



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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

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

First Session

TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2022

| TABLE OF CONTENTS | PAGE |
|--|-------------|
| TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS: | |
| Article: "Tories Won't Contest Disabled Housing Ruling," G. Burrill..... | 1901 |
| GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION: | |
| Res. 192, COVID-19: Changes to Leg. Rules Required - Recog., Hon. K. Masland..... | 1902 |
| Vote - Affirmative..... | 1904 |
| Res. 193, National Caregiver Day: Celeb. Role of Caregivers - Recog., Hon. B. Adams..... | 1906 |
| Vote - Affirmative..... | 1907 |
| Res. 194, Comeau's Sea Foods: 75 th Anniv. - Congrats., Hon. S. Craig..... | 1907 |
| Vote - Affirmative..... | 1908 |
| INTRODUCTION OF BILLS: | |
| No. 129, An Act to Amend Chapter 292 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Motor Carrier Act, Hon. K. Masland..... | 1908 |
| No. 130, An Act to Amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, | |

| | |
|--|------|
| the Homes for Special Care Act, Respecting Public Funds, G. Burrill | 1908 |
| No. 131, An Act to Amend Chapter 352 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Powers of Attorney Act, Hon. B. Johns | 1908 |
| No. 132, An Act to Amend Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2011, the Fair Drug Pricing Act, Respecting Pharmacare Programs, S. Leblanc | 1908 |
| No. 133, An Act to Establish a Pharmacare Policy, S. Leblanc | 1908 |
| No. 134, An Act to Amend Chapter 293 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Motor Vehicle Act, Hon. K. Masland | 1908 |
| No. 135, An Act Respecting Emergency Department Standards, S. Leblanc | 1909 |
| No. 136, An Act Respecting Collaborative Emergency Centres, S. Leblanc | 1909 |
| STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS: | |
| MacNaughton, Molly: Campaign Work - Recog., Hon. J. Balsler | 1909 |
| Hfx. West Warriors: Ch'ship Wins - Congrats., R. DiCostanzo | 1910 |
| Disabled Hous. Ruling: Case Stopped - Recog., G. Burrill | 1910 |
| Beck, Muriel: 99 th Birthday - Best Wishes, T. Taggart | 1911 |
| Roach, Mattea: <i>Jeopardy!</i> Contestant - Congrats., B. Clark | 1911 |
| Sexual Assault Awar. Mo.: Sharing Info. - Recog., S. Hansen | 1911 |
| Local Food Prod.: Plant A Garden - Invit., E. Smith-McCrossin | 1912 |
| Naugle, Larry & Liz: Set for Life Lotto Win - Congrats., Hon. B. Adams | 1912 |
| Islam, Dr. Samsul: Res. on Coastal Coms. - Recog., A. Duale | 1913 |
| Avalon Sexual Assault Ctr.: Adv. & Couns. - Recog., L. Lachance | 1913 |
| Armitage, Steve: Retirement - Congrats., Hon. B. Druhan | 1913 |
| Cóstafit Rebounding: New Form of Fitness - Thanks, L. Nicoll | 1914 |
| ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS: | |
| No. 370, Prem.: COVID-19 Briefings - Advise, Hon. I. Rankin | 1915 |
| No. 371, Prem.: 2,500 New Long-Term Care Beds - Explain, G. Burrill | 1917 |
| No. 372, Prem.: N.S. COVID-19 Scene - Assess, Hon. I. Rankin | 1918 |

| | |
|---|------|
| No. 373, Prem.: COVID-19 Briefings - Explain, Hon. I. Rankin..... | 1919 |
| No. 374, Prem.: Speaker's Office Policies - Explain, L. Nicoll | 1920 |
| No. 375, OAMA - Mental Health Care: Budget Short - Explain, L. Lachance..... | 1921 |
| No. 376, COVID-19: Prev. Measures - Affirm, A. Simmonds | 1922 |
| No. 377, DHW - COVID-19: Daily Info. - Provide, Hon. Z. Churchill | 1923 |
| No. 378, DHW: COVID-19 Data Removal - Explain, Hon. B. Maguire | 1924 |
| No. 379, DOJ: Promised FOIPOP Changes - Update, C. Chender | 1925 |
| No. 380, DHW - PCR Tests: Data Withheld - Explain, L. Nicoll | 1926 |
| No. 381, DHW: Access to Fourth Dose - Update, R. LeBlanc | 1927 |
| No. 382, DHW - COVID Reporting: Lack of Data - Address, F. Tilley..... | 1928 |
| No. 383, DOJ: Sustainable Policing Model Report - Commit, C. Chender | 1929 |
| No. 384, DHW: Omicron Wave: Sick NSHA Staff - Update, B. Clark..... | 1931 |
| No. 385, DHW - Pandemic Response: Surgery Backlog - Acknowl., Hon. D. Mombourquette..... | 1932 |
| No. 386, DHW: Keeping Srs. Safe - Inform, Hon. K. Regan..... | 1932 |
| No. 387, Agric.: Cultural Sector Funding - Commit, S. Leblanc | 1934 |
| GOVERNMENT BUSINESS: | |
| GOVERNMENT MOTIONS: | |
| ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY: | |
| L. Lachance..... | 1934 |
| Hon. Z. Churchill | 1939 |
| Hon. B. Druhan..... | 1943 |
| Hon. B. Maguire | 1946 |
| HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CW ON SUPPLY AT 3:57 P.M. | 1948 |
| HOUSE RECONVENED AT 8:30 P.M..... | 1948 |
| [GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:] | |
| [GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:] | |
| PUBLIC BILLS FOR SECOND READING: | |
| No. 123, the Liquor Control Act (amended) | |
| Hon. C. LeBlanc | 1949 |
| Hon. K. Regan..... | 1950 |
| S. Leblanc | 1951 |

| | |
|---|------|
| Hon. B. Maguire | 1951 |
| Hon. C. LeBlanc | 1953 |
| Vote - Affirmative..... | 1954 |
| No. 124, the Public Trustee Act (amended) | |
| Hon. B. Johns | 1954 |
| R. DiCostanzo | 1955 |
| C. Chender | 1956 |
| Hon. B. Johns | 1956 |
| Vote - Affirmative..... | 1956 |
| No. 126, the Nova Scotia Wine Authority Act | |
| Hon. G. Morrow..... | 1957 |
| Hon. K. Irving | 1958 |
| L. Lachance..... | 1959 |
| Hon. G. Morrow..... | 1959 |
| Vote - Affirmative..... | 1960 |
| HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CWH ON BILLS AT 9:08 P.M. | 1960 |
| HOUSE RECONVENED AT 9:26 P.M..... | 1960 |
| CWH REPORTS..... | 1960 |
| ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Wed., Apr. 6 th at 1:00 p.m. | 1961 |



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 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.

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

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a document, an article published in *allNovaScotia* written by Brian Flinn, entitled "Tories Won't Contest Disabled Housing Ruling," from October 8, 2021 in consideration of a member's statement I wish to read later.

THE SPEAKER: The report is tabled.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Government House Leader.

RESOLUTION NO. 192

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

Whereas the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic necessitates special measures to conduct the Spring 2022 sitting of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in a hybrid fashion, consisting of both physical and virtual participation;

Therefore be it resolved that the Rules and Forms of Procedures of the House of Assembly be suspended or amended as follows, for, and only for, the duration of the Spring 2022 sitting of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly:

- Paragraph 1 of Rule 6 is amended:
 - (a) to provide the physical presence of at least 15 members of the House in the Legislative Chamber, including the Speaker or member presiding on the Speaker's behalf, and that the House Leaders of each caucus or their authorized delegates, shall be necessary to constitute a meeting of the House for its exercise of its powers; and
 - (b) to the greatest extent possible, the physical quorum at any given meeting of the House shall proportionately reflect the overall standings in the House.
- Paragraph (2) of Rule 13 is amended to prohibit a member in virtual attendance from exiting virtual proceedings when the Speaker is putting a question.
- Paragraph (1) of Rule 14 is amended
 - (a) to provide that so long as a physical quorum of 15 members is maintained, any member may choose to attend the services of the House either physically or virtually;
 - (b) members not physically present in the Legislative Chamber are bound to attend the services of the House virtually from a location within the geographic boundaries of the Province of Nova Scotia, with their faces clearly visible by video;
 - (c) for greater certainty, a diagnosis of COVID-19 is not a precondition for a member to attend the services of the House virtually; and

(d) for greater clarity, a member who is unable to attend the services of the House during hybrid proceedings - through either physical or virtual attendance - must request a leave of absence from the Speaker.

- All references to members standing or rising in their place, including but not limited to Rules 22, 43, 47, 59, and 63, are amended to:

(a) provide that a member in virtual attendance desiring to speak is not required to rise but shall instead virtually indicate their desire to speak in a manner directed by the Speaker; and

(b) permit a member physically present to speak from any seat assigned to a member of the member's caucus in the Legislative Chamber of the House.

- Paragraph (2) of Rule 38 is amended to provide that questions in the House or a Committee of the Whole House shall be decided by a majority of votes instead of voices; and for greater clarity, votes include virtual votes indicated in a manner indicated as directed by the Speaker or the Chair, as the case may be.
- Paragraph (3) of Rule 38 is amended to provide that members in virtual attendance may demand a division in the manner as directed by the Speaker or the Chair, as the case may be.
- Paragraph (1) of Rule 44 is amended to delete the reference to a bill being printed.
- Rule 45 is amended to read as follows:

Except by unanimous consent of the House, no bill shall be read the second time unless it has been published on the Legislature's website and has been subsequently marked on the Orders of the Day as "Published."

- Rule 48 is amended to permit the Clerk of the Committee to which a bill has been referred to sign in place of the Chair of that Committee.
- Rule 49 is amended to replace printing or reprinting with publishing or republishing.
- Paragraph (1) of Rule 62DA(1) is amended to provide that the physical presence of at least nine members of the Committee on the Whole on Supply constitute a quorum.

- Paragraph (1) of Rule 62F(1) is amended to provide that the physical presence of at least six members of the Subcommittee on Supply constitute a quorum.
- (1) Paragraph (3) of Rule 62F is amended to provide that questions in the Subcommittee on Supply shall be decided by a majority of votes, including the vote of the Chair, indicated as directed by the Speaker, instead of voices, and whenever the votes are equal, the Chair has a second or casting vote.
- (2) Paragraph (4) of Rule 62F is amended to provide that meetings of the Subcommittee on Supply cannot be physically observed in person by the general public but that the meetings will be broadcasted.
- Rule 62FB is amended to provide for greater certainty that a minister may appear before the Committee of the Whole on Supply either virtually or physically with support staff.
- Rule 77 is amended to provide that the Clerk shall cause the Orders of the Day to be sent electronically to all members and shall only provide Orders of the Day in the House for members physically attending the services in this House.
- Guidelines for the tabling of documents, reports, petitions, papers, notices, and other order of speeches shall be directed by the Speaker.
- In the event of technical errors, the Speaker is empowered to take all necessary steps to remedy the error and to ensure the integrity of the legislative process.
- All other rules, customs, traditions and practises of the House including *inter alia*, decorum, and speech apply *mutatis mutandis* to hybrid proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent for waiver of notice.

THE SPEAKER: There has been a request for unanimous consent for waiver of notice.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent for passage without debate.

THE SPEAKER: The request is for unanimous consent for passage without debate.

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

Before we continue with the Daily Routine and after hearing the Government House Leader's rules for getting into the hybrid setting, as Speaker, I direct that for the duration of Spring 2022 sitting of the House of Assembly, the following changes will be instituted:

- Every sitting day, a new Zoom link to access the virtual Chamber shall be circulated via email to elected members of the House of Assembly by the Clerk's Office. The Zoom link is strictly confidential. Apart from Legislative Television, no person except elected members and officers of the House of Assembly may enter the virtual Chamber without prior authorization from the Speaker.
- Prior authorization shall be given to support staff from the Public Service who are assisting their minister during the examination of Estimates. A minister's support staff shall receive the Zoom link from the Clerk's Office for the sole purpose of providing assistance to their minister during the examination of Estimates.
- No later than one hour before the sitting day commences, House Leaders shall notify the Clerk's Office of all caucus members who wish to attend the day's sitting virtually.
- Masks must be worn at all times by all persons in the Legislative Chamber unless they possess a masking exemption from a certified medical professional. Virtual members who access the virtual Chamber from a geographic location where masks are not otherwise mandated, such as a private residence, are not required to wear a mask in the virtual Chamber.
- Virtual members are deemed capable to participate in all substantive proceedings so long as their camera is enabled and their face, head, and shoulders are displayed live, in direct and plain view.
- Virtual members are to speak, intervene, and vote showing colour cards that will be distributed for that purpose.

- Virtual members who wish to table any documentary item must do so electronically by emailing the item to the Clerk's Office at least one hour before the sitting day is set to commence.
- Virtual members who introduce bills shall receive an electronic copy to read from for introduction while the original bill shall be provided to the Clerk's Table.
- Although virtual members must by necessity use their computers to participate in Question Period, virtual members must otherwise comply with the spirit of the rule against using electronic devices during Question Period.
- Virtual members who experience a technical error impacting their ability to participate must act with due diligence to immediately alert the House to the error.

All members must use their best effort in good faith to comply with the further detailed instructions for hybrid proceedings. This directive may be altered from time to time as deemed necessary by the Speaker for the operation of the House.

With that, and to provide Legislative Television the opportunity to get our hybrid session underway, we will take a break for 20 minutes and resume at 1:35 p.m.

[1:15 p.m. The House recessed.]

