through intense consultation across the province and display a clear crisis taking place. I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, that there was no playbook at the beginning of COVID-19 - however, now there are two.

The release of the budget was an opportunity for the Houston government to listen to the people it is supposed to serve. Based on the budget, it is clear that the taps to spending are wide open, yet the Houston government has neglected to address the dire needs of this sector.

Currently, just over 70 organizations are splitting operational funding. Operational funding is huge for this sector. If the funding for this sector was increased to \$10 million - which pales in comparison to the support provided by this government to many other sectors - the operational pressures of these organizations could be addressed.

Not only this, but government could invest in furthering equity, diversity, and inclusion in the sector to ensure all voices are represented. My colleague for Dartmouth North was very clear about that.

In addition, we could see this industry be supported to increase their capacity to use digital strategies that weren't possible for many organizations, especially those in rural Nova Scotia. Further beneficial and needed opportunities in supporting advanced education in this sector could become a reality.

The list of benefits goes on. I realize that this government made promises on health care during the election, many of which have yet to materialize. I'm wondering why the government has not seen the direct correlation between this sector and health, especially mental health.

This being said, I would encourage the Premier and the minister to either read or take a closer look at these reports to understand the direct connection between arts and culture and overall well-being.

We have heard from people working directly in the arts and culture sector that they feel they are under intense pressure and the impact has been extreme. We have seen people questioning whether they need to leave our province to seek out opportunities elsewhere, in other places where there will be a greater support for the sector. That is sad, Mr. Speaker.

We have listened to people across the province share their personal stories of trying to keep their organizations afloat. The stress this has had on the lives of people trying to live out their dream careers while supporting others to do the same and helping their communities flourish has not been recognized by this government.

That has been especially made clear by this government's present budget. I believe that the government may use their recent investment in the film industry as a way to avoid or defend their position on this. This is important. We cannot help one sector and leave the other, or one side and leave the other.

However, while having heard directly from this sector that they are happy for their colleagues in the film industry, these industries are not one and the same. In fact, there's absolutely no new funding for arts and culture. This is after a direct offer from the Nova Scotia Live Performance Recovery Coalition to meet with the Department of Finance and Treasury Board regarding the budget went unresponded to. Mr. Speaker, this was a missed opportunity for this government to actually listen before trying to lead.

Affordability has been a key topic this House session. Inflation is making it even more difficult for the sector to keep up. Nova Scotians turned to arts, culture, and recreation to help cope with the stress of the pandemic. Some organizations even went as far as helping to make sure that community members had access to food during tough times. They have done this during a time when they are just holding on and incurring losses of staggering amounts.

This sector contributes greatly to our economy: \$989 million in 2020, as per the Culture Satellite Account, and in that same year employed more than 14,000 people, as my colleague mentioned. The 14,000 people require a lifeline. They need help for recovery and they need the support to build back better.

I would like to close by reiterating from theatres like the Highland Arts or the Savoy. These organizations have been here for their community and contribute greatly to all aspects of the life of the province. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the members opposite for raising this important topic. We know the pandemic has had a serious impact on arts,

culture, and recreation. Performance venues, theatre companies, and recreational facilities often had to operate at reduced capacity and sometimes had to close their doors for weeks or months at a time. Restrictions on spectators, audiences, and revenue-generating services like food and beverage had an impact on the bottom line for many venues and facilities. Major events had to be postponed or cancelled.

[5:15 p.m.]

The impact has been undeniable. We know the recovery won't be immediate, but the province has worked hard, and continues to work hard, to help sector partners and community organizations weather the waves of the storm. Staff at the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage have held regular check-ins through the pandemic with the arts and culture organizations, sports leaders, venue operators, and event organizers to answer their questions and help them operate safely within public health guidelines.

The department has provided more than \$1 million in COVID-19 recovery funding in 2021-22, including: a funding program for Summer theatres to offset the cost of reduced seating capacity; supplemental funding for Music Nova Scotia's Community Presenter Program to provide arts and culture presenters with break-even funding for live events; a Culture Innovation Audience Engagement Fund to help arts, culture, and heritage organizations re-engage with their communities; and more than \$580,000 in case-by-case emergency support for organizations that identified the need for additional resources to stay afloat.

As a government, we know how important it is to invest in support for mental health, and how difficult the pandemic has been mentally and emotionally for so many people. Those challenges have been heightened for people who have dealt with the added stress of having their livelihoods impacted by the pandemic. That certainly includes many artists and musicians who rely on live venues and performances to help make a living.

Through the Culture Innovation Fund, the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage provided \$50,000 to the East Coast Music Association's Mental Health & Wellness Program, which focuses on the mental health and wellness of our musicians. Through the Festival and Community Event Development, the department helped 32 events find ways to operate during the pandemic, including the Makin' Waves Music Festival in Cape Breton, which was able to offer a COVID-19-safe multicultural concert series that paired up-and-coming artists with headline performers.

This government will continue to support arts, culture, and recreation as we recover from the pandemic. The Province recently launched a confidence-building campaign to encourage Nova Scotians to get back out there, visit local businesses, and support arts and culture events in their communities. We have made many long-needed investments in culture, sports, and recreation infrastructure to help these sectors rebound and thrive.

Earlier this week, I was in Guysborough to announce a \$400,000 investment to Mulgrave Road Theatre's RoadHouse Creative Centre. This multi-use performance space will be a huge boon in my constituency, and I can tell you that the local arts community is thrilled. This is the single largest government investment in Mulgrave Road Theatre's 46-year history. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my colleagues, my counterparts with the Municipality of the District of Guysborough, for providing the space that they're in now.

As a government, we have shown our dedication to supporting sport and recreation. Within weeks of forming government, we delivered on our promise to implement a rink revitalization fund to help community rinks make the critical repairs and upgrades they need to remain sustainable. The first round of the million-dollar fund supported 33 projects, and the department is reviewing applications now for the second year of the fund. We provided Sport Nova Scotia with \$5 million in additional funding to support the KidSport Program, purchase accessible equipment, and provide more programming for athletes with disabilities so that more people have access to sport and recreation opportunities.

We've invested in projects, including the Banook Canoe Club in Dartmouth - we heard about that earlier - the Hawks Field of Dreams in Cape Breton, the Inverness County recreation facility, and the Springhill Lake Recreation Centre baseball fields in Middle Sackville. These community recreation facilities will be able to support events and provide more access to sport and recreation opportunities with government support.

We have made significant investments in film and tourism: \$12 million dollars to support marketing and digital adoption for Nova Scotia tourism operators and providers; \$15 million for a five-year content creator fund that will benefit Nova Scotian directors, writers, producers, and performers; and \$8 million toward a sound stage that will grow Nova Scotia's film industry and make it a year-round economic driver. All these investments will help benefit our arts, culture, and recreation sectors as we attract visitors and create more opportunities to showcase our unique culture, performers, venues, and all that Nova Scotia has to offer.

The Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage business plan for the coming year also outlines ways that the department will support opportunities for growth that arts and culture representatives proposed in their Building Back Better plan.

Some of the key initiatives include working with staff at the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration to identify supports for increased training to meet growing labour demands in the creative sector; working with the Department of Environment and Climate Change to support opportunities in the creative sector to promote education and action on climate change; and increasing equity, diversity, and inclusion across the arts, culture, and recreation sectors as we support COVID-19 recovery.

The past two years have certainly been challenging, and we know people across many sectors are still feeling the impacts. This government will continue to work with our affected partners, to listen, and to do all we can to help find solutions so that Nova Scotia's arts, culture, and recreation communities can not only rebound but grow and thrive. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: I wish to thank all the members who participated in the adjournment debate this evening. As mentioned before, we will now revert to Government Business.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Government Motions.

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Resolution No. 174.

Res. No. 174, Estimates: CWH on Supply - Referred - Notice given March 24/22 (Hon. Allan MacMaster)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin, with 52 minutes remaining.

HON. KELLY REGAN: What happens here is, I said a few things yesterday, and now I'm going to say a few more things today. Yesterday, I talked a bit about the budget. I talked about some of the good things that were in it, and I talked about some of the things that I thought should have been in it but weren't there.

I did mention that I was delighted to see that there was money for the fertility program to help people who need to access fertility treatments, and also surrogacy. I don't remember hearing about that on the campaign trail, but I thought that was a great idea.

I will just say that I had the chance to go to the bill briefing today. Again, I'm so pleased to see that there is money that does come back to people who need this important treatment, but by its very nature - by the fact that it is money that comes back at tax time - what it means is that for many Nova Scotians, this kind of treatment will still be out of reach, because you have to pay for it up front. We really don't do that with any other medical treatments that I can think of, unless they are cosmetic or that kind of thing.

For many Nova Scotians, that \$20,000 that you can get \$8,000 back on, that will be beyond their grasp. I guess an alternative would be to have it covered under MSI. I do want to commend the government on taking this step, because it isn't something that's been covered before, but I do feel that it's important to note that there are many people who are unfortunately going to be excluded from being able to avail themselves of those services simply because they don't have the money at hand.

