



DEBATES AND PROCEEDINGS

Speaker: Honourable Keith Bain

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First Session

TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
POINT OF PRIVILEGE, L. Lachance	2451
PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS:	
Gov't. (N.S.): Rent Cap - Extension Requested, G. Burrill	2452
Gov't. (N.S.): Photopheresis Treatment for Autoimmune Diseases - Provision Requested, K. Coombes.....	2452
PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES:	
Law Amendments Committee, Hon. B. Johns	2452
INTRODUCTION OF BILLS:	
No. 172, An Act to Amend Chapter 4 of the Acts of 1994, the Credit Union Act, L. Lachance	2453
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS:	
Beaton, Kristen: Deaths of - Tribute, Hon. T. Houston (The Premier)	2453

Bird, Annie: Writing Career Success - Congrats., Hon. K. Irving	2454
Reserve Mines Srs. & Pensioners Club: COVID Efforts - Thanks, K. Coombes.....	2454
Thomas, Elizabeth Joanne/Zahl, John: Deaths of - Tribute, T. Taggart.....	2455
Shaw, Elizabeth/Jessome, Ben: Engagement - Congrats., Hon. P. Arab	2455
Murphy, Sheriah - Ri's Eats: Food Serv. - Recog., S. Hansen	2455
McCulley, Lisa: Death of - Tribute, Hon. T. Halman.....	2456
YMCA Ctr. For Imm. Pgms.: Servs. for Immigrants - Recog., A. Duale	2456
Peters, Juanita: ACTRA Woman of the Yr. - Congrats., C. Chender	2457
Gulenchyn, Frank & Dawn: Deaths of - Tribute, Hon. B. Adams.....	2457
Mullin, Marilyn & Bill: 60 th Wedding Anniv. - Best Wishes, B. Clark.....	2458
KOQM Theatre Prod.: Honouring Mi'kmaw Women - Recog., S. Leblanc	2458
Ellison, Corrie: Death of - Tribute, D. Ritcey	2458
Kumar-Britten, N./Morrison, J.: Teaching Work - Thanks, F. Tilley.....	2459
Citadel High Students: Ukraine Fundraiser - Recog., L. Lachance.....	2459
Tuck, Aaron & Emily/Oliver, Jolene: Deaths of - Tribute, T. Boudreau.....	2460
Anapolie Pizza: 40 th Yr. in Bus. - Recog., L. Nicoll	2460
Vic. Mines Rec. Assoc.: Park Revitaliz'n - Recog., K. Coombes.....	2461
Blair, Jamie & Greg: Deaths of - Tribute, Hon. G. Morrow.....	2461
Yushchenko, Igor: Ukr. Imm. Efforts - Recog., R. DiCostanzo.....	2462
Heggie, Claire: Health Equity Work - Thanks, S. Hansen	2462
Campbell, Lillian: Death of - Tribute, Hon. J. Balsler.....	2463
Cumb. Tragedy: Lives Lost - Recog., E. Smith-McCrossin.....	2463
Reddick, Lameia: Com. Serv. - Thanks, A. Simmonds.....	2464

Borden, Glen: Retirement - Best Wishes, S. Leblanc	2465
Bond, Joy & Peter: Deaths of - Tribute, D. Barkhouse.....	2465
Bezanson, Diane - Les Papas Noël de Clare: Com. Serv. - Thanks, R. LeBlanc	2466
Alcare Place: Help for Addictions - Recog., L. Lachance.....	2466
McLeod, Sean/Jenkins, Alanna: Deaths of - Tribute, Hon. T. Halman.....	2466
Test to Protect: COVID Efforts - Recog., Hon. K. Regan.....	2467
Bagley, Tom: Death of - Tribute, John A. MacDonald	2467
O'Riley, Haley: Min. Awd. Finalist - Congrats., Hon. D. Mombourquette	2468
O'Brien, Heather: Death of - Tribute, Hon. B. Druhan	2468
#COVIDsafer: Keeping Com. Safe - Thanks, Hon. I. Rankin.....	2469
Webber, Joey: Death of - Tribute, L. Harrison	2469
Metlege Diab, Lena: Leb. Her. Mo. Bill Intro. - Congrats., Hon. P. Arab	2470
Goulet, Gina: Death of - Tribute, C. Palmer.....	2470
Grant, Ed: Com. Serv. - Recog., B. Clark.....	2471
Stevenson, Cst. Heidi: Death of - Tribute, Hon. M. Thompson.....	2471
Northside-Westmount Orgs.: Easter Celeb. - Thanks, F. Tilley	2472
Cole Hbr. Parks & Trails Assoc.: Trail Maint. - Recog., L. Nicoll	2472
<i>Clare Après Y Fait Noir</i> : Ent. - Recog., R. LeBlanc	2473
ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS:	
No. 490, Prem.: COVID Restrictions Lifted - Reconsider, Hon. I. Rankin.....	2474
No. 491, Prem.: Supp. for Persons with Disabs. - Address, G. Burrill	2475
No. 492, Prem.: Public Health Support - Demonstrate, Hon. I. Rankin.....	2477
No. 493, EEC: Goodwood Brook Siltation - Action, Hon. I. Rankin.....	2478
No. 494, RTA: Vulnerable Seniors Rent Cap - Inform,	

Hon. K. Regan.....	2479
No. 495, DCS: Social Assistance Indexing - Commit, K. Coombes.....	2480
No. 496, Prem.: Employer Desig. - Delay, R. DiCostanzo.....	2481
No. 497, DED: Farmers' Markets - Supp., Hon. K. Irving.....	2482
No. 498, MAH: New Housing Proj. - Supp., Hon. D. Mombourquette.....	2483
No. 499, MAH: Renovictions - Protection, S. Hansen.....	2484
No. 500, EECD: Teaching Certs. Delay - Explain, Hon. K. Regan.....	2485
No. 501, DFA: DFO-Mi'kmaw Negs. - Update, R. LeBlanc.....	2486
No. 502, MAH: Bedford W. Env. Study - Confirm, B. Clark.....	2487
No. 503, MAH - Eisner Cove Wetland: Protect - Explain, C. Chender.....	2488
No. 504, DPW: Tobin Road Upgrade - Consider F. Tilley.....	2489
No. 505, FTB - Better Pay Cheque Guarantee: Timeline - Commit, Hon. B. Maguire.....	2490
No. 506, MAH - Fireworks Concerns: Action - Commit, L. Nicoll.....	2491
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS:	
GOVERNMENT MOTIONS:	
ON MOTION FOR SUPPLY:	
L. Lachance.....	2492
S. Leblanc.....	2497
Hon. B. Maguire.....	2501
HOUSE RECESSED AT 3:47 P.M.....	2505
HOUSE RESOLVED INTO CW ON SUPPLY AT 4:04 P.M.....	2505
HOUSE RECONVENED AT 5:44 P.M.....	2505
ADJOURNMENT, House rose to meet again on Wed., April 20 th at noon.....	2507



HALIFAX, TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 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.

The honourable member for Halifax Citadel-Sable Island.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of privilege. Earlier today, the Chair of the Law Amendments Committee violated my privilege as an MLA by not recognizing me to speak, by silencing me, and by stifling my freedom of speech as a member in this Legislature. The Chair refused to acknowledge my hand up. I appealed to the Chair, was ignored, and despite my concerns, continued to be ignored. Other members were likewise treated.

It is not clear how Legislative Counsel advised the Chair at this time. By not being recognized to speak as a member of the Law Amendments Committee by the Chair, I was unable to complete my role as an MLA.

Further, I would also like to add an additional point of privilege. The Chair continuously used heteronormative and hetero-exclusive language, asking presenters to identify their pronouns as he or she, and committee members were referred to as ladies and gentlemen. I felt that this also affected my ability to act as a member of the committee.

THE SPEAKER: The point of privilege will be taken under advisement and I will report back before this session of the House is finished.

PRESENTING AND READING PETITIONS

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

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition which is about the rent cap that is in place until December 2023. Its operative clause is:

We, the undersigned, call upon the Government of Nova Scotia to continue the rules below - that is, the rent control rules which are outlined there - beyond 2023.

There are three pages of these signatures and I have signed it also. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

The honourable member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to table a petition, the operative clause reading:

We, the undersigned, as residents of Cape Breton, are requesting patients fighting lymphoma graft-versus-host disease, systemic fibrosis and other autoimmune diseases be able to receive the life-saving treatments they need within Nova Scotia. We request the Premier and the Minister of Health consider providing the treatment called photopheresis within Nova Scotia.

There are 1,740 names attached and I have attached my own, as per the Rules of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The petition is tabled.

PRESENTING REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Justice.

HON. BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Speaker, as Chair of the Committee on Law Amendments, I am directed to report that the committee has met and considered the following bills:

Bill No. 149 - Financial Measures (2022) Act.

Bill No. 154 - Tourist Accommodations Registration Act (amended).

Bill No. 155 - Public Prosecutions Act (amended).

and the committee recommends these bills to the favourable consideration of the House, each without amendment.

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that these bills be referred to the Committee of the Whole House on Bills.

TABLING REPORTS, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PAPERS**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS****GOVERNMENT NOTICES OF MOTION****INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

Bill No. 172 - Entitled an Act to Amend Chapter 4 of the Acts of 1994, the Credit Union Act. (Lisa Lachance)

THE SPEAKER: Ordered that the bill be read a second time on a future day.

NOTICES OF MOTION**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Pictou East.

BEATON, KRISTEN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. TIM HOUSTON (The Premier): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Kristen Beaton.

Kristen loved being a mother. Her son Daxton was considered her greatest accomplishment, her pride and joy, and she adored him. Kristen and her husband Nick were also quietly excited about welcoming baby Beaton to their family in the near future.

Kris was the rock and anchor in her father's life. Her dad Wade Roode, her siblings Kayla and Rick, and other extended family members always appreciated getting memorable gifts from Kris, who was the crafty girl in the family.

Known for always wanting to put a smile on people's faces, Kristen was a caring and compassionate continuing care assistant with the VON. She loved her job and always went out of her way to help her clients. Kristen was also concerned about the health and

safety of her patients, her friends, and her family, and was always fighting for greater access to PPE for front line workers.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in celebrating the lives of Kristen Beaton and her unborn child, and in honouring how Kristen lived her life, how she loved her family, and how she fought for those who couldn't fight for themselves.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

BIRD, ANNIE: WRITING CAREER SUCCESS - CONGRATS.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, what started as a few little verses around the age of eight for Annie Bird of Hantsport turned into many years of writing poems, short stories, and articles. At 83 years young, Annie has accumulated more than 50 scrapbooks of newspaper clippings of the poems, stories, and newspaper articles she has penned over the years.

Annie has written a poem each year for the Annapolis Valley Apple Blossom Festival. She has written editorials and various articles for many publications. She was the main reporter for the Hantsport Historical Society, where she received a lifetime membership in honour of her work.

Included in her accomplishments over her long career was second place in the national Dr. Henry William Drummond Poetry Contest, where she was the only person east of Ontario to win.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House of Assembly to join me in congratulating Annie Bird on a long and successful writing career, and wish her many more years of penning her poems and stories for us all.

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

RESERVE MINES SRS. & PENSIONERS CLUB: COVID EFFORTS - THANKS

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Reserve Mines Seniors and Pensioners Club. On Thursday, March 17, 2022, the members of the Reserve Mines Seniors and Pensioners Club handed out KN95 masks free of charge. With COVID-19 still in our communities and numbers continuing to rise, I want to thank the Seniors and Pensioners Club members for working to keep their community healthy and safe.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Colchester North.

THOMAS, ELIZABETH JOANNE/ZAHL, JOHN: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

TOM TAGGART: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the lives of Elizabeth Joanne Thomas and John Zahl. Joanne, as she was known to her friends, visited Nova Scotia as a teenager and fell in love with our province. In 2017, she and her husband John moved to their dream home in Portapique from New Mexico.

During their brief time in Nova Scotia, John and Joanne were both active members of their community. They were involved with animal rescue and volunteered with their local church. Joanne gave her time to provide food and laundry services to those in need. She also served on the board of directors of TREY - Trauma Recovery for Exploited Youth.

Before moving to Nova Scotia, John worked for Federal Express before retiring and working part-time as an educational assistant to students with special needs. Joanne had worked in health care, ending her career as a health systems administrator.

Joanne and John contributed so much during their three years in Colchester County. They will be missed, both here and in New Mexico, by everyone whose lives they touched in their selfless acts.

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

SHAW, ELIZABETH/JESSOME, BEN: ENGAGEMENT - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give a special member statement for a member of this Legislative Assembly, the member for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, who this past weekend finally wised up and put a ring on the finger of the lovely Ms. Elizabeth Shaw, also of Hammonds Plains-Lucasville. Liz has been a member of our caucus family for over seven years and we are all extremely happy that he wised up before she did. We love them both very much and congratulations.

THE SPEAKER: Congratulations - and that last phrase left it wide open. (Interruption) (Laughter) Point of privilege or something.

The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MURPHY, SHERIAH - RI'S EATS: FOOD SERV. - RECOG.

SUZY HANSEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sheriah Murphy, owner and chef of Ri's Eats. When the pandemic hit, the people were at home stuck without restaurant-quality food due to restrictions. Small entrepreneurs like Sheriah Murphy stepped up to the plate to fill those gaps. A local chef here in Halifax Needham sold most of her meals through social media with pre-order menus and with video and pictures of food on the menu.