[1:37 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Well, we got through one section. I just want to elaborate on a couple more things. Any votes that are going to be taking place virtually today will be by show of hands. We do have coloured paper ordered that we'll get to the members who are going to be on virtually but that's going to take a couple of days to do. Any voting that will occur today will be by show of hands.

We probably won't have members' statements because we have to go into Question Period at two o'clock. So we'll continue with the daily routine

[GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister for Seniors and Long-term Care.

RESOLUTION NO. 193

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

Whereas April 5th marks National Caregiver Day in Canada, which is a day to celebrate the vital role of caregivers in our province and our country; and

Whereas as many as six million Canadians, including many Nova Scotians, work in paid jobs while also providing unpaid care to people in their lives, including older Nova Scotians, such as spouses, parents, grandparents, friends and neighbours; and

Whereas the theme of this year's National Caregiver Day is balancing work and care, this is an opportunity to raise awareness of the many Nova Scotians who balance work with caring for people in their lives;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of the House of Assembly join me in recognizing the selfless and vitally important work done by the many Nova Scotians who provide care to families and friends.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for waiver of notice.

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. 194

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

Whereas Comeau's Sea Foods Limited, a leader in Nova Scotia in seafood harvesting, processing and global distribution, celebrates their 75th anniversary this year; and

Whereas founded by Bernardin and Clarence Comeau in 1946 and currently led by Noël Després, Comeau's Sea Foods Limited has become a significant employer in Saulnierville and the region of Clare, with diversified services including processing facilities, a smokehouse, and meal plant, marine and welding shops and a fleet of seven vessels, including their new scallop harvester and freezer trawler, the *Lady Comeau III*; and

Whereas in 2020, Comeau's Sea Foods Limited was given a Canada's Volunteer Award for business leadership by the federal government, recognizing community leaders and their commitment to making a difference in the lives of others;

Therefore be it resolved that all members of this Legislature thank Comeau's Sea Foods Limited for their continued dedication to, and investment in, Nova Scotia's seafood sector and for their ongoing support of their local community, and congratulate them on this significant milestone.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for waiver of notice.

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.

Just checking in with our virtual friends, I hope you're getting the sound okay. If you are, just wave your hand. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 129 - An Act to Amend Chapter 292 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Motor Carrier Act. (Hon. Kim Masland)

Bill No. 130 - An Act to Amend Chapter 203 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Homes for Special Care Act, Respecting Public Funds. (Gary Burrill)

Bill No. 131 - An Act to Amend Chapter 352 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Powers of Attorney Act. (Hon. Brad Johns)

Bill No. 132 - An Act to Amend Chapter 7 of the Acts of 2011, the Fair Drug Pricing Act, Respecting Pharmacare Programs. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 133 - An Act to Establish a Pharmacare Policy. (Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 134 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 293 of the Revised Statutes, 1989, the Motor Vehicle Act. (Hon. Kim Masland)

Bill No. 135 - Entitled an Act Respecting Emergency Department Standards.
(Susan Leblanc)

Bill No. 136 - Entitled an Act Respecting Collaborative Emergency Centres.
(Susan Leblanc)

[1:45 p.m.]

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

NOTICES OF MOTION

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

MACNAUGHTON, MOLLY: CAMPAIGN WORK - RECOG.

HON. JILL BALSER: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize a very special individual from my community who has helped me so much throughout my campaign and since being elected. Her name is Molly MacNaughton.

Molly is a young lady from Digby. She graduated from Digby Regional High School and is currently studying journalism at the University of King's College here in Halifax. Molly is a very talented individual, whether that be painting, writing, gardening, or directing my TikTok videos.

Molly graciously agreed to help me on my campaign this past summer. She supported me by making the campaign advertisements, posters, videos, and so much more. I personally do not know how I would have done it without her. To this day, Molly continues to help run my social media accounts even with her demanding university schedule.

Youth are truly the backbone of our communities, and they play a very important role in the growth and development in our society. It is important that we recognize this and value how special they truly are.

I ask that all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature join me in recognizing Molly MacNaughton. Thank you for everything, Molly.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

HFX. WEST WARRIORS: CH'SHIP WINS - CONGRATS.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to congratulate the Halifax West Warriors girls and boys hockey teams on winning the High School Division 1 in the provincial championship this past weekend. The SSNS female hockey provincials took place in Brooklyn, seeing Halifax West face off against Citadel in an exciting final game where Halifax West posted a goal in each period to win 3-1 over Citadel.

Close by in Windsor, the Halifax West boys team took to the ice against the Lockview Dragons. The Warriors edged the win with a final score of 3-2. A special congratulations to a member of the team, Jaidin Foran, who volunteered at my campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the House join me in congratulating the boys and girls hockey teams from Halifax West High School for their momentous provincial championship win.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Chebucto.

DISABLED HOUS. RULING: CASE STOPPED - RECOG.

GARY BURRILL: I rise today to mark October 6th, a momentous day in the fight for the basic rights of the disabled community. In the article about the government's reaction to the October 6th Court of Appeal decision that I tabled earlier, Brian Flinn writes as follows:

“The Premier said Thursday that the province will stop pursuing a case that arose from a 2014 Human Rights complaint involving three Nova Scotians: Beth MacLean, Joseph Delaney, and Sheila Livingston. Both MacLean and Livingston died before the Nova Scotia Court of Appeal released its decision Wednesday that increased compensation for both MacLean and Delaney. The Premier offered condolences to the families of the two women and expressed his appreciation for all of the litigants. ‘The courage they showed in pursuing this will leave a legacy,’ he said, following a Cabinet meeting.”

I ask the House to consider with me the significance of the Premier's words and the significance of the Premier's commitment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

BECK, MURIEL: 99TH BIRTHDAY - BEST WISHES

TOM TAGGART: I rise today to congratulate Muriel Beck on her 99th birthday, today, April 5, 2022. Muriel is the oldest resident in Tatamagouche.

Although Muriel lives with her son, she continues to live very independently. Being wise in her old age, Muriel is, I believe, my oldest supporter and one who was very proud to get out and mark her ballot on August 15th. I look forward to her marking her ballot on July 15, 2025.

I ask for the members of the House of Assembly to join me in wishing Mrs. Beck many years of future good health.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

ROACH, MATTEA: JEOPARDY! CONTESTANT - CONGRATS.

BRAEDON CLARK: I'd like to give congratulations and wish the best of luck to Mattea Roach, who will be appearing on tonight's episode of *Jeopardy!*

Mattea spent her high school years in Bedford and her parents, Phil and Patty, are still residents of Bedford South and I'm sure will be watching very closely at 8:30 p.m. tonight. It's very difficult to get to the point where Mattea has gotten, to be one of the three people on an episode of *Jeopardy!* She's obviously brilliant.

I was speaking with her via Twitter today and wished her the best of luck. I would ask all members of the House - I know we will be in the House probably at 8:30 p.m. but stay tuned and pay attention and wish Mattea the best of luck on *Jeopardy!*

THE SPEAKER: *Jeopardy!* just got some free advertising.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARE. MO.: SHARING INFO. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize the month of April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. People of all genders can be subject to sexual violence; however, sexual violence is mostly experienced by women, children, and transgender and gender-nonconforming people. It can be a single occurrence, or it can be ongoing by the same or a different perpetrator.

Sexual violence can happen to people of any age. People of all genders, races, sexual orientation, and class backgrounds can be subject to sexual violence; however, some people, such as racialized and Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, low-income

women, women with addictions, young women, and transgender people experience it at higher rates.

Sexual violence is a serious health and social and public safety issue in Nova Scotia that affects all of us. Everyone deserves to live safely. This month is a time for raising awareness about the prevalence of sexual assault, sharing information about available resources, and fostering a greater understanding.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

LOCAL FOOD PROD.: PLANT A GARDEN - INVIT.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: I just want to talk for a moment about local food and how exciting it is just to see the sunshine today, especially after our Spring snowstorm yesterday. Some of you may have heard of the old wives' tale, which actually isn't just an old wives' tale, that it's a poor man's fertilizer.

When we get a Spring snowfall on earth that's already melted, it helps to leach nutrients like nitrogen into the earth, so it's a very positive thing that we had a little Spring snowstorm yesterday. I hope it will help inspire all gardeners, including every MLA, that we can all do our own part by increasing local food production by planting our own vegetable garden.

If you've never done it before, just start with a tomato plant. It grows small but surely.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

NAUGLE, LARRY & LIZ: SET FOR LIFE LOTTO WIN - CONGRATS.

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to wish congratulations to a wonderful couple in our community, Larry and Liz Naugle, for winning Set for Life.

The couple used to play often but hadn't participated in many months until, that is, Larry was in need of a new pair of rubber boots. On his way home he decided to buy a Set for Life ticket, his wife Liz scratched some and, after some tears, she revealed that they had won.

The couple plan on helping their children in doing some home renovations. They opted for the lump sum of \$675,000 as opposed to the \$1,000 per week for 25 years.

I ask all members of the Nova Scotia Legislature to join me in congratulating Larry and Liz on their Set for Life win.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

ISLAM, DR. SAMSUL: RES. ON COASTAL COMS. - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize Dr. Samsul Islam, who is currently working as a post-doctoral research assistant at Dalhousie University.

Dr. Islam's interdisciplinary research aims to improve our understanding of how coastal marine transportation systems will be disrupted in a hazard event and how such a disturbance will impact coastal communities. He hopes to develop a strategy that could effectively address these risks during his time at Dalhousie.

I wish Dr. Islam all the best and hope he enjoys his stay in Nova Scotia. (Applause)

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

AVALON SEXUAL ASSAULT CTR.: ADV. & COUNS. - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize the groundbreaking work of the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre based in Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

Inspired by their feminist, survivor-led approach, I trained to be a crisis intervention counsellor with Avalon in 1992. At that time, the crisis line was well known around the province. There were regular callers trying to overcome a legacy of abuse and trauma who fought to get through each night. There were scared teens, folks living with domestic violence, and men who shared their experiences of violence and abuse.

The crisis line helped people access service and get through one day at a time. The crisis line has only been a small part of how Avalon has led change through counselling, services like the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program, and advocacy calling for the changes so desperately needed to end sexual violence and assault in Nova Scotia.

I invite all members to join me in recognizing the contribution of the Avalon Sexual Assault Centre over three decades. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

ARMITAGE, STEVE: RETIREMENT - CONGRATS.

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize broadcasting legend Steve Armitage of Lunenburg County, who delivered his final call during the Beijing Winter Olympics. His unmistakable booming voice has made him one of the most familiar figures in Canadian sports broadcasting.

He covered an incredible 18 Summer and Winter Olympics, thrilling us with his iconic calls in speed skating, swimming, and rowing. He made us feel we were right there with him. During his 50-plus-year career with CBC, his play-by-by calls also captured the excitement of the Canadian Football League and Hockey Night in Canada games, international swimming competitions, the Commonwealth Games, Canada Games and numerous other events.

Lunenburg County couldn't be prouder of this ambassador for Nova Scotia and Canadian icon. I would ask the members of the House of Assembly to please join me in congratulating Steve Armitage on his retirement and for a remarkable career that has touched the hearts of many.

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

CÓSTAFIT REBOUNDING: NEW FORM OF FITNESS - THANKS

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a unique fitness centre in our community.

Cóstafit Rebounding fitness centre is located on Baker Drive in Dartmouth. Rebounding is a form of aerobic exercise that is performed while jumping on a mini trampoline. This type of exercise is gaining in popularity, as it's gentle to the joints while allowing you to work your cardiovascular system without taxing the body.

Being a low-impact exercise, it's generally appropriate for people of all ages, from children to older adults. Fitness experts applaud the benefits of this fitness regime for improving balance and coordination along with increasing bone density and bone strength. It gives new meaning to putting a spring in your step.

Cole Harbour-Dartmouth thanks Cóstafit for bringing this innovative form of fitness to our community.

THE SPEAKER: We'll just take a little break here for 20 seconds so everybody can catch their breath for Question Period.

Order, please. The time for Statements by Members has elapsed.

[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 will go until 2:50 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: COVID-19 BRIEFINGS - ADVISE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, we know that COVID-19 cases are on the rise, possibly as high as they were in the peak of the last wave. The Premier has stopped holding regular COVID-19 briefings. Daily reporting has been reduced to weekly, and the Panorama dashboard isn't reporting half of what it used to. Since Nova Scotians can't access this information, I'm going to take this opportunity in the House today to ask the Premier: What was the case count yesterday?

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question on this serious issue of COVID-19. For sure we know that case counts are rising in Nova Scotia, as they are across the country and, really, around the world.

Nova Scotians should know - and I'll take this opportunity to remind Nova Scotians - that COVID-19 is all around us. There should be no question that COVID-19 is still here. People have the tools that they need to protect themselves - wear a mask, wash your hands, keep your distance. I mean, certainly know your risk factor and your social circle and use the tools that you've acquired over the last two years to keep yourself and your loved ones safe.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I have to say it is concerning that the Premier doesn't know. He's not following the daily case counts, which, as I understand, are going up. Why will he wait until the week is over to check in with Public Health or Dr. Strang? I wonder how he's able to make decisions on this very important matter. We do have different risk factors and it is the government's job to look after those who are most vulnerable in our communities. I'd like to ask the Premier: Is he hearing from Public Health or other medical health experts on what to do and how to assess the scene as we are today?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I will just start by saying that there are a lot of assumptions in the member's question and statement. Most of them are wrong, to be honest. Of course, as Premier, I'm dealing closely with the minister, Department of Health and Wellness, dealing closely with Public Health and watching very carefully as all Nova Scotians should. You have the tools to protect yourselves. You should assume that COVID-

19 is around you. We know COVID-19 is around you. Anyone who watches the news knows that COVID-19 is around.

