



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2022

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HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 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. We'll begin with the daily routine.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

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

RESOLUTION NO. 184

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

Whereas today, March 31st, Divert NS is hosting one of its regular summits, which brings together key stakeholders to look at new opportunities for waste diversion and reduction, and growth of our province's circular economy; and

Whereas these summits are a successful catalyst for change and innovation in Nova Scotia, and the focus of the 2022 summit is litter prevention and reduction; and

Whereas reducing waste and shifting to a circular economy are necessary to help us address climate change and improve the health and sustainability of our environment;

Therefore be it resolved that members of this House and Nova Scotians join me in recognizing Divert NS, its staff, and its board for their leadership and championing us to live in more sustainable ways through waste reduction and diversion, and wish them a successful and productive 2022 summit.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

I hear several Noes.

The notice is tabled.

The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 185

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

Whereas Dan Davis, a skilled communications professional with our Department of Agriculture, who has served the provincial government for 24 years in multiple departments, including Economic Development; Transportation and Public Works; Natural Resources; Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage; and Fisheries and Aquaculture as part of the Communications Nova Scotia team, helping Nova Scotians to know what their government is doing and why; and

Whereas Dan impressed me and all his colleagues in government with his calm, cool and collected demeanour, forging strong relationships with ministers, deputy ministers, senior teams, and fellow co-workers - always serving departments with his sage advice on communications issues and delivering on the task at hand; and

Whereas Dan will now be able to enjoy more time with his creative writing and music interests, as well as with his wife Danielle and his children Eli, Rose and Lucy;

Therefore be it resolved that this House of Assembly recognize and express our gratitude to Dan Davis - as his retirement takes effect today - for his impressive career of dedicated service to this province.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

RESOLUTION NO. 186

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

Whereas the sport fishing sector continues to see growth and is important to our rural communities and tourism industry, and contributes significantly to the Nova Scotian economy, ranging from \$65 million to \$85 million annually; and

Whereas sport fishing is a popular, healthy outdoor activity and more Nova Scotians are sport fishing than ever; and

Whereas sport fishing is an exciting and relaxing past time that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and skill levels, making it an excellent family experience, and it is easier than ever to obtain your sport fishing license using our new online licensing system;

Therefore be it resolved that as we look forward to the warmer weather and days spent casting lines into one of many pristine lakes or rivers throughout the province, members of the Legislature encourage Nova Scotians to head to one of the province's many waterways to enjoy the 2022 sport fishing season, which opens in most areas tomorrow, April 1st.

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

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for waiver.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 114 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 208 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Hospitals Act. (Hon. Michelle Thompson)

Bill No. 115 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 32 of the Acts of 2004, the Prescription Monitoring Act. (Hon. Michelle Thompson)

Bill No. 116 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 8 of the Acts of 1990, the Emergency Management Act, to Provide Rapid Disaster Relief. (Lorelei Nicoll)

Bill No. 117 - An Act to Study Bringing Nova Scotia Power Incorporated Back Into Public Ownership. (Claudia Chender)

Bill No. 118 - An Act to Amend Chapter 41 of the Acts of 2010, the Personal Health Information Act. (Hon. Michelle Thompson)

Bill No. 119 - An Act to Provide for the Designation of Endometriosis Awareness Month. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 120 - An Act to Amend Chapter 42 of the Acts of 2005, the Involuntary Psychiatric Treatment Act. (Hon. Brian Comer)

Bill No. 121 - An Act to Support Active Transportation. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 122 - An Act Respecting the Repeal of an Act to Incorporate the Lunenburg Rod and Gun Club. (Hon. Susan Corkum-Greek)

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 Premier.

FRASER, HUGH: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, Hugh Fraser was laid to rest. I know there are many in this House on all sides who were shocked to hear the sad news that Hugh had passed away at the age of just 54. Hugh was a skilled communicator whose career encompassed newspaper, television, government, and his own business called Fraser + Sons Communications Inc. In each of those roles he distinguished himself with his easygoing manner, generosity of spirit, and his dry sense of humour. Hugh Fraser was a true gentleman.

Hugh leaves behind his wife, Amy, and his sons Ted, Patrick, and Daniel. His family is indeed an incredible part of his legacy and over the summer I had the opportunity to get to know Patrick. I am happy to tell the members of this House that he is a fine young man, and he has definitely inherited many of his father's wonderful qualities.

I ask all members of this House to join me in paying tribute to Hugh Fraser and sending our sincere condolences to those who knew and loved him.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

MACVICAR, LAUREN: VIGIL FOR UKRAINE - CONGRATS.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I'd like to congratulate a young constituent, Lauren MacVicar, on her support of a friend during the illegal war on Ukraine. Lauren's friend Olga Veres is very concerned about family members, including her grandparents, who live in Ukraine. Lauren organized a vigil for Ukraine at Bedford's DeWolf Park in early March. Friends lit candles in solidarity with Ukraine and to support Olga.

Lauren is in Grade 8. Many members of this House will be quite familiar with her mother, Jennifer MacLeod, although I suspect none of us were here when she was a page. I want to commend Lauren on her global awareness and her support of her friend, and I want to assure Olga that we stand with her too.

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

TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY: LIVING SAFELY - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark a wonderful day of the year. March 31st is the Transgender Day of Visibility. American trans activist Rachel Crandall founded the day in 2009, citing the lack of awareness around the trans, non-binary and gender-diverse communities. She also noted that the only existing dedicated day was the Transgender Day of Remembrance, which was to mourn those whom the community lost

all too soon. However, this day serves to uplift, celebrate, and recognize trans, non-binary and gender-diverse community members.

It is a time to signal our support for everyone to be able to live safe and authentic lives. It is particularly important to mark this day in the face of continued inadequate access to gender-affirming care, legislative rollbacks in other places and a continued lack of safety at home, in schools, and in the streets, especially for trans youth.

We must also pause to acknowledge the particular challenges facing BIPOC trans folks. For the first time, the triumph of pride flew tall and proud in front of this very House this moment and this evening the Legislature will be lit in trans pride colours.

I ask all members of the House to join me in celebrating Transgender Day of Visibility and the incredible achievements and resilience of the trans community and to work together for tangible and positive change.

THE SPEAKER: Again, I would ask that members try their best to make their statements fall within the time limit.

The honourable member for Pictou West.

NAT. INDIG. LANGS. DAY: PROM. OF MI'KMAW LANG. - RECOG.

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: Mr. Speaker, I keenly rise today to recognize March 31st as National Indigenous Languages Day. This is an opportunity for Nova Scotians to honour and celebrate the language and culture of the Mi'kmaq people. Language is an important part of cultural identity, and the Mi'kmaq language reflects the culture of the First Peoples of Nova Scotia.

The Mi'kmaq language connects us to the past and shared history that we are learning about now through initiatives like treaty education. Through this work, co-led by the Office of L'nu Affairs and our partners at Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey, all Nova Scotians have the opportunity to learn who the Mi'kmaq are, historically and today. We can also learn the importance of treaties and our treaty relationship as we establish a path of reconciliation and understand what it means to be a treaty person.

Many Mi'kmaq lost their language during the time they attended residential schools, forbidden to speak their language. I hope our ancestors hear us loud and clear today as we recognize the importance of the Mi'kmaq language on this National Indigenous Languages Day. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HOSPICE C.B. TEAM: FAC. OPENING - CONGRATS

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I rise in my place to congratulate everyone in the community who has been involved with the new hospice that opened this past Fall in the CBRM. An amazing amount of work and dedication and love went into ensuring that families in the CBRM had access to a facility to support their families during end-of-life care.

There are so many people to thank who worked tirelessly over the years to make this a reality and I rise in my place today to congratulate everyone who has been involved with Hospice Cape Breton, the board, the co-chairs, all the health care team that was involved. It is a beautiful facility and it means so much to the families who need support on the island.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DAWN, HER DAD AND THE TRACTOR: IMPACT ON TRANS COM. - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, on this Transgender Day of Visibility I rise to recognize a local film that tells a thoughtful, unique, and touching story. *Dawn, Her Dad and the Tractor* was written and directed by Shelley Thompson as a love letter to her transgender son T.

Starring trans activist and performer Maya V. Henry and featuring a host of wonderful performances by many local actors and some amazing music by Rose Cousins, the film is a significant work for the trans community and their allies. It explores the difficulties and nuance of a trans woman, Dawn's return to her childhood home and family which, like all too often in real life, is met with negativity and fear. She eventually builds a bridge by restoring her father's antique tractor. It is a beautiful story of courage and resilience, family and friendship, but it also shines a light on the violence committed against trans, non-binary, and queer people in our communities every day.

Since its premiere, the film has played at countless national and international film festivals and is currently streaming on Crave. I ask that all members of this House join me in recognizing the accomplishment of *Dawn, Her Dad and the Tractor* and the positive impact for the trans and ever-growing ally communities of this locally produced film. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Well now, that's three that, ever since I mentioned the time limit, have gone over the time limit. So, please, please ... (Interruption) Order, please. The honourable member for Cape Breton East. (Interruptions) Order, please.

The honourable member for Cape Breton East has the floor.

DONCASTER, KYLE: ANCHOR SEC. SERVS.: LIST INCL. - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN COMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Kyle Doncaster of Marion Bridge, who landed himself on the Atlantic Business 30 Under 30 Innovators as one of the successful nominees in 2021.

Kyle secured his first job at age 14 while attending high school, which was not affected by work as he graduated six months early with a 98 per cent average. Wow. Today, Kyle is the successful owner of Anchor Security Services Inc., which does a variety of security and home automation jobs. He said he is enjoying the journey as the young company grows and rolls with the punches in an ever-changing industry.

I would like to take this opportunity today to thank Kyle and applaud him for his hard work and dedication and wish him continued success. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

SCOTT, ROY: LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT - RECOG.

HON. IAIN RANKIN: I rise today to recognize Roy Scott of East Dover for his courage and determination to learn to read at the age of 70.

Although oral testing showed Scott was a bright student, his learning disabilities, which were never officially diagnosed, impeded his ability to read and write. The result was that he was repeatedly held back in school. The embarrassment of being in a classroom with classmates who were much younger, along with ridiculing remarks from teachers and students saying “You’ll never amount to anything” and “I’ll give you Grade 8 if you leave” resulted in Roy dropping out of school before he learned to read and write. Scott, now 75, has worked as a fisher, on a survey ship, at the Halifax dockyards, and has owned his own business making awnings, sails, and boat covers. He is married and he and his wife raised two children in East Dover.