Ri's Eats offers meal prep, private lessons, private chef services and catering. Customers knew exactly what quality of food they would be receiving by ordering with Ri's Eats. This cuisine has class and a splash of ethnic vibes with soul food charm. Ri's Eats offers an extensive menu for catering and has catered various events. This menu is so diverse and so are chef Sheriah's skills. From all of the many foods my favourite is mac and cheese and oxtails, but she also has vegan options as well.

So please help me in this House to recognize and celebrate Sheriah Murphy through Ri's Eats.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth East.

MCCULLY, LISA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Lisa McCully. Lisa knew how to live life to the fullest, starting when she was just a teenager. In high school Lisa went to Guatemala to live and learn from an indigenous family. During university she moved to Strasbourg, France, and spent time backpacking around Europe. By the time Lisa graduated from Mount Allison University with her degree in Arts and Languages, she was fluent in both French and Spanish. Teaching was Lisa's vocation and she excelled at it. Learning was her passion and she went on to earn two more university degrees - a Master's in Education and a Master's in Administration.

But the one thing she loved most in life was her family. Lisa's two children were the lights of her life and she made sure they had a wonderful life on the shores of Cobequid Bay. Lisa's friends and colleagues describe her as vivacious and positive. She had an energy and an enthusiasm that made Lisa a beloved teacher, volunteer, and leader.

I ask that members of the House of Assembly please join me in remembering Lisa McCully, who brought love, laughter, and learning to her family, her friends and her students.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Halifax Armdale.

YMCA CTR. FOR IMM. PGMS.: SERVS. FOR IMMIGRANTS - RECOG.

ALI DUALE: Today I wish to recognize the Bayers Road YMCA's Centre for Immigrant Programs. This program provides essential services to newly settled Nova Scotians. Their outreach focuses on areas like youth, school programs, employment, along with mobile crisis management, and the prevention of gender-based violence. The YMCA allows for immigrants to feel all the more welcomed and secure in their new homes, and for that, I thank all the employees and the volunteers of the YMCA.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

[1:15 p.m.]

PETERS, JUANITA: ACTRA WOMAN OF THE YR. - CONGRATS.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I rise today to recognize Dartmouth South's Juanita Peters on being named this year's ACTRA National Woman of the Year. She is an award-winning actor, director, advocate, and the Executive Director of the Africville Museum.

Among her many talents and accomplishments, Juanita is a founding member of Women in Film and Television - Atlantic, and Nova Multifest in Dartmouth, a multicultural festival that draws crowds every year. She's served on the boards of Women In The Director's Chair, Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre (PARC), Matchstick Theatre, and the Robert Pope Foundation. She's also worked on the Council on African Canadian Education and is Knowledge Lead for the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children Restorative Inquiry.

Please join me in congratulating the incredible Juanita Peters on her latest and very well-earned honour.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Eastern Passage.

GULENCHYN, FRANK & DAWN: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BARBARA ADAMS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the lives of Frank and Dawn Gulenchyn.

Frank and Dawn were looking forward to their retirement. Dawn had worked for decades in the food service department of a long-term care home near their residence in Durham, Ontario, and the couple chose our province to spend their post-work years in an idyllic setting. They found their dream home in Portapique, and Frank came down a year before Dawn to make sure everything was ready for their move.

Frank and Dawn were devoted parents and grandparents to their blended family. They leave behind their grown children Ryan, Jonathan and Traceena, and their grandchildren. Our hearts are with them today and every day.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this House of Assembly to join me in recalling the lives of Dawn and Frank and the joy they brought to their extended family and their many friends.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Bedford South.

MULLIN, MARILYN & BILL: 60TH WEDDING ANNIV. - BEST WISHES

BRAEDON CLARK: Today I'd ask my colleagues to join me in wishing my constituents Marilyn and Bill Mullin a very happy 60th Wedding Anniversary. April 19, 1962, marked a special day as this couple married in Halifax and started their lives together.

Bill's job in the Navy moved them to British Columbia until 1966, when they moved back to Halifax, where they have been ever since. Now 60 years later, they're celebrating not only their many wonderful years together as husband and wife but also their wonderful family. They have three children - Anita, Richard, and Stephen - seven grandchildren - Christine, Natalie, Julia, Michael, Avery, Camryn, and Riley - and three great-grandchildren - Rose, Abram, and Malcolm.

I had the chance yesterday to visit with Marilyn and Bill and meet their kids, who had come from all across the country to be with them on their 60th anniversary, so congratulations to Marilyn and Bill on their 60 years together, and wishing you many, many more. All the best.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

KOQM THEATRE PROD.: HONOURING MI'KMAW WOMEN - RECOG.

SUSAN LEBLANC: This past November, I was lucky to attend the world premiere of shalan joudry's one-person show *KOQM* at King's Theatre in Annapolis Royal. *KOQM* just played a run at Neptune Theatre; it closed on April 17th.

KOQM is named for the ancient tree at the centre of the play which witnesses the lives of several fictional Mi'kmaw women over the course of four centuries. The performance is gentle and beautiful, and the stories invite the audience to reflect on the terrible impacts colonialism and structural racism have had on the First People in Mi'kma'ki. The show, co-presented by Prismatic Arts Festival, is written and performed by poet, storyteller, author, singer, and ecologist shalan joudry. It's directed by Ken Schwartz, and the mask coaching was by Ann-Marie Kerr.

According to shalan joudry, *KOQM* is a way to honour both Mi'kmaw women and the old growth forest. May her work inspire us all to do the same.

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

ELLISON, CORRIE: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

DAVE RITCEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the life of Corrie Ellison.

Corrie was a kind and generous man who would go out of his way to help his friends and family. He was generous with his time, his talent, and his thoughtfulness. If someone needed help and he was able to do something about it, he would. That's part of the reason there was such a long list of people who counted on Corrie as a friend. Corrie was a son to Richard, a brother to Clinton, and a father to Conner. Each of them held a special place in Corrie's life. Corrie was much loved and appreciated by his family.

Corrie, who lived in Truro, had worked as a social worker - a fitting occupation for someone with his level of empathy for society.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members of the House to join me in reflecting on the kindness, compassion, and thoughtfulness that Corrie Ellison brought to the lives of those who knew him and loved him.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

KUMAR-BRITTEN, N./MORRISON, J.: TEACHING WORK - THANKS

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize two teachers at Robin Foote Elementary in Westmount, Neeta Kumar-Britten and Jennifer Morrison.

Both of these teachers have taken it upon themselves to introduce their students to the world of politics, elections, and civic duty. Most recently, they participated in the Student Vote program with their students. During the last federal election, they ran a parallel election in the classroom. The students learned so much from that experience.

When teachers are able to take real world events and bring them to the classroom, I think it benefits students immensely. I want to thank both of these amazing teachers for the work that they do every day.

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

CITADEL HIGH STUDENTS: UKRAINE FUNDRAISER - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the students of the Leadership 12 class at Citadel High School.

To raise money for the relief effort for the war in Ukraine, they came up with the brilliant idea to pie their teachers in the face for a good cause. The effort has raised almost \$2,500 so far and this week they plan to continue with five new teachers and five new pies.

I ask that my colleagues in this House join me in recognizing the Citadel High School Leadership 12 class for their efforts in raising money for Ukrainian relief as well as those brave Citadel staff members who are being pied for a just cause.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Richmond.

TUCK, AARON & EMILY/OLIVER, JOLENE: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

TREVOR BOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the lives of Aaron Tuck, Jolene Oliver, and Emily Tuck.

Aaron, Jolene, and Emily were a devoted family who did everything together. When Aaron's mother became ill and needed to be cared for, they packed up their belongings, said goodbye to Jolene's family, and left Alberta to move into the home that Aaron's father built in Portapique.

Aaron enjoyed tinkering with cars and worked as a mechanic. Jolene, who loved interacting with people, happily worked as a waitress. Emily, a fiddler who was just about to graduate from high school, was trying to decide whether to become a welder or a musician.

They knew how to make their own enjoyment out of the simple things in life: listening to or playing music, writing poetry, bird watching, or sitting around a roaring fire.

I ask members of the Legislature to join me in remembering a devoted family who were loved by those who knew them, both here in Nova Scotia and in Alberta.

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

ANAPOLIE PIZZA: 40TH YR. IN BUS. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Mr. Speaker, today I stand to recognize a much-loved Cole Harbour pizzeria, Anapolie Pizza, as they celebrate 40 years of business in our community.

In November of 1982, Joseph and Elham Chidiac opened their pizza shop on Cole Harbour Road in Cole Harbour. For four decades, the family continued to serve up pizzas still using a stone oven. Although their menu has expanded over the years to include everything from donairs, of course, to fish and chips, current owner Mike Chidiac notes that the secret to their long-standing success is staying true to the family's original pizza recipe.

Mr. Chidiac credits their great community for supporting them over the years and in particular, during the height of the pandemic, when residents stepped up to ensure that local businesses such as his stayed busy.

I ask that the members of the House of Assembly join me in congratulating Anapolie Pizza and the Chidiac family on their milestone of 40 years.

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

VIC. MINES REC. ASSOC.: PARK REVITALIZ'N - RECOG.

KENDRA COOMBES: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Victoria Mines Recreation Association.

The association is made up of community members working to revitalize the community and the community park. Their love for their community and the park is evident and the commitment to revitalizing is strong and steadfast.

The park will have updated play equipment infrastructure for children and community members to enjoy. The volunteers are working hard to prep the park for the new equipment. They also received funding for a micro-grant which will allow the association to begin work on a walking track around the park.

On November 14, 2021, the beloved park was officially renamed and will forever be known in loving memory of Cody Burke and Sonya Chiasson. It is a beautiful project for the community in honour of two beautiful people.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Guysborough-Tracadie.

BLAIR, JAMIE & GREG: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

HON. GREG MORROW: I rise today to commemorate the lives of Jamie and Greg Blair.

Jamie and Greg were the quintessential hockey parents. They could often be found at the rink cheering on their young sons Alex and Jack. They were members of the West Colchester Hockey Association.

Jamie served as the association's treasurer. She also helped design the association's logo and she was involved in creating the new hockey sweaters for the teams. For all her volunteer work, Jamie was awarded the Hockey Nova Scotia Award of Merit for her significant contributions to the game.

With Greg's older sons Tyler and Craig, the Blairs ran their successful family business, GB Gas and Energy, but life for the Blairs was more than just work. They enjoyed the outdoors, spending time with their friends and neighbours, laughing and smiling. They were the life of the party.

Their business, hockey, and friends were all important to Jamie and Greg, but family was the centre of their lives. Greg's father Jack was his best friend. Greg and Jamie

were a father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister. But their most recent title - grandparent - is one that brought them immense joy.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of the House to join me in reflecting on the lives of Jamie and Greg Blair, what they meant to their families, their friends, and their community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

YUSHCHENKO, IGOR: UKR. IMM. EFFORTS - RECOG.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I rise today to recognize Igor Yushchenko, a local lawyer who is helping Ukrainians flee war.

As a Ukrainian living in Nova Scotia, Igor has been working with the federal government on a policy to help create a program to expedite Ukrainian immigration. Furthermore, Igor has been helping at least three or four people per day to apply through this specific stream, which accounts for the fact that they may not have the right documentation typically required for immigration.

I am proud to say that I have known Igor for over 10 years, and I actually gave him his first job in Halifax while he was doing his master's in law at Dalhousie University: He marked the Russian exams for the interpreters program that I gave at the Nova Scotia Community College. Igor has talked about how hard it has been for him to immigrate and become a lawyer in Nova Scotia. Actually, it's one of the hardest professions to become in Nova Scotia.

I ask that this House join me in recognizing Igor Yushchenko and thank him for the incredible work he's doing to help Ukrainians at this horrific time.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

HEGGIE, CLARE: HEALTH EQUITY WORK - THANKS

SUZY HANSEN: I rise today to recognize Clare Heggie, a steadfast volunteer with Wellness Within, an organization working for reproductive justice, prison abolition, and health equity in Nova Scotia.

Clare started with Wellness Within several years ago by coordinating events, and quickly became an essential part of strategic operations. She is now the research coordinator, responsible for several research projects including advancing doula training, examining maternal health at the provincial jail, and synthesizing evidence about community-based primary care for people experiencing criminalization.

She also holds a master's degree in health promotion from Dalhousie University, where her thesis examined sexual assault survivorship in Nova Scotia rural communities. In addition, Clare holds a full-time job advancing Indigenous health at the IWK.

I'd like all of the House to please join me in thanking Clare Heggie on her remarkable work in Nova Scotia.

[1:30 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Digby-Annapolis.

CAMPBELL, LILLIAN: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. JILL BALSER: I rise today to commemorate the life of Lillian Campbell.

Lillian was a true adventurer. Born in Ontario, Lillian spent 30 years in Yukon working as a nurse at the Whitehorse General Hospital. She and her husband Michael lived in the Grizzly Valley, where they ran an art gallery that specialized in Inuit art. They raised, trained, and raced huskies. They also volunteered with the Yukon Quest, a 1,000-mile, international sled dog race. Their son Chas still lives in the Yukon.