I don't think I mentioned in the remarks yesterday about the 13 additional cancers that will now be covered under WCB for firefighters, both paid and volunteer, as well as heart attacks. It's significant to firefighters. I have a firefighter in my riding who went through cancer treatment. I just want to say thank you for covering those. It's important to our firefighters, to their families, and to all of us who actually count on them to be there for us when we need them. Thank you very much.

I do want to make clear that the government is able to do this because successive governments and the Workers' Compensation Board held fast until the plan returned to full funding. For many years, that plan was not even close to full funding and this was tough on everybody. It was tough on people who had to administer it. It was also tough on anybody involved in it. It was toughest on the claimants, because they could not get the coverage they needed. And they haven't seen much added to their coverage over the last number of years, so I'm glad that the plan is in much better shape now.

In the past, before any of us were sitting in this House, there was no discipline about that. All kinds of things got covered whether there was money or not. The problem was that you could end up with a plan that ends up being able to help no one if you don't watch what you're doing. So I'm hopeful on that particular front that we've turned the corner.

Now that I've said some nice things, I have to do the other part of my job, which is to point out some things that are not in it. For me, when I look at this budget, I ask myself, what's in it for average Nova Scotians? Folks who are living in rural Nova Scotia, folks who are living in urban Nova Scotia? What I've said is, unless you have children, there's not a lot in it for a lot of people who are being plagued by affordability issues. There's nothing in the budget to help Nova Scotians afford gas that is rising at record-breaking rates.

Since we're coming up on Thursday, that's always the night when you have to figure out, is this the week I have to fill up on gas or can I wait for another week? There's nothing here to help them with food inflation, which empties their pocketbooks at the check-out counter.

I would note that food inflation is at 7.3 per cent. During COVID-19, because we were only going to grocery stores once a week, and because we were home working more, we began to really study those - I don't even know what to call it, inserts I guess, that come

out each week to see what's on sale. (Interruption) Flyers, thank you. For the longest time there were no sales or the front page would have a couple of things on sale and that was it.

For so many people, going to the grocery store these days has to be painful. I went to the grocery store the other day to get some fruit and vegetables. Three bags were \$133.57. There's nothing in this budget to help combat inflation in general, which is the highest in 30 years. Think back to 30 years ago, early 1990s, the highest since the early 1990s. Some of the people in this House were still in diapers. But, seriously, 30 years, think about three decades we have not had inflation this high.

I remember I had graduated from university some years before that and I remember the last time we had had a big inflationary spike and also when we had interest rates spike up, I was doing a program in English and Legal Studies at University of Waterloo in the co-op program and I remember at the time one of the people in my class, she was really smart but she had to leave because they could no longer pay the mortgage on their home if she didn't work. For them, it was huge and life-changing.

[5:30 p.m.]

So here we are in the situation once again where we are seeing huge inflationary pressures. We're not seeing the kind of interest rate spike yet but we have seen some changes. But it's a significant time for many people trying to figure out, what am I going to spend my money on this month? We are not seeing the kind of support that many people do need.

Quebec provided their citizens with a \$500 rebate and their inflation rate is actually lower than ours. They're at 5.3 per cent, we're at 5.7 per cent. Yet there's still no support for Nova Scotians who are dealing with the cost of living crisis.

Then I look to another topic that I sort of expected to see more on in this budget and that's housing. Now back around February 17th, the Globe and Mail reported that the average cost of a single-bedroom apartment in Halifax is now \$1,600 a month. That's a one-bedroom apartment, so unless you're a couple, you can't share a room - well you could share roommates - but it would be difficult to have a roommate in a \$1,600 month one-bedroom apartment. I'll table these articles.

The same article indicates that to reasonably afford such an apartment, you'd need to have an income of \$78,000 a year. I would venture to say there are a lot of young people starting out who do not have incomes of \$78,000 a year and who do not have - I don't know where they're supposed to live. I don't know how they're supposed to save for a house, as we've been discussing.

The government is only investing \$15 million into affordable housing with this budget - we previously saw the government spend \$22 million on 370 units - with that

costing, only 252 affordable units would be budgeted in this year's budget. It's not nearly enough to deal with what we are currently dealing with.

As we heard today in Question Period, the housing crisis is not only in HRM. It may be more acute there, but it is actually everywhere. We know housing is an issue all across this province. We heard from my colleague, the member for Sydney-Whitney Pier, who talked about the issue in Cape Breton and what he is seeing there. I know from talking to my colleagues all across this province, because we have rural members and urban members, that this is an issue everywhere.

We heard the member for Bedford South talk about what are young people supposed to do. I did touch on this a little bit the other day; we did talk about that. I don't know what young people are going to do when it comes to having a house, because really what my honourable colleague from Bedford did note is that for many people, having a home is actually a retirement plan. There are some people who pay off their house and then when it comes time to retire, they sell their house. They take that money and that's what they live off for the rest of their life. But if they are never able to do that, how is that going to work?

I worry about an entire generation handicapped by a housing crisis, by an affordability crisis of that housing. The lack of supply is driving up costs.

The Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing did speak about the Down Payment Assistance Program. He talked about that today. He talked about increasing - and again, this is a program for folks who are living on lower incomes - increasing the ceiling for a house in HRM, for example, to \$300,000. Well, good luck finding a house for \$300,000 in HRM.

Someone mentioned in the House this afternoon something about ViewPoint.ca, which is a guilty pleasure for many of us. In my neighbourhood, neighbours like to say, oh, so and so's house has gone up and what is it on the market for, and all of that stuff.

Recently, there was a house fairly close to our neighbourhood that went up and it was a very tiny house, it was kind of run-down. It sold. Whoever bought it did some work to it. They painted the outside and they did some work on the inside, too. This house, which was assessed at \$192,000 and probably would have taken a while to sell at that a couple of years ago because it was well-loved, let's just say - last week, it went back on the market for \$399,000. It sold in 11 days for \$550,000.

This is what we're dealing with right now. This is what we're seeing everywhere. There is no relief in this budget to help with that. There's nothing here to help with that. I don't know who's buying the houses. What I do know is that we do need to deal with this. If tiny little houses are selling for \$550,000 - on a very busy street, I might add - I don't know where people are going to live.

We keep hearing about wanting more people to come to this province and we do. But where are we going to put them? At \$550,000 for a tiny little home, I don't know who's paying these mortgages. I don't know how they could afford it. It is definitely an issue and it's something that this government is going to have to deal with in the coming weeks and months. Good luck finding a house for \$300,000 in HRM.

We move on to food. Canada's Food Price Report 2022 indicates that for the average Canadian family, the increase in food costs is going to cost \$1,000 a year. This is simply unaffordable for many Nova Scotians. Is there support in the budget to tackle food insecurity or lower food costs for Nova Scotians? Nothing. Was there an investment into a school lunch program? No. Was there maybe increased investment into the school breakfast program? No.

I have to tell you that I had a snapshot the other day from the mother of a schoolteacher. She sent a shot of what she had to feed her entire class. It might have provided a school breakfast for one child. I would urge the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to look into that. I have to say what I saw was not nearly enough for an entire class. It might have satisfied one child with a decent breakfast. I was gobsmacked.

We all know it's tough to learn when you're hungry. That's why we invested all those years in breakfast programs, because children learn better when they're fed. We do want to know how those breakfast programs are working because from what I saw the other day, they aren't - at least not everywhere.

Then we turn to economic development. We don't see anything in this budget for economic development. It has less than nothing because it cuts more than \$50 million from this department in the middle of a cost of living crisis. Just when we need more support for our businesses, there's nothing. There's no program there. There's nothing for recovery at all. There's no support to our small businesses.

When the Economic Development Critic and I were in meetings before the budget, we talked to a number of different organizations. We heard loud and clear, over and over, the need for support as we come out of COVID-19 - if we are coming out of COVID-19 - but that business needs support. Business is hurting; 67 per cent of businesses had to take on debt in this pandemic. There is no debt relief for them. I can't remember the exact per cent but a good proportion of those - I think it was the average - it was over \$100,000 of debt that they took on.

They are trying to figure out how they are going to pay this back. Are they going to be able to pay this back? Many of the businesses we spoke to thought it was going to take at least two years to pay it back, if they could at all. I think it was around 15 per cent that said they really weren't sure that they were going to be able to pay back that debt.

There's no help in here for them - 81 per cent of businesses are concerned about rising costs and this budget is offering nothing to address inflation for them.

There were things that we heard. We met one day with the Centre for Women in Business. What we heard was that some small investments to women entrepreneurs could have huge impacts. We think about things like money to buy a laptop so you could move your business online, that kind of thing. Those could have been in here. They are not a big-ticket item. It would have huge impacts when an entrepreneur can move online.

It makes a big difference if they can sell, whether people are staying home because COVID-19 cases are rising. But sometimes people just need a small amount of seed money, and it could be something as simple as buying a laptop or having someone do a website for you, that kind of thing. So programs like that that would help our businesses thrive - that money is not here, and we had expected to see something for that.