Despite a successful life, Roy was burdened by his lack of literacy. A chance encounter with an old friend encouraged Roy to return to school. That led Roy to the Western Halifax Community Learning Network or WHCLN, where kind and compassionate instructors turned Scott’s bad memories of school around and helped him learn to read and write.

I would like the members of the House of Assembly to join me congratulating Roy on the accomplishment of learning to read and write. Literacy is an important tool in every aspect of life and Roy has proved you’re never too old to learn. (Applause)

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

MERRYFIELD, VERONICA: GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE PROM. - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: On the day of Transgender Day of Visibility, I rise to recognize Veronica Merryfield, a friend. Veronica is an advocate, the founder of the Cape Breton Transgender Network, and a promoter of gender-affirming care. The work done by Veronica is saving lives. I have known a few of whom she's helped begin their journey.

Through her advocacy and work, and with thousands of Canadians, she was able to get Bill C-4 banning conversion therapy passed in Canada. She's an advocate for gender-affirming care and speaks to the need for it to be affordable and accessible here in Nova Scotia. Her work also involves advocating for more inclusive language in laws and policies. Words are important, Mr. Speaker. They can hurt as well as heal, exclude as well as include.

Veronica's story and her advocacy is one of many I could share with you today. I hope Veronica knows the love, compassion, support, and advocacy she provides is deeply appreciated.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Cobequid.

INT. TRANS. DAY OF VISIB.: CELEB. CONTRIBS. - RECOG.

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge March 31st as the International Transgender Day of Visibility. The first International Transgender Day of Visibility was held on this day in 2009, and it was officially recognized around the world in 2014.

Today is a day to celebrate the many contributions that trans and non-binary people have made to society while acknowledging the need to challenge the systemic barriers and inequalities facing gender-diverse people. Nova Scotians who identify as transgender are diverse and valued members of our province. Our government is committed to supporting gender-diverse communities and to promoting their fundamental rights.

I ask that all members of this House join me in celebrating Nova Scotia's gender-diverse population and in thanking those who have fought, and continue to fight, for gender equality.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

ROSS, DOUGLAS: 70TH BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in my place today to wish a very belated happy birthday to a long-time constituent in our community, Mr. Douglas Ross, who turned 70 on January 4th of this year. It is with sincere pleasure that I extend warm wishes and

hope that Douglas had a wonderful celebration with his family and friends. Congratulations on a very special day.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

YOUTH PROJECT: WORK FOR 2SLGBTQ+ YOUTH - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising here today to add my voice in support of the International Transgender Day of Visibility. A day to celebrate the gender-diverse people in our communities and recognize our role in creating safe and supportive environments for people who are trans, non-binary, and genderqueer.

Halifax Needham is home to the Youth Project and I'd like to thank this organization for the important work they're doing in support and empowerment of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. During African Heritage Month, the Youth Project showcased Black, queer, and trans voices, and hosted a workshop discussion on anti-Black racism, as well as a Closed Black Space debrief of the month.

I want to recognize the staff and volunteers behind this hard work, and value the Youth Project and what they bring to our community and province. These young people are leading important conversations about gender, sexuality, and social justice.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

UKRAINE REFUGEES: SUPPORT NEEDED - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the immense and urgent needs to support the people of Ukraine who are seeking refuge.

I've had many people in Cumberland North contact me to ask how they could help. Local veterinarian Dr. Carolyn Hollis gathered household and medical supplies for many of us, as did Dr. Tena Frizzle. Both had these supplies shipped directly to neighbouring countries to be used in refugee camps. My staff and I have been selling stickers and posters with the Ukrainian flag, some with and some without the slogan "Slava Ukraini!" which means "Glory to Ukraine!" All the funds will be given to the Rotary International to help in Ukraine.

Housing, clothing, food, medical care, English language supports, schools, documentation, employment support, and fiscal management are just some of the basic committees that our local Rotary Club used to support Syrian refugees. I urge all Nova Scotians to find ways to support Ukraine refugees who have fled their country to find safe refuge.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sackville-Uniacke.

CARR, ALEX: SIGNED WITH QMJHL TEAM - CONGRATS.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: I rise today to recognize Middle Sackville resident Alex Carr. On January 6th this year, the 17-year-old defenceman signed with the Rouyn-Noranda Huskies and is slated to play with the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League team for the rest of this season. Alex, who played for Cole Harbour for two years and with the Junior A South Shore Lumberjacks, was ranked the 14th-highest player for Nova Scotia in the 2020 QMJHL entry draft. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Alex on his success and wish him the best of luck with his future hockey career.

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

WELSH, MATT: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I rise today to recognize an outstanding young man in my community, Matt Welsh. Matt has been an elite hockey player for most of his life. After playing in net for the Charlottetown Islanders for five years and setting a Quebec Major Junior Hockey League record for most minutes played by a goalie in league history, he returned to Halifax during the pandemic to attend Saint Mary's University.

While at SMU, he has continued to build his reputation on and off the ice. He works with the Children's Wish Foundation, giving tours of the SMU arena to young cancer survivors, he organizes blood drives with Canadian Blood Services, and somehow as well he finds the time to coach youth hockey, and knocked on hundreds of doors with me this Summer in the past election in Fairview-Clayton Park.

Matt has been recognized as an Academic All-Canadian and was recently awarded the AUS Student Athlete Community Service Award in recognition of all of his volunteer efforts. I ask that all members of the House join me in celebrating Matt on his successes and wish him all the best as he graduates from SMU this Spring.

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

GENDER AFFIRMING CARE N.S.: TRANS ADVOCACY WORK - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Transgender Day of Visibility, it is important that we also recognize those in the community who do the legwork to tangibly improve trans Nova Scotians' lives.

That's why today I'm honoured to rise in the House to acknowledge Gender Affirming Care Nova Scotia. Gender Affirming Care Nova Scotia is a community group that advocates for trans Nova Scotians' access to proper, comprehensive health care in a timely fashion. Members can check out their website, which includes a comprehensive overview of what is needed to achieve gender-affirming care in Nova Scotia. It also features a long list of endorsements from organizations across Nova Scotia, such as Doctors Nova Scotia.

I invite my colleagues in this House to acknowledge that gender-affirming care is life-saving care, and join me in recognizing Gender Affirming Care Nova Scotia's work on making the trans community's needs more visible on this Transgender Day of Visibility.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Queens.

ORGANIZERS: QUEENS AUX. HOSP. HUSTLE - RECOG.

HON. KIM MASLAND: I rise today to acknowledge the organizers of the 41st Annual Queens Auxiliary Hospital Hustle.

The Hustle is a beloved tradition in Queens, and typically raises between \$20,000 and \$25,000 each year in support of the Queens General Hospital Foundation. After cancelling the event in 2020 due to COVID restrictions, Chair Jennifer Hutchins-Conrad and Hustle organizers got creative and moved the event online for 2021. They started the auction event in April, and at its conclusion in December, the total had surpassed \$20,000. The Foundation will put this toward the purchase of a new electrocardiogram machine.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the efforts of Jennifer and her team, and I thank them for their creativity, their time, and efforts, and congratulate them on a very successful virtual Hustle.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

CDN. MUS. OF IMM. AT PIER 21: YOUSUF KARSH EXHIBIT - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Today I would like to recognize the Yousuf Karsh exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

Karsh arrived in Halifax in 1924 as an Armenian refugee, and luckily for us, would soon move on to Sherbrooke to study photography. I say luckily because Karsh would go on to become one of the most famous portrait photographers of all time, with his photos of public figures like Churchill, Kennedy, de Gaulle, and Nova Scotia's own Portia White becoming instant international classics.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Pier 21 and its employees for bringing this work back to Halifax, to the exact spot where Karsh arrived here, and displaying it for us all to admire.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

MACINTOSH, CLARK: HFX. VOLUN. AWD. - CONGRATS.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, Wellness Within is a phenomenal non-profit organization that supports women and transgender non-binary individuals who have experienced criminalization and are pregnant or have young children.

This month, Dartmouth North resident Clark MacIntosh will be presented with a Halifax Volunteer Award for their work as the group's Queer Doula Coordinator. A disabled non-binary parent of two, Clark has volunteered with Wellness Within for several years. Recently, Clark was central to the creation of the Queer Doula Toolkit and dismantling exclusion and oppression in doula practice projects. They are also currently a co-investigator for Wellness Within's research study on best practices for queer doula training.

A Dalhousie University social work graduate, Clark also works for the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group. As a resident of Ocean Breeze, Clark spoke up in defence of the community's affordable family-friendly and accessible housing when it was put up for sale last year.

I ask the House to join me in extending gratitude to Clark MacIntosh for their work and congratulating them on this well-deserved award.

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

PANTHERS HOCKEY TEAM: CH'SHIP WIN - CONGRATS.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, as a teacher at Glace Bay High School, it is an extreme honour to rise in my place today to congratulate the Glace Bay High Panthers team.

Last Sunday, Glace Bay captured the Highland Region Division 1 championship in a competitive game against Riverview. That win secured Glace Bay's place in the School Sport Nova Scotia provincial championship this weekend in Windsor. The Panthers led the Cape Breton High School Hockey League with an undefeated 16-0-0 record. This spectacular season was made possible by captain Adam Hicks, who won the league scoring title, followed by Landon Clark and my nephew Brady Doucette, who both finished in the top 10. With 12 veteran players on the team, and an exciting mix of first year players, any one of the Panthers are capable of changing the momentum of a game.

Congratulations on the amazing year and good luck in the provincials.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

INT. TRANS. DAY OF VISIB.: SUPP. FOR STRUGGLE - RECOG.,

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize International Transgender Day of Visibility. Today, we recognize the profound contributions that transgender people make to our province and their ongoing struggle for equality. For far too long in our province, country, and world, to be trans has meant to live at times with fear: fear of losing your dignity, your job, and maybe even your life simply because of who you are. We can and we must do better to support trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse Nova Scotians to live lives free of fear and full of peace.

In particular, I want to recognize my favourite member of the trans community: my little brother Travis. In addition to being Halifax's best barber, his decency, kindness, and compassion are a joy to everyone who knows him. Travis is brave and full of happiness, and I love him very much.