The decision was made to go to weekly reporting. We've made some tweaks and improvements to that - more fulsome information, as we receive feedback. We want people to have the full picture. Most provinces have moved to weekly reporting for a number of reasons, but as Premier you have to weigh up a lot of factors, including the mental health of Nova Scotians. We do that.

These are serious decisions and it's a serious situation, but people have the tools they need to keep themselves safe. We just urge them to use them.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I guess we've established that the Premier doesn't know what the case count was yesterday. I would say that a lot of behavioural scientists would disagree that you can just throw up your hands and say COVID-19 is everywhere, and we don't have to tell people day-to-day what's happening with COVID-19 so they can make decisions.

What we do know is that hospitals are seeing their surgeries delayed. These are the same Nova Scotians who had their treatments delayed before - very important surgeries. We've had a record number of staff who are off because of COVID-19.

My question for the Premier is: What is it going take? At what threshold does he think that Nova Scotians deserve to hear from him with a COVID-19 briefing?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, again, quite a few misstatements in the member's commentary. Of course, as the member knows, nobody likes to see surgeries delayed. We're very concerned about that. It also happened under the member's watch when he was Premier. It also happened with the Premier before that, and it's happened in every single province.

What I would say is that COVID-19 is serious. If the members don't understand that, they need to pay attention to what is being said from the Department of Health and Wellness, what is being said from Public Health. It is serious. It is all around us. People need to take steps to protect themselves. They don't need the government to tell them that. (Interruptions)

Apparently, all members opposite believe it is only when the government instructs people to do something that they do it. I have a lot more faith in Nova Scotians and Canadians than that, Mr. Speaker.

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

PREM.: 2,500 NEW LONG-TERM CARE BEDS - EXPLAIN

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, in February, the government initiated a tender for 500 new nursing home beds and called it the fulfillment of their election commitment to open 2,500 new single beds in Nova Scotia. This discrepancy was noticed immediately. One of the most experienced journalists on this subject in Nova Scotia wrote that “. . . the projects appear to come up short on new beds compared with the size of the need the Tories identified before they were elected.” I will table that.

Will the Premier please explain how he thinks his government’s 500 new beds are a fulfillment of the 2,500 new beds commitment?

THE PREMIER: I’m not sure about the use of the word “fulfilled” - I’ll look at that. Certainly what I would tell the member today is that there is a huge need to support our seniors in this province. There is a huge need to open more beds. It requires a tendering process - yes. It requires construction. It requires opening.

I will tell the member that we don’t consider any job done. We will continue to work on behalf of Nova Scotians, and we have a lot of work to do after eight years of neglect of seniors in this province.

GARY BURRILL: The change in the government’s commitment was widely noticed. Another of Nova Scotia’s senior health care journalists referred to what the government was actually bringing forward with the 500 beds in February as what they called a “side shuffle” from the clarity of the original 2,500-bed commitment. I’ll table that as well.

Why did the Premier, then, shuffle - waver - on the original, pre-election 2,500-new-nursing-home-single-room-bed commitment?

THE PREMIER: I do appreciate the member’s commentary. This is an important subject. This is a really important subject. We have a lot of work to do in this province to invest in and support Nova Scotians, particularly around our seniors and the long-term care. We have a lot of work to do. We will not sidestep it. We will not look away. We will get it done. I promise you that, Mr. Speaker.

GARY BURRILL: People and families are suffering while they wait at home for long-term care placement. There are 1,672 people this week in that situation in our province, and that’s not to speak about the hundreds of people who also are suffering, waiting for placement from places in hospitals.

The 2,500 new additional beds, as the government originally committed, would have provided places for these people. Why, then, did the Premier announce a number of beds in February which are not going to meet this need?

THE PREMIER: I guess what the member is missing is that there are a lot of announcements that we have to make that are yet to come. There's a lot of work to do. We don't have a magic wand. We couldn't fix eight years of neglect in eight weeks. We certainly couldn't fix it in eight months. I want to assure the member we are committed to fulfilling the commitments we made to Nova Scotians, and Nova Scotians know it, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: N.S. COVID-19 SCENE - ASSESS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: The Premier said that they don't need the government to tell them that, Mr. Speaker. Well, that was a big part of our success in previous waves, because the government was transparent in telling Nova Scotians what was happening on the ground. We were once the envy of the world, not only in our country, but we made headlines across the globe. The *New York Times* called our province, and I quote, "a magical, virus-free world." I'll table that.

My question for the Premier is: How would he assess the scene right now? How would he describe the scene of COVID-19 right now in the province?

THE PREMIER: Present. I would describe it as present. There is COVID-19 present around Nova Scotia, just like there is in Newfoundland and Labrador, where they have a fantastic Liberal premier. He's doing a great job. Their case numbers are way up as well. Just like there is in B.C., where they have a wonderful premier there - NDP. Their case numbers are all up. This is not political.

The member can try to make it political. I remember the cartoon he was so proud of where he showed Nova Scotians locked down. He was proud of that cartoon that was in the paper. We're working with Nova Scotians. We're giving them the information to keep them safe. COVID-19 is present. COVID-19 is around us. People know it, and they need to take steps to protect themselves, and they will do that. I have great faith in them.

IAIN RANKIN: I can tell the Premier where we actually are. We're seeing unprecedented numbers in a negative way, which is causing other premiers to react. P.E.I. just extended their mask mandate because they believe in that cautious approach that we took before in this province. Québec has done the same thing. What we have been hearing is the highest counts per capita, and we're hearing about some of the highest positivity rates in our province's history. It was said on CTV News the other night, 20-30 per cent positivity. That's alarming, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the Premier is: Are we, in fact, seeing the highest positivity rate in our PCR tests? Does he know that?

THE PREMIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, the situation with COVID-19 is one to be taken very seriously, of course, not politicized on the floor of this Legislature - taken very seriously.

We're concerned about COVID-19, as the member opposite should be, as all Nova Scotians should be. They should continue to take steps to keep themselves and their families safe. We'll continue to do just what every premier before me in this province has done, too. We'll work very closely with Public Health to make sure that we do everything to keep Nova Scotians safe. That's where our focus comes from, and we will continue to stay committed to keeping Nova Scotians safe.

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

PREM.: COVID-19 BRIEFINGS - EXPLAIN

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I would say that we have to ask these questions in the House because he won't host a briefing so Nova Scotians can hear directly from the Premier and Dr. Strang.

In the last briefing, it was said that if circumstances changed, there would be a re-evaluation. I'm trying to understand from this government how much of a change they are going to tolerate before they are as concerned as we are on this side of the House. Since the most recent COVID-19 report released last week, Dr. Strang called the rise in COVID-19 cases concerning. I'm going to table that.

My question to the Premier is: Does he agree with Dr. Strang that the state of COVID-19 is concerning?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, any time I hear about a Nova Scotian having COVID-19, it's concerning. COVID-19 is a serious condition. Obviously, for a number of people it can be less severe, but for others it's not.

We see hospitalizations. We know it has an impact on people. We're watching very closely. Any discussion that I'm involved with that deals with the health and safety of Nova Scotians, I listen to very carefully. I'm always concerned about those discussions.

I don't need to know the case numbers to be concerned. I just know it from listening to Nova Scotians. Of course I'm concerned.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear: Those hospitalizations and people in the ICU are avoidable. Public Health experts are very concerned. They have been consistent with people needing the information required to make informed decisions, and their government is telling them, by virtue of having no COVID-19 briefings: just throw

up your hands, COVID-19 is everywhere, and it doesn't matter what we say about masking, about keeping your circle small, about testing.

If the Premier is actually concerned but not willing to share the data, can he explain to Nova Scotians if he will re-evaluate the recommendation on testing and isolating, and make that recommendation an expectation to bring back government policy to where the medical health experts are?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the member sounds like his position is that we should lock down Nova Scotians. I'm not there. Oh, he's backing away now, backing away now. (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Premier has the floor.

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, the reality is - and I do hear from the member for Dartmouth South adding her editorial to this as well. Maybe she'll stand up and ask the question.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that there are very few people, very few experts or otherwise, who believe that zero COVID-19 is possible. Perhaps the member is the only one. We will continue to follow Public Health, work with the Department of Health and Wellness and do everything possible to keep Nova Scotians safe, balancing a number of factors - their mental health, their physical health - and giving them the information that they need.

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

PREM.: SPEAKER'S OFFICE POLICIES - EXPLAIN

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, and in the vein of experts, last week when your office introduced new COVID-19 workplace policies, including mask mandates, the Premier put out a statement that "Our government does not agree with the decision the Speaker's Office made on their own." I'll table that.

We have now seen at least five members of this House and a few staff members test positive for COVID-19. My question to the Premier is: Does his government continue to disagree with the decision made by the Speaker's Office?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with organizations. If people want to set their own policies, we're happy for them to do that.

Again, to the Premier's point, we continue to wear masks at the Speaker's request. It's respectful. I continue to wear a mask, as strongly recommended by Public Health. I

wear it everywhere I go. We need to be able to make some decisions on our own and protect ourselves.

We're content to be here with masks. We have a hybrid model in order to accommodate our colleagues, and we'll continue to adapt as necessary.

[2:15 p.m.]

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, five members of the House tested positive, and the Premier refused to call it an outbreak. That same day, he said that he disagrees with masks . . . (Interruption) Pardon? Am I supposed to hear . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The member for Cole Harbour-Dartmouth has the floor.

LORELEI NICOLL: I'm giving him the opportunity to respond, but he had the Health and Wellness Minister respond.

I would ask the Premier: Considering the number of cases reported here in Province House, is the Premier ready to make an admission that the Speaker's Office was right to implement COVID-19 workplace policies, and that it likely prevented the spread of more cases, for which I'm very grateful?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: As I said before, we continue to follow the policy set by the Speaker as requested by him. I can't confirm that those people have COVID-19. That's personal health information that I don't have access to. If the member does, they . . . (Interruption)

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

OAMA - MENTAL HEALTH CARE: BUDGET SHORT - EXPLAIN

LISA LACHANCE: My question is for the Premier. It has been one week since the government released the budget, and we continue to hear from Nova Scotians who have been left out or left behind. People suffering without mental health care are waiting for universal access. They heard the Progressive Conservatives during the election, and they thought the wait was over and that they would not have to pay out of pocket.

In this budget, there is no \$100 million election promise for universal mental health care, and the budget falls short of meeting the World Health Organization's recommendation for 10 per cent of health spending to be on mental health. It doesn't look like that's in the plan for next year either.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain why he campaigned on a promise to provide universal mental health care, raising people's hopes, only to let that promise drop at budget time?

HON. BRIAN COMER: I said it once, and I'll say it again. We're going to do it once, and we're going to do it right. It is coming. In the meantime, there are some really positive things happening in the province. For example, today there is going to be three new opiate use disorder treatment clinics opening in the Western Zone.

I just want to tell the member that there's going to be significant progress in the next couple of months. Just have a little faith and give me a little bit of time.

LISA LACHANCE: I stand here as an MLA, but I also stand here as a parent who has tried to hold faith and hope, and has been left on their own. In fact, I guess I've been given the information and made my own decisions about how to support my family. I'm one of many Nova Scotians who have waited and continue to wait.

Mr. Speaker, more concerns were laid out in an op-ed penned by Karn Nichols from the Canadian Mental Health Association and Alec Stratford from the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers: no new funds for collaborative community health centres, insufficient funding for harm reduction and trauma responsive programming, and no new funds for pride health. They conclude, "Until this week, we had hope that the Progressive Conservative government might make significant shifts to build supports . . ." Until this week. That hope remains unanswered. This is not the budget we need to meet the challenge of our time.

Will the Premier agree we can't fix health care without fixing mental health care?

BRIAN COMER: I actually had the opportunity to meet with both of those groups quoted in the article. I respect their roles as advocates for sure, and I look forward to working with them.

I do think the \$5.8 million we donate to community-based organizations, the \$3 million to the foundation, the \$2 million to Tajikeymik is definitely noteworthy. There is something being done.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

DHW - COVID-19: PREV. MEASURES - AFFIRM

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, Omicron is sweeping across the province. Yet on February 23rd, the Premier announced that all restrictions were being lifted within a month, while Dr. Strang was saying to keep masking and social distancing.

My question is for the Premier: Does he agree with Dr. Strang that masking and distancing are important individual measures to limit the spread of COVID-19?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I will say is that on March 21st, the mandate stopped, but the Public Health recommendations are still strongly recommended, and we do still encourage people to wear their masks, keep their social circles small, and do all the things that we have been doing for the past two years.

We want to continue for Nova Scotians to be safe. We know that there is Omicron all amongst us, so we continue to ensure that people have testing. We encourage people to wear their masks and to continue on, carry on, and do the things that they've been doing for the past two years.

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Speaker, I thank the honourable minister for the answer. On Wednesday the Premier told reporters that the Premier's Office and the PC caucus office were not required to wear masks. I'll table that.

There seems to be a disconnect between the Premier and the advice of Dr. Strang and public health experts. We know that within the past two years we have been going through COVID, but we have been doing this under the leadership of Dr. Strang.