I spoke earlier today about the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee program that the Premier said was evidence of the PCs' can-do attitude. That's not even in the budget and that was splashed all over the election documents. Does this mean we have a can't-do attitude now?

I will just say that the Premier was so proud of the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee that he put it right on the cover of his platform, right next to all the other sound bites, like universal mental health coverage that we haven't quite seen yet.

The government likes to talk about poverty reduction. I want to be very clear: There are some good measures here, particularly to reduce poverty in families with children. There is good work done at DCS on supports for persons with disabilities. But the minister got up yesterday and talked about her mandate letter, the first to create a strategy to decrease poverty in the province, and yet the province didn't increase income assistance.

Trust me, I get it. You have a lot of clients - when you spread it across a whole lot of people, the money gets spent quickly. I think that's why for many years the increases that we saw to income assistance were not substantial, the monthly increases, because once you spread that across all of the client base, it adds up very quickly.

I think in 2018 we increased the income assistance rate by \$20 a month and that was the biggest increase to the time. That kind of blows me away. Last year, we were able to increase it five times that amount for every adult in the household, and that was a significant spend, but we didn't know what was looming on the horizon with inflation.

At a time when inflation is at 5.7 per cent, I would have thought that perhaps the Province would have at least indexed income assistance to inflation. Even New Brunswick did that. I hate to break it to folks in this Chamber, but the fact of the matter is that with

the cost of living rising, and as this government fails to grapple with it, poverty in this province is going to increase.

[5:45 p.m.]

Single adults, the majority of whom are living with disabilities, are often living on the lowest incomes in this province. We heard about this yesterday. We heard about people who are living on less than \$8,000 a year. If you don't have children, or if you don't have a partner, that's what you're living on in this province if you're getting income assistance. Nova Scotia has been making progress on child poverty. The data often lags behind, so when you hear the poverty numbers come out, they're often from a couple of years ago, simply because that's when Statistics Canada releases the data when they get it from all across the country, so it takes a while to actually get the numbers.

In 2019, we moved from having the highest rate of child poverty in the country to having the fourth lowest. We also had the lowest rate of single-parent family poverty in the country that year. You often don't hear about these, because for whatever reason we don't talk about it a whole lot, and then other groups take the numbers and put a different spin on them, but Stats Can actually reported the poverty numbers, I think, earlier this month. We have them for a more recent year. In 2020, our overall poverty rate took a big drop, from 12 per cent in 2019 to 7.7 per cent in 2020. Our poverty rate for couples with children fell from 9.2 per cent in 2019 to 3.2 per cent in 2020.

That's the result of some work across a number of different government levels. I think about the federal government with their Child Tax Benefit, and us with a number of different initiatives, and it could be anything from no longer counting maintenance support payments as income for a single mom who's on income assistance. That can bring an additional \$300 a month. That's huge in a family that never had that option before.

Statistics Canada reported that the poverty rate for couples with children fell from 9.2 per cent in 2019 to 3.2 per cent in 2020. StatsCan reported that the poverty rate among children aged 17 and under in Nova Scotia has declined considerably since 2017. The rate back in 2017 was 20 per cent, which boggles my mind. In 2020, it was 5.5 per cent. Only Quebec, B.C., and Alberta had lower rates of poverty.

This is not to pat us on our backs. This is the reason why many of us sit in the House, because we want to make life better for our fellow Nova Scotians. It's important that we continue this trend. I should table that. Thank you.

That's why you're seeing concern from this side of the House, because we were making progress on this particular issue. There's so much more to do, but we were making progress. I am concerned that by not increasing income assistance rates, we are going to backslide on that. We won't know for a couple of years about those numbers because, as I said, it's a couple of years along.

This is a really awkward sort of term that StatsCan uses - non-elderly persons not in an economic family - or for what the rest of us would call single people who are not elderly, the poverty rate remains stubbornly high, not just in Nova Scotia but across the country. It has been declining in every province recently, though, except for Saskatchewan. In 2015, the poverty rate for non-elderly singles in Nova Scotia was 44.2 per cent, which is shocking. By 2020, it had declined to 28.2 per cent, and that actually put us in the middle of the pack in the country.

It is these people who still face the highest rates of poverty, and it is these people who are particularly hard-hit by the rising costs in food, housing, electricity, and transportation. Of course, if you live in HRM and you get income assistance, you'll get a free bus pass. Outside of HRM, it's tough. We have (Interruption) CBRM, we finally got that after much great work. (Interruption) No, it was never aggravation, it was stick-to-it-iveness, which I appreciated, and a lot of really creative thinking by people in the Department of Community Services and determination from people in CBRM. They came up with sort of a hybrid model to run a pilot project there, so there's some help there.

But there are so many people who have no way of getting about in this province or who spend so much of their income to get around or who have to beg rides from people they know or don't know. That makes life even harder for them for a variety of reasons.

I keep asking myself, what is in this budget to help those people? I keep asking, what is going to help folks living in rural Nova Scotia who don't have children or whose children are grown up, and so they're not getting that extra money that is coming through the child benefit? Unfortunately, the answer is nothing.

Then we turn to health care. Of course, none of us can forget that this government promised to fix health care. Yet, surprisingly, they increased health spending less than we did last year. They are investing \$400 million, and last year we invested over \$500 million. The funny part about that - let me just find my pages here - is that the now-Premier last year called our budget, which increased health care funding by \$500 million, "a mile wide and an inch deep." If that's the case for spending half a billion dollars, you have to wonder what less spending makes it.

We have heard in the House, the Minister of Health and Wellness said health care was going to get better every single day under them, but it's not. So many indicators are out there: wait times for long-term care are up by 33 days; the wait-list for long-term care is up by more than 400 people.

One hundred and thirty-three people have died from Omicron, the worst wave for Nova Scotia, more deaths than all the other waves put together. We locked down in the past to save our most vulnerable and to save our health system, and we are seeing the effects now when you remove restrictions early, when you don't protect your health care system.

I had a reach-out from a constituent on Monday. Her mother is in her 90s, and she's in the hospital. My constituent had arrived at the hospital about 9:00 a.m., and her mom was in a johnny shirt and she was freezing cold. Her pajamas were soaking. They were hanging on a guest chair. She had no breakfast. The drapes were closed, and her mom had been sitting in urine overnight. My constituent bathed her mom, got her warm, her medication was on the floor, and my constituent said there is no staff.

What we know is that we have hundreds and hundreds of health care staff who are off right now. The number, I think, was up by 144 from the previous week, the numbers of staff who are off. It's not coming to my mind directly, but it's 400-and-something. The fact is that this is not dignity for seniors. This is a system in distress because the government of the day did not protect the health care system. We're now short-staffed because all of these people have COVID-19 and they're off.

Then we think about the paramedics. Boy, we heard about the paramedics during the election. The Premier said he cared about paramedics, said he fixed Code Criticals. There was an emergency debate in the House about it. This week there was another Code Critical in the Western Zone, and do you know how much money there is in this budget for paramedics? There's nothing.

We know we need more health care workers, but you know what? So does every other jurisdiction in the country. Yesterday, Ontario was announcing what they were going to do to recruit health care workers, and for a second, I kind of shook my head because I thought, is this a report out of Ontario or is it a report out of Nova Scotia? It's all the same stuff. Everybody's doing the same stuff. We're going to the same pool for the same people.

A lot of the stuff, a lot of the things that we were doing to help recruit health care workers are things we were already doing. That's what most of my questions were about last Fall here in the House. I hauled out the minister's mandate letter. The minister's mandate letter had item after item after item that we had already done or were items that were well under way. We found it interesting that they were solutionists, and they were already the solutions that we already had under way. Whether it's paying tuition for CCAs, return of service agreements for doctors, or, literally, hiring the whole nursing class upon graduation. Do you think we weren't doing that already? It was happening.

I hope I'm wrong. I hope the announcements that we have been hearing about will produce more staff. I hope that when those people move here from other places, we have a place for them to live and that they don't have to pay \$550,000 for a house that just three years ago was less than \$200,000 to buy. Part of the reason people flocked here over the last couple of years is because we did so well with COVID-19. We know that because that's what we heard.

We heard from people who lived in Ontario, and they were convinced that their government wasn't taking it seriously. They saw our rates here, and they saw that we took

it seriously here. They saw that we protected our health care system, and we protected Nova Scotians, so they moved here. Sometimes they helped to drive up housing costs, but we're really glad to have them here living with us. I worry about what will happen for the people who come next. What will they face when they come here? Rising costs and possible accommodations issues.

[6:00 p.m.]

Then I looked through the budget and I look at things like environment. The government says they are for the environment, and they are not like their Conservative counterparts elsewhere, the folks who deny climate change. Yet they have reduced funding for the environment and climate change, not insignificantly. Last year the department spent around \$46 million, and this year it's less than \$38 million. In the time of a climate crisis, that's unacceptable.