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

YOUTH VOLUNS.: MALL KIOSK WASTE INFO. WORK - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Layla White, Neely Pheifer, Claire Morrison, Kate Morrison, and Isabella White for spending their March Break at the Mayflower Mall volunteering at CBRM's information kiosk on waste management. This volunteer team, while surrounded by a fleet of organic waste green bins and carts, held conversations with mall-goers on waste and recycling and the importance of putting organic waste in the right place to ensure it doesn't end up in the wrong waste management facility.

I commend them for their climate stewardship, and I remind us all we should all do our part.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

MAR. PROVS.: COLLAB. IMP. - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: The Maritime provinces have a long history of collaboration, unity, and regional strength. Before Confederation, the Maritime provinces were wealthy, with a robust economy.

Looking back at our history, former Premier Joseph Howe was an anti-Confederate, believing the Maritimes had nothing in common with Upper Canada and the west. He

believed we were more aligned with the eastern U.S. and Liverpool, England. However, Sir Charles Tupper, who was Premier of Nova Scotia, led us and other Maritime provinces into Confederation in 1867. Ironically, Charles Tupper was from Amherst.

There have been many movements since 1867 to unite and restrengthen our Maritime region, to regain our wealth and our position in the world and in North America. Mr. Speaker, I encourage us all to consider the Maritime provinces and the importance of collaboration to regain the strength of our Maritime region.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

DART. BEAVERS SCOUT GRP.: COM. SERV. - THANKS

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a local Dartmouth Beavers Scout group. In mid-February, the Beavers joined me, Councillor Tony Mancini, and volunteers in preparing bundles of fresh produce for the bi-weekly Dartmouth East Square Roots program.

Beaver Scouts is composed of youngsters between the ages of five and seven. They help prepare our youth for their future. It is truly a rewarding experience to see our youth, our future leaders, take ownership to improve our communities. Scouts Canada instills a strong sense of civic responsibility to shape active citizens creating positive change.

I'd like to thank the Beavers for volunteering with us at the East Dartmouth Square Roots initiative.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

MACDOUGALL, SAMMY: OFFICE WORK - THANKS

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the belated birthday of Sammy Macdougall. Sammy turned 16 in February, and he works in my office. The streets of Cape Breton are to be on the lookout for Sammy as he has just received his driver's licence - but he is a very competent driver and a very competent employee in my office. Sammy has a very strong political mind. He helps me immensely in the office. He's a strong believer in me, in our Leader and in our Party. I want to thank him for his service and look forward to what the future brings for Sammy.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

KIDNEY HEALTH MO.: KIDNEY DIS. AWARENESS PROM. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the last day of Kidney Health Month in Canada. One in 10 people have kidney disease in Canada, and that number

continues to rise. There is a lack of awareness of this disease despite kidneys being vital organs affecting overall health. This is an incurable disease. Receiving a transplant - while being the gold standard of care - is not a cure. Something widely misunderstood - the disease affects people of all ages but is more likely in those of African, Indigenous, Asian, and Hispanic descent.

I would like to acknowledge all those working in this field, whether in research, treating patients, volunteering and otherwise. For those living with this disease, know that I acknowledge your struggle and perseverance.

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

BRADLEY, RUSS: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

LARRY HARRISON: Mr. Speaker, it is with high regard that I draw your attention to a citizen of Shortts Lake named Russ Bradley. Throughout the years, Russ has brought his many skills to the communities of Shortts Lake and Brookfield.

He is an accomplished singer, giving his talent willingly to the John Fisher Choir, and has participated in other community events. Russell's skills extend to cooking, carpentry, gardening - all loaned to fundraisers. He has also donated his time and property to enhance the Brookfield Day celebrations, along with his leadership, to the Train Station Heritage site, giving many hours to maintaining the property and planning fundraisers.

As Russell moves into a retired life, I wanted to rise and recognize his many contributions to the community. Volunteers such as Russ Bradley keep our communities alive and active.

Congratulations, Russ. I hope you enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

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

PEC SCOUT GRP.: TREE PLANTING - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to recognize the Portland Estates and Colby scout group, affectionately known as PEC. Scouts Canada is our country's leading youth organization. The success of the scouting program is supported by a dedicated team of volunteers who provide youth with the opportunity to challenge themselves and experience countless firsts. Our local P.E.C. scout group joined together this Summer to plant 1,000 trees on the Salt Marsh Trail Crossing on Bissett Road. The scouts were so pleased to see the increase in vegetation from the previous planting two years ago.

I ask that the members of this House of Assembly recognize and thank all the volunteers across Canada who make the Scouting Canada program possible for our youth.

[1:45 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Argyle.

MUISE, ANNIE & CHARLIE: 100th BIRTHDAYS - BEST WISHES

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a remarkable couple, Annie and Charlie Muise of Tusket, on amazing milestones.

Charlie turned 100 on August 3, 2021, and Annie on January 13, 2022. The pair still live together in their home they purchased 75 years ago. The two were married in July 1942, and three months later Charlie went to war. He was gone for more than three years, arriving back in Nova Scotia on New Year's Day in 1946.

The couple will celebrate another incredible milestone later this year when they celebrate their 80th wedding anniversary. Neither have any serious health issues - Annie still knits, her fingers are nimble and arthritis-free, and Charlie is quite the singer.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in wishing Annie and Charlie continued love, happiness, and health together.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

CAMP. VOLUNS.: CREATION OF INCL. ENV. - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the incredible newcomer volunteers on my campaign team this past Summer. This is the second session that I've been wishing they were here so I could introduce them, but all I can do today is tell you about them and the countries they come from. I had at least six or seven countries on my team - constituents with roots in those countries, or they are mainly youth newcomers from Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Italy, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Nigeria, Iran, India, and the French Ivory Coast.

That was my team. I had the pleasure of mentoring them on the value of the democratic political system and the value of casting their vote. I am so proud of our team for creating an environment where everyone was welcomed and included.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask this House to join me in recognizing and applauding these wonderful newcomer volunteers. I truly hope I can invite them to this House soon.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings North.

**CLARKE, L./BLENUS, E./KILPATRICK, K.:
OUTDOOR RINK RESTOR. - RECOG.**

HON. JOHN LOHR: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring recognition to Luke Clarke, Evan Blenus, and Kris Kirkpatrick, who restored the old outdoor rink in Sheffield Mills this winter. This rink had not been used in approximately 25 years.

Three weeks and between 100 to 120 hours of dedicated hard work by these gentlemen produced the 115-foot by 40-foot outdoor rink located near the intersection of Highway No. 221 and Black Hole Road. Its sole purpose is to provide an outdoor place for the community children to enjoy.

Please join me today in recognizing Luke Clarke, Evan Blenus, and Kris Kirkpatrick for their hard work, community spirit, and generosity with their time for the community of Sheffield Mills.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

WILLIAMS, DR. CHADWICK: CONTRIB. & ACCOMPL. - RECOG.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to acknowledge my cousin and dear friend, Dr. Chadwick “Chad” Williams. He is a gastroenterologist and inflammatory bowel disease specialist at the Dartmouth General Hospital. He is from East Preston, a husband to his beautiful wife, Glenda, and father to two beautiful girls. He is an assistant professor of the Faculty of Medicine at Dalhousie and practises internal medicine coverage for the Dartmouth General.

Dr. Williams completed his Bachelor of Science and medical degrees at Dalhousie University prior to leaving to complete internal medicine residency at the gastroenterology residency at the University of Calgary. He is one of the first African Nova Scotians to graduate from Dalhousie Medical School and is the first ever from the Preston Township.

Dr. Williams has been awarded the prestigious Dal Med Innovator Award. He is heavily involved in the analysis and improvement of the institution of medicine from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective. He sits on many initiatives and boards and is currently a member of the Men’s Brotherhood.

I ask that the members of this House of Assembly join me in recognizing Dr. Williams for his incredible contributions and accomplishments in his field of medicine.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

GLOADE, SHELLEY: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, we've all heard the saying that a company is only as good as the people it keeps. Sobeys was very lucky to have this value in their employee Shelley Gloade.

Shelley worked for Sobeys in Elmsdale for 38 years, her entire career, until her retirement in September. As we all know, a loyal employee is a gem. She started out in the grocery department and finished in produce. Shelley was an assistant in several departments due to her vast knowledge of products, but it was Shelley's customer service skills that made her an exceptional employee.

There wasn't a regular customer who didn't know Shelley. She could often be found chatting with customers, making them feel like their business mattered. It was more than that for Shelley - she genuinely cared for people, and it showed.

It will be different going into Sobeys for many customers, not seeing Shelley at the store, but I would like to wish Shelley a long and fruitful retirement and congratulate her on her 38 years of service.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DOW, DR. MICHELLE: PHYS. RECRUIT. EFFORTS - THANKS

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, to help address the physician shortage, our community built a health clinic that would foster a collaborative approach to family medicine. In addition, our doctors continue to play a key role in our recruitment efforts.

Dr. Michelle Dow is actively involved in our physician recruitment, often meeting with medical students to offer her support and her guidance. Also, Dr. Dow is a preceptor to the residents in the family medicine program, focused on working in rural settings. In this role, she helps prepare the next generation of doctors, hoping they decide to practise medicine in Clare and the adjoining communities.

I ask that all members join me in thanking Dr. Michelle Dow for her efforts in mentoring the next generation of doctors and in encouraging them to consider practicing in a community like ours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

TEASDALE, ALICIA & MIRANDA: APOTHECARY OPENING - CONGRATS.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Alicia and Miranda Teasdale on the recent opening of Teasdale Apothecary Co. Alicia and Amanda, both Antigonish locals, moved home from Alberta with plans to open a drug store that serves the needs of their customers in an innovative and environmentally friendly way.

The Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia believes that Teasdale's Apothecary Co. is the first pharmacy in our province that allows people to pay a deposit to have their prescriptions filled in reusable glass vials instead of plastic containers.

The drug store's environmentally friendly mandate is also seen in other parts of the store. Products such as shampoos and household cleaners have refillable options, supporting customers who are committed to low to zero waste principles and looking for healthier alternatives to toxic personal care items. Teasdale Apothecary Co. is committed to reducing pharmacy waste and educating their customers.

I wish Alicia and Miranda all of the success with their business. I want to applaud their entrepreneurship and innovation and thank them for the quality and compassionate care for the people they serve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

ARENBURG, JONATHAN: PUB. OF BOOK - CONGRATS.