If the Premier has asked Nova Scotians to take personal responsibility for their own health, why isn't he?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I can assure you that we are a very responsible caucus, and we continue to follow the strong recommendations of Public Health. Certainly, there have been a number of pictures of the members opposite celebrating at their annual general meeting. There wasn't a mask in sight.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

DHW - COVID-19: DAILY INFO. - PROVIDE

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, while the Premier was Leader of the Official Opposition, he said that Nova Scotians just want to know the facts. They just want to know where they stand. Yet at a time during the most pervasive wave of COVID-19, when the new government strategy is to trust people to make decisions on their own, they are restricting information that's vital from getting to the public. How can the government claim that they want people to make their own decisions when they are removing restrictions and also removing critical information to help inform those individual decisions that people are making?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I will note that this past Thursday we did release the epidemiological report that Dr. Strang receives on a weekly basis in

order to make the decisions and continue to advise us. I will inform the member that, similar to when other members were in the role, we do speak on a regular basis to Public Health. We talk to our NSHA partners on a daily basis. We continue to give the information that we have available and we're using the same information that Dr. Strang uses.

ZACH CHURCHILL: Mr. Speaker, they're not even sharing that information with the public. The Premier today didn't even have the daily case count. It's been left up to Dr. Lisa Barrett to talk about the positivity rate with our PCR tests report to the public.

We just heard last night in Estimates from the Minister of Health and Wellness that there are 36,000 positive rapid tests that have come in. That's the first time anybody's heard about that, and this is a time when the government strategy is that we're going to trust people to make the right decisions. I trust people to make the right decisions too, Mr. Speaker - when they have the facts they need to make those decisions.

Will this government change course and start providing daily information to the public so that they can make the decisions that are in their best interests and that can protect our health care system and people's lives in this province?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, not unlike a number of jurisdictions across the country, we continue to do weekly reporting. We are in contact with the Nova Scotia Health Authority on a daily basis as well as Public Health. We will continue to use the weekly reporting as Dr. Strang has been using as well.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

DHW: COVID-19 DATA REMOVAL - EXPLAIN

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I'd correct the member for Yarmouth. They weren't rapid tests, they were PCR test results, and the minister will be tabling the rapid test results, as she said in Estimates.

Since lifting restrictions on March 21st, we have seen significantly less data being reported by this government. COVID briefings are few and far between, case numbers are released weekly at best, and a breakdown of the vaccine status is almost impossible to come by. Why does the Premier feel that lifting restrictions goes hand in hand with lifting data?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Again, we are releasing weekly data that is compiled by Public Health. It's the epidemiological report that Dr. Strang is using, and Public Health is using. We will continue that track.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I'll remind the minister that what's missing from that data is the self-reported tests for December, January, February, and March. The Panorama dashboard, which was relied on by many for accurate, up-to-date COVID reporting - half

of the data that was once there is not only no longer collected, but has been moved from the website entirely, including vaccine status by age group. My question is to the Premier: Why did he choose to remove this data from Panorama?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: I will go back to the department and ask. I was not aware that it was not updated, so I will have a look.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

DOJ: PROMISED FOIPOP CHANGES - UPDATE

CLAUDIA CHENDER: My question is for the Premier. The mandate letter for the Minister of Justice instructs the minister to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to give order-making ability to the Privacy Commissioner. I'll table that. When asked by reporters in November, the Premier said that he was not focused on it, but hoped to have it ready for the Spring sitting - and I'll table that.

Stephen McNeil also campaigned on a promise to give order-making powers to the Commissioner, and also broke that promise as soon as he was elected. My question for the Premier is: Where are the amendments to the FOIPOP Act and when will you table them?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: As I'm sure the member knows, the current FOIPOP legislation is well over 20 years old. Both the Commissioner, Ms. Ralph, as well as members of our department - it became very clear very quickly that there needed to be more than just order-making powers, and we're moving forward still with looking at FOIPOP.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: There needs to be more than just order-making powers and yet yesterday the province's Information and Privacy Commissioner told the Law Amendments Committee that her office was not even consulted about the government's changes to a key privacy bill. She said that amendments presented by the government could actually weaken privacy protection and reduce the government's ability to respond to information breaches. This is in the health field, I can remind everyone.

Our Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act is in fact almost 30 years old and the Commissioner's office has been asking for the Act to be updated since at least 2017. I am glad that the Premier finds this funny and I look forward to his answer to the question of when he will agree to update the Act as recommended by the Commissioner; and further, if he might think about talking to her the next time he wants to change our privacy laws.

BRAD JOHNS: I believe that although Commissioner Ralph was not consulted, I do believe that the department was consulted prior to her being there. (Interruption) I'll

defer that in regard to yesterday's Law Amendments, but thank you very much for the Noes.

Once again, this legislation is important, but it also has a huge effect to more than just government. It affects over 250 organizations across the province - universities, hospitals, school boards, municipalities. We want to do this and we want to do it right. We recognize that it's outdated legislation, so it's still in my mandate letter and we will be coming back with it shortly.

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

DHW - PCR TESTS: DATA WITHHELD - EXPLAIN

LORELEI NICOLL: Early in the Omicron wave, this government made the decision to limit criteria for PCR testing, leaving many Nova Scotians to rely on rapid tests. Since making this decision, only PCR tests have been reported in the case numbers and with many people ineligible for PCR tests we only have a snapshot of what COVID-19 truly looks like in this province. My question for the Premier is: Why does this government not release data on cases confirmed by both PCR and rapid tests?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We do continue, as said, to distribute the PCR testing data. We know that there are a number of people who have rapid testing, and a portion of those people notify Public Health, but we also know that there are a number of people who don't.

Though PCR testing is an opportunity for us to understand, it is a snapshot. It's a surveillance tool for us to see what is happening in the community but it does not give us the fulsome picture and we're aware of that completely. We know there are a number of people who are not even doing rapid tests. If there's someone positive in their home the assumption is they're positive as well.

The rapid tests are important and we want people to respond and let Public Health know but it is an underrepresentation of the degree of COVID-19 that is in the community.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, we are seeing a rising number of cases in the reports we see each week, and these do not include cases that are confirmed by rapid test.

I would like to ask the Premier: How can he be sure that his government is making informed decisions - because we just heard it is not accurate - when they only have a sample size of how many active cases there really are? How confident can Nova Scotians be on this decision-making?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things in that question. So in a highly vaccinated population of people - and to Nova Scotians' credit,

they came out in droves. There were over 300,000 people who received their booster shot in January and February, which was a monumental effort. (Applause)

[2:30 p.m.]

What we are looking for is severe disease, so we are monitoring particularly for hospitalizations and severe disease, because we know that for the vast majority of Nova Scotians who are vaccinated that the Omicron virus will be mild. What we do watch very closely are hospitalizations, we watch our system capacity, and we encourage people to get vaccinated. We know that unvaccinated people are at the highest risk of severe disease.

We continue to work with Public Health and we continue to work with Nova Scotia Health in order to monitor our system and ensure that we have the capacity that we need.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DHW: ACCESS TO FOURTH DOSE - UPDATE

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, NACI had previously recommended that people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised receive a fourth dose of vaccine six months after getting their third shot - I will table that. NACI announced today that Canada should prepare for rapid deployment of COVID-19 boosters over the next few weeks, prioritizing adults 80 and over and residents of long-term care - and I will table that.

With the limited data available now, it is impossible to know how many Nova Scotians have had access to this fourth shot. I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: Can the minister please provide the House with an update?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: The recommendation from NACI came out at lunchtime. We have not mobilized vaccination clinics yet, but I can tell you that Dr. Shelley Deeks at NACI is very well aware that this was coming. There has been some work done in anticipation of this and we anticipate in the coming days that there will be more information in terms of how we will roll it out. It should be a fairly uncomplicated process given our past vaccination rates and the processes that we used.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, Ontario has offered four doses to long-term care residents and those who live in other congregate settings who are more at risk for contracting COVID-19. I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: Does her government have plans to offer these protections to Nova Scotians?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. The NACI statement today, the first time we anticipated that this was coming - adults over 80 years of age, residents of long-term care facilities, and seniors living in congregate settings.

The recommendations also said that jurisdictions should consider a fourth dose to adults who are 70 to 79 years old, as well as Indigenous populations.

Again, we will work with our partners as we have done in the past and I expect that in the coming days you will hear about how we will roll that program out. We will be quick and we already have pre-existing channels and delivery methods that will make it very easy for us to deliver those vaccines in a timely manner.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DHW - COVID REPORTING: LACK OF DATA - ADDRESS

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has removed restrictions and is telling Nova Scotians to make individual decisions to keep themselves safe, yet his government is no longer providing regular case reporting on COVID-19. He is refusing to provide Nova Scotians, especially vulnerable Nova Scotians, with detailed reporting needed to make their own individual health care decisions.

Nova Scotians want a proactive premier, not a reactive premier. I would like to ask the Premier: How can people make informed health care decisions when he . . . (Interruption)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Order, please. Order, please. The member for Northside-Westmount has the floor.

FRED TILLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He is chirping over there. Answer the question, Mr. Premier. Oh, what's this? It's dismissive, sorry.

THE SPEAKER: Is there a question?

FRED TILLEY: The question is: How can people make informed individual health care decisions when our reactive premier is not giving them the facts?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker . . . (Interruptions)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Health and Wellness has the floor.

MICHELLE THOMPSON: I thank the member for the question. What I will say and what we've been saying all along is that the Omicron variant that came to our province in December is very contagious. It is a different type of variant than we have seen in the past. We know that it is everywhere in our communities and we need to continue to follow the Public Health recommendations.

What we say to people is you need to adjust your risk. You need to understand what your risks are and govern yourself accordingly. We strongly recommend the Public Health measures. We continue to ask people to ascertain their risk and to follow the Public Health measures.

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, the Premier said this when he was the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I will table it:

“But for many Nova Scotians - those with underlying conditions - the feeling of isolation is even greater because everything carries just a little bit more risk for them. The trip to the grocery store, the dinner out, or the visit with loved ones are all just a little bit harder to justify when you have a pre-existing condition that makes the virus more dangerous and the consequences more dire.”

The Premier has made day-to-day activities harder for those who are immunocompromised and with underlying conditions. Does the Premier agree that not providing the facts has put these Nova Scotians at greater risk?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I would say is that these decisions, as many of the members opposite will know, are not easy and need to be balanced. This morning, as an example, I watched a video published by CBC about three moms who recently had babies during the COVID-19 pandemic and how that affected their pregnancy experience in those early times.

We are constantly trying to balance the physical, emotional, mental, social, and economic impacts of Omicron. It is not straightforward.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

DOJ: SUSTAINABLE POLICING MODEL REPORT - COMMIT

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I am happy to wait for the government to keep applauding themselves.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. In the last sitting of the Legislature, I asked the minister about the contents of an FOI request that clearly demonstrated that work on a review of policing services is under way. A January 2021 briefing note on police services delivery identifies significant cost pressures and suggests that centralized and modernized policing may ensure a more sustainable model. I'll table that.

As of March of this year, the Department of Justice had more than \$11 million in additional appropriations due to RCMP contract operating costs - I'll table that. Mr.

Speaker, will the minister now commit to tabling a report on a more sustainable model of policing for Nova Scotia?

HON. BRAD JOHNS: What I will say is that I do recognize that policing is a shifting portfolio. Things arise all the time, and one of the issues currently is the pressure to provide policing across this province.

We've heard from municipalities and we are looking at having discussions. Once again, I'm waiting to hear some of the recommendations that come out of the Mass Casualty Commission, who have been directed to make recommendations in regards to policing in the province. We'll wait until that time.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: So in the last six months there was a report, there wasn't a report, there didn't need to be a report, and now there are conversations.

Mr. Speaker, the final report prepared by the Subcommittee to Define Defunding the Police for the Halifax Regional Municipality calls on the provincial government to bring the Police Act into compliance with relevant international human rights standards. These include the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and others.

Recently, other jurisdictions, including British Columbia, have opened up their policing legislation for review for just these reasons. In Nova Scotia, as is so clear right now and was mentioned by the minister himself, such a review must be informed by the findings and recommendations of the final report of the Mass Casualty Commission . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question, please.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: When that work is complete, will the minister finally agree to a full review and reform of the Police Act?

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is the HRP Commission, of course, is independent of the province. They may forward recommendations to the province but they're independent from us.

Once again, it would be kind of premature for me to make any guess on what's going to come out of the recommendations of the Mass Casualty Commission. I have committed to waiting until the end.

What I will offer the member is I do know that sometime in May the Mass Casualty Commission will be presenting an interim report and I will be looking at that at that time. As things move, I may readjust my decision at that time after I see the interim report.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

DHW -OMICRON WAVE: SICK NSHA STAFF - UPDATE

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, an underappreciated but hugely significant element of this current Omicron wave is the impact it is having on our health care workforce. All Nova Scotians were alarmed last week to learn that 800 Nova Scotia Health Authority employees were out of work because they either tested positive for COVID-19, were waiting on a COVID test, or had someone in their home who tested positive. I'll table that document.

I'd like to ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: As of today, how many NSHA staff are on leave due to COVID-19?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question. What I can guarantee you is that there is not one health care worker who is underappreciated on this side of the House. There are just over 600 staff who are off in the Nova Scotia Health Authority today.

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't suggesting, as the minister seems to suggest, that health care workers are underappreciated. I was suggesting this is an underappreciated impact of the current wave. I just want to make that clear. That's not what I was saying at all.

My question: In January, the chief of the Central Zone Emergency Department, Dr. Kirk Magee, commented on the unprecedented strain our hospitals are under right now, saying, "I have never seen it this bad before." I will table that as well. Since then, the stress on our hospital system has only gotten worse. I would like to ask the minister: What impact specifically is this staffing crisis having on our hospital system?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, the Nova Scotia Health Authority continues to monitor the situation. There's just over 600 staff off today and the impact that would have would be dependent on where those health care workers would be off. So three people in a small hospital could look very different from three or four people off in a larger centre.