Following their retirement, Lillian and Michael moved to Wentworth to start a new adventure. Whether it was touring the province, a day trip to the beach, or quiet time in her garden, Lillian lived life to the fullest. A warm, caring, generous person, Lillian was known for giving the best hugs.

Lillian continued to volunteer in her community and was best known for serving dinners at the Wentworth Recreation Centre.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members of the House to join me in remembering Lillian Campbell, a woman who lived her life with grace and kindness.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland North.

CUMB. TRAGEDY: LIVES LOST - RECOG.

ELIZABETH SMITH-MCCROSSIN: Mr. Speaker, today I stand alongside other members in this House to acknowledge and remember the lives lost in the horrific, senseless crimes two years ago - the worst massacre in our country's history.

Many in Nova Scotia awoke two years ago today - April 19, 2020 - knowing nothing of the terror experienced overnight. They had no idea there was imminent danger literally in our own small communities, on our back roads and, for some, even in their own homes in rural Cumberland County and Colchester County. The lives lost that day were

taken too soon, but each person made a lasting impact on everyone who had the privilege of knowing them.

As their loved ones and witnesses relive their experiences through the public inquiry, it is not fair for us to further impose on them. Following the unspeakable acts, the enduring love and support was clear through the heartache of Nova Scotians, Canadians, and people around the world. It proves time and time again that the enduring spirit of love and humanity prevails in spite of horror and devastation.

As all members of this House would agree, the outcomes of this unfortunate, necessary inquiry must lead to change so that all involved can finally continue on their healing journey.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Preston.

REDDICK, LAMEIA: COM. SERV. - THANKS

ANGELA SIMMONDS: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to recognize LaMeia Reddick. LaMeia Reddick is a community engagement consultant, founder of KINnected Leadership consulting firm, artist, and community advocate in creating a safe space for Black youth and young professionals in North Preston, focused on leading by example and sharing her talents, her goal to spark positive change for herself and her peers in the community of North Preston.

LaMeia Reddick is also the founder of the North Preston Surf Program. LaMeia states: “The experience of being on the water and the vastness of the ocean pushed me out of my comfort zone - it really pushed me. And that’s something I want to instill in my community.” In addition to increasing inclusion in the sport of surfing, Reddick’s goal for the program was to challenge historical narratives.

She is also the Executive Director of the 2b Theatre Company and she is looking forward to building cross-cultural connections and digging into rich history in the performing arts community in Nova Scotia. Reddick says stepping into the executive director position at 2b Theatre Company at this time is historical and a real gift.

I ask the members of this House of Assembly to join me in recognizing LaMeia Reddick for her incredible accomplishments and community commitment.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

BORDEN, GLEN: RETIREMENT - BEST WISHES

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, the Freedom Foundation of Nova Scotia is a not-for-profit organization located in Dartmouth North dedicated to helping men recovering from addiction.

Over the past 32 years, the Freedom Foundation has housed and supported over 1,040 men. For the past 22 years, Dartmouth North resident Glen Borden has managed the Foundation's recovery home and cooked for the men who have lived there. Glen has just retired from his position. During his over two decades at Freedom Foundation, Glen was in charge of running the house and budget, shopping for groceries, gathering donations, and on top of it all, doing the cooking.

Glen always went above and beyond, both for the men at the house and the community as a whole, decorating the house with items he brought in, distributing food to those who came to the door, helping set up the men with housewares and appliances once they moved out.

I ask the House to join me in registering deep gratitude for the many years Glen Borden dedicated to the Freedom Foundation of Nova Scotia and wishing him nothing but the best in his retirement.

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

BOND, JOY & PETER: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

DANIELLE BARKHOUSE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the lives of Joy and Peter Bond.

Peter and Joy raised their sons, Harry and Cory, in Chester before moving to Portapique for their retirement. Joy is remembered for her beautiful smile, her contagious laugh, and her skills in the kitchen. Peter was a trucker and a bus driver for Bonny Lea Farm. He always had a keen sense of humour and would always tell a good story. Both Joy and Peter were known for their willingness to help anyone in need.

Peter and Joy were married for 43 years and were much loved by their sons, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren. Mr. Speaker, I ask members of this Legislature and all Nova Scotians to join me in remembering Joy and Peter Bond.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

BEZANSON, DIANE - LES PAPAS NOËL DE CLARE: COM. SERV. - THANKS

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, every year Diane Bezanson and Les Papas Noel de Clare ensure that the families in need from our area will have a special Christmas. The group's major fundraiser continues to be a telethon featuring local singers and musicians. Also, in the days prior to the telethon, Les Papas Noel organize an online auction of articles and services donated by local businesses and individuals.

As the group gets requests to help from local families, they prepare to get the items for the hampers they will deliver to the families before Christmas. Each one contains the food to make a special Christmas meal and gifts for the youngsters in the household.

I ask that all members join me in thanking Diane Bezanson and her team of Christmas elves of Les Papas Noel for ensuring that all our families will be able to enjoy a merry Christmas.

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

ALCARE PLACE: HELP FOR ADDICTIONS - RECOG.

LISA LACHANCE: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize a not-for-profit in my constituency. Alcare Place has helped countless men over the past several decades with navigating substance use and gambling. More than just a simple recovery house, Alcare is a welcoming, comprehensive facility nestled in the south end of Halifax that provides all-encompassing residential treatment services to men who need them.

As well as Alcare Place itself and its programs, I would also like to recognize their executive director, Phil Bissett. Since joining the team, Phil has worked tirelessly to ensure that Alcare Place gets the people, funds, and support it needs to run optimally. Phil works with a wide-ranging team to deliver programs and help clients on their road to well-being, whether that's finding employment, mental health resources, or housing.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my fellow members join me in recognizing Alcare Place for being a life-changing organization to countless men on their road to well-being, as well as Phil Bissett for making the organization a warm, welcoming place.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Cumberland South.

MCLEOD, SEAN & JENKINS, ALANNA: DEATHS OF - TRIBUTE

HON. TORY RUSHTON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the lives of Sean McLeod and Alanna Jenkins.

Sean and Alanna were the loves of each other's lives. They were a warm, caring, and joyful couple who enjoyed spending time with people. They were the couple that were always hosting events at their home in Wentworth, whether it was Thanksgiving dinner, tubing on the river behind their house, or just having family and friends over for a bonfire. Everyone who knew them knew them as the kindest people around.

Alanna was a wonderful stepmother to Sean's two adored daughters, Taylor and Mia, and grandparents to Ellie. Not only did they love, they were loved. Alanna and Sean were cherished by their parents, their brothers, their aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, cousins, and friends alike.

Sean and Alanna both worked for Corrections Canada: Sean at the Springhill Institution and Alanna at the Nova Institution for Women. In their spare time they enjoyed spending time outdoors, ATVing, boating, hunting, fishing, and just loving life.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that members of this House join me in remembering two wonderful people, caring and loving, Sean McLeod and Alanna Jenkins.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

TEST TO PROTECT: COVID EFFORTS - RECOG.

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to take a moment today to say thank you to the various members of Test to Protect. A lot of their volunteers were out this weekend around the city handing out rapid test kits. While the rest of us were breaking our fast or celebrating Passover or hunting for Easter eggs or going to church, these folks were out there making sure that Nova Scotians could gather with their own families by ensuring that they had rapid tests. To me, it's an act of love for their fellow Nova Scotians.

I would like to thank them for their work this weekend, which made it possible for so many of us to gather with our families and friends, even while they were missing the same time with their own.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Hants East.

BAGLEY, TOM: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

JOHN A. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Tom Bagley. Tom was not only a husband, a father, and a grandfather, he was a Navy veteran and retired firefighter. Tom was quick to act when he saw his neighbours' house in Wentworth was on fire. Tom was always quick to act when someone was in need. He was a hero.

Following his 10 years of service in the Royal Canadian Navy, Tom spent more than 30 years as a crash rescue firefighter at Stanfield International Airport, and 20 years as a volunteer at the Elmsdale and Enfield fire stations. He was also a dedicated community volunteer as a member of the Knights of Columbus and the Lions Club.

Tom enjoyed spending time outdoors hunting and fishing, driving his ATV, his skidoo, and especially his Harley-Davidson. But Tom didn't just ride his Harley or his ATV, Tom got involved. He was a member of the Snowmobile Association of Nova Scotia and Atlantic Director and Regional Director of the Harley Owners Association.

Tom and his wife, Patsy were married for nearly 47 years and had a daughter, Charlene, before adopting two more daughters, Karla and Amanda. Tom had an especially close bond with his daughter Charlene, even helping to build a home for her and her family.

Mr. Speaker, Tom Bagley was a hero. I ask that all members of the House of Assembly join me in commemorating his life of selfless acts and service to his family and his community.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

O'RILEY, HALEY: MIN. AWD. FINALIST - CONGRATS.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Mr. Speaker, I rise in my place to recognize Haley O'Riley of Membertou. Haley is 13 years old, and she is one of eight finalists for the Minister's Award for Entrepreneurship. Haley started her own business called Sweet Friends Chocolates. Haley lives with autism and because of that, she says her chocolates are that much more unique.

I've watched Haley grow up, almost as an extended member of our family. I rise in my place today to recognize Haley on the success of her business. She just spent the last week delivering chocolates to family members because they had to isolate, as she did too.

I wish her all the best as she competes for the Minister's Award for Entrepreneurship. On behalf of my wife and I, who spend a lot of time with Haley and her mother, Madeline, I want to congratulate her and wish her all the very best.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Lunenburg West.

O'BRIEN, HEATHER: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Heather O'Brien. Heather was a beloved daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, and aunt. Her six children and twelve grandchildren all lived within five minutes of the home

she shared with Teddy, her husband of 35 years. Her two stepchildren were also never far from her heart.

Heather lived her whole life in Masstown and loved her community. For the past 17 years, Heather worked for the VON as a licensed practical nurse. She loved meeting with her patients, bringing them the kind of joy and compassion she was known for.

Heather's love of people extended beyond her family, friends, and patients. She also taught Sunday school and mentored youth groups at our local church. More recently, Heather had come to understand the art of Reiki as part of her healing process.

I ask every member of the Legislature to join with me in remembering the life of Heather O'Brien, a woman who brought love, compassion, and joy to those who knew her.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Timberlea-Prospect.

#COVIDSAFER: KEEPING COM. SAFE - THANKS

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize #COVIDsafer, a community-led initiative to keep Nova Scotians safe through the pandemic.

As Public Health restrictions ease in the province, the #COVIDsafer website shares a list of local businesses that have stepped up to keep their community safe. The website shares restaurants, bars, salons, and stores that continue to use the tools we have learned that are most effective in combatting the pandemic, such as masking. #COVIDsafer is particularly helpful for the most vulnerable Nova Scotians, who rely on local businesses to help keep them safe. This website has been made possible by the many volunteers who are working diligently to compile and share the list, as well as the hundreds of people who have shared the message on social media.

I ask all members of the House to join me in thanking the volunteers behind #COVIDsafer and the many Nova Scotian businesses who have stepped up to keep our community safe through the pandemic.

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

WEBBER, JOEY: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

LARRY HARRISON: I rise today to commemorate the life of Joey Webber. Joey Webber was the kind of hero who never expected recognition or rewards but only wanted to do what was right. Always a good Samaritan, Joey saw an accident and stopped to see what he could do to help. Joey, a true country boy, lived in Wyse's Corner with his partner Shanda MacLeod and their three daughters. He enjoyed working in the woods with his

father Thomas, bow hunting and training draft horses. When he was younger, racing was his passion and Joey could be found in Car No. 75 at Scotia Speedworld.

[1:45 p.m.]

Joey was close to his family. He worked with his father and considered his sister Laura to be his best friend. He also kept a wide circle of friends, many of whom he'd known most of his life. Joey was the kind of friend who was always happy to lend a hand without ever asking for anything in return.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in remembering Joey Webber, a true family man, hard worker, and a quiet hero.

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

METLEGE DIAB, LENA: LEB. HER. MO. BILL INTRO. - CONGRATS.

HON. PATRICIA ARAB: I rise today to congratulate another member of our Liberal caucus family, my former colleague and good friend, the honourable Lena Metlege Diab, who is now an MP for Halifax West.

Since being elected last September, Lena has hit the ground running, working hard every day and sometimes all night too. This should come as no surprise to anyone who worked with her provincially when she was an MLA and minister.

Earlier last week, she introduced a Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons to establish November as Lebanese Heritage Month nationwide. I was so proud when Nova Scotia designated November Lebanese Heritage Month in 2018. I hope Parliament follows suit, celebrating Lebanese Canadians and the numerous contributions they've made to our country.

I invite all members of this House to join me in congratulating my very good friend and my new office neighbour, the Honourable Lena Metlege Diab.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings West.

GOULET, GINA: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

CHRIS PALMER: Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate the life of Gina Goulet. Gina always had a smile and a kind word for everyone in her life. She could light up a room. Whether she was working as a denturist, salsa dancing, or sitting by a river bass fishing, Gina found joy in everything she did. Maybe that's because she defeated brain cancer - twice.

Gina and her daughter, Amelia Butler, were very close. Mother and daughter often chatted on the phone or texted, and she and her husband David would visit just to share news and enjoy some time together.

Born in Middleton, in the Annapolis Valley, Gina lived in Shubenacadie. She was a fiercely independent woman who ran her own denturist business, loved the outdoors, and enjoyed travelling, especially to Cuba. She also loved animals, particularly horses and her two dogs, Ginger and Ellie.