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Jonathan Arenburg, a constituent who became a mental health advocate after being put off work with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Jon dedicated most of his professional life of 18 years working with individuals who have intellectual development disorders, behavioural challenges, and mental illness. He was also a volunteer firefighter for 15 years. Jon is now a mental health blogger, writer, speaker, wellness coach, and published author.

He self-published his book *The Road to Mental Wellness* in September 2021. It goes into detail about his lifelong battle with depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Since being put off work, Jonathan has dedicated his time to his mental wellness journey while helping others along the way. I've had the privilege of meeting Jon in my office, and he definitely has a passion for everything he does.

Mr. Speaker and all members of the House, please join me in congratulating Mr. Arenburg on his recent publication and thank him for sharing such a poignant and detailed look at his own journey to mental wellness.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

YAR. HOSP. FDN.: RADIOTHON FUNDRAISER - THANKS

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: The Yarmouth Hospital Foundation recently held its sixth We Care Radiothon, with its presenting sponsor, Y95.5 CJLS, broadcasting the all-day event. This year's fundraising focus is to purchase new cardiac equipment for the Yarmouth Regional Hospital, specifically an echocardiograph unit and cardiac stress-test unit and stress echo bed. Donations poured in all day, and the final total was over \$171,000.

I ask this House to join me in thanking the Yarmouth Hospital Foundation for its meaningful, inspiring work for our region, Y95.5 CJLS for their continued partnership in this important fundraiser, all the volunteers for their dedication and hard work, and the many sponsors and donors for their generosity.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Waverly-Fall River-Beaverbank.

ESHOUZADEH, SIERRA: NAMED ATHLETE AMBASS. - CONGRATS.

HON. BRIAN WONG: Mr. Speaker, Sierra Eshouzadeh, a Beaver Bank boxer, is among the 12 athletes chosen by Sport Nova Scotia's True Sport Athlete Ambassador Program to use their voice and influence to share their passion with others. Seventeen-year-old Sierra is a multi-sport athlete and took up boxing when she was just 10 years old. She hopes to compete in the 2028 Summer Olympics.

The True Sport Athlete Ambassador social media campaign was created to foster a positive and safe sporting culture across the province. The ultimate goal is to increase awareness of the seven True Sport Principles: Go for It, Play Fair, Respect Others, Keep it Fun, Stay Healthy, Include Everyone, and Give Back.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating Sierra on her well-deserved honour of being chosen as a True Sport Athlete Ambassador.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

MAHER, DR. BOB: RECIP. OF TOMLINSON AWD. - CONGRATS.

CARMAN KERR: Last Fall, constituent Dr. Bob Maher was presented with the Roger F. Tomlinson Lifetime Achievement Award from Esri Canada. This award recognizes outstanding achievements and contribution in the GIS community. He is certainly a very deserving recipient.

Dr. Maher has had an exemplary career in academia, government and the private sector. Among his many professional accomplishments, Dr. Maher was instrumental in establishing a world-class GIS program at the College of Geographic Sciences in Lawrencetown. This college has trained hundreds of geospatial leaders.

I invite all members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating Dr. Bob Maher on receiving the Roger F. Tomlinson Lifetime Achievement Award and for the tremendous contribution he has made to his field.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Shelburne.

HALLETT, KATLYN: OVERCOMING HEALTH CHALLENGES - CONGRATS.

NOLAN YOUNG: Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to celebrate 10-year-old Katlyn Hallett of Shelburne. Katie is truly a miracle child who has been chosen for the provincial 2022 IWK Champion, representing all of Atlantic Canada.

At birth, Katie was diagnosed with a life-threatening respiratory condition that kept her in the IWK for the first two years of her life and over the first six years she had over 46 surgeries. She has overcome numerous challenges that were thought not possible. As things continue to improve, Katie, a typical 10-year-old, with the biggest heart for others, and her family remain optimistic for a very bright future.

I respectfully ask that all members join me in congratulating Katie and wishing her well in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

AIDOO, KWAMENA: EXTRA HELP TO STUDENTS - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to recognize Kwamena Aidoo, a teacher who goes above and beyond for his students at Halifax West High School. Mr. Aidoo is the kind of teacher who wants every student to be successful, and he volunteers his time to give extra help to students. In addition to offering lunchtime support, Mr. Aidoo also offers extra help for after-school students who are struggling with chemistry or occupied with their sports competitions. For his IB students, he has stayed late to help those completing lab requirements, and the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the House join me in recognizing the hard work and the outstanding service of Mr. Aidoo and wish him continued success in his teaching career.

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

NBHD. SOUP SERVANTS: COM. SERV. - THANKS

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the Neighbourhood Soup Servants of the Parish of French Village. Four years ago, several parishioners saw a need in the community among seniors who were living alone. Since

then, over 30 volunteers have come together nearly once a month to provide a healthy soup to more than 75 seniors. The idea is not to just offer soup but to visit and provide social support for residents who often live alone.

I would like to ask the members of the Legislature to join me in thanking these volunteers for doing what they can to support and care for their neighbours.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

MARTELL, ALAYNE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Alayne Martell of L'Ardoise was a dedicated staff member of Ringette Canada for over 22 years. In November 2020, Alayne lost her battle with cancer at the age of 50. A well-respected member of her community, she was actively involved in numerous fundraising activities. Alayne was instrumental in starting up the Harbour Wars initiative in L'Ardoise. This event was not only a way to showcase the skills required to work in the local fishery but a way to raise funds for the Cancer Patient Care Fund at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital.

In October 2021, Alayne was posthumously inducted into Ringette Canada's Hall of Fame. Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing all of the contributions Alayne made to our community and to the sport of ringette during her lifetime.

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

HUDSON, KAREN: BLACK LOYALIST EDUC. CAMP. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to bring to your attention an incredible educational campaign undertaken by Karen Hudson, principal of Auburn Drive High School. Dubbed the #1792 Project, its hope is to effect change by looking back 230 years, when at that time 1,196 Black Loyalists from Nova Scotia boarded 15 ships bound for Sierra Leone, Africa. At the end of the American Revolution, promises that were made to these Nova Scotians were not kept and these Black Loyalists faced harsh racism and economic exploitation. As a result, many families organized and decided to leave Nova Scotia for Sierra Leone.

Ms. Hudson proposed that her students write letters to the passengers on these ships, intending to forge a connection with the 18th-century Black Loyalists. The letters are written from today's perspective with the aim to form a deeper understanding of the causes and conditions that led to their exodus.

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

[2:00 p.m.]

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The time is 2:00 p.m. We'll go until 2:50 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: HIGH GAS PRICES - SUPPORT NEEDED

HON. IAIN RANKIN: It's now over a month that Nova Scotians have been struggling with the shock at the gas pumps. When asked what his government would do, the Premier said back on March 8th that everything is on the table. Now that nearly a month has passed, I want to ask the Premier: Is everything still on the table?

THE PREMIER: The only thing that's not still on the table is the significant investments we made just last week in advance of the budget. We talked about how we're going to look at alternatives last week in advance of the budget. We put \$13 million out there in support of Nova Scotians, recognizing that it's the little bit we can do to help them with the cost of living. We'll continue - of course, that's in addition to the \$13 billion invested in Nova Scotians in our budget, but we'll continue to look at doing more. We're happy to look into more. If the member wants to bring something of meaning forward, we're happy to look at it.

IAIN RANKIN: The Premier gloats about the \$13 billion of spending, which the vast majority he inherited. That's the program spending he voted against in every single budget that he now supports, but there is no doubt that that small bit of money that they put out before the budget does help some people. Less than 5 per cent of the population got that support. What about the senior living at home alone? What about the single parent struggling from the gas pump? What about a farmer? What about small businesses?

By the government freezing income assistance, that means that families who are the least fortunate are facing a crunch on their purchasing power. What can these Nova Scotians expect from the government for long-term support to deal with this gas price that's not going down anytime soon?

THE PREMIER: Just as a start, I'd point the member to - want to talk specifically about seniors? I know this government is a former government. Eight years they had to talk about seniors. They didn't talk about seniors much in eight years. We've talked about seniors more in eight months than I heard them talk about in eight years, and I'll point the member to the Seniors Care Grant, just as one start. If the member, the former Premier, wants to talk about who voted for what, I'll be happy to have that discussion with him.

IAIN RANKIN: The previous government actually put record spending into home care to support our seniors, and they need help now. Gas prices are hitting record highs. An average family will pay \$1,000 a year now more for groceries. Despite the bombastic rhetoric we see on the other side of the House and the plan that this government tabled this week, I couldn't find any solutions for the vast majority, 90-some per cent of Nova Scotians who are dealing with these soaring costs.

The Premier repeatedly assured us that help is there and it's on its way, but Nova Scotians surely cannot feel it in their wallets. Can the Premier explain to this House and Nova Scotians how he's going to help them deal with this cost of living crisis?

THE PREMIER: I'll be happy to have the discussion if the member is really interested in a serious discussion, but if the member was interested in a serious discussion about supporting Nova Scotians, he'd be talking about some of the things in our budget that we just tabled that's before this House. There's a lot in there in support of Nova Scotians, there's a lot in there to invest in Nova Scotians. Can we do more? Of course, but we're trying to pick up the pieces after eight years of neglect from the prior government.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

PREM.: ENERGY EFFICIENCY - MORE NEEDED

CLAUDIA CHENDER: On the topic of affordability, we often hear this government talk about protecting the ratepayers of the province. The fact is, people don't pay rates, they pay bills, and the number one way to lower those bills is through increasing the energy efficiency of people's homes. There are no downsides. Efficiency can be the cheapest form of fuel. It increases the comfort and value of homes, it creates jobs, and it is critical for meeting our net-zero ambitions.

My question is for the Premier: Does he agree that to lower bills, we must increase our ambitions on energy efficiency?

THE PREMIER: Of course. Energy efficiency is incredibly important. Big fan of Efficiency Nova Scotia and the work that they do, 100 per cent. Just to complete the circle for the member, the bills that Nova Scotians pay are based on rates, and we will protect the ratepayers of this province, which is a little different experience than Nova Scotians were used to when the NDP was in power, when the power rates went up by 25 per cent over four years. That won't happen on our watch, Mr. Speaker. I can guarantee you that.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I thought that was tired five years ago. I guess he can't think of anything else to criticize us about, Mr. Speaker.