What the Nova Scotia Health Authority does is understand where those staffing shortages are and they work operationally around how to protect the services in each of those areas. It is not a blanket reduction across the system but it is done in a very targeted way based on the resources available in each of the organizations that are affected.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

DHW - PANDEMIC RESPONSE: SURGERY BACKLOG - ACKNOW.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, some individuals are living in pain awaiting surgery to improve their joints while others worry about the potential exacerbation of conditions as a result of extended delays. That is a line from the government's election platform.

[2:45 p.m.]

The Progressive Conservatives said that they would eliminate surgical backlog. Yet under the Premier's pandemic response, surgery wait times have gotten longer. I will ask the Premier: Will he admit that individuals living in pain will have to wait longer due to his government's pandemic response?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, we're very aware that there are a number of people who are waiting for surgeries. During this current - if there is a reduction of service, what's happening is there is a lot of work happening behind the scenes. We know that we need to ramp up capacity in the health care system and that doesn't happen just like that. There's a lot of work that's happening in the background so that as we transition back to full service we can hit the ground running and get to those surgeries.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, there are 27,000 Nova Scotians waiting for surgeries in this province. This government committed to meeting the national wait-time benchmarks within 18 months of coming into office.

My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness: Knowing what we know about the crisis in our health care system and nine months left in their timeline, will she meet the national benchmarks and deliver on their campaign promise?

MICHELLE THOMPSON: What I can tell the member opposite is that there's no "quit" in this team. We are going to work as fast and as quickly as we can.

We are, again, planning. We are looking at every possible resource that we have so that when we move through and service reductions are lifted, we will be able to get to those surgeries in a timely manner. We want to maximize the capacity within the Nova Scotia Health Authority first, but we are willing to look outside to make sure that people who are suffering and are waiting for their surgery get the timely access to the care they deserve.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

DHW: KEEPING SRS. SAFE - INFORM

HON. KELLY REGAN: On the first day of this sitting in a Member Statement, I recognized the 133 Nova Scotians who had died because of the COVID-19 variant,

Omicron. Sadly, since then, another 10 Nova Scotians have died from Omicron. We're up to 143.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, there have been more deaths due to COVID-19 in the last eight months than in all the other waves combined. Every month in 2022 has seen more deaths than the previous month. I will table that. Who is most at risk? Our seniors. Those 65 and older represent the vast majority of deaths in this wave.

The question is for the Premier: With restrictions lifted, what is he doing to keep seniors safe?

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: We continue. We just had NACI statements today. We will continue to work in communities with the people who are vulnerable to ensure that they have the services they need. We will be rolling out fourth doses in the upcoming days to ensure that those most vulnerable are protected.

We continue to strongly encourage people to follow the Public Health recommendations and ensure that family members are wrapping around those most vulnerable to help protect them.

KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, we learned through a Freedom of Information request that 34 long-term care facilities were closed to new admissions in February of this year: 17 because of staffing and 17 because of COVID-19. I'll table that.

My question is for the Minister of Seniors and Long-term Care: Under this government, seniors are already waiting longer to get into long-term care - in fact, a whole month longer - since the "solutionists" came to power. Of the 34 facilities closed to new residents in February, how many have re-opened to admissions?

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: I am, I must admit, a little confused, because I thought I was hearing that we were being too loose with our restrictions and now I'm hearing that we're being too strict with restrictions.

On a monthly basis, when there is a facility that needs to have closures because of short-staffing, they have the freedom to do so. The staff are a priority as well as the residents who live in long-term care. I don't have the exact number on me now, but certainly during Estimates I will come back with that answer as well as all of the other answers that the members might be looking for.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

AGRIC.: CULTURAL SECTOR FUNDING - COMMIT

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to combine the two questions because of lack of time. This government has said that tourism was moved into the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage to leverage the assets of that department. Tourism got \$12 million of COVID-19 relief funding, which is awesome.

The cultural sector, which is responsible for the creation of many of those assets to be leveraged by tourism, remains underfunded. There is the Building Back Better report, which is asking for a doubling of operational funding for organizations that have been stagnant for 20 years, and the live performance sector has suffered greatly in the pandemic.

My question is for the Premier: Will he commit today to doubling operational funding for the cultural sector, and will he commit to taking a step in the right direction by making the emergency investment to the cultural sector and the live performance sector that they need to get back on their feet?

GREG MORROW: I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question . . .
(Laughter)

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

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

LISA LACHANCE: It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Supply on Budget 2022. Last week was Transgender Day of Visibility and at that time we talked about how it was a day to not mourn, but rather celebrate the members of the transgender, nonbinary and genderqueer communities. We will all review this budget through a range of lenses, from our critic areas to concerns of our constituencies. Today I would like to look at the budget through a rainbow lens, in the spirit of Transgender Day of Visibility, as a celebration. I want to highlight what could be gained for folks in the 2SLGBTQ+ communities and for all of us in Nova Scotia if we had a rainbow budget.

The rainbow community is comprised of people and communities of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Estimates project that between 4 per cent and 8 per cent of Canadians identify as a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, and 2 per cent to 4 per cent of Canadians identify as trans or gender-diverse. With those estimates, we can see that the 2SLGBTQ+ Nova Scotian community is a significant portion

in our province but continues to face systemic barriers due to homophobia and transphobia. My challenge today is to inspire all of us to look at the range of ways we can better support the 2SLGBTQ+ communities in our province.

The path to rights started with the decriminalization of homosexuality in Canada in 1969. There was a large gap when people were mobilizing and fighting for rights, and then we started to see the expansion of formal rights in my lifetime. In Nova Scotia, sexual orientation was added to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act in 1991. Same-sex couples gained the right to adopt in 2001, and the right to marry in 2004, and the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act was further amended in 2013 to include gender identity and gender expression.

As I have said before, this is not a timeline of peaceful change. This is not a question of government stepping forward proactively to support our communities. Rather, these were changes made after years and decades and centuries of protest and civil disobedience, and they were made by the government in the face of mounting court cases and findings of human rights violations, both in Nova Scotia and across Canada. 2SLGBTQ+ communities have fought for our rights every step of the way, and with rights, the 2SLGBTQ+ community has, in many ways, flourished.

Across Canada, Statistics Canada - and I'll table a report - reports that between 2006 and 2016, the number of 2SLGBTQ+ couples identifying as such increased by 60.7 per cent. We are also communities of opportunity, with one-third under the age of 25 years old, yet challenges remain. 2SLGBTQ+ youth face barriers to acceptance in education and access to gender-affirming care. Further, family violence and disruption and homelessness cause significant hardship to our community.

Prior to the pandemic, in the same Statistics Canada report, 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians, at 27 per cent, were twice as likely as their non-2SLGBTQ+ counterparts to have experienced some type of homelessness or housing insecurity in their lifetime. Hate crimes against 2SLGBTQ+ people are on the rise across Canada. In 2019, police reported 263 hate crimes against 2SLGBTQ+ people in Canada, a 41 per cent increase over the previous year and the highest since 2009. Overall, sexual-minority Canadians were more likely than heterosexual Canadians to report they considered their mental health to be poor or fair. They were also more likely to have seriously considered suicide in their lifetime. All that to say that the situation for our rainbow communities is far from perfect.

A budget, as we know, is all about priorities and usually we use a number of different ways to look for what priorities are in the budget. I'm sure we've all heard my broken record on this, but I'm going to repeat it again. There was no mention of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the Progressive Conservatives' platform. In fact, during the election, they received an F on their responses and platform regarding the communities from the provincial organization the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project. There was no mention of the communities in the Speech from the Throne. There is no minister. There is

no mandate letter that mentions the 2SLGBTQ+ communities. There has been no policy or funding announcement that specifically supports our communities.

I note that, twice in communications, the Progressive Conservatives have made a bit of a desperate grab to note that the proposed changes for fertility funding in the Income Tax Act include 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Rather than letting us know that's how you're showing your support, in fact that's how you're showing us that you still consider us other. We fought that fight. It's not 2005 anymore. It's 2022. Just like any other family in this province, we know that when you're talking about families, that includes us. I really invite you to think about how you in your own ways can expand your vision of what you think of as a family. We continue to lose folks who leave Nova Scotia for more inclusive jurisdictions, for better government systems, better access to health care, better supports for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

We know what's not in the budget for 2SLGBTQ+ folks. Let's take a trip over the rainbow and imagine what an inclusive budget could look like. I have used the 2021 ministerial mandate letters as inspiration for how to add the rainbow sparkles.

First of all, there is limited data on 2SLGBTQ+ experiences in Nova Scotia. An important first step of this Progressive Conservative government to demonstrate their commitment to supporting our communities would be committing to gathering data, working together with a steering committee of 2SLGBTQ+ community members and researchers, and undertaking a comprehensive survey and engagement process.

Then what would we do with the data? There's no one actually in the province who is working on 2SLGBTQ+ issues, aside from 0.8 of a person at prideHealth. There's a need to build permanent capacity in the Nova Scotia public service. A 2SLGBTQ+ secretariat or division would find kinship among other equity-deserving groups at Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage. By funding such a division, the government could create specific policy and program capacity in order to support 2SLGBTQ+ community initiatives.

The dedicated expertise could build on community input and fund a 2SLGBTQ+ action plan, as well as the creation of a network. The department could also support 2SLGBTQ+ tourism. For example, many Nova Scotia communities support Pride celebrations. Let's build a rainbow trail around Nova Scotia and highlight Nova Scotia queer history and more.

As I said, 2SLGBTQ+ youth continue to face challenges. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development can provide essential support for our young people by ensuring that 2SLGBTQ+ students, teachers and community organizations are provided opportunities to engage in the review and development of new diversity curriculum. Genders & Sexualities Alliances should be provided with adequate funding and not have to rely on volunteer teachers already stretched because of the pandemic to

support clubs. As an aside, a number of GSAs have not started, while other clubs have, because of staffing resources.

[3:00 p.m.]

2SLGBTQ+ seniors also deserve special consideration. The current generation of seniors is the first generation who lived their lives, or at least part of them, openly. Nonetheless, this generation started their lives being told they were sick and immoral, that their consensual sexual encounters were illegal, and were systemically excluded from institutions like marriage until 2004. Systemic government policies precluded them from forming legal families, welcoming children, having access to the same spousal benefits and securing housing. 2SLGBTQ+ seniors continue to pay the price of this legacy of exclusion. They have not been able to access the same life milestones as their straight and cisgender peers and may find themselves with fewer supports as they enter their senior years.

There are a number of issues that have been identified in a research project here in Nova Scotia - and I will table that - about the housing needs of 2SLGBTQ+ seniors. I would encourage you all to have a look at that research project. It tells us that close to one-third of respondents indicated that they'd had negative experiences due to the housing environment being non-inclusive, such as intake forms containing heteronormative or cisnormative language, staff or landlords making assumptions about their gender identity or expression, and negative interactions with other residents related to the respondent's identity.

The research provides a lot of ideas of what we could do better. We need to provide training and information for housing providers and landlords on the housing needs and rights of 2SLGBTQ+ residents. We need better data, and we need inclusive policies and procedures as they relate to 2SLGBTQ+ residents.

We also need to look at intergenerational housing approaches that are being rolled out in other jurisdictions in Canada, such as home-sharing and co-operatives for our communities.

There is so much more that can be done to support the health and well-being of 2SLGBTQ+ folks: increasing the funding to prideHealth - we've heard about the 0.8 person who stretched across the province; more funding to community health clinics like the Halifax Sexual Health Centre; updating MSI to cover gender-affirming care; staying up to date by establishing a ministerial advisory committee on gender-affirming care; providing and making sure that all staff in the system have access to the amazing training developed by prideHealth that can support all medical and health professionals to provide culturally competent care.

There's still more. The Minister of Advanced Education can support medical education programs to increase their capacity to train all professionals in specific care for

2SLGBTQ+ communities. I'm looking forward to the creation of a child and youth commission through the Department of Community Services with a particular expertise and support to 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth and their families.

The Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration has been asked to carry out their mandate to build an inclusive Nova Scotia to advance our interests. Students, Nova Scotians who have moved away, people who can work remotely - all of these people will want to come back if they know that the Government of Nova Scotia cares about them and will protect them.

There should be ongoing support for the efforts of Rainbow Refugees in Nova Scotia to support the immigration of 2SLGBTQ+ refugees, and support for the creation of a regional network of refugee welcoming agencies who want to welcome diverse refugees.

In economic development, there are enormous opportunities for supporting 2SLGBTQ+ small and medium-sized businesses in the province, as well as helping all businesses to get ready to serve this population when they visit. The U.K. government - and I'll table this - recognized this last year when they sponsored a national meeting under the leadership of the Minister for Women and Equalities to bring together businesses to champion LGBT equality in the workplace and celebrate the effort of businesses that were supporting their LGBTQ+ employees.

Other jurisdictions have done a lot of work in this area. Cities like Toronto, Ottawa, and Edmonton have sought to understand their 2SLGBTQ+ communities and how to support them. In Toronto - and I'll table some documents related to this - the city created a 2SLGBTQ+ advisory committee and has worked with this committee to undertake specific initiatives. The City of Toronto also joined the national organization Pride at Work to help ensure its civil servants are working in an inclusive setting.