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in commemorating Gina Goulet, a woman who had a passion for life, her friends, and especially, her family.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

GRANT, ED: COM. SERV. - RECOG.

BRAEDON CLARK: Today I'd like to recognize a constituent of mine, Ed Grant. Ed was the first riding association president in Bedford South. He also gave many great years of service to the member for Bedford Basin, and Geoff Regan as well, the former MP for Halifax West.

Ed could often be found at political events playing the guitar. He's a great musician, a great human being, and also a small business owner. Really hard working, he's the franchisee of a Second Cup Coffee location here in the city.

Like all small business owners in the province and around the world, it's been a very difficult couple of years. So I'm wishing Ed all the best over the next couple of years and beyond in his business and his life.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Antigonish.

STEVENSON, CST. HEIDI: DEATH OF - TRIBUTE

HON. MICHELLE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Constable Heidi Stevenson.

Heidi was a mother, a wife, and a daughter. Her husband Dean and their children, Connor and Ava, and her parents Avon and David were the most important part of her life. She made sure they knew how much she loved them every single day - and she knew how much they loved her.

Despite her busy schedule with the RCMP, Heidi always made time for her family. She volunteered at the school, cheered loudly at her children's hockey games, and hosted many of the neighbourhood children who came over to play.

Raised in Antigonish, Heidi knew she wanted to join the RCMP while at university and working part-time for Acadia University's Department of Safety and Security. As she did in life, Heidi excelled in her career. During her 23 years on the job, she became an expert in drug recognition and spent three years representing the RCMP across North America as part of the Musical Ride.

Acadia University has established the Constable Heidi Stevenson Memorial Award to be granted to a student entering the final year of their degree who has worked at least one year with Safety and Security and plans to become a law enforcement officer.

Mr. Speaker, I request that all members of this House join me in reflecting on the life of Cst. Heidi Stevenson, who loved her family, excelled in her career, and worked to serve and protect the people of our province. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

NORTHSIDE-WESTMOUNT ORGS.: EASTER CELEB. - THANKS

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to rise and thank the many organizations in Northside-Westmount who made Easter a fun time for the many children of our riding. Sydney Mines & District Little League and Five Eleven Youth both put on Easter egg hunts, as well as the Downtown Business Development in North Sydney, who put on a nice contest for our children.

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

COLE HBR. PARKS & TRAILS ASSOC.: TRAIL MAINT. - RECOG.

LORELEI NICOLL: Sorry, I was just - from Constable Heidi Stevenson. Thank you for that.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association and their team of tenacious volunteers who are responsible for all construction and maintenance of the Cole Harbour Heritage Park.

These volunteers, including volunteer trail stewards, regularly patrol the park and conduct or supervise maintenance activities that keep the park safe and enjoyable for all. The pandemic has certainly made us more aware of the benefits of our natural environment in the riding of Cole Harbour-Dartmouth.

Our trails provide a social infrastructure for the wellbeing of our residents. It's so nice to see neighbours out connecting with nature. The last message I received from Constable Heidi Stevenson was about the trails and how wonderful they were to everyone's mental health - so this is why it's hard to read this.

I encourage all members of the House of Assembly to take a few minutes each day to participate in the wonders of the trails in your home riding. I wish to thank the Cole Harbour Parks and Trails Association volunteers for their efforts in helping to preserve a piece of iconic Nova Scotia for now and future generations.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

CLARE APRÈS Y FAIT NOIR: ENT. - RECOG.

RONNIE LEBLANC: In May 2019, Vernon Belliveau, Claude Gaudet, and Matthew Blinn launched their radio show *Clare après y fait noir*, a fun-filled hour of stories, skits, and quizzes.

Less than a year later, their show went off the air when access to CIFA's studio was limited to employees. The three decided to stream the show on Facebook, each host on his laptop at home. Eventually, they moved their show to a studio at Chez Jean restaurant, a studio equipped thanks to their sponsors. Two years later, the boys, who obviously enjoy spending time together and sharing their unique sense of humour, continue to produce their show.

I ask that all members join me in recognizing the team from *Clare après y fait noir* for continuing to entertain and to make us laugh during the pandemic, and wish them well in the future.

THE SPEAKER: If there are no further Statements by Members, I want to first of all, in observation of the significance of today, I'd let most of the Statements by Members go on well beyond our limit. I want to express my sincere thanks to all the members for their attentiveness and their caring.

If there is nothing further, I think we will recess now until 2:00 p.m., and then we will have Oral Questions Put by Members to Ministers. We're in recess until 2:00 p.m.

[1:53 p.m. The House recessed.]

[2:00 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order please.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORAL QUESTIONS PUT BY MEMBERS TO MINISTERS

THE SPEAKER: The time is now 2:00 p.m. We will finish at 2:50 p.m.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: COVID RESTRICTIONS LIFTED - RECONSIDER

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, for weeks now we've been asking the government to get in line with public health recommendations. Cases are at an all-time high, we have the highest positivity ever in our province, highest hospitalizations. The advice from Public Health is clear: Continue to wear your mask, continue to use the tools that have been keeping Nova Scotians safe throughout this whole pandemic. But the Premier has chosen to act against this advice by lifting all restrictions.

My question is: Why is he only listening to Public Health and not acting on their advice?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for this important question. Obviously, we know all Nova Scotians have a great deal of respect and owe a great deal of gratitude to Dr. Strang, the team at Public Health, honestly, Dr. Strang's family - we know what's happened there with protests at his house. We know there has been lots of division in the media but what I would assure the member is that I personally and our government have tremendous respect for Dr. Strang and we do more than just listen to him.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, when the opportunity arose for media to ask Dr. Strang the question about masking in this wave, he said, "I cannot comment on the decision made by elected government on removing the mandate." But there's a very clear recommendation from Public Health people: continue to wear masks.

So if Dr. Strang cannot comment on that decision, I'd like to ask the Premier: Knowing that we're still in the middle of respiratory virus season, knowing that this variant is more transmissible than ever, and hearing that Public Health very much still recommends wearing masks, based on whose advice did he lift the mask mandate?

THE PREMIER: The advice of Public Health. But here's what I would say: Yes, Public Health recommends wearing a mask. Guess who else does. I do. So does our government. So do all kinds of health care professionals.

The difference is I have tremendous faith in Nova Scotians. The honourable member might think you might need to make it the law to get Nova Scotians to follow common sense but I have more faith in Nova Scotians than the member does.

IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, the issue is that there is no consistency in what the government and Public Health are saying and it's chaotic and it's disruptive. You have even some of our public institutions not requiring masks, some of the universities and yet in this Legislature where we all work, we still have mask mandates, yet in schools we still

have mask mandates. But we still leave it up to Nova Scotians whether or not to wear a mask and businesses are suffering for it.

I have another quote here from Dr. Strang: “Some people have basically turned off the switch: COVID is over. We can just get back to life as normal. No, you cannot.” I’ll table that.

I don’t think the severity of this wave can be overstated. People have been dying in this wave more than ever - 165 people have died from Omicron. This is not a mild virus for those Nova Scotians. Yet we know vaccines can be the difference. Dr. Strang reiterated this despite . . .

THE SPEAKER: Question.

IAIN RANKIN: Why is this government not spending any attention at all in making sure that we have more vaccines, given that they haven’t hit any of their vaccine targets to date?

THE PREMIER: I completely disagree with the member. Of course we recommend boosters, of course we recommend people getting their vaccines, of course we do, Mr. Speaker. We also respect those businesses, those institutions that make their own decisions.

Mr. Speaker, you made a decision that people would wear a mask in here. Our caucus had committed to wearing a mask months before that, but we respect your authority to do that. Just like we respect a business owner who will require that. But what we will not do and what Nova Scotians are finished with is the division that politicians are using for political advantage. This is not something to be politicized. This is something to be respected.

The members may feel they have something to pick at. They do not, but they can try.

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

PREM. - SUPP. FOR PERSONS WITH DISABS. - ADDRESS

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, in Question Period debate about the disabilities discrimination case on Thursday, the Premier said, “This government supports people with disabilities.” But it’s hard for people with disabilities to feel this when in Nova Scotia the people with disabilities dependent on income assistance for their income have the second-lowest level of such income assistance anywhere in the country. A single disabled person in Nova Scotia receiving income assistance gets in the area of \$11,000. In Newfoundland, the number is \$18,000.

If the Premier's government really supports people with disabilities, why is income assistance for persons with disabilities in our province so very far below the Canadian average and so very far below that of even our neighbours in Newfoundland?

THE PREMIER: Mr. Speaker, is there more work to do? Of course, there's always more work to do. We have a budget before this House right now where there are significant investments in a number of initiatives, certainly, supporting people with disabilities around housing and around other initiatives. Of course, we'll continue to do as much as we can. We have great respect for all Nova Scotians.

There is always going to be work to do, Mr. Speaker, but we're doing everything that we can, starting with this budget. I hope the member supports this budget for all the incredible initiatives that are in it.

GARY BURRILL: It remains the case that in a province like Alberta, a single disabled person receives through income assistance practically fair double, at \$22,000, what a person in that situation receives in Nova Scotia, at right around \$11,000.

The Premier and his ministers have spoken at various times about how there's much to do, this is our first budget, and there will be other budgets. I think that's all very reasonable and fair.

I want to ask the Premier if he will commit to not bringing in another budget without addressing the fact that disabled persons in Nova Scotia have the second-lowest level of income assistance in our whole country?

THE PREMIER: Of course, the commitment from this government is to keep moving forward on a number of initiatives. We've done a number in this budget, \$13 billion of spending in this budget. I know that at times the members opposite have a bit of a chuckle over that. I don't think \$13 billion of investments in Nova Scotians is anything to chuckle at.

Of course we will continue to do more. We didn't wait for the budget. We invested in CCAs before that. We've invested in all kinds of Nova Scotians before that. If the honourable member is asking if we will continue to invest in Nova Scotians, I can 1,000 per cent assure him, yes.

GARY BURRILL: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't chuckle about the \$13 billion, but I would definitely not chuckle about the fact that a single disabled person in Nova Scotia who must rely for their income on our province's income assistance system lives today on \$12,843 a year below the poverty line.

Does the Premier recognize that his statements about support for those who are disabled will carry a lot more weight and hold a lot more water when his government addresses this great scandal?

THE PREMIER: I just think that I disagree with the general statement, for sure, because we know there are many Nova Scotians with disabilities who actually work and make a lot more than probably anyone in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't rule that out or bet against them.

In terms of the honourable member's raising of an important issue, I would just reiterate what I said before: of course we will continue to support Nova Scotians, as we have done in this budget. We have a lot of work to do in this province. After three successive governments let Nova Scotians down, we will not.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition.

PREM.: PUBLIC HEALTH SUPPORT - DEMONSTRATE

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about division. Those most vulnerable are not feeling safe when they go out to a restaurant or to buy their necessities. Some of the workers are off because they are sick with COVID-19 and we are hearing from restaurant owners who can't serve people because they refuse to wear the mask, even though they're providing masks. That's why we continue to ask questions about COVID-19.

Why won't the Premier appear with Dr. Strang and Public Health to show more continuity and confidence that the government is at least listening to someone, since we already know that advice from virtually all infectious disease specialists in the province has been ignored?

THE PREMIER: Oh, the joys of politics, Mr. Speaker. If I appeared with them one more time, they'd say I was politicizing it.

The reality is that I have tremendous respect for Dr. Deeks, who's been at the last two press conferences with Dr. Strang. I think this is the time for Public Health to carry this forward. They have my support, and they know.

IAIN RANKIN: This coming from the member who asked virtually all of his questions in Question Period to me when I was Premier around COVID-19. To say that someone is politicizing COVID-19 when he asked every single one of his questions - check the record.

This is the most deadly wave that we've had yet with Omicron. My understanding is that three specific recommendations have been ignored from medical health experts. I'll

ask one more time: Given we know that wearing a mask does not restrict any economic activity, to be clear, given that we know that wearing a mask literally saves lives, I'll give the Premier one more chance to tell us why he removed the requirement to wear masks.

THE PREMIER: On the advice of Public Health, but here's what I would say. (Interruption) Yeah, I guess everyone . . .

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

THE PREMIER: We of course strongly recommend that people wear masks, but here's what else we know, and what we believe in, is that Nova Scotians know what is required to keep themselves safe. We actually believe in this province. We believe in Nova Scotians.

After two years of Public Health mandates and instructions and learning for all of us collectively, we've arrived at a place in the pandemic where we have high immunization rates, but we have a very, very informed population, and every single time I will come down on the side of those informed Nova Scotians.

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

ECC: GOODWOOD BROOK SILTATION - ACTION

HON. IAIN RANKIN: Sixty-three per cent is not a high immunization rate for boosters, which are important for Omicron.

My new question is for the Department of Environment and Climate Change, which has a mandate to regulate compost facilities in the province, as well as a responsibility to protect water courses and wetlands that fall within our jurisdiction. In May, June, September, October, and November, siltation in the brook behind HRM's compost facility in Goodwood was reported to the department. The contamination is a result of the expansion of HRM's compost facility in Goodwood - an inadequate retention system to ensure siltation is not released into the brook.