What the Premier says is true, though. We have a proud history in this province of striving for energy efficiency. We had the first energy efficiency utility in Canada. The Liberals capped efficiency spending. The goals for efficiency in this government's legislation are vague. The latest Efficiency Canada report notes that our progress is stalled. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable member for Dartmouth South has the floor.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I'll table that. We need workforce development, coordination, and a plan for deep retrofits that create jobs and make power bills, which can come down separate from rates with high energy efficiency, affordable for everyone.

My question, again, is for the Premier: When will this government present a clear and ambitious plan for deep retrofits so that every house in this province can count on lower energy bills?

THE PREMIER: I know the member might be tired of hearing of her party's record when they were in government, but I can assure you that Nova Scotians don't forget. I hear about it every day when they say to me: Premier, please don't let our bills go up like happened under the NDP. We won't, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: FUEL TAX - GOV. PROFIT

HON. IAIN RANKIN: A little history lesson: the NDP did raise power rates by 30 per cent, but the PC government before that raised them by 40 per cent for a combined 70 per cent. We stabilized rates.

As Nova Scotians struggle to find change in their pocket to pay for the increased costs at the pump, Mr. Speaker, we found out in the budget that the government coffers had increased by \$16.5 million for their fuel tax coming in. That's \$3 million more than the temporary support that the Premier likes to gloat about - that \$13 million going out to the small percentage of Nova Scotians. Less than 5 per cent.

My question to the Premier: Why is the government comfortable with turning a profit on the backs of Nova Scotians?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I don't take the member's assessment that we're making a profit on anything. I don't know if the member was paying attention this week, but we actually tabled a budget with a \$500 million deficit. That's not profit. That's investments we are making in Nova Scotians that far exceed the revenue that's coming in.

I can tell you why, and Nova Scotians know why that investment is required, because for eight years, those investments weren't made. We're making them. We're picking it up and we're moving forward.

IAIN RANKIN: On this side of the House, for weeks we've been asking for support for Nova Scotians facing all these cost pressures, especially the spike in gas prices recently. Several provinces have acted, Mr. Speaker, across the country: British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador. Maybe their premiers are more optimistic about their ability to pay. The question is: When will the Premier see the financial gift that this government has been given and start to help everyday Nova Scotians with the cost of living crisis?

THE PREMIER: There's no financial gift involved. I think when you hear that type of statement from the member opposite, it tells me that they really don't understand how government is supposed to work. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, we're focused on one thing on this side of the House, and that's supporting and investing in Nova Scotians and Nova Scotians know it. Just ask them.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Annapolis.

SNSIS: SPIKING FUEL PRICES - PLAN

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, as gas prices fluctuate, Nova Scotians are looking to this government for help. Over the last month, fuel prices have skyrocketed across our province and have affected everyone, including in rural Nova Scotia, where residents drive long distances to pick up groceries, pick up kids, and do their daily commute. Where is this government's plan to handle the fuel spikes in our rural communities?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: As the minister responsible for the Petroleum Products Pricing Act and regulations, I can speak a little bit to the process, Mr. Speaker. It is the NSUARB that establishes the gas prices in this province on a weekly basis, free of political influence, free of any industry influence, and that is based on a number of global pressures and the sad situation that is happening in Ukraine, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I point to our government's investment last week: \$13 million to get the money in the pockets of Nova Scotians who need it the most. Does that mean that we are done listening and acting? No. We will continue to look at the needs of Nova Scotians.

CARMAN KERR: Mr. Speaker, prices at the pump directly threaten the success of small business and working people in rural Nova Scotia. Does the Premier or the Minister of Service Nova Scotia agree that Nova Scotians deserve relief at the pump and, if so, what is he planning to do about it?

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, it sounds like maybe a little bit of a history lesson from this side of the House to that side of the House. It reminds me that apparently the party opposite wanted to get rid of gas regulation. Gas regulation ensures that there is a supply in our rural regions and that there is a stable pricing across Nova Scotia, contrary to what happens in many other parts of this country, where we see fluctuations in gas many times per week and per day. Again, we will continue to listen to the needs of Nova Scotians and take their concerns very seriously.

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

DHW - VON NURSES: FUNDING FORMULA - CLARIFY

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, home care nursing professionals are given an allowance for travel through the province but are struggling to make ends meet with the rising cost of fuel. They need the government to adjust the rate so they are not paying out-of-pocket to do their important job. I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: Has this government met with VON to discuss how they can better serve our nurses?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is referring to the per kilometre rate for government workers and I can report that the rate has actually been increased 10.8 per cent, starting April 1st. So it is going up to about 6 cents - from 45 cents up to 51 cents per kilometre.

PATRICIA ARAB: My question wasn't about government workers. My question was about VON nurses. So, they fall under the same category, is that - the question is: Are VON nurses under the same funding formula, travel formula?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I will confirm with the member. I will investigate that but, yes, that is my understanding, that they would get the same rate.

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

AGRIC. - FARMERS' MARKETS: HIGH POWER RATES - ADDRESS

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Farmers' markets are the heartbeat of many Nova Scotian communities, non-profits started and held together with dedicated volunteer support. They are valuable spaces where people can support their local food producers and entrepreneurs, meet people in their community, and learn more about their food. Does the minister agree that farmers' markets are important gathering spaces that build community and foster food security and entrepreneurship?

HON. GREG MORROW: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Yes.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. There is a lot of chatter. The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island has the floor.

[2:15 p.m.]

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, under the law, Nova Scotia Power and the UARB treat farmers' markets differently than other community entities and charge them a commercial rate for power with expensive demand charges. The government has been told that many farmers' markets will not be able to continue - and I will table that - unless the government steps in. All that is needed is a legislative amendment, adding farmers' markets to the list of other groups like legions, fire departments, and community halls who, under the Public Utilities Act, are charged no more than the domestic rate.

I would like to ask the minister: Will the minister bring legislation before this sitting is done to ensure that we do not lose any farmers' markets to crushing power rates?

GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for this question. I guess I could just say everything is on the table, but maybe nobody wants to hear that today. To the member's question specifically, yes. That is certainly something that we are looking at. Stay tuned.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

AGRIC. - COST OF LIVING CRISIS: RISING FUEL COSTS - ADDRESS

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, soaring gas prices are affecting every sector of our economy, making it more costly for our farmers to operate equipment and transport food to market, driving up costs to Nova Scotians and slashing farmers' profits. My question is for the Minister of Agriculture: What work is being done to support our farmers who are struggling with the cost of living crisis?

HON. GREG MORROW: These cost of living increases, as we have said, are not just a Nova Scotia problem. They're not a Canadian problem. They're a worldwide problem. It's not just affecting farmers, it's affecting everybody everywhere. Yes, I'm hearing these concerns when I talk to farmers. The department has a number of programs that can help. We want to continue to have those conversations with farmers to find out ways that we can help.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Rising fuel costs are hurting our farmers. The price of gas is making it harder for our farmers to bring their products to market, leading to additional food costs that people can't afford amidst the cost of living crisis. What is the Houston government's plan to make food affordable for Nova Scotians?

GREG MORROW: The answer is in the Nova Scotia food and beverage strategy. It's a key driver in meeting our 20 per cent local food consumption goal by 2030. We're working across many departments with many of my colleagues from Health and Wellness; Community Services; Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage; Education and Early Childhood Development; and Advanced Education. These are all departments that are involved in that strategy, and we're looking forward to getting going.

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

DAE - STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY: PLAN TO ADDRESS - DISCUSS

HON. BEN JESSOME: Mr. Speaker, today my question is for the Minister of Advanced Education. Nova Scotia universities are amongst the top for tuition rates in the country, and our post-secondary students are struggling to meet their basic needs. Dalhousie's food bank, for example, is open twice a week and accessed by about 300 students weekly. I'm happy to table that - perhaps not so happy to table that. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What's the plan from the government to address food insecurity among university and post secondary students?

HON. BRIAN WONG: We do offer a \$1,283 student grant for every Nova Scotian student going to Nova Scotian universities to help reduce their burden. Food banks right across Nova Scotia are a concern, whether it's through our school system or for our post secondary system or the general public. We continue to work with our university sector and our post-secondary sector in general to really help them with any of the needs and stuff that they have. I just want to make sure that you recognize that students are always at the forefront of our minds in everything that we do. I look forward to helping students in any way that we can.

BEN JESSOME: Costs are continuing to increase. It's disappointing to see that there was nothing new in the budget by way of additions to the weekly allowance. It's frustrating to think that students can expect a status quo scenario, which makes it difficult to plan for next year. Mr. Speaker, I'm asking the minister: Does he think it's acceptable to offer students a status quo scenario with the cost of food, cost of housing, and other costs continuing to increase?

BRIAN WONG: We recently invested \$15 million towards students. We had a \$9.8-million grant that went out to over 11,000 students. The Premier listened to our nursing students at Dal in the accelerated programs, noticed there was a gap in their assistance, and offered approximately \$3,300 for each of those students to cover that gap. That's what you get when you listen to students. Nursing students who stepped forward to help out with nursing in our long-term care facilities were given a \$1,000 honorarium for helping out.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

EECD: SCHOOL MEAL PGM. EXPANSION - COMMIT

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. The reality is many children rely on school to provide healthy meals. The PCs were the only party that did not commit to expanding the school meal program to include lunch. I did not see any mention of it in their spending plan last week. My question to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is: When will this government get on the right side of this conversation by providing more meals to our children at schools?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: This is a really critical issue, and I think we are absolutely on the right side of this conversation. We have a healthy schools food program. There is food provided for students in schools. We know this is vital to students' health, to their well-being, and to their learning. Our schools, our educators, and our administrators are aware of this issue, and they're mindful of this issue. If any student needs food, they get this food. We are aware that this needs a systemic answer, and we continue to work on ways to better support our students' needs.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Maybe at some point, the minister and I can have a more expanded conversation about some of those programs, because some of them I'm not aware of. What I will say is this: On March 8th, CBC reported on the growing number of families seeking support from local food banks. In six months from August 2021 to January 2022, Feed Nova Scotia saw a 50 per cent uptake. I will table that.