At the provincial and territorial level, the Yukon government stands out. The Yukon territory released in 2021 a comprehensive, five-year action plan designed to chart a path forward in ending discrimination and making Yukon government programs and services more inclusive of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Support from the Ontario government resulted in the creation of Rainbow Health Ontario. An example of their important work is the creation of the *LGBT2SQ Populations Supplement* resource for the government's Health Equity Impact Assessment tool, which is required for all health initiatives in the province.

The Government of Canada established the LGBTQ2 Secretariat in 2015. National consultations have concluded, and a national action plan is under development. Similarly, the U.K. government has also released a National LGBT Survey and Action Plan starting in 2018 with annual reporting. I'll table that as well.

I feel like I've given you a bit of a laundry list, but what I really wanted to do was to elicit your ideas and your passion around making positive change for all Nova Scotians and think about how we can better support our 2SLGBTQ+ communities. There are simply too many of us to leave out of the plan to make Nova Scotia better.

Equality gains have been achieved across the globe with the right to equal marriage on six continents. At the same time, there is still a long way to go, as you can see, in getting rid of systemic exclusion.

The Progressive Conservative government has assured us that they have plans for everything. They are working towards a strong future that the Premier says he's excited about. Last week, they tabled a compassionate budget. I hope that I have demonstrated how the Nova Scotia budget for 2022-23 could have been truly inclusive, ambitious, compassionate, and a rainbow budget. With that, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Yarmouth.

HON. ZACH CHURCHILL: It's a pleasure to stand in my place and speak into Supply.

I do first want to offer my congratulations particularly to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board for tabling his first budget. I know that must be a very special milestone in the minister's career - and of course congratulate the government on presenting their first budget. This is the first time that the government actually gets to move money in a major and demonstrable way into the areas that they believe are priorities.

Mr. Speaker, I'll break with the tradition of the previous Official Opposition and actually say some nice things about positive elements in the budget. There are a few that I have no problem identifying. I do think support for those seeking fertility treatment is a positive move. We all know individuals who are impacted on that front. Hopefully, this funding will be distributed in a way that's going to have an impact for families.

I think the focus on skilled trades is very important, particularly since we currently have a shortage in skilled trades here in Nova Scotia, even though our population is going up. I do think that the wage increase to CCAs is a positive move. It should help with recruitment and retention of a critical, vital workforce. I think it will make for very interesting labour negotiations when other unions are at the bargaining table with the government. We anxiously anticipate those conversations when they begin to happen, and we'll see how the government handles those negotiations here in the province. I do think there are some positive things there.

I will say that one area where I was really surprised, however, was on health care efforts in this budget, considering that this government was elected on health care, particularly access to primary care in rural Nova Scotia. They said as recently as today in

Question Period that they have to fix the health care system after eight years of neglect. They've been talking about the health care crisis for years, and yet when it comes to this budget, we don't see any major transformations in health care. We don't see a major shift of strategy or tactic. We don't see very much except the continuation of some of the key policies that the previous government had been moving on.

Mr. Speaker, just look at the executive summary of *Solutions for Healthcare*. If one were to look at this page, the majority of the items on here are obvious continuations of the previous government's announcements and initiatives. In fact, it's a regurgitation of initiatives that have already been announced even over the course of the last year.

Virtual care - the government has been patting itself on virtual care. That is a program that this government knows very well we brought to the province. I can table the press release that went out when that happened. That was on March 30, 2021: Government Continues to Make Virtual Care an Option. Extra nursing seats in Cape Breton - that was announced in July 2021. I'll table that as well. A good move. I'm glad the government is continuing with these.

Access to mental health e-resources: again, a continuation of what the previous government did. Moving forward in the Fitch report: adding new vehicles to double patient transfers, taking non-emergency transport away from paramedics. Again, that is a continuation of the previous government's work.

The capital projects that have been announced have been a regurgitation of previous announcements. Opening recovery and support centres to help people struggling with substance and gambling - a continuation of a previous announcement, although I will note one exception with this: There are only three regions covered. There was a plan under the previous government to have the Western Region covered by an addictions management hub in Yarmouth. That is not here in this budget.

This government has removed an access point to one of our major health care zones, where they do have two ministers, I'll note as well, representing constituencies there who know the pressure on our addictions management system. They know the challenges that our communities face, particularly in rural Nova Scotia, when it comes to addictions and the lack of resources available.

I'm very surprised that, while the government moved forward with this plan in three of our health care zones, they omitted the Western Zone, where I would say some of the demand is probably the greatest in the province.

Considering this has been a government that has continuously patted itself on the back, derided the previous government for their work on health care - I have to say I'm pretty flattered. It seems they actually liked a lot of our ideas. We've got no problem saying that these are good ideas and that they should move forward. You do fear when you lose

government that some of your plans won't move forward. These are important steps in the right direction.

When it comes to the key commitments that this government made to Nova Scotians in their platform, we see very little in this budget, which is quite shocking. Three hundred new doctors a year. Okay, we have a new Office of Healthcare Professionals Recruitment, so somebody else is doing the same work that the Health Authority was doing. I haven't heard what the change of strategy is, or the plan to recruit more doctors. We haven't heard anything from the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration on if she's going to be involved in this either.

This government promised 2,500 new beds for long-term care. Yet we only see 500 budgeted, which I will say again, that's what the previous government had budgeted as well. I do understand the rationale for that because I've seen the modelling on it. That certainly has changed.

A big promise: 24-hour, 7-days a week surgery - a big focus of the PCs when they were in Opposition. There's nothing in this budget to address surgical wait-times. In fact, we're seeing surgical wait-times increase in Nova Scotia under this government.

Universal mental health care: We have seen no major investments in this budget to help increase access to health care beyond what had been previously committed by the Liberal government. Two thousand new nurses were promised as well.

These are major, specific commitments that were sold to Nova Scotians to get their votes. The first opportunity that this government had to move on those commitments, we don't really see anything, Mr. Speaker. That surprises me.

In fact, I do remember in the Fall session of the Legislature when the minister and I had an exchange in Question Period, which I have no problem admitting that she got the better of me in. She said in her answer that under a PC government, the health care system would get better each and every day. In fact, what we've seen over the last eight months is the exact opposite of that.

By utilizing every metric that the PCs focused on in Opposition - doctor attachment, surgical wait-times, full-time equivalent positions in our health care system, access to mental health care, ambulance coverage - everything has gotten worse by every one of those metrics over the last eight months. Demonstrably worse.

There are 15,000 more people without a family doctor. For the first time, 16 long-term care facilities are not even accepting residents. Wait-times are going up. We, I believe, as a government saw one province-wide Code Critical during our time in government. I think we've seen close to a dozen since this government has taken office - from one end of the province to the other - in every zone.

We see nothing in this budget around ambulatory care. The Premier gets up and defends the actions in the Fitch report, 40 per cent of which was already done. More than 40 per cent of which - 40 out of the 50-odd recommendations were already done before this government was in office.

[3:15 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to accessing primary care, when it comes to the services that our hospitals deliver, when it comes to availability of ambulatory care, when it comes to efficiencies and availability in long-term care, every single thing has gotten worse under this government over the last eight months.

You know what? I don't mind when the government gets up and says that it's because of eight years of neglect and we're going to fix it - we're going to fix health care. I do think those are words that the Premier and the government might eat someday. Especially considering that the party who promised to fix health care has failed to even protect our hospitals during this past wave of COVID-19, and the current wave that we are dealing with. Imagine the irony there: a party that is going to fix health care and won't even take the necessary steps to protect our hospitals from COVID-19. That's shocking to me.

We should have known it because we did see some indications when they were in Opposition: questioning Dr. Strang at the time, questioning the vaccine rollout, both of which they are quite proud of now that they are on the governing side of the Legislature again. Very flattering, but let's be honest, the government was two weeks behind in making the decision to bring restrictions during Christmas that led to our wave. Looking at the numbers and the epidemiology, we knew what needed to happen and the government was two weeks too late, so we saw that spread.

We now have the government lifting restrictions en masse. I know that is where the public mood is at. I am as tired as anybody else about COVID-19 and the restrictions, but sometimes you have to make decisions against the public mood to protect the public. We are opening up at a time when Omicron is sweeping across our province. As the member for Bedford has mentioned, more people have died in the last eight months than the previous two years of COVID-19. Yet the Premier gets up and nonchalantly says, oh, we know it's serious. We have to live with it, and we trust Nova Scotians to make the right decisions. Okay, sure. We trust Nova Scotians to make the right decisions too, when they have the appropriate facts to base those decisions on.

When you have a government that is indicating that everything is fine, we're going to open up, no masks are necessary from a public regulatory perspective, sure, you should wear them but it's on you. To see that be the strategy here is one thing, but to see that be the strategy when we are actually restricting access to information on COVID-19 in really critical areas - case counts being one of them, impact on hospitalizations being another - I think this is a very dangerous strategy, and we are going to watch and see what happens.

I don't know if the members on the governing side actually realize how far back they are setting their own health care agenda by the way they are approaching COVID-19. How long is it going to take to catch up with these surgeries? I think we are years behind now. I think we are behind years, and I don't see that situation getting better, but we will see. There is nothing in this budget that is going to make it better, that's certain. All that while we add significantly to the debt that my kids and my grandkids are going to inherit in the province.

It has been very interesting to watch this government get up, get very excited about this budget - a budget that does very little on their number one priority issue, that does not have specified funding for these specific promises that they made, who are still promising to fix health care when the situation is getting worse by the day, by the week, and on top of that now we know that my daughters - hopefully grandkids, someday, great grandkids - are going to inherit more debt for their efforts, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know if this government also understands the long-term impacts to our health care system when we drive ourselves further into debt, and with our debt to GDP ratio going up. Governments need funding to pay for health care. Someone is going to have to pay the piper some day here. I was very proud to be part of a government that took our fiduciary responsibility very seriously and I am very concerned that we have a government that is currently not doing that.

Moving forward, I am very much looking forward to holding this government to account on the commitments they made to Nova Scotians, on the risks that they are creating for the long-term financial health of our province, on the risk they are creating right now for our hospitals, for our health care workers, and for the public when it comes to COVID-19, and I very much look forward to continuing debates in this Chamber every single moment that we have.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development..

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, we have just heard 15 minutes of stump speech sound bites and although there are many that I would like to speak to right now from the honourable member for Yarmouth, we have 80 hours of Estimates where we can speak to all of the incredible work we've done over the last eight months and all the incredible work we're going to do in the next year. So I'm not going to use the 15 minutes right now to speak to that.

I'd like to use the 15 minutes right now to speak to what we're doing here today in Supply and what we're doing in this House in Supply. It's a privilege today to rise and speak to Supply. In this context, I use the word "privilege" because I recognize that I am incredibly fortunate to be one of the very few people in this province's history to take a place here, to use my voice to represent my constituency, Lunenburg West, and to perform

this kind of public service. Not everyone has this opportunity and some face more barriers than others to get here. The absence of those barriers is privilege.

The member for Dartmouth South spoke in Supply last week. She mentioned fundamental flaws in the way we do democracy and expressed concern over the late hours that we seek to keep in this session. Concern that these hours will prevent us from working in our constituencies, concern that these hours will keep us and the public servants who support this process away from our families.

This is what I want to take a moment to speak about. I don't claim to know why the default hours of this House are five a day. The member for Dartmouth South suggested that they were designed for MLAs to work in their constituency. For those MLAs who have the privilege of a short walk, bus, bike, or car ride into this House, into this Chamber, that may in fact be the case. However, this is not true for many if not most of us. Those of us from rural ridings - those of us who travel from Cape Breton, from areas that are two, three, four, five hours away from the Legislature - the default House hours do not allow us time to be present in and work in our constituencies.

Members from Victoria-The Lakes, Digby-Annapolis, Richmond, Cape Breton East, Lunenburg, Pictou County, Pictou East, Argyle, Kings North, Pictou West, Inverness, Queens, Guysborough-Tracadie, Kings West, Cumberland South, Colchester North, Antigonish, Glace Bay-Dominion, Shelburne, Lunenburg West and others who travel two to three hours a day to be present cannot be in their constituency when we sit, and they do not get the opportunity to be present with their constituents or their families.

When the Legislature is sitting, we are here in Halifax. We are not in our constituencies. Whether we sit from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. or from 9:00 a.m. to midnight, when the House is sitting, our constituents - who need us to hear their problems and help them find solutions - don't get to meet with us face to face. Local events and celebrations go on without our representation, they go on without our presence. Our children go to school in the morning and go to bed at night without us. We are here and we and our constituents expect us to be working more than five hours a day.

Who are those constituents who do not get the benefit of our presence when the House is sitting? They include First Nations like Bear River, Pictou, We'koqma'q, Wagmatcook, and Paqtnkek. They include French communities like Isle Madame, Cheticamp and Argyle. They include African Nova Scotian communities like those in Shelburne and Digby.

I value access to democracy. We need to continuously examine and break down barriers to participation. If there are fundamental flaws in the way we conduct democracy as the member for Dartmouth South suggests - and there are - the answer is certainly not as simple as limiting MLAs to sitting in this House five hours a day.

I guarantee you when I am in Halifax my constituents want me here in this House getting the job done - ultimately, getting back to my constituents in Lunenburg West sooner.

It was not very long ago that each of us were going door to door asking people to put their confidence in us, asking for their vote. Those were long, hot, sometimes difficult days and personally I went from morning to night every day of the week hitting 4,000 doorsteps, over 1,000 square kilometres. Those long days did not end for me because I got the votes I was seeking back in July, and I know they did not end for my colleagues in government.

Now, when there are so many pressing, crucial, critical challenges that we need to deal with in Nova Scotia, now is when we should be willing to go the extra mile. It is what we were elected to do.