Long-term consequences of this action could result in contamination of the Prospect River Watershed. Why is the Minister of Environment and Climate Change not ensuring that water courses are not violated by polluters?

HON. TIMOTHY HALMAN: I want to thank staff at Environment and Climate Change for the ongoing work that they do each and every day to protect the environment, to protect human health. Certainly, in the case that the member has raised, certainly I'll look into that.

IAIN RANKIN: It has now been almost a year of repeatedly submitting reports of contamination to the water course from this facility to the department. Why isn't the Minister of Environment and Climate Change requiring and enforcing the operators of the facility to install a system that will ensure the water course is protected, and monitoring the installation to ensure it's done in a timely fashion?

TIMOTHY HALMAN: Certainly, the inspection and compliance division of our department - there's always a lot of ongoing work that's taking place. As I indicated to the member, I'll instruct staff to look into this and report back to me, and I'll certainly provide that information to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

RTA: VULNERABLE SENIORS RENT CAP - INFORM

HON. KELLY REGAN: Recently, a gentleman who's not from my riding reached out to me. He was concerned by what he was seeing in his home community. He said seniors there were being charged above the allowable rent increases, and he indicated to me that yes, the seniors knew that they were covered by the rent cap, and they weren't supposed to be getting increases of over two per cent this year.

He said he knows of a seniors complex where this is, in fact, happening. I said, but they're covered by the rental cap. He indicated he told the seniors that but the seniors feel vulnerable. My question is for the Minister Responsible for Residential Tenancies: What would you tell seniors or anyone who feels vulnerable to do in a situation like this?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: As with any unresolved dispute between tenants and landlords, there is a Residential Tenancies Program, which I encourage anybody to file and reach out. Without knowing particulars of the question that the member is raising, I don't know if it's through Housing Nova Scotia for the seniors complex, through that, or if it's an apartment that's maintained by a landlord. Other than that, the Residential Tenancies program.

KELLY REGAN: No, it was a private landlord. I want to be clear: Most landlords conduct their business properly. We know that most of them are following that rental cap, but we know not all. Here's the thing: Many seniors feel vulnerable. They know their landlords can make life miserable for them if they complain, and they know that it's a tough market out there, and they're afraid they'll be targeted if they speak out. It's not just seniors, Mr. Speaker, it's also people with disabilities, people living on income assistance. Often they have limited options.

My question is for the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services: Is he prepared to introduce additional sanctions for unscrupulous landlords who hike the rents above the cap to discourage them from taking advantage of vulnerable Nova Scotians?

[2:15 p.m.]

COLTON LEBLANC: I think it was raised on the floor of the Legislature before about enforcement. I know I've had discussions with colleagues regarding enforcement. That goes for both the tenant side and the landlord side, and that's something I've brought back to the department and we're looking into and seeing how it can be rolled out if that's something that can be rolled out in Nova Scotia.

What I would say is actually in response to a question from last Fall. I think it was my colleague from Dartmouth South - Dartmouth North, sorry - regarding marketing and education for tenants and landlords. That's something I brought back to the department. I can say that we've done some significant targeted marketing campaigns, both online - and we're going to be preparing a direct mailer - advertising on Google, Kijiji, and on Facebook, and I'll table for the pleasure of the House these documents that we've done as marketing.

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

DCS: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE INDEXING - COMMIT

KENDRA COOMBES: My question is for the Minister of Community Services. New Brunswick has recently announced that it will index social assistance rates. This means on April 1st each year, social assistance rates will increase by the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index. This year in Nova Scotia, the rate of the increase of the cost of living is expected to be over 4 per cent. Without this same change, people relying on the government for income will be even worse off this year than they were last year.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to indexing all social assistance rates to the cost of living?

HON. KARLA MACFARLANE: The Department of Community Services is always looking at how we can improve income assistance. We're working collaboratively across all departments, looking at what other programs we can implement, endeavour to put out there for individuals who are finding living in Nova Scotia challenging.

We know that there are 22,000 individuals on income assistance in Nova Scotia. Many of them do work, and there are lots of programs within our department that set them on a path to success.

KENDRA COOMBES: The minister needs to look no further than New Brunswick for those initiatives.

Last week when I asked the minister about income assistance clients who access CERB, the minister said, "There are choices in life that they made. They made a decision,"

and I will table that. This government also has made a choice. They made the decision to table a budget that sets income supports well below what is needed for a household to meet their basic needs. A single adult receiving the standard household rate, the Poverty Reduction Credit, and the Affordable Living Tax Credit has an income that is more than \$16,000 below the poverty line. That's a choice the minister made.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister think it is an acceptable choice to set income levels for income assistance clients thousands of dollars below the poverty line?

KARLA MACFARLANE: We recognize the challenges of most vulnerable Nova Scotians, those who are living in poverty. That's why my mandate letter from the Premier has indicated to work across all departments in government to ensure that we put a five-year plan in to tackle poverty, and that's exactly what we're doing.

I think, with regard to the member's question last week about making choices, perhaps when the video goes up this week, it will be the whole video so that we can explain what I meant by choices. When my son got a \$2,000 cheque in the mail, he didn't deserve it so I said, you send it back, you get this over here.

What I am trying to say is that the Department of Community Services will work with anyone who wants to work with us.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clayton Park West.

PREM.: EMPLOYER DESIG. - DELAY

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration.

Is the minister aware that the federal government has been taking applications for the Atlantic Immigration Program since March 6th but firms have yet to receive their employer designation from the Halifax office of the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration?

I'd like the minister to let me know what to tell the firms the reason for the delay.

THE PREMIER: Obviously, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program has been a really important tool for Atlantic Canada and for Nova Scotia specifically. I was very pleased when Minister Fraser made that into a permanent program. We've obviously worked with him to increase the numbers under that and on the very specific question, we can go back to the department and ask on those specific issues.

As a general thought, the opportunities from the Atlantic Immigration Program are very significant and very important to Nova Scotia.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Yes, I would love an answer to the firms and what is the delay.

My second question is also to the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration. The province requires a large number of workers but immigrants have been unable to settle because their work permits have expired and many more are about to expire. Many temporary residents in Nova Scotia are waiting to apply for their work permits.

Does the minister know how many are waiting and what is being done to assist them?

THE PREMIER: I certainly agree with the member. We have significant needs in this province and our government has a stated goal to double the population of the province to two million people. Encroaching over the million was very important for our province. We know we have a long way to go in population growth in general.

In terms of the specific delays, we'll talk to the departments and make sure that the communication between the federal government and the provincial governments is processing just as quick. I do know that in the federal government there is a significant investment to help process times on their end. If there are delays on our end, we will get to the bottom of that and sort those out because we are very pro-population growth.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Kings South.

DED: FARMERS' MARKETS - SUPP.

HON. KEITH IRVING: Mr. Speaker, I believe most Nova Scotians understand that farmers' markets are important to local food in Nova Scotia. These are the places where communities gather to meet local producers, learn about food, and purchase locally produced food. A farmers' market is a place where small farmers learn to market their products and grow their businesses. Local citizens learn about new products and see their money stay in their community. Does the Minister of Economic Development agree that local farmers' markets play an important role in local food production?

HON. SUSAN CORKUM-GREEK: I am the biggest advocate of farmers' markets you would want to find and it is regrettable to me because the Lunenburg Farmers' Market, the lowly Lunenburg Farmers' Market, not nearly the population of HRM, is a year-round market and I lament that on Thursdays I am often in Halifax now and have to miss it. The answer to your question: yes, absolutely.

KEITH IRVING: We hear this government claim that increasing local food consumption is an economic priority but it is puzzling that when the farmers' markets of Nova Scotia reached out to the government for emergency assistance - and I'll table that request - the response was no.

Farmers' markets have done their best to manage challenges of less customers during COVID-19 and then this Winter they were dealt another blow with multiple weekend storms, severely affecting revenue.

With several markets accumulating debt and on the edge of survival, why was the minister not willing to support local farmers' markets with a \$100,000 emergency grant, given her mandate letter to increase local food consumption and the province running a \$108 million surplus?

HON. GREG MORROW: This is a question that came to us during Estimates as well. We were clear then that the department provides funding to Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia on a variety of fronts; damage or storm insurance and its costs are a private sector matter and we do not. That's not to say that we don't support farmers' markets, Mr. Speaker.

Right now, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia have \$276,000 of asks in financial supports for queries and partial outlines in the last two months. Over the last two years, the Department of Agriculture has provided \$165,000 in programs in support for farmers' markets these past two years. As the member opposite would know from his time as the Chair of Finance and Treasury Board, not every request that comes to government is approved - but we are here to help in a number of ways.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Sydney-Membertou.

MAH: NEW HOUSING PROJ. - SUPP.

HON. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Housing is also a pressing issue in the CBRM. Many people across Cape Breton need immediate assistance in the creation of more housing stock and the expansion of access to affordable housing. Like many, I was pleased to learn about plans to develop a new housing project on the old Tartan Downs racetrack in Sydney.

My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: Can the minister commit to support for this project that is also going to include affordable housing?

HON. JOHN LOHR: We recognize the housing crisis right across the province. We are working right across the province. We are investing in CBRM. We have invested in a number of community groups in CBRM. We are making a massive investment through the Green Fund to update some of the very significant stock of housing that we have in CBRM.

In terms of the question about specific projects, we are open to work with any group, any non-profit or for-profit groups, whatever. We are open to work with them. I am not familiar with the details of the specific project, but every project gets reviewed for its

own merits and we work with whomever we can work with. We are very willing to work with them.

DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: I appreciate the answer from the minister because it is a huge conversation - housing in the HRM - but I always like to put the plug in for CBRM. It is the second-largest municipality, with 100,000 residents within the community.

Mr. Speaker, the non-profit Urban Neighbourhood Development Association plans to develop residential units with Cape Breton University. The president of the development association, Kent MacIntyre, has said it will contain some affordable units. I will table that.

My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: How will he make certain that this becomes a priority project for the CBRM - ensuring that - and how many affordable units could potentially be part of that project?

JOHN LOHR: What I can say is that every project that comes forward is a priority for us and we have staff contacts that I am happy to provide to the member afterwards. He can work with those staff individuals to bring these projects forward.

There is a filtering process, obviously. As they come forward, we look at the merits of each project. We want to work with, again, both for-profits and not-for profits across the province. We recognize there is a housing crisis across the province, and we are doing all that we can. I am happy to provide those staff contacts.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Needham.

MAH: RENOVITIONS - PROTECTION

SUZY HANSEN: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. A news story published today reports another example of a landlord beginning demolition before the tenant has even moved out. I will table that.

A single mother in Lunenburg who rented an apartment for \$550 a month went to the residential tenancies board and was successful in getting permission to stay in the unit, but the demolition crew still showed up.

I would appreciate a simple yes or no answer. Does the minister agree that the government needs to do more to protect tenants from renovitions?

HON. COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible, I am very happy to respond to that question. What I can say is that we knew last Fall that the renoviction ban wasn't going to be permanent. That is why we took action last Fall and implemented one of the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Commission's report to protect tenants specifically against renovitions.

I understand this is a new process. It's a new process for MLAs to understand, a new process for tenants to understand, a new process for landlords to understand. That is why we have done targeted marketing that I have tabled in the House in my last response. We will continue to do those efforts for Nova Scotians from one end of the province to the other.

[2:30 p.m.]

SUZY HANSEN: I knew you would stand, minister. Before I get to my question, what would be the penalty for that? We know that this is happening. It's in the news, it's public.

During Budget Estimates, my colleague, the member for Cape Breton Centre-Whitney Pier, asked a question about 20 people who were evicted from their homes in March because the landlord had not kept their affordable units safe and properly maintained. In response, the Minister of Community Services said, we all know that having a home is really at this point in time a luxury. I'll table that.

In this caucus we believe housing is a human right. My question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is: Does the minister agree with his colleague that housing is a luxury?

COLTON LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I think that's the purpose of the tenant protections: again, to bring protections for renovations. We understand that substantial renovations are important to maintain the security and a safe roof over the heads of Nova Scotians. I heard members opposite talking about safe housing. That's why all infrastructure in this province has an expected life span. That's why at times, there are requirements to have renovations done, and at times, there are opportunities when there must be renovation.

Again, a new outline process, and I'm happy to sit down with any member in this House to go over that process.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford Basin.

EECD: TEACHING CERTS. DELAY - EXPLAIN

HON. KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, we have had some concerns raised recently from teachers or their family members. They moved here from other provinces and they have many years of experience, but there are delays getting their certificates from the Office of Teacher Certification. That means these teachers may get hired but they're actually being remunerated at a lower rate. Until their certification is recognized, they're actually paid at a lower rate.

They have filled out the required forms, they have sent in all the certificates necessary, but they're hearing nothing from the office. My question for the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is: What is taking so long? Why are they waiting more than six months?

HON. BECKY DRUHAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member opposite for the question. As we've said, and as we continue to say, it's very important to us in the government that we have a welcoming and receptive province to encourage immigration, encourage people to be here for various sectors, including education. I can say we have an Office of Teacher Certification that works very hard to process. I haven't heard from the member opposite, I don't believe, with respect to these individual cases, but if she'd like to reach out, I'd be more than happy with the department to address any of those issues.