Mr. Speaker, I know that when I was minister, we were working on implementing a full lunch program for students in schools. The work is already started. The work may already be done. My question to the minister is: When can Nova Scotians expect lunch to be provided in our schools?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: This is a critical issue that we're all dealing with. I would just like to remind the members here that we have just made in our support package an investment of \$1.2 million to Feed Nova Scotia, which will distribute out to 140 food banks, as well as \$200,000 that enables any food banks that are private to reach into funds. Actually, just this week I was able to help a school. If there's a school that's struggling, please reach out, because we will do everything to make sure that they have food there for the children. Again, reach out, please.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

EECD: RAISE ECE WAGES - COMMIT

SUZY HANSEN: First of all, I want to say we shouldn't rely on food banks. Once again, that's a shame to talk about. Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. Our caucus strongly supports a move to a universal, affordable, publicly-funded child care system. Early childhood educators are at the centre of quality child care. Recruitment and retention of ECEs has been a serious issue for many years. Part of the problem has been the low wage floor set by the government.

Will the minister commit to addressing this long-standing issue by raising ECE wages, effective immediately, as they did for CCAs?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: This is a hugely important issue, and we absolutely agree that our ECEs deserve to be compensated fairly. They do incredible work. They care for our littlest, our smallest, our most vulnerable learners, and we value the work that they do. For this reason, one of the priorities in our work in the Canada-wide agreement is implementing improvements to the pay and the benefits of our ECEs. That work is under way as we speak.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the minister for that answer. Child care providers have faced challenges created by the rushed implementation of pre-Primary and by the pandemic. ECEs are frontline workers who helped restart Nova Scotia's economy and made it possible for businesses and public services to reopen. Now it is the government's turn to recognize their value, and I'm glad to hear the minister speak, as they are implementing such things on their way. I want to make sure that we recognize the value of the work ECEs do by prioritizing a compensation framework and workforce strategy.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is: Will the minister commit to immediate action to provide all ECEs with access to benefits, pensions and paid sick leave?

BECKY DRUHAN: Thank you to the member opposite for raising and addressing this important question. We absolutely commit to immediate action, and we are taking immediate action right now to make sure that we have a framework in place for our ECEs to compensate them fairly, to make sure they have pay that reflects the professional and incredible work that they do and that they have benefits in place.

We are striking an engagement table and we want ECEs at that table. We need to hear their voice. We have a survey out to operators to better understand the current compensation structure and we commit to and are on track to have that framework in place this Fall for our ECEs.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cole Harbour.

AGRIC.: FOOD SUPPLY RESILIENCY - NEEDED

HON. TONY INCE: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. According to the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, only about 92 per cent of the food produced is coming in to Nova Scotia. Preliminary estimates show that about 8.4 per cent of Nova Scotia's diet is produced here. Fifteen years ago, it was closer to 15 per cent. I'll table that. This puts the food security of Nova Scotians at risk and with the world facing international crisis after international crisis, we are vulnerable. My question to the minister is: What will this government do to increase the resiliency of Nova Scotia's food supply chains and address the cost of living crisis?

HON. GREG MORROW: I have seen that article before, and I know from within the department there is some question about what number we are at right now. That's one of the things that we're trying to determine: what the metric is, what number we are in terms of locally produced food that we're consuming in the province, in order to get to 20 per cent by 2030. The simple answer is that by putting more local food on shelves and supporting producers, supporting farmers and getting more of that local food on the shelves of Nova Scotians, we'll be proud to buy.

TONY INCE: What specific plan does this government have to prioritize not just the purchase of local food but its production right here at home?

GREG MORROW: I referenced the Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy earlier. That will help with our healthy food choices, it will help support our rural sustainability, lead to more local food on shelves. Within that plan is institutional procurement, Mr. Speaker, and that includes working with our hospitals, with advanced education - again with education, with community services, to put more local food directly into our institutions.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

AGRIC.: FOOD INSECURITY CRISIS - SPECIFIC ACTION

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Food insecurity is impacting the lives of more and more Nova Scotians. In fact, experts are telling us that Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity out of any Canadian province. I'll table that. I've seen these issues first-hand. I spend most of my Friday evenings and Saturday mornings volunteering with an organization called Square Roots, with fresh produce that is free to those facing food insecurity. As rewarding as this volunteer work is, I wish that there was no need for it, and I wish that we didn't have to package and deliver hundreds of these food bundles in my community, because I wish that so many people across this province were not facing food insecurity.

Mr. Speaker, is this government not seeing what the rest of us are, that families are going hungry or being forced to make less healthy decisions due to rising costs? If they are, my question for the Premier is: What is the plan to address this?

[2:30 p.m.]

HON. GREG MORROW: I'm not sure, has anyone mentioned \$13 million today? Has that been brought up? We announced last week that my colleagues in the Department of Finance and Treasury Board and the Department of Community Services and the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services have announced to help those Nova Scotians most in need with their bills. That's not an insignificant number (Interruption) - \$13 billion budget, yes, thank you. Look, there are ways, things that we're doing. We've acted on them last week, we'll continue to act on them. In the \$13 billion budget we saw a number of them.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, that's a one-time support. I'll go through it again: the programs like the one I just mentioned, Square Roots, is a program that doesn't just feed communities, but it actually feeds - I heard a colleague on the other side mention Square Roots, actually in Dartmouth, further out, so it's not just my area that this problem is, it's consistent. Again, I'll ask if this government, even with this most recent budget, is committed to specific action to address the food insecurity crisis in this province?

GREG MORROW: I'll go back to the Nova Scotia Food and Beverage Strategy that will put more local food on shelves, but again, we have partners in my department in the sector who want to help Nova Scotians. They want to get their food to Nova Scotians, including those most vulnerable. When we have those conversations, they're talking about 30 per cent of their food that isn't being used at retail level. Let's get that food to people who need it most. Let's get it to food banks. Let's get it to these community programs, and let's help Nova Scotians that way. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

IGA: COLLAB. WITH OTHER ATL. PROVS. - COMMIT

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Many people believe that the Maritime Provinces and Atlantic Provinces, including Nova Scotia, would be stronger economically and socially if we worked together as a Maritime region. Cumberland North adjoins the neighbouring province of New Brunswick, and my constituents live every day with the effects of two provinces that historically have not been collaborating. The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, APEC, have made recommendations over the years to the Council of Atlantic Premiers that have not been taken which would make us stronger. I will table the document.

My question to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs: Could he share if Nova Scotia legislation is considered at all through the lens of the impacts of the new legislation on the entire Maritime region, including border communities?

THE PREMIER: The Council of Atlantic Premiers met last week. I have to say, we have a great group of Atlantic premiers in Andrew Furey and Dennis King and Blaine Higgs, and of course Nova Scotia. We want to work together on a number of initiatives, and the spirit of collaboration between that group - I'm told from some of the federal members that they've never seen it higher. We'll work together on a number of issues to put our constituencies first, our provinces first, Nova Scotians first, Atlantic Canadians first. We're happy to work on anything together. We've shown that we'll do just that in a short period of time.

ELIZABETH SMITH MCCROSSIN: I appreciate the response from the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and I look forward to seeing very positive changes. Just even in the last three months, our constituents of Cumberland North have seen the effects of our two provinces not working together. Our renal patients were threatened with losing dialysis within a two-week period. Thankfully, that's been pushed - they're working on that. Our cancer patients who used to travel 40 minutes are being forced to travel two hours. Our highway rules are different, emergency alerts are not working together, illegal drug activity, our law enforcement's not working together. There's so much that needs to be done.

My question to the minister is: Will he commit to strengthening our Maritime region, Nova Scotia, by working more collaboratively on real issues important to the people of Cumberland North and all Nova Scotia?

THE PREMIER: The answer is yes, Mr. Speaker.

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

MAH: STIM. FUNDING FOR CBRM - COMMIT

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The people of Cape Breton are fed up with the Province's inaction on the fiscal imbalance between the CBRM and the HRM. Given high poverty rates, the cost of living soaring, and a critical need for affordable housing and updated infrastructure, CBRM needs significant and sustained economic support. We saw some announcements for Cape Breton in yesterday's budget, but will the Premier commit to providing stimulus funding that recognizes this long-standing imbalance?

HON. JOHN LOHR: I do want to say, I thank the member for the question and say that our municipal partners - CBRM, HRM, all 49 municipal units - are extraordinarily important to us. The member may be aware that this past year we doubled the Municipal Financial Capacity Grant, which CBRM received the single biggest share of. HRM, in fact - I believe the number was zero for HRM and six or seven other municipal units. There is some concern about that on those who didn't receive it, but we are very committed to being a fair and equal partner with all our municipal units.

KENDRA COOMBES: All municipalities in this province have been waiting for their fair share of the cannabis tax. The federal government agreed to give the provinces more of this excise tax if municipalities were given 25 per cent share to cover the costs associated with legalization. Those costs included policing, which are rising significantly for municipalities who must contract services from the RCMP. I will note that in Opposition, the PCs supported municipalities receiving this funding.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier: Does the Province intend to make good on the commitment to give municipalities their fair share of the Cannabis tax? I will table that document.

HON. JOHN LOHR: I do want to recognize the rising costs of policing, which is really being downloaded from Ottawa, we'll say. That commitment about the cannabis tax was a federal commitment, so maybe you should talk to your MP about that.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

FTB: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - GOV. ACTION NEEDED

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: For many seniors, young families, small business owners, times are tough right now, and how could they not be with the cost of groceries alone going up \$1,000 for the average Nova Scotian? Yes, global factors are impacting this. This is happening across the world, but other jurisdictions are taking drastic action while this government turns a blind eye. The cost of living crisis is a conversation that's dominating dinner tables around this province. My question to the Premier is: When will it dominate the Cabinet table?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this is something we care about very much. That is why we didn't wait for the budget. We actually made an announcement prior to the budget that was targeted, meaningful, and quick. We used existing programs to get the money out quickly to people because we know that people who are on fixed incomes, people who have the lowest amount of income, they are the ones who are most affected when we see rises. Somebody who is wealthy, the price of bread goes up, it doesn't mean a lot to them, but somebody on a fixed income, if the price of food or travelling to work goes up, that's something very serious for them.

We take it very seriously, and I know we've had many, many discussions on this side of the House about it.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Speaker, perhaps if Nova Scotians got a quarter for every time this government patted themselves on the back, we actually might be getting somewhere in the province. (Applause) Alas, there was a poll published by Angus Reid Institute on February 28th that said more than half of Atlantic Canadians are struggling to

keep pace with the rising cost of living. I'll table that. The Premier may have missed this as he was planning his trip to Hollywood at the time when that came out.