No one in this Legislature put their name on a ballot thinking they were signing up for a 9:00 to 5:00 job. Certainly not a 1:00 to 6:00 job. Many of us don't sleep in our own beds when the House is sitting. We don't get to see our children off to school in the morning or tuck them in at night, but we do this for the incredible privilege of representing our constituents.

We know it's this kind of work that the public service demands and most of us do it happily. After all, we are hardly the only public servants who work long hours or in difficult circumstances. I ask members to think about the officers and crew of HMCS *Halifax*. The brave men and women, dedicated public servants, left Halifax to join Operation REASSURANCE. They are not sure when they will next see their families, kiss their children or sleep in their beds.

I was struck by what the commanding officer told reporters before the ship left Halifax: "The schedule has changed so many times already . . . and it will change again. Right now, we're tracking the return mid- to end of July but with what's going on in the world right now, we just can't know for sure . . . I've told the crew to be flexible." I'll table that.

There's no calendar for this kind of public service, no set hours, and who among us doesn't know a nurse, a doctor, a CCA, or a truck driver that hasn't pulled a double shift or accepted another route in the last two years because they considered it part of their job, part of their service to fellow Nova Scotians? Unbelievably, members of Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, have continued to sit, even as their country is being shelled by Russians. The pride they take in this remarkable act is palpable.

We are privileged by the safety and security that we have in this Chamber, in this province and in this country. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, it is an honour and a privilege to be an MLA. It is an honour to travel to Halifax on behalf of Lunenburg West

and put the time in here in this Chamber to do this valuable work, and it's a privilege that I don't take for granted.

THE SPEAKER: Go ahead, if you want to drag it out. (Laughter)

The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, I heard you comment that if we want to drag it out, but I just heard the member opposite talk about how we're privileged to be here and we shouldn't really complain that we're in the House. I wasn't going to stand up, but one of the things that really struck me about her speech is the comment "sleep in our beds." That we're unable to sleep in our beds.

I understand that, but do you know who understands it more? The homeless. The people without a bed across this province that this government did not address in this budget. Not a cent for homelessness? (Interruption) The Minister for Community Services - you want to stand up and speak, you certainly can. Can I speak, or is the minister going to continue to interrupt me?

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The member for Halifax Atlantic has the floor.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: It may be something to laugh about and chirp about here in this Legislature but again I will say to members: Drive up to Chebucto Road in HRM. This government promised in the last sitting that they would deal directly with this before the Winter and not one of them visited the site. Not one of them.

AN. HON. MEMBER: That's not true.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I would like to see the schedule. If the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development visited the homeless site on Chebucto Road, I would like to see when and how. When I spoke to them - and we were there constantly, Mr. Speaker - not a single member of the government.

That's what we were told by the volunteers and the people there - and even if they did visit, that's fine, but do you know what? They were there for the entire Winter. They were there for the entire Winter after they were promised by this government that this issue would be dealt with and that the Premier himself said not a single one of them would have to worry. He said Winter is coming . . .

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. I'm just going to ask the member to get rid of the pen. That's the same as pointing a finger at somebody.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: That's why I wanted to stand up and speak about this. We heard this government when they were in Opposition - they talked about a Better Pay

Cheque Guarantee. Less than a month after they were elected, the Minister of Finance and Treasury was on the Todd Veinotte Show and he was asked about this. He said, well, that's a lot more complicated than we thought. Is it going to come this year? Probably not, he said. Probably not.

[3:30 p.m.]

We were told that they were going to hit the ground running and health care was going to be fixed, and it was going to be better month after month after month. They sent letters and flyers out to every community in Nova Scotia. It got worse month after month after month.

They are literally responsible for the worst wave of COVID-19 in this province's history. They sat over there, Mr. Speaker, and said some horrendous things to the former Minister of Health and Wellness about his handling of COVID-19. They sat over there and said horrendous things to two former Premiers about their handling of COVID-19. I lost sleep over the comments. The members can laugh over there, but I lost sleep over comments that were made about the responsibility of the former government when it came to people losing their loved ones in long-term care and in Nova Scotia.

Not a single time in the last week and a half to two weeks that we've been here has the Premier of Nova Scotia taken any responsibility. In fact, he has deflected it. He said, you know to wash your hands, you know to wear a mask. Tell that to one of my best friends whose son has no immune system and has to deal with this. They have to go along and live a normal life, but they're scared to death - and she's a research scientist. All she's saying is, I just want to see the numbers, I want to be able to make an informed decision.

They won't even release the numbers of the positive COVID-19 tests that were self-reported. Do you want to know why, Mr. Speaker? I'll bet you my house on it - it's 10 times larger than the PCRs. We're talking tens and tens and tens of thousands of positive cases that were self-reported that for one reason or another, this government acted like it didn't exist.

I understand the thought of personal responsibility, trust me, but part of personal responsibility is making informed decisions. Part of making informed decisions is having the evidence and the facts in front of you. When you are hiding the evidence and facts - and just now we're seeing there was a little blurb on the Nova Scotia Health Authority's website that they are going to be archiving those numbers, so there's going to be even more limited access to those numbers.

On April 13th, they are going to be archiving former numbers, so nobody can get at them then. (Interruption) Someone just said a screenshot. That is pretty callous from the government to say something like that - take a screenshot of the numbers. How about if you guys do your job and release them? It's unbelievable that someone would say that.

Why don't they say that to my friend Katie, whose son could die if he gets COVID-19? Why don't you say that to the seniors who have health care issues? Take a screenshot.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does nothing for that. What they are doing is they are saving money on COVID-19. When they were given a \$100 million surplus, and people in Nova Scotia were begging for access to tests, what did they do? They cut the tests and they saved the money. Then if you actually look at the budget, they trickled it down into their own ridings. If you look at the amount of money and where it's going, the majority of it is going into Progressive Conservative ridings. Isn't that funny?

If this government wants to be taken seriously on health care, you can't zero in on one thing. You are going to pay the price for not taking this last wave seriously, and as we're seeing now, it's going to be backups in the health care system, and you're going to see health care workers leaving the province.

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

We'll briefly recess for 15 minutes.

[3:35 p.m. The House recessed.]

[3:57 p.m. The House resolved into a CW on Supply with Chris Palmer in the Chair.]

[8:30 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. The Speaker, Hon. Keith Bain, resumed the Chair]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. The Chair of the Committee of the Whole on Supply reports:

THE CLERK: That the Committee of the Whole on Supply has met and made progress and begs leave to sit again.

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: 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. 123.

Bill No. 123 - Liquor Control Act (amended)

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

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 123 - an Act to Amend Chapter 260 of the Revised Statues, 1989, the Liquor Control Act - be read for a second time.

The Liquor Control Act is an Act shared between my department, the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, and the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. For clarification, I'm delivering these remarks on behalf of both myself and my colleague, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

Since May 26, 2021, third-party delivery companies and those working independently have been temporarily allowed to deliver alcohol with food purchases. This was introduced to help businesses as they struggled financially though the pandemic. It gave them the opportunity to enter a new market and earn some extra money while we continued to fight against COVID-19. The temporary measure was tied to the state of emergency, and it ended on March 21, 2022.

Now we are taking the first step to make this a permanent option for our restaurants and consumers. We are creating the regulation-making authority to allow this on a permanent basis. As a government, we are here to support Nova Scotians. We are here to support businesses both large and small. By allowing this option we will give greater flexibility to our restaurants in managing their operations.

By allowing third-party delivery of alcohol, we are also helping our smaller restaurants that might not be able to afford a dedicated delivery person, giving them an opportunity to earn more revenue by offering a service that includes both alcohol and food. As always, when it comes to the consumption of alcohol, the health and safety of Nova Scotians is a top priority.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue the safeguards that were introduced with the temporary allowance of third-party delivery during the state of emergency. These include: that the person delivering alcohol is required to take special training; alcohol will only be available for delivery between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m; and the person delivering the alcohol must be 19 years of age or older.

Customers will also be limited to an alcohol purchase that is three times the value of the food they purchase, or a single higher-value bottle of wine. We also plan to enhance these rules to include additional safety for consumers by ensuring those delivering alcohol follow the rules and are held accountable if they break them.

A new special delivery licence will be introduced for any third-party delivery person who wishes to deliver alcohol. The minimum fine for illegally providing liquor will also increase to \$3,000. Again, this is only the first step to allowing the third-party delivery of alcohol with food purchases. Regulations will need to be developed before this will be allowed.

Another amendment we are making relates to breaking down internal trade barriers within Canada. There have been ongoing conversations at the federal-provincial-territorial level on how we can remove trade barriers within our country with a focus on alcoholic beverages. These amendments are about showing national leadership on this file by signalling that Nova Scotia supports and is willing to lead a coordinated approach to allow direct-to-consumer sales of alcohol. These amendments will also position us well to be an early adopter of a national direct-to-consumer system.

With agreement, Nova Scotia's strong and vibrant alcoholic beverages industry will be able to ship their products directly to consumers outside our province and Nova Scotians will be able to purchase products directly from producers outside our province.

This sector has been vocal about expanding the market for their quality products. We support that goal with these amendments and are encouraging other provinces to join Nova Scotia in signalling their intent to reduce these internal barriers. When they do, we will be ready.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks and look forward to comments from my colleagues opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

HON. KELLY REGAN: I just want to share with my honourable colleague that we are, in fact, pleased with this bill thus far, which is the continuation of our work really from last Spring through a ministerial directive at the time. During the state of emergency it allowed third party individuals to deliver liquor with food from licensed establishments.

This bill is going to make the necessary amendments to make this directive permanent and we are therefore happy to see that. This is something that the sector wants and we hope it will help these businesses regain some of their lost revenue from the pandemic but more support for businesses, of course, will definitely be needed.

We think it is appropriate there will be a continued training program because it is important for the safety of Nova Scotians that alcohol is delivered to the appropriate people and not to people who are underage, for example. We hope that there will be increased uptake in this particular program once it is made permanent.

We are also pleased to see that the Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia, Restaurants Canada, and individual operators were consulted about this bill because that doesn't always happen when legislation is proposed, so we were pleased to see that happening and we are also pleased to see that the government is making the necessary changes in anticipation of a direct-to-consumer system. We hope this is made possible soon in co-operation with the federation, the government, and provincial partners.

I will just say that I would like to give a shout-out to Stephen McNeil because he spent a lot of time trying to dismantle those interprovincial trade barriers and spent a lot of political capital on that particular issue because it didn't make sense to him.

Direct-to-consumer has the potential to create greater markets and we welcome further opportunities for our small businesses and our domestic producers. With those few words, I will say thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: I am happy to rise and speak briefly, once I get my mask off, to this bill - the Liquor Control Act amendments. Certainly in Dartmouth North, Dartmouth South, we in Dartmouth have an awful lot of restaurants - small, family-run restaurants and establishments. When these changes came in during the pandemic, this was a real boost to those struggling businesses and it was really good news at the time.

We are cautiously optimistic about this, but we are fairly concerned that with making permanent this idea or this practice that it doesn't seem to be that the public health or addictions experts were consulted about how to engage in a harm reduction lens. If I am wrong about that then I would be really happy to hear what consultations were done with Public Health around what it means to have alcohol delivered to your home.

We do recognize that restaurants are struggling and this is a really good thing for restaurants. We basically are just looking forward to hearing from stakeholders at Law Amendments about the changes. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I guess we're here till 11:59. I just wanted to quickly talk about this one. I applaud the support for small businesses, and I do want to take a little bit of the angle from the member for Dartmouth North around the mental health strategy and the addiction strategy of alcohol. We do know that alcoholism is prevalent in

Nova Scotia, as it is in every other jurisdiction. If you just do a quick search of the numbers and the Nova Scotia Alcohol Strategy, it's pretty significant. It has a huge impact on people's lives. Alcohol is one of those strange things where so many of us - either directly or indirectly - have family and friends whose lives have been torn apart by alcohol.

Yet I remember shortly after we got elected, maybe it was our second term, because I think the Minister of Justice was there then, we did a ban - we worked with stakeholders, and actually I helped work on that with Dr. Strang - and we did a ban on flavoured tobacco. I just got talking to stakeholders and people within the Department of Health, and the thing that kept coming up over and over was these different flavours of alcohol, and these different "cool" names of alcohol, and they knew, or they assumed these things were being obviously marketed to minors and marketed to the younger generation.

It's hard to kick that habit. I'm going to say that some people know this, but as of Saturday it's been a year since I've had a sip of alcohol. (Applause) Maybe it's why I'm so cranky, now that I think about it.

THE SPEAKER: Was that cranky or crazy?

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Cranky and crazy - both. But a big part of it for me was that my biological parents are both what we like to call "raging alcoholics," and my entire family is from Northern Ireland, my brothers and sisters. I was born in England. The whole family were alcoholics, and they don't like me to say that, but you know the signs, you see the signs: the red face, the nose, the ears, all that stuff of really hardcore alcoholics.

So for me, I had a few drinks one night with a friend, and my wife always said that the alcoholism DNA runs strong in my family, but for me it was like the reverse. Alcohol had really adverse effects on my body, especially mentally. I'd get depressed for sometimes weeks on end after having a few drinks. I once said to a friend that I had a really bad hangover, and this was after I had kids and everything. And I sat in the bathroom with the lights out and I came out and I said to my wife, "Now I know why people kill themselves," because I was so depressed, so depressed. That's what alcohol had done to me that day.