Then I took a little delve through some of the supplemental details, and I see there's \$400 million in restructuring. For folks who aren't familiar with the process, restructuring is where governments will park money when they're not sure what stuff is going to cost, or they haven't finished figuring out a program, that kind of thing. The supplementary details - \$400 million is a lot of money.

We have no idea, no clue, what that is about. That's nearly half a billion dollars, and it's just sitting there. We don't know what they're going to spend it on. It's a lot of mad money to just say, hey, you have this pool of money over there, and you are going to do something with it, and that's great. We don't have any idea what it's about.

Mr. Speaker, back in August, Nova Scotians thought they were getting a health care fix. We have seen very little sign of it. In fact, by many measures, whether it is wait times, COVID-19 deaths, emergency rooms, Code Criticals, or whatever - trying to pry information out of the Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care about which long-term care homes are actually taking patients. In February, 34 of our long-term care homes were closed to residents. They were not taking new residents at 34 of our province's long-term care homes. For 17, that was because they had COVID-19 in the long-term care home. For 17, it was because of staff shortages.

Now we have had seven months under the new government, and things have not gotten better. Perhaps things will take time, but I'm not sure any measures are getting better, and that's concerning.

We have seen no signs of fixing the health care system. We've seen a lot of announcements, but we haven't seen the results of those announcements. I think Nova Scotians thought they were getting a business-friendly bunch, but there's nothing here for business. There's no Better Pay Cheque Guarantee, no guarantee at all. There's no Nova

Scotia loyal program and sometimes we hear mutterings that they're working on it and sometimes we hear different rumours, but honestly, where is it?

It was a big flashy program, at least all over the election campaign. There's no relief in this budget for Nova Scotians. No relief from high prices, no help for first-time home buyers, no protection from renovictions. There's a program to help seniors get their groceries delivered but there's nothing to help them buy the groceries. This budget is not helping many Nova Scotians.

At the end of the day, because we're going to borrow so much with this budget, our children are going to end up paying once again. So our kids who can't buy a house are not going to be able to have new programs because we'll be spending so much - we used to spend a billion dollars a year servicing our debt. I would often say, boy, what DCS couldn't have done with another billion. I might have had to wrestle the Health and Wellness Minister for it, though. I just think back to that. We could have so used that billion.

I keep thinking, what happens if interest rates go up? What happens there? That has to be a concern. We know it's a concern. So our children are going to end up paying for the next four years for what gets spent. And God help us if we have a recession or interest rates go up or anything like that.

I have so many things to table and I didn't do them. Anyway, I did some of them but I didn't table the rest. I can't table it because they won't let you print anything.

I'm just going to end with something that one of the folks who covers the House wrote about the money we're borrowing. Again, I'm conflicted, because it's great to have money to spend on programs, and we all want to see health care improved, but at the same time we always have to remember we may be mortgaging our children's future. That may be the only mortgage those kids ever get because they won't be able to afford a mortgage on a house, so they'll get this mortgage here.

Brian Flinn in *allNovaScotia* wrote the Premier “. . . plans to add \$6 billion to the provincial debt over the next four years . . .” A 36 per cent increase that will dwarf anything the province has seen since the John Buchanan era of the 1980s. So with that, with those few words, I will now take my seat.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, before I begin I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge that we are meeting on traditional territory of the Mi'kmaw people. The land mass that we call Nova Scotia was never ceded or surrendered. We are all treaty people and we must strive to meet these obligations.

I am pleased to rise today to give the NDP caucus response to yesterday's budget. While there are a few items in the budget that I am pleased to see, overall, the budget leaves much to be desired and leaves many people without the supports they need.

Mr. Speaker, the Progressive Conservatives call this a compassionate budget, but it lacks a real answer for the Nova Scotians who are facing a cost of living crisis. Nova Scotians, like the rest of the world, are facing record levels of inflation: over 5 per cent in Nova Scotia today and expected to rise even further.

It is, as the Premier has reflected, or perhaps deflected, a human problem. It is indeed a global shared experience of inflation, but this government and this budget is supposed to show compassion to Nova Scotians who are struggling daily to get by. This budget does little to provide relief to Nova Scotians.

For a budget promising compassion, this budget does little to reassure Nova Scotians that their government understands what it's like day in and day out: rising prices at the grocery store, at the gas pump, and to heat our homes; rental rates and housing prices that outstrip the resources of many working people and families. The Progressive Conservatives have let renovictions begin again and paid sick leave will end this week. In many ways, the government is making the situation worse.

The pandemic was a shared experience, but not an even experience. Many people have been negatively affected by the pandemic, either when it comes to their health, their relationships, or their finances. The Progressive Conservatives will say that not everything can be done at once, and that is true. It is true that priority-setting is needed. But the lack of action around affordability is incomprehensible.

Yes, \$13 million was provided in a support package in one-off year-end funding announcements. That actual funding received by families - it's evaporated by now, perhaps covering already accumulated debts. This approach gives folks nothing to plan for upcoming expenses.

I surely cannot be the only member who has stood at a grocery store checkout, keeping track of each item, asking for subtotals, and putting things back. Some of my earliest memories are of standing beside my mom doing this budget dance, stress emanating from her whole being. That's how we're asking our children to grow up today.

Nova Scotia's income assistance rates have been inhumanely low, and they actually shrink in real dollars every month. We spoke this afternoon about the inadequate social safety net that is provided to Nova Scotians. One-fifth of our children are living in poverty and one-third of the children in Cape Breton are living in poverty.

Have you ever worked or volunteered at a school breakfast program or lunch program? Children shouldn't arrive at schools hungry with nothing in their backpacks for

snacks or lunch. I know that all members would react with compassion in the face of this. Can we agree that we cannot accept poverty management any longer? We need poverty elimination.

I am very proud of the work that the federal NDP did to create the CERB and make sure everyone could make ends meet during the pandemic. Unfortunately, many of these supports have ended, yet most households have not properly recovered. The result is lower incomes at exactly the time that the cost of living has skyrocketed, putting a major strain on families.

Another way the pandemic was not an even experience was around the impact on women and gender diverse folks, racialized communities, and other marginalized groups. For example, while employment rates for men have largely recovered, unemployment for women remains higher than at the beginning of the pandemic.

Given this situation, it is very odd that the government seems to have failed to conduct any gender-based or diversity analysis of its budget and how the changes will affect different people differently.

Another item lacking in this budget is any idea of a multi-sectoral economic recovery plan. The NDP caucus has been calling for such a plan since the end of the first wave of the pandemic. The government should have brought everyone to the table: businesses, community organizations, unions, environmental groups, First Nations organizations, and others to start working on sector-based economic growth plans. The failure to have all these voices at one table means that things are being missed and overlooked.

The hot Summer days of a Summer election seem far away on this cool March day, but let's collectively recall. I was unprepared for the intimacy of the campaign. On the doorsteps, people shared their hopes and fears and their reflections on where we are today. In health care, people as parents, as children of aging parents, and for themselves spoke of their concern about their lack of access to primary health care and lack of access to specialists. They worried about the "now" and they worried about the "what if." In the terrible "what if" of a health scare, would they be able to count on the system to respond in a compassionate and timely fashion?

I also heard from diverse medical professionals who shared the fears of their own family's access to health care, their own access to the services they needed for their patients, and feeling like they were not practising to their full potential. They spoke about leaving. They also spoke about how they felt a lack of respect in the system. Over the years, and during the campaign, Nova Scotians in agony shared with me how their loved ones worsened during the long wait for mental health care.

Mr. Speaker, it was promised that health care would be fixed. In the face of fear and desperation, people put their trust in this government. Most people knew that it wouldn't be easy, but they are still waiting for a plan. I am pleased to see that many of the budget items focus on health care, especially that the government is implementing a long-standing NDP proposal to provide 4.1 hours of direct care for every resident of a long-term care facility. That said, the Premier promised a plan to fix health care by March 31st, and we have not seen such a plan.

The NDP caucus was also pleased that the government acted on increasing wages for CCAs. This was a positive step. We had hoped that they would build on this in Budget 2022-23 by looking at the wages for paramedics, nurses, dietary, and janitorial staff, all of whom are essential to operating our health care system. Unfortunately, there was nothing to increase the wages of our health care heroes in the budget.

We are also disappointed not to see any mention in the budget of physician assistants and midwives. While there is new money to support the recruitment of health professionals, there is little to no action on integrating these important professions into our public health care system. Physician assistants would help ease the pressures of the doctor shortage, both in primary care and emergency care.

Midwives could help reduce pressure on hospitals and primary care providers by providing high-quality care to people who are pregnant. It is very odd to me that given we have people in our province who are trained and qualified to work in these roles, that the government has not taken any further action to integrate these professionals.

Finally, on the health file, I am deeply disappointed to see such little action on resolving the issues that paramedics are facing and the problems in emergency health care. Paramedics are facing burnout and every one of us in this Chamber hears from paramedics on this issue. The paramedics' union has been issuing Code Criticals when there are fewer than two ambulances available in a given county. There have been hundreds of Code Criticals this year alone and it is only March. This is a major shortcoming in Budget 2022-23.