KELLY REGAN: Mr. Speaker, delays like this are not doing anything to deal with the teacher shortage. It's great that practicum teachers are being allowed into the classroom to be able to sub, and that's been helpful. But perhaps they could, oh, I don't know, just actually approve teacher certification in less than half a year. Will the minister commit to ensuring that office actually does their job in less than half a year?

BECKY DRUHAN: I have a burning passion for efficiency and effectiveness, so absolutely I can commit to the members opposite that I will do everything in my power to make sure we follow all of our processes as quickly and efficiently as possible. I would suggest to the member opposite that the most efficient way to address something if somebody approaches her office is to reach out directly and not wait for Question Period.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Clare.

DFA: DFO-MI'KMAW NEGS. - UPDATE

RONNIE LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, Fisheries and Oceans Canada continues to try to define and implement the Mi'kmaw rights to a moderate livelihood fishery in Atlantic Canada. DFO has reached a mutual understanding with a few Mi'kmaw bands, but these are not signed agreements. The lack of information coming out of the federal department is creating a lot of uncertainty in the fishery. Has the minister had any discussions with Minister Murray about these negotiations, and if so, can he provide an update to this House?

HON. STEVE CRAIG: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for Clare for that. Specifically, I have not had a conversation with Minister Murray about this particular issue. We do know that implementing moderate livelihood fishing rights is a responsibility of the federal government. Nova Scotia does expect them to carry on in a manner that respects conservation, the rights of the Mi'kmaw, as well as the interests of other fishers. We encourage the federal government and the Mi'kmaw of Nova Scotia to actively engage in fruitful discussions.

RONNIE LEBLANC: Last year, DFO revived the licence buyback program to implement the moderate livelihood fishery without increasing fishing effort. To this point, the buyback program has had very little uptake. If the elver fishery is any indication, DFO may not be as committed to the buyback program as previously hoped.

Is the minister working with Minister Murray to assure that the buyback program remains in place? Does the minister believe in the one in/one out or willing seller/willing buyer approach to implementing this fishery?

STEVE CRAIG: The established willing buyer/willing seller approach is important. It's a long-standing concept utilized by DFO for both the conservation and existing licence and quota holders. It covers all of that, and we support that. Nova Scotia supports the established willing buyer/willing seller model as a method for the federal government to obtain the licences, the quotas, and the fisheries that they desire in order to carry on their business.

In fact, I wrote to the minister back in March about this very issue - that Nova Scotia supports the willing buyer/willing seller concept. My hope is for the continuation on a path that sees mutual respect, that is collaborative among all participants in the fishery, and has the ultimate goal to make this happen and provide evidence of true reconciliation.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Bedford South.

MAH: BEDFORD W. ENV. STUDY - CONFIRM

BRAEDON CLARK: Mr. Speaker, special planning area Bedford West 10 will see 1,300 units built very close to Kearney Lake - no more than a few hundred feet in some cases. These units will be built into steep cliffs, with runoff leading directly into the lake, perhaps.

The lake is home to the Maskwa Aquatic Club. It's a popular swimming destination. It's an environmentally sensitive area. We've heard all of these things at the Law Amendments Committee in the last couple of weeks. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has indicated that environmental studies are an important part of the special planning process. There's \$2.3 million available for studies of all kinds, including environmental.

Can the minister confirm if an environmental study will be completed for the Bedford West 10 special planning area?

HON. JOHN LOHR: What I have said in the past, and I will reiterate, is that for these special planning areas, all required environmental permitting and all types of permitting will be done for them without special requirement. If that's not successful, it will not go forward. That's a requirement for us.

In terms of the specific question that the member asked, I don't have that information right in front of me, but I can certainly get that information to the member. There's a lot of information in all of these nine areas, and I don't have it all right in front of me.

BRAEDON CLARK: I thank the minister for the response. I look forward to finding out the specifics. I understand there are quite a lot of moving parts on those planning areas. We'll look forward to that.

In the case of an environmental study for this Bedford West 10 special planning area, as we've heard over and over throughout this process, transparency and openness are key to building public trust. That's true across the board.

When this study is done, can the minister confirm that it will be released to the public and interested stakeholders to make sure that Kearney Lake is protected for future generations?

JOHN LOHR: The processes will be followed. I can assure the member of that. I know the member is well aware that we all hear these stories of people who have put in bids on 20, 30, or 40 houses and not gotten one. We realize we're in an absolute housing crisis in the province, so we're taking steps as a government to address them.

We will do more, Mr. Speaker, but this is why we're doing this. As I've reiterated, all required environmental permitting and all permitting will be done, but we see the urgency for the province to go forward. We're doing it across multiple areas of our government. We will continue to work on it.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth South.

MAH - EISNER COVE WETLAND: PROTECT - EXPLAIN

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Last week, my colleague asked a question concerning development and the impact on wetlands. Just now we heard about a waterway, and I've got another one for the minister.

Given the lack of transparency under the new planning task force, my constituents have many questions about what environmental safeguards will be put in place for the Eisner Cove Wetland, now that it has been designated a special planning area and development is being fast-tracked behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, government needs to increase access to housing. Government also needs to protect the environment, but without transparency, how will the minister assure my constituents that this wetland is not damaged?

JOHN LOHR: Again, as the member references, we are in an absolute housing crisis in the province. That means we need to act, but that doesn't mean we're going to short-circuit the permitting and environmental regulations that are required.

As the member mentioned and as the previous member mentioned, we are investing money in making those studies happen, to make the process move along. Is it a crisis or not? It is an absolute crisis, and we are going to act to solve it.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: We're not asking if it's a crisis, with respect to the minister. I believe we were the ones who sounded the alarm. My constituents understand the need for truly affordable housing, which they are not at all convinced they are going to get out of their special planning area, but they also want to be consulted about the future of their community.

Unlike the nearby Penhorn special planning area - also in my district - HRM identified the Southdale lands for potential development, but according to our local councillor it was a blank slate. It had never gone to any kind of public review and now the Province has swooped in and taken over the process. It hadn't gone to public review because it was only recently sold by the Province of Nova Scotia with no consultation to a private developer.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the minister is: How will the minister ensure that people are informed and able to help shape the future of their own communities?

JOHN LOHR: What I can say is that we recognize there's a housing crisis across the province and in HRM, and we're taking steps to address it. We've created the special planning areas to look at what we need to do as a province, and to work with HRM collaboratively at what we need to do, what they need to do. We're addressing that in bills before this House in the special planning areas.

As I continue to reiterate, all the required environmental permitting and all required permitting will be done.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Northside-Westmount.

DPW: TOBIN ROAD UPGRADE - CONSIDER

FRED TILLEY: Mr. Speaker, there's currently a turning lane project on Highway 105 that turns onto Tobin Road. This will make it a main entrance to the Northside Industrial Park, make it a second entrance.

That being said, the 300 or so metres of Tobin Road prior to the park entrance is a residential area, a residential street. This road needs to be upgraded for safety reasons to be able to handle the increased traffic, especially trucks.

My question to the Minister of Public Works is: Can the minister confirm that this section of Tobin Road will be considered as part of the upgrade in the project, as well as including community consultation?

HON. KIM MASLAND: This is the first I am hearing about this but if he wants to talk about it after we leave the Chamber today, we certainly can have that conversation.

FRED TILLEY: I was actually polite with my question. I couldn't find the minister earlier or I would have given her a heads-up. I'll take that as a "no." Can the minister confirm how they ensure to plan the safety of the children and motorists on this residential street to handle this increase in traffic?

KIM MASLAND: I thought I was polite with my response, but apparently not. I thank the member for bringing forward the question. I mean, there's 23,000 kilometres of road in this province. I don't know it all but I can certainly commit to the member that I will have a conversation with him once the Chamber rises today to talk about this concern.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

FTB - BETTER PAY CHEQUE GUARANTEE: TIMELINE - COMMIT

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is skyrocketing, housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable, and fuel is reaching an all-time high. The people in our communities are experiencing the pinch. This government campaigned on better paycheque guarantees for Nova Scotians.

During a local radio show call-in, the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board was asked why his government hasn't delivered on this promise. The minister's response was it was just too complicated.

What has changed between election time and now governing, and why do the people of Nova Scotia have to wait longer for more of their own money in their pockets?

HON. ALLAN MACMASTER: Nothing is too complicated . . . (Interruption) I was trying to give a compliment to the staff over at the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. Nothing is too complicated for the staff over at the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. We can't do everything in the first year. This budget that we put forward has a significant investment in health care. That is really the showpiece of this budget. Essentially, we can't do everything in the first year.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Some of my comments that were made during Estimates - finance is directly connected to health, and the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board should know that.

[2:45 p.m.]

Power rates are about to go up 10 per cent, and this government is doing nothing to prevent this. Food prices are skyrocketing, and over 22,000 on income assistance are now living in extreme poverty, and taxes and fees are strangling working-class people. It will be a year when this House rises, and still no Better Pay Cheque Guarantee.

My question to the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board: When can the people expect a better paycheque? When can they expect lower taxes? When can they expect more of their hard-earned money in their pockets?

ALLAN MACMASTER: I can tell you that the economy we have before us right now, I know going back to the month of February - the third-lowest rate of unemployment in the history of the province. There are opportunities out there. The labour market is very tight. Employers have to pay more right now if they're going to get talent. That's a simple fact. Go and talk to any business out there. Most of them are struggling to find people. There are opportunities for better paycheques for people right now.

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

MAH - FIREWORKS CONCERNS: ACTION - COMMIT

LORELEI NICOLL: Over the past months, many of us, I'm sure, have heard concerns about the excessive use of consumer fireworks in their communities - I have received countless emails, calls, letters from constituents of Cole Harbour-Dartmouth. From air pollution to fire risks to triggering PTSD in those nearby, the excessive use of fireworks in many communities has caused distress and concern.

Is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing aware of the harms and impacts of excessive use of consumer fireworks, and do they plan on taking any action to mitigate future harm?

HON. JOHN LOHR: This would be a question for the Office of the Fire Marshal. In one sense, fireworks would be regulated by that, but in terms of what the member is asking about - the noise of fireworks - municipalities in the province would regulate noise and sound, so to regulate that would reside within our municipal units across the province.

LORELEI NICOLL: I was hoping the minister would go there, because as a municipal councillor for 12 years, I also received a lot of complaints about fireworks, to which there was a lot of this going on, and it continues to go on as to who is responsible.

Until 2002, the Nova Scotia Fireworks Act regulated consumer fireworks, which banned the sale and use of consumer fireworks. This legislation was repealed, and since

then the incidents of excessive and unnecessary use of recreational fireworks has increased steadily over the years.

Municipal bylaws have been ineffective, and after speaking with HRM councillors, it's the jurisdiction of the provincial government to legislate the sale of fireworks ...

THE SPEAKER: Question.

LORELEI NICOLL: Will the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Emergency Management consider re-enacting the Nova Scotia Fireworks Act?

JOHN LOHR: I don't mean to be pointing both ways. It is a reality that noise bylaws are a municipal responsibility. Fireworks are inherently noisy. In terms of what we are doing in taxation, I know that that is a responsibility of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, and I can't comment on taxation, but I will say that we are concerned about the health and safety of Nova Scotians ...

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

We'll take a 10-minute recess and resume at 3:00 p.m.

[2:50 p.m. The House recessed.]

[3:01 p.m. The House reconvened.]

THE SPEAKER: Order, please.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I move that you do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Supply unto Her Majesty.

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

LISA LACHANCE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to spend some time talking about the mental health system as I know it in Nova Scotia - the gaps that I see, what has been promised, and where this budget falls short - with the focus on child and youth mental health. I want to convince members of the urgency of action now and some of the immediate first steps we should be taking.

On one hand, we don't know much. It is difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate clearly the publicly available data and evaluation results and the state of mental health for children and adolescents in Nova Scotia, including rates of mental illness, access to

treatment, and patient outcomes. We don't know, so it is hard to know what to focus on or if what we do helps, or will help, and that makes it incredibly hard to take next steps.

What we do know, in fact, should concern us. Many young people between the ages of 12 and 25 in Canada struggle with mental illness and the rate is the same in Nova Scotia. Overall, 75 per cent of ongoing mental health illnesses develop during this critical period, affecting an estimated 12 to 25 per cent of the population, with the rate of onset of mental health disorders peaking between the ages of 19 and 25.

The majority of children and adolescents do not receive needed mental health treatments in Canada, with an estimated only 25 per cent of young people getting the help that they require. So 25 per cent of young people, 75 per cent of onset, and only 25 per cent of service. This unmet need is resulting in growing service demands in different areas of a health system that is often ill-equipped to respond to mental health issues.

For instance, emergency room visits for mental health issues in Canada increased by 55 per cent for children and 37 per cent for youth from 2006/2007 to 2013/2014. Self-harm resulting in hospitalizations increased 85 per cent during the same period. Suicide remains the second-leading cause of death for young people under the age of 24 in Canada.

As I said, we actually don't know very much about the current state of child and youth mental health in Canada. One of the only ways that we know about service access is around wait times, which remain significant across Nova Scotia.

I know there has been some progress that people will point towards, but I will tell you that I have watched the Nova Scotia wait times as a parent, as an advocate, and as a researcher, from about 2014 onwards. They have varied enormously. They continue to vary enormously.

What that tells me is the system hasn't yet stabilized. Investments were made, systems were changed but actually we keep on going up and down. This doesn't serve young people well.