My question for the Premier is: How many more Nova Scotians will have to fall behind before this government acts on the cost of living crisis?

THE PREMIER: Some of my light reading on the Liberal campaign suggests that maybe they learned their lesson on relying on polls, but maybe not, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

FTB: RISING COST OF FOOD - GOV. PLAN

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Nova Scotia has the third-highest food inflation rate in Canada. I will table that. This is not an area that Nova Scotia wants to lead in. My question is to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: Where is the PC plan for food inflation?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: We're always monitoring things. I'll give you an example: the budget itself. The cut-off for the budget was pretty well the same day that Russia invaded Ukraine, so we're always updating our information.

As a government, we always have the option. A budget is a budget. It's an estimate of what will be spent in the coming year. We'll aim to stick to it, but there's nothing stopping the government from doing what we did just before the budget, make an announcement of over \$13 million to support people who most need it.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: That was \$13 million for a million people. That's \$13 per person. That is very little and a one-time thing. Mr. Speaker, in our cost of living crisis, food inflation is now outpacing wage growth by over 6 per cent. This is making it more difficult for families to put food on the table.

My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board is: How many more Nova Scotians will have to go hungry before this government does something about the rising cost of food?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, just to clarify, it was a lot more than \$13 per person because the supports were targeted to people most in need. What I would say is that the member is raising a very important issue. It's one that we want to keep our eye on. It's something we want to be able to have the power to react to in the future, and we will, if necessary.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

FTB: GAS PRICES - RELIEF

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, gas prices are skyrocketing. This month they hit \$1.85 a litre for gas and over \$2 a litre for diesel. Yet we have seen no solutions from this government to address runaway gas prices for your everyday Nova Scotian. With gas prices like these and no solutions to be seen from this government, I must ask: Did the solutionists driving the solution express get lost on the way to help Nova Scotians, or could they just not afford the gas to get there?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: I know the member is trying to inject some humour in a very serious situation. I think of somebody who is buying a tank of gas today compared to a few months ago. If they're using a tank of gas a week, they're probably paying upwards of about \$80 more per month, which is very significant for somebody on a fixed income.

I think of home heating oil - 40 per cent of Nova Scotians are heating with home heating oil. I know because I had to buy a tank not so long ago. It was \$1.93 per litre. That's a dollar more than it was last year. It's a significant matter. It's something that we continue to keep our eye on, Mr. Speaker.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, what's humorous is the way this government is not helping Nova Scotians every day at the pump, at the grocery store, and in other ways. The cost of gas isn't only emptying Nova Scotians' pocketbooks, it's now emptying their savings accounts too. The minister is lucky that he's able to afford a full tank of oil. Many Nova Scotians are not able to do that. I ask: Why is the government ignoring the soaring cost of gas on everyday Nova Scotians and when can they expect some relief?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, that is the member's opinion. I don't expect him, on that side of the House, to ever give us an ounce of credit for anything we do to help people. I know that everybody who sits on this side of House cares. We are concerned about this. We have taken measures already - before the budget was even tabled. If we need to do it again, we'll do it again.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

DHW: MIDWIFERY ACCESS - INVEST

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Access to midwifery has huge potential to improve the primary care outcomes of pregnant people. Midwifery clients commonly report positive feelings about their birth experiences and more confidence in the transition to new parenthood - but access to midwifery in Nova Scotia is patchy at best. This is why the Association of Nova Scotia Midwives has recommended a plan to grow the profession to 20 full-time midwives while establishing a training institution right here in Nova Scotia. Mr. Speaker, will the minister agree to invest in this expansion of midwifery services?

[2:45 p.m.]

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Thank you for the question. Of course, as a registered nurse, I am a strong proponent of midwifery. I have had an opportunity to meet with the midwifery association early on. We will continue to look at what services folks are able to provide. Recently in my local community, a home birth was able to happen through midwifery. It was actually in the First Nation community of Paqtnkek and happened outside. It was in a decorated tent. It was absolutely beautiful. It is a very vital service and we're interested in learning more and expanding the service if we can.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I know that the association will be happy to meet with the minister and offer more information. In fact, research shows that midwifery care results in births with significantly fewer medical interventions. Midwifery care offers higher rates of vaginal birth and breast and chest feeding - but there isn't a single practising midwife at Cape Breton Regional Hospital, which has the province's highest rate for C-sections for low-risk pregnancies. Can the minister clearly say when parents in Cape Breton will have access to midwifery services?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I don't have a timeline for that, but I'm certainly willing to speak with the folks who run the Nova Scotia Health Authority to see if there are any plans in the works regarding midwifery services in Cape Breton.

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

FTB: COST OF LIVING CRISIS - ASSIST

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, we've heard resoundingly from all members in the House agreement that the cost of living crisis in Nova Scotia right now is hurting all Nova Scotians - especially low-income Nova Scotians.

A February poll by Angus Reid - even though we shouldn't rely on polls - showed that 40 per cent of people making less than \$25,000 are feeling left behind, and 35 per cent feel as though they are losing pace with the rising cost of living. I will table that. Despite this, the government made no increase to income assistance.

If there was ever a time to do this, it is now. My question is for the Premier: Why is he letting our most vulnerable Nova Scotians fall behind during this cost of living crisis?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question and for the members highlighting this important need here today in the House. Some of the comments opposite were suggesting that some of the initiatives in the budget were one-time but, in fact, they're not one-time. The Seniors Care Grant - up to \$500 for every senior in the province - is not taxable income. That's not happening just this year. We intend to continue that every year.

Many people will remember the rent cap that was put in place. We know there's not enough housing supply. A lot of people are suffering because of that. There is a rent cap in place to protect people from rising costs for their own housing needs. I think I'm out of time, so I'll let the member ask the next question.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, inflation is out of control. Inflation is 5.7 per cent - the highest it's been in three decades. Food inflation is at 7.3 per cent, and the cost of gas has increased 32 per cent this year. Last Fall, New Brunswick announced they will increase social assistance rates by the percentage change in the New Brunswick inflation. I'll table that. My question is for the Premier: When will he take the same lead as the New Brunswick premier and do the same thing?

ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I think about it, and my sincere hope is that the price of oil and the cost that it's contributing to in terms of gasoline, home heating oil, the price of food going up, and everything really going up - my hope is that it goes down. It was a year ago that the price of oil, even during the pandemic - people will remember, you couldn't actually sell oil for anything. You actually had to pay people to take oil off your hands in the markets. The prices fell drastically.

I'm hopeful that prices will become more normalized and fall. Until then, I think of a couple of other things that we've done. I think about the Nova Scotia Child Benefit, increased in this budget for people at the lowest income levels to up to \$1,275 per child.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

FTB: COST OF LIVING - ADVISE

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying in politics that Tory times are hard times. (Interruption) I think the last eight months have proven that beyond a shadow of a doubt. The cost of housing is through the roof. The cost of food is through the roof. The cost of gas is through the roof. I think there is no doubt that Nova Scotians are worse off than they were on August 17th of last year. I would ask the Premier: What would he say to Nova Scotians who are falling further and further behind under this government?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, what I would say to people out there is that there are opportunities out there. Don't lose hope. There are opportunities. We actually have many shortages of labour right now. We need to try to help people see a future . . .

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

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege - personal privilege. Earlier today, during Statements by Members, I rose to speak about Transgender Day of Visibility and a local film production that celebrates and honours the lives of trans people. During my statement, the Premier talked very loudly throughout at a level that was very distracting. I felt that I was not able to do my job, and I was obstructed from doing my job. I found it quite disrespectful.

Outside the Chamber, I then approached the Premier, explaining to him that I wanted him to know what I was talking about. I wanted to give him an opportunity to read the statement or to listen to it. Again, the Premier was disrespectful in dismissing my appeal - even using a hand gesture.

I felt like I was being told to stick to my knitting. I really thought that those days were over. It's happening again right now. I'm on a point of privilege right now and the Premier continues to interrupt. I am a woman in this House, and I deserve to be able to have my voice heard, the same as anyone else. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I ask for an apology from the Premier to me and, through me, to the transgender community of Nova Scotia.

THE SPEAKER: Your point of privilege is taken under advisement. I'll rule on it at a later date.

We're going to take a 10-minute recess, because you'll notice that the Clerk is by himself today. Many of us are free to get up and do what we want to do, but that doesn't apply to the Clerk.

Before we do that, I want to announce that by agreement of all the House Leaders, there will be no Estimates today or tomorrow. I just want to make everybody aware of what will be taking place. The three House Leaders and I met earlier today, and that agreement has been reached.

We'll take a 10-minute recess. We'll resume again at 3:02 p.m.

[2:52 p.m. The House recessed.]

[3:08 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

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

PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 109.

Bill No. 109 - Income Tax Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: On behalf of the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, I move that Bill No. 109 - An Act to Amend Chapter 217 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Income Tax Act, Respecting a Fertility and Surrogacy Rebate - be now read for a second time.

Today, I am speaking in support of changes to the Income Tax Act respecting fertility and surrogacy rebate. Our government is proud to introduce these amendments which, for the first time in our province, provides support for fertility treatments and surrogacy-related medical expenses for Nova Scotians trying to have a baby. This measure also makes Nova Scotia the first province in Canada to provide this kind of support for surrogacy.

We know the impact infertility can have on Nova Scotians trying to grow their family. These challenges are extraordinarily stressful, emotionally exhausting, and very expensive. The Nova Scotia Fertility and Surrogacy Rebate was introduced as part of the Budget 2022-23 to provide coverage for all types of families, including many from the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Previously, families had no option but to pay the full cost.

There is no limit on the number of treatments that an individual can claim, but the maximum claim is an annual total of \$20,000 in eligible costs for the maximum annual rebate of \$8,000. Coverage is for treatment provided by a Nova Scotia licensed medical practitioner or infertility treatment centre. In the case if the services are not offered in the province, a licensed practitioner in Nova Scotia can refer a patient elsewhere.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the government on this particular part of the budget. They've already heard about all the things I didn't like, most of the things I didn't like. But I did want to say I think it's significant that people who want to be parents or want to be parents again will have the opportunity to have their financial burden somewhat lifted.