Coming out of the pandemic, the need to address the backlog of surgeries and other procedures is huge; however, more clarity of how increased OR time will be prioritized is important. Across health care, there is a growing need to monitor against further privatization. Our health human resources will always be finite. Creating more demand for private service providers will result in an increased competition for professionals, a competition that the Province may not always win.

As I said, people often talk to me about their struggles and the lack of adequate mental health services in our community. So it is somewhat surprising that Budget 2022-23 does so little to address the growing need for mental health services in our province.

The budget has a \$20.6 million commitment to mental health. I want to walk through the planned expenditures in detail so that we fully understand how little there truly is for the mental health of Nova Scotians. First of all, this is, of course, much less than the \$100 million that the Premier promised to create universal access to mental health care. It does not include funding for same-day, next-day mental health services as the Premier suggested was being worked on when he went to Ottawa in the Fall.

We continue to advocate for a community-based mental health system that provides wraparound and diverse services, and where there is immediate access, by walking in or, if needed, a phone call. However, the discussion on the relevancy of the idea of extending MSI costs to cover private professionals does not need to happen today because it's not in the budget. There is simply an additional half million dollars put towards working on this project in the coming year.

From the \$20.6 million, the majority - \$12 million - is an investment in early autism intervention services. Like other advances in disability supports, this is important because we know early intervention is key. But early intervention needs to be matched by a lifetime approach to support for people with autism - inclusive education, employability supports, housing, and adequate financial supports as adults.

The *Roadmap for Transforming the Nova Scotia Services to Persons with Disabilities Program* called on the government to phase out institutional facilities and replace them with small option homes by 2023. With the wait-list of more than 1,500, this budget includes funding for only 22 new small option homes. I would ask this government to keep in mind institutions do not have to be large. As long as individuals living in small option homes cannot be actively involved in our community due to lack of funding, they are still living in an institution, so we need to think about the long-term plan.

All investments need to be matched by respect and true compassion, by stopping the fight and chorus against disabled people in this province. How can it be argued that there has not been systemic discrimination when government has restricted access to education, housing, and health care for generations?

This is a critical investment for young Nova Scotians, yet not likely what we all thought we were promised when we heard universal mental health care. What are some of the other actual investments in mental health? There is a \$3.4 million investment in additional clinicians to provide virtual care and this year that covers - the budget commits to 11 of the planned 22 clinicians for Nova Scotia Health. So when we talk about the 22 clinicians, the budget hasn't been allocated for those yet.

There are an additional eight FTEs, all at the IWK, all to provide virtual care. That's right, all the additional resources announced focus on additional people to connect with folks using an iPad, particularly during emergencies. This is apparently a compassionate budget, but I can't imagine the compassion when you or a loved one is in psychosis and

suffering, and the only service available to you is still the emergency room, and then you are handed an iPad.

Where are the investments in communities to keep people well? The IWK is currently implementing an integrated youth services initiative. We are almost the last place in Canada to introduce this model to support young people. In every other jurisdiction, these initiatives were introduced, championed, and supported by the government as a systemic response to youth mental health needs, but this budget offers no support.

There is also \$2.3 million allocated to additional FTEs to help in data collection and evaluation. Surely this is important. We need services based on evidence. There is also \$600,000 being provided to consult with stakeholders and review models of care. I hope that is a broad consultation with the vast array of community organizations that support the mental health and well-being of Nova Scotians.

In terms of direct service, there is a commitment to the ongoing funding of the pilot day treatment program. Nova Scotia has long lacked any step-down mental health care options. However, the current program is a small initiative and it's not clear that it will provide adequate time or wraparound services to ensure success, and it is currently accessible only to folks in the HRM.

I do applaud ongoing expansion of the withdrawal management delivery system. In many ways, this initiative is a great example of what we need. These services are located in the heart of communities, and there is no gatekeeper. You can truly walk in at any point in your journey. Connections with other services ensure wraparound services to support people to make sustained progress in their well-being.

I'd like to turn to housing as well. In this budget plan, there also will not be a single new unit of down-market housing built, yet the Progressive Conservative government will continue to give subsidies to wealthy developers.

The NDP has been calling on the Progressive Conservative government to enact permanent rent control and commit to a clear plan to address the housing crisis, but they've allocated nothing for people trying to survive in an increasingly inaccessible housing market.

The recent Dartmouth announcement promises affordable housing at 60 to 80 per cent of people's income, far above the recommended level of 30 per cent. The Progressive Conservatives promised they wouldn't wait to solve the housing problem, but an entire Winter has gone by and there are now more people sleeping in the streets than there were when the government took office in the Summer.

On Thursday, tomorrow, the overnight temporary shelter at the Pavilion in the Halifax Common will close. What happens on April 1st? I am sure people would love to

hear that plan. I am deeply disappointed with the lack of action on affordable housing in the budget. It shows an out-of-touch, disinterested approach to helping manage the real problems that Nova Scotians are facing.

I am hopeful to see the commitments in the budget to inclusive education. I know the cost of not providing inclusive education. Just before the electoral campaign started, we as a family lost our young friend Adam, whose story I've shared with you before. Adam's experience in school, in particular, spiralled due to a lack of consistent support. Of course, for kids, school experience is definitive. With ongoing failures in school, his health suffered, and we lost him before his 15th birthday. Adam didn't get the support he needed, and far too many children are in the same situation.

We look forward to the results of the evaluation of IPPs amongst African Nova Scotian and Indigenous students, and we look forward to those being taken into account to develop further culturally competent supports for these students. Overall, we need to move away from a year-by-year approach that forces children and parents each year to fight for recognition for a plan and for implementation.

We need to support students with respect and dignity throughout their public-school careers. If we are truly serious about implementing the recommendations of the inclusive education report, then we need to circle back to the question of respect for the fundamental rights and integrity of persons with disabilities in this province.

In 2018, I was honoured to lead youth engagement processes to advise the commission on inclusive education in partnership with Easter Seals, Pathways to Education Spryfield, and Laing House.

What youth said they wanted and what they needed was respect and compassion by the system. Right now, when they look forward in their lives as young adults to working or further study into independent living, they see members of their community in the courts, taken there by government that wants to make them fight the concept that they are discriminated against in a systemic way.

The Progressive Conservatives made some one-time year-end investments in advanced education. Research Nova Scotia received a \$25 million investment, but to truly make sure that we have the research happening and being shared that we need in this province, Research Nova Scotia needs an ongoing increase of approximately \$20 million per year.

There were one-time infusions to help offset the deferred maintenance needs of rural universities, but there are further pressures in this area. The specialized facilities at universities need to keep pace with the technical requirements in all areas of study.

The crisis of affordability hits the students hard. Coming to Nova Scotia for school means coming to a province with a low minimum wage and high costs, especially in housing. Coupled with no mention of controlling tuition fees or relieving student debt, it's hard to see how any student would find this a welcoming place.

The one-time year-end allocation of \$875 was, I hope, helpful for some. Yet, in many ways how this was administered demonstrates exactly how out of touch the government is with the needs of students. Students who qualified - and it was a complicated process - received that one-time payment, and certainly that would be a welcome relief for groceries for exam month or maybe a few less hours at work and more time to study.

[6:30 p.m.]

The challenge with this payment was that it was too little, too late. As a student, I had to pay my tuition in January, and students are making decisions about continuing their studies in December and January. How much do I need to make it though the second semester? Do I have enough for rent? How much will I need to work? Maybe they thought I will work more and study part-time which then, sadly, made them ineligible to receive this payment.

We continue to call for more equitable treatment of international students. We want international students to come and stay. There are specific steps to making this province more welcoming, including extending MSI access from Day 1.

We have spoken to our concern about the lack of investments in environment, climate change, and natural resources. We are eager to see the climate plan and the plans for the Green Fund over the next few years. Achieving our climate change goals requires action now. It is difficult to look at a budget that does not announce any new investments, and if we are to truly achieve our climate crisis goals, we need systemic changes in energy and other systems - but we need to do this all together. The lack of investment indicates that there will be a lack of support to keep partners in this plan to enable them to do the work.

For municipalities, too, there is little in this budget. For climate change, municipalities need support to hire staff, to engage in planning, and to construct and rehabilitate physical infrastructure. Municipalities also need support with projects to address other priorities of the government, including anti-racism initiatives.

We've heard quite a bit today about the plight of small businesses in our province. Small businesses kept the heart of our communities beating during the pandemic. Creative approaches to feeding and supplying us were usually done with a sense of civic duty, pride, and good humour. We saw the compassion of small business owners who tried desperately to keep staff on payroll and keep staff and customers safe. Most small and medium-sized

businesses across Nova Scotia now hold an enormous amount of debt. They're also facing mounting costs and continued uncertainty from the global market.