The most recent publicly available wait times - and I should say that I have a pile of documents to table after this is all over - on the Nova Scotia wait times website: in Cumberland County for non-urgent care, the first wait time is 24 days but then the second wait time is 180 days - the first wait time of 24 days is currently the lowest being reported in the province; in the CBRM, the first wait time is 144 days, and the second wait time is 121 days.

I think, just take a moment and really think about what that means. That is an incredibly long time for a young person. That is a school year, that is a school year and a Summer. It's a hockey season. It's a lot of parts of the community engagement activity that

often they are not able to sustain or not able to participate in to the fullest extent that they should be.

In the research that I've done on youth mental health, I will say that youth report the pain of feeling that they've fallen behind in life, fallen behind their peers, time and time again. When you have people waiting so long for treatment, there are numerous impacts. One of them is, actually, that shame and that frustration starts to overtake folks' ability to plan for the future and engage in all the things we want young people to engage in: community, education, employment, and family life.

There are various goals in Canada for access to mental health care. Just to give you an example: the ACCESS Open Minds project, which is a national research project focused on youth mental health. The only Open Minds site we have is through Eskasoni. They actually have two goals that they have set for all the territories and provinces: One is that for urgent care, in fact, you have immediate access and for non-urgent care, there is an initial assessment completed within 72 hours.

The Canadian Psychiatric Association is also in the process of updating their recommended wait times for mental health care but currently recommends that people over 18 years of age should receive mental health treatment within 30 days of presentation at a health care provider with a potentially serious mental health issue.

The effect of wait time, as I mentioned - there are myriad effects. One of the things we should be concerned about is not only the increase in types of symptoms, but that actually for a lot of mental health issues they do not necessarily have to become entrenched if they are treated well and treated early. You know, we talk about tiers in Nova Scotia, and you can prevent mental health issues from going to issues around Tier 4 or 5. There's also less treatment adherence, so the longer people have to wait, the less they are going to find that the treatment they have been waiting for is the right treatment, the less they are going to engage.

The effects of waiting for mental health treatment for marginalized youth can be severe. Racialized youth in Canada are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system and untreated mental health needs make them much more vulnerable to community incidents and contact with the legal system.

A study in the Peel Region of Ontario found that one-sixth of children accessing community-based mental health services had experienced police encounters due to emotional distress that involved aggression, self-harm, and destruction of property.

I mentioned that mental health issues could become entrenched. One of those physical and mental health issues that you can overcome, depending on the prognosis and the diagnosis - but as it stands globally - mental and substance use disorders are the leading

causes of years lived with a disability, which is one measure of the burden of disease. It is estimated that the cost of untreated mental health issues in Canada is \$51 billion annually.

So how did we get here? We're not the first jurisdiction in Canada with a Minister responsible for the Office of Addictions and Mental Health. We're not the first to have a separate office or department and we're not the first jurisdiction to grapple with these challenges.

Medical and psychiatric treatment and practice both developed and evolved rapidly in the 1900s. However, psychiatric illness lagged behind, subject to ongoing stigma and underfunding. Coupled with the unsuccessful move from institutionalization and segregation, our mental health crisis was evident by the 1980s in Canada. The Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada referred to mental health as the orphan of Canadian health care. Our first mental health strategy for Canada wasn't created until 2012, and that was created by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, thus an arm's-length organization from the federal government.

However, the national research and conversations that went into the development of that strategy produced a number of key strategic directions which I think still need to inform the work we do here in Nova Scotia. We need to think about mental health across the life span, whether that's early childhood to seniors' mental health, and we have to think about mental health in all sectors and every place where we find ourselves: home, schools, workplaces, and more. We have to foster what recovering will mean for people of all ages living with mental health problems and illnesses and uphold their rights. We need to provide access to the right combination of services, treatments, and supports when and where people need them, and we need to reduce disparities and risk factors and access to mental health services and strengthen the response to the needs of diverse communities.

I think there are a few things that we need to be doing, particularly in Nova Scotia, particularly right now. In Estimates discussions with the Minister of the Office of Addictions and Mental Health, it's clear that there seems to be - it's actually not clear - there seems to be some work being done on a number of our challenges, including those around data and evaluation, and understanding where we are and where we want to get to and how we're going to measure it. If we don't know that, we're still going to keep funnelling money and effort into programs that aren't the ones we need to be focused on.

I think there needs to be an increased commitment to transparency and accountability throughout the mental health system in Nova Scotia. We need a systems approach - this means building from within community, working through community-based mental health centres, and integrating clinics - that acknowledges and builds on community context, resources, and particular challenges. A lot of jurisdictions, when they've looked at mental health reform, have also looked at the role of primary health care. This is a very difficult suggestion for Nova Scotia in the time and place we're at, in terms of access to primary health care resources. I think that is something that we need to think

about working toward. Primary health care providers are the folks who know people's context, they have a relationship, and remain as gatekeepers for many mental health services. As long as we have that system, we need to be supporting primary health clinicians to take on that role.

The school system is obviously really important as well. There are school mental health programs, and those are important. However, there's a lot of evidence being collected across Canada that a lot of programs are being used that are not evidence-based, thus don't have clear outcomes. A large knowledge synthesis in 2019 looked across Canada and noted that school mental health programs are not being implemented consistently. So school boards and schools are taking on these programs and then not implementing them the way they're supposed to be, and because they're evidence-based, you don't actually get the outcomes that you expected.

I also just wanted to say a word about inclusive education. I do think all of these things are integrated, and young people who start to struggle in school - whether it's elementary, junior high, high school - start very quickly to develop feelings of shame and often are excluded from our classrooms. This can compound into failure. Our investments in inclusive education really need to be thinking about how we support young people and their well-being across their school careers.

I've mentioned research, evidence, and quality. More than with physical health, a lot of times our responses to mental health rely on anecdotes, things we've heard, and this is a reasonable reaction by whether it's you as a friend, whether it's someone as a parent, by even a primary health care provider, but it doesn't give you the answers that people need. I think we always need to be asking, how do we know that a certain program works? How do we know what can support people with different challenges? And so on.

Youth and family engagement is a core part of the response to child and youth mental health across Canada and around the world. This is the type of engagement that's more than conversations, more than the one-off meeting. If you do it that way, it can often be exploitative and ineffective. What we're talking about is the ongoing ability for families and young people to be involved in the services that they seek and that they access. We have a national and international body of research and evidence on what this looks like but we also have national standards for Canada on youth engagement. They even come with an evaluation framework so we should use them.

I'm also hoping that we will hear more in this Legislature and across the province about Nova Scotia moving towards integrated youth services. I started my Ph. D. in 2017 because I was convinced we were going to be the last jurisdiction to implement integrated youth services and that may still be the case. But that's okay. I think we're on the road, so I really would hope that we can all support the folks at the IWK who are leading this in particular. One area in Nova Scotia that I think needs attention is encouraging the Nova

Scotia Health Authority and the IWK to work together to provide services across that youth time span.

[3:15 p.m.]

If I could show you some graphs, I would show you the onset of mental health issues between the ages of 19 and 24. It is a steep line that goes up that graph. We need services that particularly target the youth developmental period and that respond to the realities of that time of life. It's a time of life where we want people to explore education, independence, employment, and yet often they're facing the onset of serious mental illness.

Also, I think another key piece is thinking about how we work in our community-based organizations. I've had the pleasure, the privilege really, of working with community-based organizations across Nova Scotia that provide services and provide mental health support to children and youth. They do amazing work and they are exhausted. They are overburdened. They need to be part of the system, but they need to be supported and respected properly so they can do their jobs well.

With that, I will take my seat with those thoughts on mental health.

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Mr. Speaker, I will deliver a slightly less robust and exciting speech going into Supply than I did the other day. Nonetheless, it is something that I'm very passionate about, which is my community of Dartmouth North. I wanted to take a little bit of time to talk about my community and about how the budget will or will not benefit folks who live in my community.

I've said this before and I'll say it again: Dartmouth North is an amazing, vibrant community. It very much is a community, it's part of HRM, it's very urban but it also has real pockets of neighbourhoods. Historic, old neighbourhoods, a very historic Black neighbourhood, but also historic pockets of post-war neighbourhoods, that kind of thing. People love living there. It is also a place where there's a huge amount of rental housing. So we know Highfield Park - it's apartment building after apartment building after apartment building and Pinecrest and Primrose, these streets that people hear about, it's mostly rental units on those streets.

Many of them are getting run-down. The minister talked a little bit about that today. Buildings, infrastructure have a life span and there are lots of places in Dartmouth North that aren't great quality anymore. I don't know all of the ins and outs of the real estate market and the REITs and their values except for paying their investors. But I would say that Dartmouth North and the buildings in Dartmouth North and therefore the renters, the residents of Dartmouth North are easy prey for large multinational real estate corporations to come in and buy up buildings for pretty cheap and not really invest in them.

That's happening all over the place. Buildings will change hands from TransGlobe to Northview to MetCap, back to TransGlobe - it's constant. There are some people who live in Dartmouth North who have no idea who even owns their building anymore, it has happened so often.

This may not seem like news to anyone in this House, because I have talked about it a little bit, but Dartmouth North used to be the place where you could go and get an affordable place to live. There are still some affordable units in Dartmouth North. I have a friend who lives on Leaman Drive, not in a high-rise but a six-floor building. This person has a studio apartment on the fifth floor. It's a small place, but it's perfect for them as a single person with no children. It costs about \$600 and some, which is pretty good.

This person, their income is not much more than that because they collect disability, a federal disability I believe, so they have a very fixed income, but they can make it work. The unit next door is the exact same, and there was a similar type of situation where there was a person who was able to afford it there. For some reason they moved. That unit went back on the market for \$1,200 - for a studio apartment on Leaman Drive. Not that there's anything wrong with it - Leaman Drive is a beautiful street - but it is astounding to me that in that neighbourhood, that's what rents are going for. They are. That means that anyone who makes less than \$2,000 a month, say, just has no option if they need to get somewhere new.

I want to say this, that rents are skyrocketing, housing in general is more and more unattainable. By the way, buying a house in Dartmouth North, again the reason I went to Dartmouth North is because I was an artist, and it was the only place I could possibly afford to buy a house when I was lucky enough to be able to do that. I couldn't do it now if I was - well, I don't even know if I can do it on the income I'm making now. I seriously don't. It's becoming totally impossible.

In our office, we spend a lot of time assisting folks with renovictions, with rent cap things. We heard about it today in the Legislature already. Tenants are told by their landlords that this has to happen, that they have to be out by the end of the month because they're going to renovate. We all know in this House that that's not allowed, and we all know that what you have to do is file a Form J. We all know that, absolutely, but most people who are worried about being homeless because they know that there's nowhere else to go don't really know that right at the beginning.

Some of them know enough to come to the MLA office or the library or Welcome Housing, whatever, and then they will get that information, and yet it still happens. I worked with Welcome Housing, I worked with Dal Legal Aid to canvass buildings where this was happening to people. By the time we got to them, to the residents in that building - and most of them were paying \$535, the amount that income assistance was paying at the time for the housing part - they had all left, or they had all decided to move in with their sister or whatever.

The point is that the system doesn't really work, and the point is that there are landlords - and I know there are lots of great landlords, there really are, and lots of them live in Dartmouth North, and I agree with them, and I agree that their life is made very difficult by these rules too - but there are landlords who are using these rules to take advantage simply to raise the rents, in the same way that there are landlords who are using fixed-term leases to simply break the rules and raise the rents.

We hear from the government that there is lots going on, and I know that there is. I know there is, and I appreciate the member for Argyle, the Minister of Service Nova Scotia and Internal Services, talking about how he heard me. I got a copy of what he tabled today, and I'm really excited. I love the little ads. I'm going to make sure that Rebecca in my office is pushing them out big-time. Very helpful stuff. Great, but there's more to be done. Really, what it comes down to essentially is income inadequacy.

Subsidies are kind of helpful, except there are lots of rules attached to them and all that stuff, but ultimately what we're doing is we're subsidizing private companies - we're paying private companies on behalf of the public. A better use of that money would be to put that money into not-for-profit housing so that we're not paying a profit line for a huge multinational corporation, but instead we are paying for the actual building, for the services that someone in a not-for-profit building would be getting. Anyway, there's nothing in the budget for that right now, it seems. That's what I wanted to say about that.

Also, we know these things. We know the result of there being no money dedicated to not-for-profit housing in the budget. We know the results of very high rents. We know the results of the threat of renovations. We know that it results in this: People are staying in unsafe conditions, Mr. Speaker.

A woman who is possibly in an abusive relationship but if she left would literally have nowhere to go, and would probably stay in that situation. People are sleeping in their cars in the Walmart parking lot. People are sleeping on the street. I know the Minister of Community Services will say that if that's happening, to get them connected to the Shelter Diversion Support Program. That doesn't work for everyone. There are people for whom it won't work. It's helpful but it's a band-aid.

We know that people are couch-surfing. Again, possibly in unsafe situations. We know that families and people with children who are in this situation, their families are destabilized, Mr. Speaker. That is a heartbreaking situation.

The other thing I want to talk about is Nova Scotia Power. In Dartmouth North, we have a ton of people whom we help to fill out the heating rebate forms. We negotiate with Nova Scotia Power - the fine people who run those negotiating lines - to try to get folks to get on a payment plan and not get their power cut off.