So I worry about that. I worry that we are - the hardest thing for me about giving up alcohol wasn't actually giving it up. I really never enjoyed it that much. It was just you start to realize - and I read this really good book about how alcohol is more ingrained in our society than anything else we do. Anything else. There's nothing even remotely close. When we say, "Let's go watch the football game and have a beer and chicken wings, let's go watch a hockey game, let's have a beer with chicken wings. Let's go out for a glass of wine," everything. We very much are an alcohol-centric society.

What I wanted to say here is I'm glad that this government did step up to help our small businesses because this really is vital for them. But I also know that the NSLC had record profits during COVID-19. There's a reason why that goes hand-in-hand, right?

People were at home, people were depressed, people were upset and what did they do? A lot of people, they drank. So I hope that - I know that money goes into the public coffers, and it gets spent on different programs and different things, but I really do think that the Minister responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health should be lining his pockets with some more money, especially when it comes to alcohol and addictions.

[8:45 p.m.]

I think that if COVID-19 has shown us anything, it's that we know there have been mental health issues - that is scientifically proven now - that have come with people having to isolate. I remember when we did our very first lockdown there, I think it was the only real lockdown we did, at first it was like a breath of fresh air. It was like oh my God, everything is so quiet - unless you have kids - the community was quiet, everything was quiet but after a while it does get really depressing.

All I ask of the government is that you just don't take your eye off the prize on this one. While you are going to reap the benefits of higher alcohol sales and our small businesses are going to reap the benefits of this also, I would hope that you take some of that money and really fight alcoholism and mental health and depression and everything that comes with it because it absolutely destroys families.

It's not fair to children who have to go through that, it's not fair to children to have to witness that, and it's not fair to the adults and the loved ones. If you marry an alcoholic, it's not a good experience, it's not a good thing to see, and it's very hard.

I hope that maybe when the minister stands up to close debate that he'll give a few comments on some of that money going back into mental health and addictions.

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

The honourable Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services.

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleagues across the aisle. Without getting into too many details, I myself do know very well the impacts of alcoholism on families - something that my family has lived through - so I appreciate the sentiments expressed by the members opposite.

Regarding the finances here, speaking to my particular amendments, those there, I mean we're going to be supporting it. As the members had expressed, we'll be supporting small businesses. So perhaps for the NSLC side of things, that would be a question for the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board.

I do want to again remind the members of the content of the bill and the provisions and the safeguards that are going to be in place - I mean the parameters and whatnot - so I'm not going to rehash those.

I do want to confirm that Dr. Strang of Public Health was, in fact, consulted and expressed support for the mitigations put in place during emergency measures. Our intentions are to continue to consult with the Department of Health and Wellness, as well as the Office of Addictions and Mental Health during the regulatory-making process.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the Law Amendments Committee process and I move to close debate on Bill No. 123, the Liquor Control Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 123.

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 Bill No. 124.

Bill No. 124 - Public Trustee Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 124, amendments to the Anatomy Act, the Public Trustee Act, and the Fatality Investigations Act, be now read a second time.

All Nova Scotians deserve respectful and compassionate final arrangements on their passing. Our individual circumstances are different. Not everyone leaves this world with a plan in place or loved ones to ensure that their remains receive care and attention upon their death. Government becomes involved and plays a necessary role when there are no family members or loved ones identified or if they cannot take responsibility for the deceased.

The current process, however, is cumbersome and with multiple departments having overlapping roles, depending on the nature and circumstance of the death. A single clear and coordinated mechanism is needed to ensure final arrangements and timely disposition of those remains that are left unclaimed.

In March 2020, government made an interim change through an Order in Council giving the Public Trustee of Nova Scotia responsibility to manage unclaimed remains. Since that time, the Public Trustee has been responsible for ensuring that people in these circumstances receive dignity after death. This was intended, though, to only be temporary, a timely measure until legislative amendments could be made more permanent.

The proposed amendments to the Anatomy Act, the Public Trustee Act, and the Fatality Investigations Act will give clear legislative authority to the Public Trustee of Nova Scotia to manage uncremated human remains that are not claimed by next of kin. Specifically, these amendments will give the Public Trustee the legislative authority to determine when human remains are unclaimed and assume all responsibility for them, make and pay for the disposition arrangements, and if possible, recover cost from the estate when and if possible.

I hope that I could have all support from the colleagues in this House as we move this bill forward through the legislative process.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill No. 124 and to give a bit of background. In 2020, government moved authority from the Department of Health and Wellness to the Public Trustee to ensure a more streamlined approach to unclaimed remains. In October 2019, Service Nova Scotia sent a survey to funeral homes, crematoriums, cemetery licensees saying they were considering regulations to unclaimed remains because they were contacted by funeral professionals asking what to do with those remains; 63 out of 87 funeral homes responded. There were many funeral homes that had remains; 31 had no remains while one had 124, and another had 101. On average, there were 11 per funeral home.

Regardless of where an individual passes away, whether it's in a hospital or long-term care facility or their home or any other location, government becomes involved when there is no next of kin or the next of kin is unwilling or unable to take responsibility for the final burial arrangements. There are roughly 60 cases of unclaimed remains each year in Nova Scotia, at a cost of approximately \$4,000. Uncremated remains of a deceased person held by an institution such as a morgue or hospital are considered unclaimed when the next of kin cannot identify or cannot take responsibility.

If there is a refusal of remains due to cost, the Department of Community Services does have a budget allocated that will help with costs associated with Nova Scotians on income assistance.

The other intent of the changes formally recognizes the Public Trustee of Nova Scotia's authority to manage cases and make final arrangements for deceased persons when the next of kin cannot be identified or take responsibility. Amendments to the Anatomy

Act, the Public Trustee Act, and the Fatality Investigations Act will give the Public Trustee the authority to determine when human remains are unclaimed and assume responsibility for the deceased, make and pay for the disposition arrangements, and recover costs from the estate when possible.

The changes that are coming with this Act will update the language and definition of “missing person” to make it gender-neutral and add the definition of “unclaimed human remains.” “Unclaimed human remains” means human remains that are determined to be unclaimed by the Public Trustee pursuant to Section 25A.

It will permit the Public Trustee to be reimbursed out of the deceased’s estate. It will provide grounds for the Public Trustee to make the determination that human remains are unclaimed. It authorizes the Public Trustee to assume responsibility for unclaimed human remains, investigate whether the deceased had an estate, make disposition arrangements for the unclaimed human remains, and recover from the estate of the deceased any costs incurred for the unclaimed human remains, and lastly, provides indemnity to the Crown and the Public Trustee for actions taken with respect to unclaimed human remains.

With that, we are in agreement with this bill. We are happy to support it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a housekeeping bill, and an important one. We’ve heard now at some length about the details of the bill, which are a bit macabre and sad, so I won’t go back over them, but they make a lot of sense. We are in support and looking forward to hearing from folks from Law Amendments Committee, if they choose to appear.

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

The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, I’d like to thank both members for their comments on this bill. I would move that we now close debate on Bill No. 124, amendments to the Anatomy Act, the Public Trustee Act, and the Fatality Investigations Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 124. 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, will you please call Bill No. 126.

Bill No. 126 - Nova Scotia Wine Authority Act.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Agriculture.

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 126, the Nova Scotia Wine Authority Act, be now read a second time.

This bill represents an important advancement in the wine-growing and winemaking industry in Nova Scotia. This legislation will establish the Nova Scotia Wine Authority to administer a Quality Wine Standards Certification Program in the province. It will be a voluntary program for makers of Nova Scotia wine made from local grapes. The quality standards have been developed by an industry consultant with input from local wineries.

We are fortunate to have a unique climate and talented winemakers producing world-class products in Nova Scotia. A wine authority will support the industry's focus on quality for consumers and help the sector grow and prosper. That's why our wine industry in the province has been keen to have this type of wine authority developed in our province, as other jurisdictions have already done. The Nova Scotia Wine Authority will be equivalent to Ontario and B.C.'s Vintners Quality Alliance program, known as VQA.

The proposed Nova Scotia Wine Authority Act will help advance Nova Scotia's wine industry in a few ways. It will allow the Minister of Agriculture to designate a wine authority through regulations. It will establish quality wine standards through regulation, and products may be certified under those standards. It will define new terms for product labels so that consumers will recognize Nova Scotia's quality wine. It will set fees and reporting requirements, and under the Act, inspectors will be appointed to monitor and enforce the program requirements.

These are all welcome points that members of our winemaking industry are very excited by. Feedback from our consultations with industry on the wine authority have been very positive, with many basically saying it's about time. The industry has been advocating for this authority. They have been clear they want to work with the Province to help move their industry forward with the advancements these standards will provide.

In fact, the executive director of the Wine Growers Nova Scotia, Ms. Haley Brown, has told us that the standards that will be provided by this new wine authority are a necessary step to ensure that quality remains at the forefront for our wine industry. Ms. Brown has pointed out that Nova Scotia wine is being recognized not only across Canada,

but globally as an exciting new wine region. A wine authority will enable the industry to move forward on stronger ground.

[9:00 p.m.]

We are bringing forward this Act in response to the wine-growing industry's desire for a wine authority in our province, similar to the ones that have helped the industry grow in other jurisdictions. The Nova Scotia Wine Authority Act will set up powers for the authority to establish and monitor a certified program that will align with international standards.

The establishment of a wine authority and quality standards is the next step for Nova Scotia's wine industry to develop international recognition for its products. The program of standards will help Nova Scotia wines be further recognized in new markets and increase consumer confidence.

With these remarks, I will take my seat, and look forward to hearing from any input from members of this House.

THE SPEAKER: This will be the test to make sure our virtual meeting is taking place.

The honourable member for Kings South, virtually.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Good evening to my colleagues in the House. I'm happy to be speaking to you from Nova Scotia's wine country in Kings South, so it's appropriate to make a few comments here this evening on Bill No. 126, the Nova Scotia Wine Authority Act.

This bill was a culmination of the work by the former Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Keith Colwell, and representatives of the wine industry. I want to thank the minister and his staff for getting it through the final steps to get it across the finish line - hopefully in this sitting of the House.

As the minister indicated, this bill will establish, administer, and enforce a Nova Scotia Wine Standards Certification Program. This bill enables the creation of the Nova Scotia Wine Authority, which will set and enforce standards for Nova Scotian wines, and inform customers who are purchasing the best quality Nova Scotia wines. As the minister has indicated, this has been a top priority of the Nova Scotia wine industry.

Building the industry from a foundation of wine quality both strengthens our marketing position in the world and supports better pricing for our exceptional wines. Our wine sector is important to our rural economy. Anything that helps grow and sustain our wineries we are happy to support.

In my discussions with the member from industry who worked on this project today, an initial review of the bill as it has been presented appears to meet the industry's expectations. I do understand there may be some details that may be presently left to regulations, which could possibly be put in the legislation, but we'll await comments at the Law Amendments Committee.

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

LISA LACHANCE: I am pleased to rise to speak to this bill tonight. Our caucus is receptive to any work that supports producers, wine makers, farmers in rural Nova Scotia, and so we are glad to see the government moving on these fronts. We can already see the positive impacts of wineries and other businesses in the rural areas of Nova Scotia. We're hoping that this will help increase that profile.

As the honourable member for Kings South noted, there are some outstanding questions. I am wondering if we can see some clarification around that through either the Law Amendments Committee or back at the Committee of the Whole House.

I know that we won't be using the existing VQA system, and like B.C., who created their own distinction program, Wines of Distinction, this will be a distinctly Nova Scotian one. It would be interesting to understand the differences between these programs. The program is also designed to be self-sustaining, ultimately, so it would be great to know if we are providing seed funding and what the implementation plan is. I know that a consultant helped the department work on this, so I'm also wondering if that report is available publicly.

Just to finish up, as with the proposed amendments to the Liquor Control Act, I'm just wondering if this proposal has gone through a Public Health review. In particular, I think that between Ontario and B.C., we probably have some information from other jurisdictions on how the introduction and implementation of programs like this proceeded.

I look forward to the Law Amendments Committee and additional details. With that, I'll take my seat.

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

HON. GREG MORROW: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the members opposite, especially the member for Kings South. It's nice to see him in the House again, albeit virtually.

I rise to close debate on Bill No. 126.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is for second reading of Bill No. 126.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

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

Before I recognize the Government House Leader, we had our first test of virtual and I think it's important that we thank all the people in Legislative TV for making sure it happened. (Applause)

The honourable Government House Leader.

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

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[9:08 p.m. The House resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole House on Bills with Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

[9:26 p.m. CWH on Bills rose and the House reconvened with Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance in the Chair.]

THE CHAIR: 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. 94 - Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day Act.

Bill No. 101 - Marine Renewable-energy Act.

Bill No. 102 - Wildlife Act.

Bill No. 106 - Condominium Act.

Bill No. 107 - Crosbie Memorial Trust Fund Act.

Bill No. 114 - Hospitals Act.

Bill No. 115 - Prescription Monitoring Act.

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

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

The honourable Government House Leader.

HON. KIM MASLAND: That concludes government business for the day. I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Wednesday, April 6th, between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

Tomorrow is Opposition Day, so I will ask the Opposition House Leader to call the business, but I would like to note that after their agenda, we'll move directly into the debate on Budget Estimates.

THE CHAIR: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Wednesday between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. (Interruption)

The honourable Official Opposition House Leader.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you, Mx. Chair. Tomorrow after daily routine and Question Period, we'll be calling Bill No. 103, the Youth Food Security Act, and Bill No. 116, the Emergency Management Act.

THE CHAIR: The motion is that the House do rise to meet again on Wednesday between the hours of 1:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until Wednesday at 1:00 p.m.

[The House rose at 9:28 p.m.]