Finally, I just want to touch on arts and culture, and the honourable member for Dartmouth North provided an eloquent overview of the importance of the creative economy. Can you imagine a Nova Scotia without a creative economy? I cannot. I remember the thrill when we moved back from Ottawa - and I won't comment on Ottawa's level of creativity - and first hosted friends old and new, and we realized that we had an amazing group of friends who gathered. They created music, words, performances, dances, and more. Another sector that suffered in the pandemic was the accommodation of food, again as the honourable member for Dartmouth North outlined.

We know that the government sees the value of sector investments in film and television, sports and rinks, and the decision to move tourism into the department, but we can do more. We need a recovery plan that assesses how to support diverse parts of the sector. The investment in Nova Scotia Film, in a sound stage and in the Content Creator Fund, are important, but the live performance sector needs more of a boost, and unless we take action there will be long-term effects on this sector.

Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments with a few final thoughts. I want to talk for a moment about what was needed versus what was delivered in Budget 2022. One thing that was needed was action on the rapidly rising cost of living. What was delivered was very little: no help for people to buy their groceries, no help for people to fill their oil tanks, no help for people to put gas in their car, and no relief from some of the highest electricity bills in the country.

Another thing that was needed - that is still needed - is getting people access to the mental health care they need. What was delivered was a broken promise on universal access. People who are struggling have grounds to be deeply disappointed in this government.

Another thing that was needed was action on affordable housing. What was delivered in Budget 2022 is more of the same failed policies, more subsidies for developers, more rent subsidies, the end of the ban on renovictions but not one new non-market home will be built as a result of this budget. That means the housing crisis will only get worse. What was needed was broad-scale relief with people struggling to make ends meet and what was delivered were regressive tax credits that will only be accessible to those who have resources in the first place.

We are running a deficit that we need now, but without a plan for implementing priorities we also can't anticipate the financial plan going forward in an adequate way. Before I was a student of health systems, I was a student of public administration, so forgive me when I resort to technocratic solutions. When forced with enormous challenges, we do

need plans and yet here we are nine months in, the first budget, that cuts the path for this province that will be hard to get off of. It's still not clear how it all hangs together.

Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat by saying I hope to see more details from the government on their intentions and I look forward to the Estimates process, where I hope we will get some detailed answers from our colleagues on the other side of the House.

THE SPEAKER: With the end of the responses to the Budget Address, the Estimates are now referred to the Committee of the Whole on Supply.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is to resolve into a Committee of the Whole on Supply and is now carried.

My apologies. The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to debate into Supply about why we are going into Supply.

The government tabled a budget this week, a budget that by all accounts they are very proud of. In the intervening days there have been several positive cases of COVID-19 identified in this building and yet, here we are at 6:38 p.m. on a Wednesday night in the middle of a pandemic being asked to debate the budget line by line. We have at our disposal a cadre of well-informed, hard-working Public Service servants and like us they are away from their families working extra hours, ready with not a lot of notice, as we all know, to assist their ministers in this effort.

I have risen in this House now probably a dozen times to discuss the fundamental flaws that arise from the way that we choose to conduct democracy in Nova Scotia and against the backdrop I just described, I will take this opportunity to do it again. For a start, I will point out that we are for the first time in the memory of most people in this House moving into this debate in Supply without the agreement of the House. Both of the House Leaders have asked that this debate be postponed and have been told that is not going to happen.

In light of the fact that we are discussing how to move forward, in light of COVID-19 that this government has said that they would like to bring a motion to help us move forward, our response was, great, give us some time. Why don't we delay for one night the line-by-line debate on a budget that we know will pass? The government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars in the last couple of months doing what they think they

need to do. There is no urgency at 6:39 p.m. on a Wednesday night on the fourth day of the sitting for us to be here in the middle of a pandemic.

So, why are we here? I can think of three answers. The first, the big question: why are we here? That I can't answer. I have my thoughts, but that would take more than 12 minutes and 28 seconds. We'll bookmark that for when I'm trying to fill an hour sometime down the road.

The second "Why are we here?" is because our democratic process here in Nova Scotia is in need of reform. I have introduced several bills that I think would accomplish that, but I'm not here to talk about those bills because they're on the Order Paper. What I will say is that here in Nova Scotia, we sit the fewest number of days of any Legislature in Canada. We have no Legislative calendar. We never know when we're going to sit. We never know how long we're going to sit.

Fun fact: there used to be sitting hours. I'll just remind the government that we have sitting hours in the House of Assembly Rules. We sit from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday. We sit from 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday with 30 minutes provided for late debate. We sit from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Friday.

Those were designed so that MLAs, who do a lot more than just come into this Legislature as we all know, can work in their constituencies and can do all of the other things. Ministers, certainly, have a lot of other work to do. Not all the work that MLAs do happens in this House, but the work that happens in this House is very important.

Those rules used to actually be that you needed amendment if you wanted to contravene those rules. A motion would have to be brought and it would have to be passed by two-thirds of the House. At some point that provision was removed from the House of Assembly Rules. So now those rules are meaningless.

We saw, before we even sat, the hours called for this week were to 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock, and now we hear that we're here until 11:59 p.m. tomorrow. In the middle of a global pandemic when the government says they want to address it. That is ridiculous.

There may certainly be times when we need to be here late into the night. We all know this job is demanding, but the idea that in the first four days of the Legislative sitting we need to be here at 6:42 at night, going line by line through the budget with public servants who probably don't even want to be in this building with COVID-19, is absurd.

There's a third answer to this question. The third answer to this question of, "Why are we here?" The answer is this: because this government is determined to get their way at all costs. They forget that their majority status out there does not give them carte blanche in here. (Applause)

They say they want us to move to a hybrid format, but they won't engage with us to get there. So what do they do? Because we won't do things on their timeline - because we take seriously our responsibilities to our caucus, our constituents, the Speaker, and this Assembly - they keep us here longer, as cases are rising, because they can. They would rather flex this ability to control their agenda than work productively across parties to determine how to go forward in this session.

Mr. Speaker, it is a bad decision. It is the wrong decision. I am hopeful that it will be revisited. Thank you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

[6:45 p.m.]

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm here to talk about Supply. That was a hard act to follow - my colleague across the way.

When we looked at the plan that was just presented to us this week - we've all heard the analogy of the dog chasing the car, then the dog catches the car and doesn't know what to do with it. When I think about the current government and the plan, or lack of plan, that's been put forward, that analogy was the first thing that came to my mind was, okay - what do I do? I'm not sure what to do.

So the plan that came forward was a plan about solutions: solutions for health care; solutions for not much of anything else.

It was a plan about compassion. I didn't see much compassion in this document myself. I'm not sure what others saw and I'm not sure what the public will see. Time will tell.

I want to go through a few items from the current plan and just talk about what I think is missing. Of course, there were some good things that were placed in this plan. There's no doubt about that, but there are also lots of things that are missing. I just want to give a little synopsis.

I'll start with supports for business. As I tabled a document earlier during Question Period, and my colleague from Bedford spoke about, 66 per cent of businesses in this province are still not operating at normal revenue levels. That is a scary statistic. Another 66 per cent of businesses had to take on debt over this pandemic, a lot of debt, and 15 per cent of those businesses fear that they won't be able to pay back this debt. What does that mean? Generally, that's it, it's over, kaput. The businesses may close.

There was nothing in this budget - it appears as though we feel COVID-19 is over. When we look at the Department of Economic Development, during this fiscal year, we

way overspent what the estimate was - way overspent. The majority of that spending was to help businesses get through that portion of the pandemic. Then I look at the estimate that's put forward by this government for this fiscal year. We are still in a pandemic. That is evident, as my colleague just talked about. It's going to get worse.

The budget for economic development is less than the previous estimate last year, even though the previous government and this government have overspent that line item to try and make businesses whole. Businesses are not whole. They need more help. In order to do that, we need to spend money, so I'm a little bit worried about that. In my opinion, on the small business piece I didn't see any solution, nor did I see any compassion.

Where we did see compassion is around big business. I think the statistic quoted was somewhere around \$200 million for big business. Wow, that could go a long way to help some of our small businesses in this province to not only recover but to help thrive, to help grow our economy. We all know that small business is the engine of our economy. Get people back to work and get people earning money and spending money in our province.

The other thing that's missing from this document is an economic recovery plan. I know it has been stated that it's across all the mandate letters about growth, about economic recovery. I didn't see it, but if it's that important, it should be in this document. As we have stated earlier today, the first thing that happened - let's just fire the Economic Growth Council. We don't need them. Let's fire them. We don't need to grow our economy.

We talked this week extensively about Plan A, Plan B and Plan C. I would just like to see a plan - a plan on how we're going to get out of it. What does this message tell Nova Scotians? What does it tell small business? It tells them good luck. Good luck recovering from this pandemic. Good luck building your business. Good luck surviving. Good luck paying off that debt, business owner. We're not here for you right now. Our doors are closed.

That brings me on to a major topic in this House so far this session, and I'm assuming going forward, and that's the issue of affordability. This would have been the biggest area where some compassion would have been welcomed.