For many, the desire to be a parent is just part of who they are at their core and so being able to get some of that money back - it is not an insignificant amount of money that many Nova Scotians pay to have these services. But I would be remiss if I didn't mention some caveat questions and concerns that we have.

I'm thinking today of the many, many people who do not have \$20,000 to put up in advance. You have to wait until you get the money back from your income tax return, so they will not get to attend a clinic or receive this kind of treatment from a medical practitioner, because it's not offered on the formulary, it's not part of MSI at this time. So, for many of those people that upfront cost is a real barrier.

I would also note there is only one fertility clinic in Atlantic Canada and that means that the wait-list is 11 to 12 months just to get in the door to have your initial appointment. I don't need to remind the House that for many women in their 30s and beyond, fertility is waning and so every month counts. Spending a year on a wait-list has consequences.

There was a response from the Department of Health and Wellness about this particular issue in the media yesterday - we do not fund private clinics, they said. But we do know that they're planning to pay for private surgeries and when some people go out of province for certain treatments, they do pay for that.

Finally, I would just like to say that it is good that the government is giving families some hope. As we heard yesterday in the media, it can be a long expensive journey having a child if you have to pay for surrogacy expenses or fertility treatments. I would just like to note that the government, in addition to giving hope to prospective parents, can give grieving parents some comfort by passing Ruby's Law which would recognize miscarriage and stillbirths as deaths and therefore give family members time off.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I'm really happy to be able to speak to this bill today. I have a lot of friends and quite a lot of constituents actually who have contacted me who are in the midst of struggling to get pregnant or to become parents. I would never say that any help for those folks is bad. We welcome any help for people who want children and need access to fertility treatments.

However, as my colleague from Bedford Basin has pointed out, tax credits are good but only if you can afford the upfront costs. So it does leave out a significant part of the population. Certainly, when I was having my children, I would never have been able to afford fertility treatments. I didn't have any drug coverage and didn't have that kind of money - most people don't.

[3:15 p.m.]

Our caucus would prefer to see an expansion of publicly-funded insurance to infertility treatments and surrogacy, including the associated drug treatments, Mr. Speaker. That's a significant part of the process: the drugs needed to be taken in advance of the treatments.

I know there are going to be a lot of happy people in this province because of this bill, including a good friend of mine who is thrilled to hear about it. I look forward to hearing from stakeholders and hopefully residents, individuals, at Law Amendments Committee, to hear some of the stories of the struggles and to see how we could improve the bill.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief in my comments. I think it's important that I stand on my feet just to recognize some of the advocates that were part of these conversations to get to this point where this is presented at the Legislature. Carolyn Dubé, who is the Executive Director of Fertility Matters Canada - I think it's important that we recognize her, and all of the advocates who have been advocating to get to this point for years. To me, this is really one of the real highlights of this budget for families who are trying to grow.

I just wanted to take this opportunity to recognize Carolyn for her advocacy and the advocacy of Fertility Matters Canada, all of her staff, and some of my friends in Cape Breton who have been on this journey and spent a significant amount of money along the journey, and now this provides them with some hope.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I want to stand up for just a few moments and thank the government for this one. We were often critical of them on lots of things, but this is truly a good thing. During the past election, I spent some time with a young family who are friends of ours and this was a struggle that they have had.

It's a very personal struggle, obviously, and when the dollar sign is put in front of them, for some people it is insurmountable. To be quite honest with you, it really was something that I hoped and prayed that this government would pass right away, so I'm actually glad that they did. I will say that I hope that - nothing is perfect, but this is darn good.

I represent a lot of people in the community who do not have the type of money for this. I hope the government continues to look into ways to help those individuals who don't have the tens of thousands of dollars that it's going to cost to do this. I am not saying this facetiously - I know they like to say they are very compassionate, and I believe that you are, so I hope that for this particular program we think of those who can't afford it.

In the end, this is a great first step. To the Premier and the Minister of Health and Wellness, thank you for a lot of people in my community who are going to take advantage of this.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Inverness.

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say a few remarks as well. I feel sad when I think of couples who are struggling, trying to have a child. I know there are many couples who have not survived the pressure associated with that, or many who have not been the same as a result of it. That is why I hope this message brought here today is one of hope for those who may have lost it.

I also think about children who have been lost in pregnancy and infancy. They are not lost, Mr. Speaker. I believe there is a spiritual realm. My hope depends on it. No matter our differences here, I believe we truly care for each other there, and they are just there ahead of us.

When I first learned our twins were on the way, I envisioned a light exploding and then another. I thought of my late father and I immediately felt his joy in that moment. Who knows, maybe our consciousness just informs us of things we want to believe, or maybe there is more to our existence than what we think we may understand.

Should it come as a surprise that when I was sitting outside the operating room waiting for our son Lochlan to be born, I had a small yet significant experience. I was saying a little prayer and I asked, what should I be thinking of? Moments later I received a text message. Lucie's stepfather Bill explained to me that my father's name was mentioned randomly in an article on the cover of the *Herald* that morning and I thought in that moment, perhaps he was sending me a little sign he was with me in spirit.

Today I want to speak about how the financial support offered in this rebate can help people who choose restorative reproductive medicine. It is a lesser form of licensed medical assistance that empowers women and men to understand and co-operatively manage their own fertility. It gives them the tools and education to track biomarkers of the woman's fertility cycle, which informs medical care to restore the health of the reproductive system. Instead of bypassing an underlying problem, restorative reproductive medicine identifies what is not working and fixes it. Pregnancy can then occur naturally in the body.

Having a child depends, of course, just as much on the health of the man's reproductive system. Improvements in sperm quality or counts can be achieved through healthier lifestyle choices or medical and surgical treatments. The entire range of reproductive health is addressed - things like infertility, miscarriage, premature birth, ovarian cysts, irregular cycles, and other matters.

Does it work? Restorative reproductive medicine success rates are similar to other procedures in published literature. Are there side effects? Usually positive ones. All health issues are addressed, which improves outcomes for people and less invasive medical treatment is needed, which reduces risk for the patient.

How much does it cost? It is going to cost a lot less with the passage of this legislation. From speaking with licensed medical practitioners who offer this care, the cost can vary but at an average cost of \$6,000 over the course of one year, less a 40 per cent rebate with passage of this bill, it becomes \$3,600, which is significantly more affordable than other options out there.

I will close with this: May we wish everyone waiting to start a family well with the hope offered today with this legislation.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I am happy to rise today to recognize this initiative. Certainly, the desire to start families is not one that is limited to heterosexual couples, but to individuals, couples and families. Certainly, it is one that I heard about during the campaign, on the doorsteps, and I hear about it from constituents.

Being able to access fertility support in Nova Scotia - like other colleagues have mentioned, I have just a few concerns around the reliance on tax credits to ensure this access. This is one part for those who can afford it and can afford the initial investment, but we'd also like to see the expansion of publicly-funded insurance to infertility treatments and surrogacy and, like my colleague from Dartmouth North said, the associated drug treatments.

I am also curious in terms of other investments that can be made. As I work in health policy and look at gender-affirming care, I know that, in fact, there are other issues that enable access. One very easy one is, do people see themselves in the government policies? Do they understand? When they hear the words of their leaders, do they understand that their communities and their families are included? I would argue that we could do quite a bit of work in that.

I know that the Department of Health and Wellness has a diversity, equity and inclusion group, and I'm wondering if that group has been engaged to look at issues. What sort of analysis has been done about who is impacted? Who is left out by this initiative and what can be done to make it more inclusive?

Then also to consider, again, if we want to make sure that the services that we want to make easier for Nova Scotians to access are truly accessible, then it's thinking about how we support increased cultural competency among service providers. What sort of

training, what sort of ongoing medical education is necessary so that medical professionals are able to provide this in a way that welcomes all types of diversity into their treatment?

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

The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I'd like to thank my Chamber colleagues and members opposite for the thoughtful remarks.

Infertility and its treatment can affect all aspects of people's lives and can be a source of stress and difficulty for many. We believe this public support for reproductive health can alleviate some of the pressures faced by individuals and families dealing with infertility. It is my pleasure to speak to this important initiative. I now close debate on Bill No. 109.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 109.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call the order of business, Private and Local Bills for Second Reading.

PRIVATE AND LOCAL BILLS FOR SECOND READING

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you please call Bill No. 112.

Bill No. 112 - Holy Heart Seminary Dissolution Act.

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 112 be read for a second time.

After having been expelled from France, arriving in Canada in 1890, and founding Nova Scotia's first francophone college, Collège Sainte-Anne - now known as Université Sainte-Anne, proud alma mater for myself - Eudists, a congregation of priests, endeavoured to establish the Maritime provinces' first major seminary. Built in 1894 and opened in 1895, the Halifax-based Holy Heart Seminary was officially incorporated on April 19, 1906, and its Charter was amended in 1907.

In the Winter of 1970, faced with a steadily declining number of seminarians, financial pressures and a general uncertainty around the future of training priests, it was announced that the Holy Heart Seminary would close permanently. The seminary was subsequently sold and demolished in December of 1971.

Since the Holy Heart Seminary has been inactive for more than 50 years, owns no property or assets, and has no debts, liabilities or further obligations, the congregational authorities that owned and operated Holy Heart wish to officially dissolve the seminary by repealing its incorporation Act and Charter amendment.

With that, I conclude my remarks.

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

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I so move to close debate on Bill No. 112.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 112.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

We'll have a short recess while the committee sets up.

[3:29 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CWH on Bills with Deputy Speaker Angela Simmonds in the Chair.]

[6:02 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Angela Simmonds assumed the Chair.]

THE SPEAKER: Order. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole House on Bills reports.

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole House on Bills has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 96 - Dismantling Racism and Hate Act.

Bill No. 99 - Quality-improvement Information Protection Act.

Bill No. 104 - Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act.

and the Chair has been instructed to recommend these bills to the favourable consideration of the House, without amendments.

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move for the House to now rise to meet again Friday, April 1st between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Following the Daily Routine and Question Period, business will include bills for second reading: Bill Nos. 94, 114, 115, 118 and 120; and bills for third reading: Bill Nos. 96, 99, and 104.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Just very quickly, Madam Speaker. I don't know if I'm out of order or not, but I think it's important to recognize the Clerk, who's doing this by himself. (Applause) (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Speaker seconds that.

The motion is that the House rise to meet again on April 1st between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until April 1st at 9:00 a.m.

[The House rose at 6:04 p.m.]