Yet we also know that as hard as we work at that, it's coming up to cut-off season. The weather is getting better, the temperatures are rising, which means that Nova Scotia Power can cut off power - and they will do it. There will be people in my neighbourhood, in my constituency, who cannot feed their kids on the way out the door. They cannot bathe their kids in hot water and ultimately cannot function as a family because their power will be cut off. It's shameful. No one's power should get cut off - it doesn't matter how badly you screw up paying the power bill.

It all comes down to income inadequacy, Mr. Speaker. In this budget there is a small amount of emergency money for people on ESIA. We heard it today in Question Period: We need income assistance rates, number one, to get jacked some more. We also need them to be indexed to the cost of living. We cannot continue like this. We cannot continue having income assistance lagging 10 years behind what is actually needed in this province. Nobody is ever going to get anywhere if we continue to trail along with what's going on.

We need a major increase. We need indexed rates. We need a higher minimum wage - big surprise. We need free tuition. We need - wait for it, I know you're going to like this one - tax breaks for people under 30 in the skilled trades, which should include early childhood educators, CCAs and other female-dominated skilled trades.

The other thing that we could have - the Minister of Environment and Climate Change is here. (Interruptions) I'm glad that somebody important is going to hear what I'm about to say. We could have a massive investment in energy efficiency. Nova Scotia is a leader in energy efficiency. We already are a leader. We could make it way better. Why settle for pretty great? Let's make it amazing.

Let's make sure that all of our public housing in Nova Scotia is retrofitted so that people who are in public housing are not losing their housing because they can't pay their power bills. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: Order, please. Just to assist the honourable member for Dartmouth North, there is a lot of idle chatter. And it is very idle chatter. (Laughter)

The honourable member for Dartmouth North.

SUSAN LEBLANC: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to finish with this. Since I'm running out of time, I want to say this. Dartmouth North - people in Dartmouth North - it's an extremely high-needs area. There are places in the constituency that are extremely high needs in terms of health and wellness. There are high levels of mental health problems and addictions.

We have been working with community, with people in government, for years on bringing a collaborative care centre to Dartmouth North. Once again, I am saddened to see

that there is no new investment in collaborative care clinics in this budget. Every year we get to budget time, this group that I work with is like, this is the year, we feel it, it's good, it's going to happen. I'm like, "I'm going to be there on the day it opens." And once again, the budget has fallen short.

[3:30 p.m.]

I want to close by saying that I'm very disappointed in that. We will continue to call for investments in health care in high-needs communities like ours. We need a holistic approach to health. We need access to mental health services.

Dartmouth North is amazing. This budget is letting it down. Thank you. (Applause)

THE SPEAKER: The honourable member for Halifax Atlantic.

HON. BRENDAN MAGUIRE: I don't know how to follow that up. I would say that the member for Dartmouth South, and actually . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: North.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: North. Maybe I was going to compliment the member for Dartmouth South.

The individuals in Dartmouth North are well-represented by that member. (Applause)

Speaking of well-represented, I want to talk about Halifax Atlantic, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: John Buchanan was good.

BRENDAN MAGUIRE: Yes, he was good. John was great.

Mr. Speaker, I want to kind of tie on to some of the stuff the member for Dartmouth North said. There is absolutely nothing in this budget to help low-income people, working-class people, and middle-class people pay their bills. There is nothing there.

In Question Period today, I did bring up the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee, which was one of the major pillars of the then-Opposition, now-government's election campaign. They guaranteed. It was called the Better Pay Cheque Guarantee during the election. Their now-elected members and their ones who were not elected ran around saying that this was something that was going to happen right away. It was a priority to put more money in the pockets of Nova Scotians.

It was like a quick 180. I've never seen a faster 180 in my life. The moment they were elected, they were out on the radio saying, well, we can't do it, it's too complicated, there are a lot of moving parts.

This budget, to me, is the all-sizzle, no-steak budget - a lot of words. They stand up and they say a lot of good, pretty words: We're concerned, we're really upset that people are living in poverty.

But do you know what? You could have a talk with them. You could, as the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board said today, encourage them to get a better job. That was the theme of what he said today: Unemployment is at an all-time low; employers are paying people more money; if you can't afford to pay your bills, get a better job.

This is the second session in a row that the - I was going to say "Progressive Conservative," but at this point they've lost the "Progressive" - the Conservative government of Nova Scotia has made a comment about people's economic standing and tying it to the jobs that they have. In the first session, it was: People don't want to work those jobs; they can get better jobs. In this session, we just heard the minister say: Unemployment's at an all-time low; there's lots of work out there; if they want to get paid better, just find a better job.

That's absolutely the wrong thing to say. There are a lot of things that lead to people's living circumstances. If unemployment is so low, I think maybe the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, who represents Cape Breton, should look in his own backyard. There's a 13 per cent unemployment rate in Cape Breton.

The thing about unemployment is that it doesn't take into account underemployment. It doesn't take into account the people who are working 40, 50, 60, 70 hours a week and getting paid \$10, \$12, \$13. They're getting paid next to nothing. You can talk about the unemployment rate all you want, but the truth is - I challenge anyone in this Legislature to leave, go work 50, 60, 70 hours a week at \$13 an hour, put food on your table, and then pay for power rates that are going to go up 10 per cent.

These power rates are going to go up. Everybody in this Chamber knows that. This government promised a piece of legislation that would prevent it. It was in the news, it was in the interviews that the Premier did. This piece of legislation that they put forward this session does nothing to prevent the 10 per cent power rate increase. Nothing.

They said, we're going to intervene. Their opinion means as much as anybody else intervening in this process. It doesn't matter if it's the Minister of Energy, the Premier of Nova Scotia, or the Pope, or the Speaker of the House. They'll bring their facts, they'll be weighed against everybody else's facts, and I guarantee every single person in this House that those rates are going up.

There's nothing in there to deal with the cost of inflation. There's nothing in there to deal with the over 22,000 Nova Scotians whom we know of who are living in extreme poverty on income assistance. There's nothing in this to deal with the affordable housing crisis.

In the last session - I keep going back to it - we had the ministers and the Premier stand there and make this fantastic announcement about \$30 million going toward affordable housing. What did they do? They turned around and gave \$22 million of it to a billionaire company to build housing with absolutely no affordability connected to it. There's nothing in those contracts that says those rental properties are going to be \$600, \$700, \$800, \$900, \$1,000 a month that are affordable for Nova Scotians.

In fact, those properties are going to be out of the price range for the average Nova Scotian. How do I know that? Because all I have to do is look in my own backyard and see the developments from that developer - \$600,000, \$700,000, \$800,000 homes in the heart of Spryfield. That's what they built. That's great if you can afford it, but here's what's happening right now, and this is what really everybody in this Chamber should be concerned about. It's either going to be house poverty that we're putting people in, mortgage poverty, or as the member for Bedford South says, and preaches non-stop, his generation and the generations to come will not be able to afford a house. They're not going to be able to do it.

How many people who are our age do you know right now who can afford a \$700,000, \$800,000 house? That house is the side of a duplex on Hartlen Avenue in Spryfield. A year ago, that house was selling for \$400,000. Two years before that, it was selling for \$150,000.

There used to be a term called "starter homes." I don't know if people remember that. My very first home with my amazing partner was \$109,000 on Joffre Street in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. We paid \$109,000 for that home. It had a rental property in the basement, and because it was a rental property in that basement, we kept the rental at - wait a second - \$535 a month. That's what we kept it at. Does anyone know what that price was for? Why did we keep it at \$535? That's the amount that you got on income assistance. We made a conscious decision, because we knew that the cost of our mortgage was next to nothing on a starter home for two starting working-class professionals.

We wanted to give someone a break. We wanted to give a single mom with children a break. We wanted to give someone on income assistance an opportunity to not have to worry about dipping into their food bill, dipping into their electricity bill, to dip into this stuff and that stuff, and not be able to send their children to camp and hockey and buy a pair of sneakers.

That's gone. The days of that are gone. There is no such thing as a starter home, and that's going to trickle down. The rents are getting more expensive because people are

paying more money. We've seen that their answer to this was that out-of-province tax that will do absolutely nothing to stem the flow of prices in this province. Nothing.

I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I don't know how many people here, or anywhere, are looking to rent or purchase a \$1 million home in Chester on the water. I don't know how many people consider that a starter home. I don't know how many people consider that a home. I'm still puzzled that people can afford a \$700,000 mortgage. I really am.

To talk about personal finances, we went from Dartmouth on Joffre Street to beautiful Herring Cove and we got a five-bedroom, three-bathroom home with a huge backyard that is seconds away from a school. We're across the street from a lake and Halifax Transit stops in front of our house. We bought that nine years ago for \$205,000. That's what we bought it for. Good luck - you can't even get a shed for \$200,000.

We're seeing trailers from the 1960s that have tires on the roof - literally tires on the roof - to keep the roof in place that are selling for \$180,000. They're not even recognizing the issue and that's the problem with this budget.

They say it's a health care budget. The problem with saying this is a health care budget is it's flat-out not true. Everybody knows that there are all kinds of factors that go into health care, but the number one factor that impacts your health as a human being is poverty. It's poverty, bar none. It's not even close.

Access to healthy food - we don't even know how much local food is produced, let alone how much healthy food is purchased in this province. I mean, the member for Halifax Chebucto could tell you all the prices. I've said this before, but the price of chicken is through the roof. The price of a bag of potatoes, oranges, bananas, apples, and all the things we were taught - we, in this Chamber - were taught to eat, that were important. That were an essential part of our health and our diet that are now completely unaffordable for most people in Nova Scotia.

Somebody taking home \$12,000 a year on income assistance cannot afford it. Somebody making less than \$15 an hour can barely or can't afford it. And the answer was, well, go to a food bank. Grab your three or four kids, two kids, single kid - it doesn't matter if you have kids or not. A day like today in the pouring rain, go to the food bank.

You'll be lucky if you can get some of this stuff at a food bank. That's the truth. I don't know how many people here have ever volunteered at a food bank, but it's like Christmas Day when there's fresh fruit. It's like Christmas Day when there's meat.

So how do you plan to have a healthy lifestyle and how do you plan to have healthy food for your children? Once a month. Don't eat that apple - that's got to last you a month. Leave that apple right there. A bite a night, that's what you get.

So while I appreciate some of the stuff they're doing in this bill - they've hitched their government and they've hitched their wagon and reputation to a few little incentives and numbers. But the numbers are going up. They're getting worse. All the metrics are getting worse, and they refuse to recognize that.

[3:45 p.m.]

They keep saying over and over, \$13 billion. We are spending \$13 billion. You're not spending \$13 billion - the people of Nova Scotia are spending \$13 billion. Stop acting like it's your money. We hear it over and over - I gave this much money to this, and posts online, I gave money to this. You didn't give a cent, the people of Nova Scotia did.

This budget is Nova Scotia's money. Health care is going to get worse because of this budget because they are not going after the underlying factors. They could care less about the long term - they're only looking at the short term. The short term is, let's change a couple of percentage points, hopefully, so then we can go back to the polls and say, do you know what? It went from 88,000 to 80,000 and that's a huge increase, and do you know what? We had only four years to fix the mess of the so-and-so and the last one and this one, and this one.

A lot of things get done in a year, a lot of things get done in a month and a lot of things get done in six months. What this budget shows is that this government came into power with no ideas because they are recycling Liberal and NDP ideas and they have no plan for the future, other than you are on your own. People know better - they're on their own.

That's a term we hear over and over from the Premier of Nova Scotia himself - you're on your own, make up your own mind, make your own decision. Well, it's pretty tough when you've got no money, you've got no transportation, you've got no power, and you've got no government.

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

We'll recess for 15 minutes to allow the committee to get settled.

[3:47 p.m. The House recessed.]

[4:04 p.m. The House resolved itself into a CW on Supply with Deputy Speaker Angela Simmonds in the Chair.]

[5:44 p.m. CW on Supply rose and the House reconvened. Deputy Speaker Lisa Lachance assumed the Chair.]

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

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

THE SPEAKER: Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader.

JOHN WHITE: That concludes government business today. (Applause) Thank you. I'm here again tomorrow. (Laughter)

I move that the House do now rise to meet again on Wednesday, April 20th between the hours of noon and 11:59 p.m. Business will include Committee of the Whole House on Bills, considering Bills No. 120, 147, 148, 149, 154, and 155. Time permitting, we will have third reading of bills, including Bill Nos. 118, 123, 124, 126, 129, 131, 134, 137, 138, 143, and 145; and Private and Local Bills Nos. 112 and 122. It looks like we're all going to be here for a while.

THE SPEAKER: As tomorrow is also Opposition Day, I will now ask the NDP House Leader to call their business.

The honourable House Leader for the New Democratic Party..

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Thank you for the reminder that tomorrow is, in fact, Opposition Day. We look forward to seeing everybody for Opposition Day. We are only going to call three bills because we like to take our time with legislative processes.

After Question Period, we will be calling the following bills: Bill No. 23, the Mental Health Bill of Rights Act; Bill No. 128, the Energy Efficiency Act; and Bill No. 3, the Housing as a Human Right Act.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is that the House rise to meet again on Wednesday, April 20th between the hours of noon and 11:59 p.m.

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We stand adjourned until April 20th at noon.

[The House rose at 5:46 p.m.]