Again, I didn't see any solutions or any compassion for Nova Scotians in this document that are going to help them survive. Last week the member for Halifax Chebucto took us on a tour of the grocery store. That tour was a very good example of what the average, everyday Nova Scotian is facing right now. I went to the grocery store the other day, and if you want to try and eat healthy - I walked out of that store with one bag, a nice-sized bag - one bag, \$100. One bag, throw in some vegetables - as my colleague said, let's go along to the meat aisle, throw in a few items of meat - and you are over \$100.

I would like to add to the member for Halifax Chebucto, and I think he may have talked about this, but add in the cost of groceries with the cost of gas, the cost to heat your home, the cost to pay your power bill, which is going to go up by 10 per cent under this government, there's nothing here for low- and middle-income families who are all struggling. There's no compassion; there's no solution.

Sure, there are some one-time \$150 payments. Well, we know that \$150 bucks is one trip to the grocery store, one bag and a half, based on my experience. A bag and a half of groceries, one time. What Nova Scotians need is help over a long period of time. They need help to live. Nobody is able to survive in the environment that we are in today. Paycheques are not rising.

That brings me to another point, the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee. I think that might have even been on the campaign bus if I'm not mistaken. That was a huge cornerstone for Nova Scotians. To build that trust with Nova Scotians, we are going to put more money in your pocket so you are able to buy the things that you need and you are able to pay your bills. You would think with compassion and with solutions that that would be the first thing, the first place we would want to hit Nova Scotians is in their pocketbook. We're hitting them there all right, but in the wrong way. We need to hit them there in a positive way; we need to help them to get through where we are today.

My colleague talked about Quebec, \$500 right now, get it in their pockets. We're not doing anything like that. So, what in this document has the government said to Nova Scotians, to low- and middle-income Nova Scotians? They've said, "Good luck." Well, I'm pretty sure that luck doesn't buy groceries at the grocery store.

I'd like to talk a little bit about what we saw in health care. In this document we saw some investment in health care, which is great. We know that this government ran on fixing health care and every Nova Scotian is hoping and praying that you can fix health care. The key word there is "praying", because this budget doesn't go nearly far enough to fix some of the things we're talking about. We're still seeing surgical wait-times that are extraordinary, we're still seeing difficulty getting appointments, we're having difficulty getting our scans, difficulty getting all of the things that we need in this province.

This budget was supposed to be - I think I heard the word at some point - transformational. I don't see it. I'm sorry, I don't see this as a transformational budget. I see it as a status quo budget. Let's just put a budget out there, our first one, and get our feet wet. I don't think we should be using the word "transformational."

When we talk about health care, there are many, many people in this province who are struggling. I think about all of our citizens who are struggling with diabetes. Those citizens are struggling not only with the disease but with the financial impact to purchase the materials and the tools that they need to manage their disease. I spoke with a young

man in my office who's an advocate for people with diabetes. He posted on my wall: There's nothing here for me. There's nothing here.

Please, when we're thinking about health care and we're thinking about all the different aspects of this budget, let's help those who need it the most. Let's help people like those with diabetes. Let's help seniors. There's nothing here for seniors. There's nothing here for seniors at all.

While we saw some modest increase in the health budget, what really struck me was where there were cuts: economic development, environment, fisheries, natural resources. Wow. I see a theme here - things that are very important to the people of Nova Scotia - and we're significantly reducing the budgets in those very key areas. We all know what climate change is doing to our province. We all know that we need to be spending more money in the environment. We need to be spending more money in our resources. We need to be improving those areas. We need solutions. We need compassion. It's not there.

Where we do see transformational growth is in the public service. We see growth in the Estimates in Public Service and in restructuring costs, whatever restructuring costs are: \$400 million for restructuring costs. It appears the minister knows what it is, because he just yelled it across, although I couldn't hear. But it's not about compassion. It's not about transformational. It's a slush fund. He said, ask your colleagues about it, they'll know.

Well, the restructuring costs that I see in this Estimate are three or four times greater than the previous government's Estimate: \$400 million versus \$100 million. When we talk about growth, that is significant growth.

In my last 30 seconds, I will talk about housing. We heard today about the number of units versus the rent supplement. We need more supply of housing. We need more affordable housing in this province - \$15 million, yes, I agree. We need more, and it's not here. It's not here. Not enough is here. We need much more of that. I'll be happy to see that when it comes.

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

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House and speak to the 2022-23 budget, *Solutions for Healthcare, Solutions for Nova Scotians*. It is actually an appropriate name for the budget, as it reflects many of the policies laid out in our election platform, *Solutions for Nova Scotians*.

You know it's a good budget when the first criticism from the Opposition was that they didn't like the photo on the front page - on the cover - making reference that Premier Houston, as opposed to our Finance and Treasury Board Minister, is on the front page. The

truth of that matter is that we did try to get a picture of our Finance and Treasury Board Minister for the front page, but he was working so hard on the budget with his head bent down, tapping on his adding machine. The proof of that is he has a spot on the top of his head from the light that was shining down while he had his head there.

[7:00 p.m.]

In all seriousness, and before I get into what I have prepared, I just really want to respond a little bit to some of the remarks toward our budget. I just want to remind everybody that this is Year 1. We had a lot of promises. One of the things that Premier Houston does is that he is a person of his word.

Some of the other things I hear: \$13 billion, \$13 billion, \$13 billion - not helping Nova Scotians? There is \$13 billion being put back into the Nova Scotia economy, paying Nova Scotian workers, Nova Scotia infrastructure, highways, hospitals. The money is all going back to Nova Scotia. It's not going elsewhere. It is in Nova Scotia.

I heard conversations and comments about a living wage, and about protecting small businesses, and there is nothing for a small business. Well, let me guarantee you that if we take a living wage from where it is right now to \$20 an hour, we will have more bankruptcies from our small businesses than have ever happened before. We need to ease into this on the plan that we have and listen to the commission on it.

The other thing that is wonderful right now is we are at a pretty well natural, full employment. There is a job there for anybody who wants a job right now. Now, I do admit that not everybody can do all of the jobs that are available. In our consultations with the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, I have been told several times that if you can find somebody who can put their arms out and carry lumber and walk with it to move it from place to place, it's \$25 an hour, easily. So there are jobs available for Nova Scotians.

You know what? This is my first year here. It has been quite an experience, and it is a learning experience for me. I do understand what the Opposition is trying to do, but I am going to go through some of the items that are in our budget. We have good things in our budget, Mr. Speaker. We have proposed good spending to help Nova Scotians.

This budget follows through on a number of these commitments in our plan, including investing to increase staffing levels to a daily standard of at least 4.1 hours of one-on-one care for long-term care residents. This will ensure that our seniors have the care and the dignity that they deserve.

Our government's budget also follows through on more opportunity for skilled trades programs starting at the 2022 tax year. This program will return provincial, personal income tax paid to the first \$50,000 of earnings for eligible people under the age of 30.

With historic investments in hospitals, schools, roads, bridges, and universities, we need to attract and recruit more trades professionals to complete these projects.

Trades is not the only field facing incredible demand. I am pleased that this budget will enable the department I lead, Advanced Education, to increase training for 200 nurses and alongside the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, establish the new work and learn model while waiving tuition for CCAs.

These are strategic investments in the priorities of Nova Scotians because, as the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said in his speech, this is a budget about listening to Nova Scotians and acting with compassion. I have only been elected for about seven months, but I thought that listening to people was an obvious part of the job.

That is why I was surprised yesterday when I heard a Liberal Party member across the way, in reply to our new budget, state as a criticism that our government toured the province to find out how to fix some of the problems. Mr. Speaker, it is no wonder the Liberal Party failed to earn the confidence of Nova Scotians this past August, if they think that listening to Nova Scotians is a mistake. Perhaps it's also the reason that our province stagnated under their leadership.

If you want to truly fix health care, you need to listen to the people on the front lines: the doctors, the nurses, the CCAs, the students. That was something the previous government failed to do, and it's one of the first undertakings of our government. In fact, I'd like to read from an article in *The Cape Breton Post*, which I will table, entitled "Cape Breton CCAs motivated to stay after wage increase announced." This article was in response to a long overdue 23-per cent wage increase our government gave to CCAs.

The article writes that the call between the Premier and the Minister of Seniors and Long-Term Care was the first time that some of these CCAs had ever heard from government. One CCA was quoted in the article, saying, "On the call with the premier and minister the other night, I had so much respect for Premier Houston for making himself vulnerable on a call like that." Another said, and I'm reading from the article here, that "it felt like Houston and Adams heard their concerns and took action, unlike other governments." I'll table that.

I'd like this House to think about those quotes for a moment. They felt like this government took actions, unlike other governments. That's the value of listening, and truly listening to understand the needs of those we serve.

The work this government has done to improve the lives of CCAs is important because it addresses a vital component to staffing that has been neglected for years: retention. While that is but one example, that is what this government has demonstrated in our budget: that we are listening and that we are taking action. Another good example for this government's listening and taking action is that after the Premier had a call with

nursing students, we immediately eliminated the gap in student assistance support for those in accelerated nursing programs.

It's amazing the good ideas, the struggles, and the life experiences that you hear when you go out and listen to Nova Scotians. I'm proud that our Health and Wellness Minister went out to meet with the front-line health care workers to listen to them directly. Similarly, I'm proud that our Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is meeting with teachers on a regular basis. In my role as Minister of Advanced Education, I have made it a priority to visit all our universities and many of our colleges and to meet with students - not only the regularly-scheduled meetings with student leaders, but going into classrooms and listening to those whose voices are not often heard.

There's no doubt that this budget is about listening. Just look at the investments in housing: \$15 million more for affordable housing programs, \$2.7 million more for new rent supplements associated with quick start investments, and investments to build three new NSCC residences as part of developing a student housing strategy.

This budget is also proactive and addresses problems at their roots. As a former educator for 28 years, I know first-hand that students who are hungry and who don't have support at home are not able to learn to their full potential in the classroom. That's why I'm pleased that this budget invests \$12.5 million for the Nova Scotia Child Benefit to support reducing childhood poverty and \$2.1 million to continue the new Healthy Schools Grant for all public schools.

To repeat the words of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, we strive to be a compassionate government, committed to listening and finding creative solutions to help Nova Scotians thrive. This budget is about finding real and lasting solutions, starting with listening and working alongside Nova Scotians.

For these reasons and many more, I'm pleased to be in support of this budget. I look forward to watching the impact of this budget on our province. With those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I shall take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I've got a full 15 minutes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to get up. I appreciate the comments from my colleagues.

I'll take a few minutes to talk about Supply, but I do want to say this: regardless of the debate back and forth, there are wonderful staff. Four departments later, I see how hard the staff works on those budgets to get ministers ready for Estimates and the hours that they'll go through in questioning. I do want to say to the staff who are going to be coming in tonight and will be involved throughout all of it: a big thank you from all of us. (Applause)

We are going into Estimates and I will say this. My colleague, the member for Dartmouth South, talked about this: You're not getting out any quicker going into Estimates tonight. We knew that it was going to go past 7 o'clock, just based on the debate. That was really what we've been saying. The government's actually making your life way more difficult by going into Estimates tonight - for not doing it for four hours.

It was never a political thing. We just knew based on the business of the day that we were going to get to this point and the suggestion was that we should just start Estimates off fresh. We've done it as a government, too. We didn't jump into Estimates the very first day. You're not giving yourself any extra or less time by going into Estimates tonight, so I just wanted to get that on the record. It makes no sense to do it. I would have done it with a four-hour window. It's easier on your ministers and it's way easier on staff.

There's been a lot talked about the budget. I'll probably get up again on it. I do want to say that it's very, very few times that a Cape Bretoner has their hands on the wallets of the government. Regardless of political stripes, it's nice to see a Cape Bretoner give the speech. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, to the member for Inverness, I do want to congratulate him on his first speech. As a fellow Cape Bretoner, we are strategically placed all over the world to take over. We now have one as Minister of Finance and Treasury Board of the province. I do want to congratulate him. I know how much it meant to him and I know how much it meant to his family. I want to say that to the member for Inverness.

I wasn't expecting to get up tonight, but here I am. I'll give some broad comments about the budget and what I've seen now that I'm back. It's not the same watching it through YouTube. You get the real-life experience here. I'll say that there are some good things in the budget. I'm not going to deny that.

I think the work that Carolynn and the fertility advocates have done is amazing. That was a conversation that I was involved with for many months with them before the election. They are great advocates. That is important for families. I do want to say that on the record. That's very important.

They're making investments like every other government made investments. I'm happy to see that they are supportive of all of the infrastructure that the previous government did and that they're continuing on that. For Cape Breton, those were the largest decisions on infrastructure investments in history, period. No other time, since the last four years, has Cape Breton seen the investment and the commitment from government that they did.

I'm not trying to poke too much, but when we made those decisions on health care, which were very difficult - if people who were following along remember - the response that we received in the beginning - Premier McNeil, myself, and Minister MacLellan at the

time - because we were telling Cape Bretoners that we were going to completely look at health care a different way. Kevin Orrell was involved with that. Other members of the leadership team were involved with that. It was difficult. Cape Bretoners didn't accept it in the beginning. Neither did the people on that side who are now in the government, the veterans.

[7:15 p.m.]

The word "disaster" was used. "Political influence" was used. Things that we had to walk around the community and wear every day as two guys who were elected, really trying to represent the entire island. Fast-forward and I'm looking at brochures and pictures on social media about the new cancer centre, pictures about the hospice, the Premier's name across the Nova Scotia Community College Marconi Campus.

All things that were not supported. They voted against them all. They voted against the cancer centre. They voted against the hospice. They voted against the community college. They voted against the second berth. They voted against the Charlotte Street redevelopment. They voted against the residence at the Gaelic College. They voted against highway work in Victoria. They voted against the trail in Port Hawkesbury. They voted against the Miners Forum in Glace Bay. They didn't vote for anything. We put 1,000-plus people to work in Cape Breton, and they didn't support any of it. But now it's okay.

Health care was a disaster, but they were there to celebrate. A new master agreement that paid doctors the most in the region, they didn't support that either. We made investments in health care too. But here is one thing we did: We made those investments, and we balanced the books. We made all of those investments and balanced the books. That matters.

We built the best solar program in the country, and by the way, three CEOs of Nova Scotia Power later, I can say with 1,000 per cent confidence that there were conversations about that program and other programs. They met with the minister and met with the Premier. I wasn't here last week to ask that question but nobody else in this House knows more about that than I do because three CEOs later, that's how they operated. They went to the minister, and they went to the Premier.

I remember every meeting I had with them for three years, because it was the same issues: power rates, programs that are funded by the taxpayer in partnership with Nova Scotia Power. Three CEOs, the same people who came in, CEO and senior management. We meet with the minister. We go across the street, and we meet with the Premier.

When I hear, and I'm watching this online, that people don't remember their meetings, and they don't remember what they're talking about, I know the difference, and I absolutely know what you talked about. I got it all. I remember it all. We talked about it. That's why, in my opinion, they never ever went to the NSUARB on solar, because they

knew how much solar meant to us. We told them how much solar meant to us. That's why we kept building. If you look at the statistics from 2017 to 2021, we went from here to the best program in Canada.

I'll stop there on some of the Cape Breton stuff. Actually, I'll finish on the Cape Breton stuff. Some of the announcements that they have made are very good. The work that they did to finish the job on the ball field in Dominion - I want to give credit to the member for Glace Bay. He was very classy in his announcement, recognizing the former government for the work that we did. I know how hard he worked on it.

The Minister Responsible for the Office of Mental Health and Addictions - I know that he had lots of conversations with Cape Breton University around the announcement that was made this past week. That's important infrastructure for CBU. I will say this isn't the government. I said this on the record before. I think that building should be in downtown Sydney or in Glace Bay.

I think that when we moved the community college, we changed the game forever in the CBRM. I think major infrastructure projects that can - I would say that for any community across the province. Those residences that are announced, they matter. Location also matters - where they go. When we moved the community college to a critical core area, we saw tens of millions of dollars in investment. That matters at home. That changed the game. That would be the only thing I would say.

I have said this publicly before: CBU needs to start having a conversation about 50 years and what that university looks like and the conversation to get it into a community. It needs to get into a community. The Marshall Institute is important. Donald Marshall was from Membertou. It should be close to his community. These are the conversations that I think CBU needs to have. I want to give them credit because that is an important investment for that school.

I've actually used up almost 15 minutes. Anyway, I'll have more to say as the budget goes. I think that what I really will be watching - everybody knows my heart is in Cape Breton, right? We changed the game over the last number of years. I just hope that momentum stays. It's \$1 billion. That's the number I'm looking at for the next four years.

That number represents the commitments that Stephen McNeil and the current Leader and Geoff MacLellan and myself and the Health Care Redevelopment team and the teams at the Nova Scotia Community College, guys like my colleague for Northside-Westmount, the volunteers at the hospice, the doctors on the ground, the nurses who advocated for a new mother infant unit and we said yes, it's their work. It was \$1 billion over the last four years. I'm not even getting into the rest of the Island; I'm talking specifically about the CBRM. That number gets bigger.

If this government wants to compete with that, new ideas, \$1 billion for Cape Breton, that is my number. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The motion to resolve into the Committee of the Whole on Supply is now carried.

[7:21 p.m. The House resolved itself into CHW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Angela Simmonds in the Chair.]

[10:45 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance assumed the Chair.]

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

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and made progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mx. Speaker, that concludes government business for today. I move that the House do now rise to meet again Thursday, March 31st, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

Following the Daily Routine and Question Period, business will include the continuation of the Committee of the Whole on Supply to deal with Budget Estimates. As well, time permitting, second reading of Bill No. 109 and No. 112. In addition, Bill Nos. 96, 99, and 104 will be considered by the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for the House to rise to meet again tomorrow, Thursday, March 31st 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.

The House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 10:46 p.m.]